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Washington Post
September 1, 2006
Pg. 1

Iran Defies Deadline On Nuclear Program

U.S. to Press U.N. To Impose Sanctions

By Dafna Linzer, Washington Post Staff Writer

A defiant Iran faced the prospect of economic sanctions after U.N. inspectors reported that the country ignored yesterday's deadline to halt its nuclear program and has been hindering efforts to determine whether it seeks to secretly develop nuclear weapons.

President Bush, invoking the same language that he used to describe Iraq before the March 2003 invasion, called Iran a "grave threat" and said "there must be consequences" for Tehran's actions. "It is time for Iran to make a choice," Bush said in a speech to the American Legion's national convention in Salt Lake City.

His administration had offered to join talks with Iran and held out the possibility of future cooperation after 27 years' enmity, if Tehran met the United Nations' deadline for suspending its nuclear program. Yesterday, however, U.S. officials said they will demand international sanctions against the Iranian government.

"We are going to move this toward a sanctions resolution at the United Nations," said R. Nicholas Burns, undersecretary of state for political affairs. "We expect others to join us."

It is unclear how much support the White House has for the tough measures it hopes will force Iran to abandon a nuclear effort that has become a source of national pride. No world leader who commented on yesterday's events spoke in the stark terms that Bush used, and none of the president's closest allies said sanctions are certain.

European officials expressed dismay with Iran but emphasized a commitment to negotiations; they scheduled a meeting next week with Ali Larijani, the Iranian government's point man on nuclear issues. European diplomats will meet with Burns the next day in Berlin to discuss their options.

Since his 2002 State of the Union speech, when he singled out Iran as part of an "axis of evil," Bush has tried without success to roll back Tehran's nuclear energy program. He has asserted, without offering proof, that it is a cover for weapons development.

Iran has insisted that the nuclear program, which it kept hidden for 18 years, is for the production of peaceful energy that it has a right to develop.

"The Iranian nation will not accept for one moment any bullying, invasion and violation of its rights," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said. He called the United States government "tyrannical." His foreign minister said Iran's program is transparently peaceful and will continue.

In yesterday's report, nuclear inspectors with the International Atomic Energy Agency detailed a mountain of circumstantial evidence, collected in the last three years, that suggests Iran is still concealing aspects of its nuclear program. In just six pages, the inspectors complained 18 times about Iran's lack of cooperation, including refusing to hand over crucial documents, denying access to facilities and a new policy of rejecting certain entry visas for some inspectors. As a result, inspectors said, they could not confirm "the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program." But IAEA officials noted yesterday that they have not found proof of a weapons program and said Iran is still complying with basic, mandatory inspections that allow the agency to monitor all of its work with uranium. That access enabled the IAEA to report that Iran had "not suspended its enrichment related activities," as the Security Council required it to do by yesterday.

Inspectors reported that since April, when Iran began enriching uranium in a string of centrifuges, it has produced about six kilograms of uranium to levels consistent with an energy program. The material cannot be used for a weapon.

Iran began enriching another small quantity last week, but inspectors wrote that there have been more substantial pauses than progress. They noted that the Iranians are working at a much slower pace than the IAEA, outside nuclear experts and some foreign intelligence agencies had forecast.

Iran had said it would be operating three cascades by now, each with 164 centrifuges able to enrich uranium.

Instead, one cascade is assembled and is working only sporadically.

"Their progress is far less than expected," said David Albright, a nuclear expert who is president of the Institute for Science and International Security. "Whether it's because of technical problems or self-restraint it's hard to gauge, but I don't think the U.S. can deliver on its promise to get hard sanctions when Iran is barely progressing."

Russia and China were reluctant to impose sanctions even before the report came out, playing down the need just weeks after U.S. officials felt they had received assurances from both countries to support such measures. Although many countries appear to share U.S. suspicions about Iran's intentions, they have profound differences with the Bush administration over how to respond and are apprehensive about the goals of a U.S. president who has said that "all options are on the table" in dealing with Tehran.

"Concerns about a slippery slope toward a military conflict with Iran have hurt U.S. efforts at diplomacy," said Robert J. Einhorn, who was assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation until November 2001. "The administration approaches the idea of negotiations with Iran as if we are prepared to take yes for an answer, but also engages in activities that suggest regime change is the real objective."

U.S. officials have refused to respond to questions about whether they are seeking the removal of Iran's clerical government. But they have given private assurances to allies that they are currently committed to diplomacy.

There were signs yesterday that Europe will maintain a steady role in that process. Larijani, the Iranian official, spoke by phone Saturday and Tuesday with Javier Solana, the senior representative of the European Union, in discussions both sides described as positive.

Privately, Iranian officials have said they would resume cooperation with inspectors and even consider freezing the nuclear program, but only after they restart talks with Europe and Washington.

In addition to several unanswered questions about the history of the program, inspectors detailed new ones in yesterday's report. A cylinder filled with uranium hexafluoride was temporarily moved by a technician at a uranium

conversion plant in the town of Isfahan. No materials seem to be missing from the container, but inspectors expressed concern about the incident.

Also, traces of highly enriched uranium, which can be used for the core of a weapon, were discovered through environmental samples taken at another facility. Previous traces were found to have been the result of used and discarded centrifuge equipment the Iranians bought from Pakistan. Officials at the IAEA said privately yesterday that the new contamination appears to be from old spent fuel the Iranians moved out of harm's way during their eight-year war with Iraq.

"I think the only thing that would move opponents of sanctions now is if the agency found unambiguously the 'smoking gun,'" Einhorn said.

Staff writer Michael Abramowitz in Salt Lake City and researcher Julie Tate in Washington contributed to this report.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/30/AR2006083000681.html>

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New York Times
September 1, 2006

Highly Enriched Uranium Found At Iranian Plant

By Elaine Sciolino

VIENNA, Aug. 31 — The global nuclear monitoring agency deepened suspicions on Thursday about Iran's nuclear program, reporting that inspectors had discovered new traces of highly enriched uranium at an Iranian facility. Inspectors have found such uranium, which at extreme enrichment levels can fuel bombs, twice in the past. The International Atomic Energy Agency concluded that at least some of those samples came from contaminated equipment that Iran had obtained from Pakistan.

But in this case, the nuclear fingerprint of the particles did not match the other samples, an official familiar with the inspections said, raising questions about their origin.

In a six-page report to the United Nations Security Council on Thursday, the agency withheld judgment about where the material came from and whether it could be linked to a secret nuclear program.

Iran says that its nuclear program is intended only for the production of energy, which would use uranium enriched at far lower levels than the sample described in the report.

As expected, the report confirmed that Iran had continued producing enriched uranium, but only on a small scale and at relatively low levels, at its vast Natanz facility.

Thursday was the deadline set by the Security Council for Iran to freeze its enrichment-related activities. Iran's failure to comply means that it is vulnerable to further punitive action, perhaps economic and political penalties, either by the entire Council or a smaller group of countries led by the United States.

In a speech at the American Legion national convention in Salt Lake City, President Bush ratcheted up his warning to the Iranian leadership, saying that the war in Lebanon and Iran's support for Hezbollah "made it clearer than ever that the world now faces a grave threat from the radical regime in Iran."

He concluded by saying that while he was committed to a diplomatic solution to the confrontation with Iran, "There must be consequences for Iran's defiance, and we must not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon."

The European Union foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, and Iran's nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, are to meet in Europe next week in a final attempt to seek a way out of the impasse. Afterward, the major world powers will meet in Europe to discuss Iran's case. But Russia and China are resisting sanctions and Iran has shrugged off all threats, vowing to continue its nuclear activities even as it seeks negotiations.

As in the past, the nuclear agency painted a confusing and incomplete picture of the state of Iran's nuclear program, underscoring the limits of outside inspectors whose access to Iran's nuclear sites was curtailed by Iran early this year.

On one hand, the report makes clear that, as the official familiar with the inspections said, "Inspectors have not uncovered any concrete proof that Iran's nuclear program is of a military nature."

On the other hand, the report captures the long pattern of confusion, stonewalling, partial disclosure of information and a minimum of cooperation under Iran's international obligations to the agency and details new suspicious activities.

Since February, when the agency referred the Iran dossier to the Security Council, Iran has drastically reduced the access of the international inspectors. The decision has limited or blocked inspections of hundreds of the country's atomic sites, programs and personnel; the result is more uncertainty and less information about Iran's progress in mastering the basics of uranium and plutonium, the foundations for both producing electricity and building bombs.

Most noteworthy in the report was the discovery of particles of highly enriched uranium on a container at a waste storage facility at Karaj, not far from Tehran.

The particles were taken from the container for testing a year ago, but the agency obtained the result only a few weeks ago because of the limited capacity of its verification laboratory.

In late 2003, the discovery of traces of highly enriched uranium in Iran touched off international concern about the country's nuclear intentions and raised questions about where the material had originated. Another find of the radioactive material earlier this year redoubled the sense of alarm.

But Thursday's disclosure was different, diplomats said. "This is the first case with no known linkage," said one European diplomat who could not be quoted by name because of diplomatic rules. "But we have to be careful because over time these things can be explained away, at least in theory."

Robert Joseph, the under secretary of state for arms control and international security, was cautious in talking about the new evidence, but said, "We need to be very concerned that Iran may well be undertaking experiments, and may be undertaking the construction of centrifuge machines, out of sight of I.A.E.A. inspectors."

Highly enriched uranium, containing 80 percent or more of the rare uranium-235 isotope, is considered bomb grade and can be fashioned into the core of a nuclear weapon.

Iran says its atomic program is meant to enrich uranium to the low levels of up to 5 percent for the production of nuclear power, but the United States calls that effort a cover for the acquisition of a nuclear arsenal.

The agency has written to Iran asking for an explanation of the source of the highly enriched particles, but has not received a response.

The report did not specify the level of the particles or whether they were weapons-grade quality. The official who was discussing the report refused to be drawn into that discussion, suggesting that such a definition was meaningless. "You cannot say weapons-grade, but very high," he said.

The report also concluded that Iran had continued to produce enriched uranium but on a modest scale, despite claims of various Iranian officials of plans to build and operate thousands of gas centrifuges on an industrial scale.

Indeed, Iran has built and operated only one 164-machine cascade or set of centrifuges, and other isolated machines. Over the summer, the centrifuges did not produce enriched uranium continuously, but only for a few days and then often operated empty, the report said.

In addition, only a few kilograms of nuclear material was fed into the machines; only a small amount of uranium — tens of grams — was enriched, the official said.

"The qualitative and quantitative development of Iran's enrichment program continues to be fairly limited," the official said. He added, "From a technical point of view, we have not seen a very extensive experimentation with those machines."

The program appears to be lagging behind Iran's stated deadline to install 3,000 centrifuges at Natanz in the last quarter of this year.

The report documented Iran's refusal last summer to allow inspectors into an underground part of the Natanz facility and to give inspectors multiple-entry one-year visas for easy access to the country. Iranian officials since have backed down.

The report also faulted Iran for once again failing to answer questions and provide documents and access on a wide range of issues, some of which have been outstanding for more than three years.

"There is a standstill" in resolving these issues, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of normal diplomatic rules. The agency, he added, is losing confidence that it can give the world assurances about the "completeness" of Iran's program.

William J. Broad and David E. Sanger contributed reporting from Washington for this article.

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/01/world/middleeast/01vienna.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

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London Times

September 1, 2006

Foreign Editor's Briefing

Not With A Bang, But With A Whimper

By Bronwen Maddox

SO, what now? Iran has defied the United Nations order to stop its most controversial nuclear work.

It looks as if there will be a fudge by the European Union, dragging the US along behind. At yesterday's deadline, which was supposed to be the climax of this long-running stand-off, Europeans blinked first.

Germany and Italy, in particular, have taken the view that more talks would be preferable to sanctions, even at the cost of blurring the force of the UN Security Council demand.

That has played into the hands of Russia and China, who never much wanted sanctions. It has left the US, Britain, and France, who favoured an immediate move to sanctions, frustrated on the sidelines.

Why the change since the aggressive brinksmanship of early this summer? Lebanon, in a word. In the strained attempts to muster a UN force to keep the peace between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, few want to pick a new fight with Tehran. Iran has accurately gauged the limited appetite for confrontation among its adversaries and divided them.

There have been three signs this week of the fudge. First, Javier Solana, the European Union foreign policy chief, said that he and Ali Larijani, Iran's chief negotiator, would meet soon, after a phone conversation yesterday.

Secondly, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, said that although "we cannot act as if nothing had happened" in Iran's refusal, "we will not slam the door shut".

Thirdly, the new Italian Government of Romano Prodi has made clear that it wants a bigger say than its predecessor in determining Europe's relations with Iran. Italy, which is Iran's leading commercial partner in the EU, with trade worth \$4.7 billion, has also taken the lead military role in Lebanon, backed up by France.

Earlier this week Massimo D'Alema, Foreign Minister, said that Italy would use its seat on the Security Council from January "to make the UN hear the voice of the EU better and with more force".

These factors have blunted the plans sketched out by Britain, France and the US for imposing sanctions. One senior British official said yesterday that "no one would have expected sanctions to go ahead from September 1" and that "the sanctions process will happen in parallel" with any more talks with Iran.

The US is also taking a softer line. Sean McCormack, State Department spokesman, said that even when sanctions talks began, Iran could still halt the work and be rewarded.

The "sanctions process" will begin with a meeting on Thursday in Berlin between the political directors of Britain, the US, France, Russia and China, the permanent members of the council, plus Germany. They will try to agree on whether to impose the softest sanctions on a list that they drew up earlier in the summer. The list begins with penalties on people and companies involved in Iran's ballistic missile industry.

But there seems little chance of securing Russian and Chinese support for sanctions that would hit the political class and the economy generally — not even for those targeting the nuclear industry.

China has contracts with Iran to buy oil and gas, which it badly needs, while Russia has lucrative work building Iran's first nuclear power plant.

The start of sanctions talks "never meant excluding further contacts with Iran", said a British official. All the same, as deadlines go, yesterday's passed with a whimper not a bang, to Iran's advantage.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,251-2338055.html>

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Washington Times

September 1, 2006

Pg. 14

N. Korea Shifts Views In Japan

By Richard Halloran

YOKOTA, Japan -- North Korean leader Kim Jong-il has inadvertently added urgency to U.S. plans to realign its military forces in Japan and prompted Tokyo to seek even closer operational military ties with its American ally.

In the weeks after the North Korean launches of seven missiles into the sea between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, Lt. Gen. Bruce Wright, the Air Force officer who commands U.S. forces in Japan, said "a monumental change" has occurred in Japanese attitudes toward the transitions. Japanese officers, queried separately, agreed.

Although negotiations had been progressing, political pressures within Japan raised obstacles.

Opposition focused on local issues such as noise from aircraft in residential areas that have grown up around U.S. bases.

Those issues have not disappeared, but "Japan is on the cusp of major changes in security policy," said a staff officer at Yokota Air Base.

Tokyo, for instance, has asked the United States to accelerate delivery of Patriot anti-missile batteries to Japan.

Reports that Mr. Kim may order a nuclear bomb test in North Korea have given more impetus to the revisions.

Adm. William J. Fallon, who commands U.S. forces in Asia and the Pacific from his headquarters in Hawaii, visited Japan last month. He met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, the front-runner to succeed Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi later this month, and other political and military leaders in Tokyo.

The admiral also flew to Japan's southwestern island of Kyushu to meet with Lt. Gen. Naoto Hayashi, who commands Japan's western army, and Vice Adm. Yoichi Koda, commander of the Japanese navy's regional district.

The weight of Japan's small but modern armed forces is shifting gradually from Hokkaido, where the northern army's mission was to repel any Russian invasion.

Today, Japan sees a near-term threat from North Korea and a longer-range threat from China. Kyushu is closer to both than is Hokkaido.

"We are the ones out front now," said a Japanese officer in the western army.

Timelines have been set for changes that will add up to a new look for both U.S. and Japanese forces by 2014.

In 2008, a forward element of 200 soldiers from the U.S. Army's I Corps is to move from Fort Lewis in Washington state to Camp Zama, southwest of Tokyo, to prepare communications, a combat command center and support facilities for a joint task force headquarters.

At Yokota, the Japanese Air Defense Command will move from nearby Fuchu by 2010. A joint command center was set up in December, tested in exercises during the winter and operative on July 4, in time to collect intelligence on the North Korean missile launches.

Seeking to rectify a glaring lack of coordination and joint operations among the Japanese armed forces, Tokyo established a joint staff office in March along the lines of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon.

Gen. Wright said the joint coordination center was intended to speed communications among Japan's joint staff office, his headquarters at Yokota and the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii.

"Working together has tremendous power," he said in a TV interview. "One plus one equals much more than two."

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20060831-094601-3563r.htm>

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Miami Herald

September 2, 2006

Iran's Leader Defiant As Sanctions Loom

After Iran flagrantly disregarded a U.N. Security Council deadline on uranium enrichment, its president said it would not give up its nuclear program.

By Nasser Karimi, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran underlined its disregard Friday for the now-expired U.N. deadline to halt uranium enrichment when its president vowed never to give up its nuclear program and accused the West of misrepresenting Tehran's nuclear activities.

Iran had until midnight Thursday to halt its enrichment activities or face the possibility of economic sanctions under a U.N. Security Council resolution passed July 31.

Although the U.N. nuclear watchdog reported Thursday that Iran had not halted enrichment, opening the way for punitive measures, U.S. and other officials said no action would be sought before a European diplomat meets with Iran's atomic chief next week to seek a compromise.

On Friday, in the first comments by an Iranian official since the deadline passed, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, told a rally, "Exploitation of peaceful nuclear energy is our obvious right. We will never give up our legal right."

"The West's claim that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons is a sheer lie," state TV quoted him as telling the gathering in Maku, northwestern Iran. "The West basically opposes progress by Iran."

Striking a more conciliatory note, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi urged the West to desist from taking hasty action, saying that the current situation underlined the need for talks with the Security Council's permanent members plus Germany, state TV reported.

John Bolton, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the Security Council would wait to consider possible actions until European Union foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, meets Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, sometime next week.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan also was expected to raise the issue during a visit to Tehran this weekend.

The EU reiterated its commitment to a diplomatic resolution but said a resolution could not wait forever.

"For the EU, diplomacy remains the No. 1 way forward," said Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja, whose country holds the EU presidency.

The European Union as a whole has been a moderate voice on the Iran issue. But Britain and France, which are also permanent Security Council members, support tough action, as Germany as well is believed to support.

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/world/15422592.htm>

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London Times

September 2, 2006

Foreign Editor's Briefing

Defiance May Invite Military Strike

By Bronwen Maddox

WILL Iran's defiance of the deadline to stop its nuclear work make a military strike by Israel more likely? Perhaps several years down the road. But it may have increased the chances of a US attack on Iran within the final two years of the Bush Administration.

From the American point of view this week's developments are exasperating and alarming. The Iranian refusal to acknowledge Thursday's deadline to halt its nuclear activities was not a great surprise, although brinkmanship, of the kind the UN Security Council was practising, can produce unexpected results.

Tehran continues to maintain that its work is purely for power generation, but Thursday's hard-hitting report by the International Atomic Energy Agency listed all the evasions that have led other governments to accuse Iran of a covert weapons programme.

More worrying for America, Iran's defiance revealed that the impetus for sanctions among Tehran's diplomatic adversaries had ground to a halt over the summer.

In theory they will all now sit down, beginning next week, and try to agree some sanctions (or "measures") against Iran. But although Russia and China have signed up to the principle, in practice anything they back is likely to be innocuous. Where does that leave President Bush, and his declaration that a nuclear-armed Iran would be "intolerable"? Or Israel, which fears that it would be a prime target of those weapons?

The formal Israeli position is unchanged. "We really hope that this international community will solve this problem diplomatically," a spokesman said yesterday. "We are well aware of the importance of putting an end to the problem, but I will not even talk about what will happen [if diplomacy fails]."

But some analysts argue that the popular speculation about an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations is misplaced. It is prompted, of course, by Israel's strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981. But the Iranian programme is far larger, dispersed and likely hidden.

"I don't think an Israeli strike is likely at all," says Mark Fitzpatrick, proliferation analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a London-based think-tank. "Israel could not do it as well as the US could do it." An Israeli attack would reap all the disadvantages of a US attack in terms of reprisals, more so if it provoked direct retaliation. But it would secure fewer benefits in that Israel would not be able to knock out any sites.

The only circumstances in which that calculation would change, Fitzpatrick suggests, would be if Israel concluded that diplomacy had failed, that the US would not act and that failure to strike would risk its annihilation. "That discussion wouldn't happen for several years," he said.

That is a plausible argument, which has an air of melodrama now, but may not in a year's time. The signs of whether diplomacy will work are not promising: intransigence, backed by wild populist appeals on the Iranian side; and muddy indecision among the permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, the US, France, China and Russia).

If a year passed with little progress, then it is conceivable that quiet discussions about military action might begin within the Bush Administration, where the threat is taken seriously and intimately.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,251-2339168.html>

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Washington Times

September 2, 2006

Pg. 1

U.S. Test Missile Hits A Korean Bull's-Eye

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

The U.S. missile defense system yesterday shot down an incoming dummy warhead simulating the last-stage trajectory of a North Korean Taepodong-2 missile, a milestone that U.S. officials expect to counter critics of earlier tests.

It was the first time a dummy North Korean missile was intercepted, and the sixth successful intercept since 1999, said officials from the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency.

"What we did today is a huge step in terms of our systematic approach to continuing to field, continuing to deploy and continuing to develop a missile defense system for the United States, for our allies, our friends, our deployed forces around the world," said Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry Obering, director of the Missile Defense Agency.

He said there is "good chance" the system would be successful against a Taepodong-2 launched from North Korea.

Seven North Korean missiles launched July 4 included a long-range Taepodong-2 that failed less than a minute after launch.

Robert Joseph, undersecretary of state for international security, said the intercept was especially significant in light of North Korea's missile tests and Iran's nuclear standoff with the international community.

"Missile defense is an essential element of our overall counterproliferation posture," Mr. Joseph said. "This successful test ... demonstrates that we can and will deploy capabilities necessary to defend the United States and our allies against missile attack."

Pentagon officials said the warhead was destroyed in outer space above a point several hundred miles west of Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.

The test began with a target missile fired from the Kodiak Launch Complex on Kodiak Island, Alaska, at 1:22 p.m. and its last stage was rammed by the high-speed interceptor launched from Vandenberg 17 minutes later. The interceptor used data gathered from an early warning radar located at Beale Air Force Base near Sacramento, Calif., and electronics that were used to track and identify the 4-foot-long warhead and guide it into a high-speed, midspace collision.

Both missiles were traveling at 15,000 to 18,000 mph, making the intercept a difficult technical challenge for what the Pentagon calls the Ground-based Midcourse Defense System. The system uses sensors in space, at sea and on the ground, along with communication links stretching from Japan to Colorado.

North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland issued a statement, carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency, saying the test "clearly shows that it is the U.S. which is increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and threatening war against our country." As a result, Pyongyang will boost its "self-defensive deterrent," a phrase North Korea often uses for its nuclear program.

Unlike earlier tests, the interceptor was not launched from nearby Fort Greely, Alaska. Its success is expected to counter critics who said the Missile Defense Agency had been using artificial conditions and equipment for its previous tests, instead of realistic weapons trajectories and operational conditions.

"This test validated the confidence that I've expressed in the past with the performance of the system," Gen. Obering told reporters.

In addition to launching the first interceptor from Vandenberg, the test also was the first in which the military used an operational missile defense fire-control system and the operational radar system at Beale, Gen. Obering said.

"We did intercept the re-entry vehicle, and we did use the operational radar data to provide the initial track for that intercept, and the kill vehicle performed its own discrimination and targeting of the kill vehicle," the general said. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld applauded the result, saying it will "increase confidence" in missile defense capability, but warned that the system is not perfected.

"While today's test was a success, the test program is by no means complete," he said. "Tests will continue, some of which will be successful and some will not. This was a challenging test, and the tests will become even more challenging in the period ahead."

Asked when a realistic "end-to-end" test of the system could be held, Gen. Obering said: "Well, you know, I don't want to ask the North Koreans to launch against us. That would be a realistic end-to-end test. Short of that, this is about as good as it gets with respect to that."

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20060902-121240-2995r.htm>

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New York Times
September 2, 2006

Missile Defense System Intercepts Rocket In Test

By David S. Cloud

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1 — In the first full-scale test of the ballistic missile defense system in more than a year, an interceptor rocket launched from California on Friday shot down a target fired from Alaska that officials said in some respects resembled a warhead from a North Korean rocket.

Pentagon officials said that the successful interception, which occurred in space over the Pacific Ocean, showed that the fledgling system, put in place in 2004 by the Bush administration before testing was complete, would have a good chance of stopping a ballistic missile fired at the United States in a limited attack.

"What we did today was a huge step in terms of our systematic approach to continuing to field, continuing to deploy and continuing to develop a missile defense system," said Lt. Gen. Henry A. Obering III, the director of the Missile Defense Agency, at a news briefing. "This is a validation of the confidence I have in this system."

But critics said that the test lacked key elements of realism and that its main objective had been to allow the Missile Defense Agency to claim the program was back on track after the interceptors in the last two flight tests, in December 2004 and February 2005, failed to leave their silos.

Even General Obering, after calling the test “as close as we can come to an end-to-end test,” said that the target missile did not deploy decoys or other countermeasures meant to confuse the interceptor from striking the actual warhead.

Decoys involve relatively basic technology that a potential foe like North Korea could be expected to employ, said Stephen Young, a missile defense specialist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, which opposes deployments of missile defenses.

“This test was as scripted as it can be,” he said. “It’s a very complicated test, technically, but it’s much simpler than dealing with an actual missile launch would be.” In a real-life attack, he said, far less would be known about the timing, trajectory and characteristics of an incoming warhead.

Countermeasures might be used in the next test of the system, planned for later this year, General Obering said. He added that the target’s speed, size and other characteristics resembled those of a North Korean long-range missile, called the Taepodong 2. North Korea test-fired one of the missiles in July, but it failed or was aborted shortly after launching and fell into the Sea of Japan.

In Friday’s test, the interceptor missile launched at 1:39 p.m. Eastern time from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, one of two interceptor sites in the United States. The launching came about 17 minutes after the target missile was sent up from a military installation in Kodiak, Alaska.

Tamping down expectations, officials had been saying that the goal of the test was not necessarily to strike the target but only to gather data on whether the so-called kill vehicle, which separates from the interceptor in space, would recognize the warhead and maneuver toward it.

That enabled General Obering to say that the test had exceeded the objectives when the missile intercepted the target. “What we are trying to do is under-promise and over-deliver,” he said. Data from the test would be used to make further improvements in the system and to design additional tests, he added.

Asked for the chances that the fledgling missile defense system could shoot down an America-bound intercontinental ballistic missile from North Korea, General Obering declined to offer a specific percentage number, saying such information was classified. Pressed to rate the chances from “excellent” to “poor,” he replied, “I think we’d have a good chance.”

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, who said earlier this week that he wanted to see a successful full-scale test of the system before declaring whether he had confidence that it would work, said in a statement that the results vindicated the Bush administration’s decision to make the system operational while continuing to test it.

“Successful tests such as these increase confidence in the approach to developing an initial missile defense capability,” he said. “While today’s test was a success, the test program is by no means complete. Tests will continue, some of which will be successful and some will not.”

The test on Friday is the latest chapter in the long-running saga of the United States missile defense program, which began with President Reagan’s expansive vision of a space-based antimissile shield.

More than 20 years and billions of dollars later, the Bush administration is proceeding with a limited antimissile system that is designed to counter prospective dangers from nations like North Korea and Iran that might eventually be able to launch, at most, a small barrage of missiles.

President Bush made the program a top priority soon after taking office and cleared the way for antimissile deployments by withdrawing from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty with Russia. The White House decision to move ahead with the system before finishing testing meant that two interceptors sites, one at Vandenberg and one at Fort Greely, Alaska, are already operating, while testing continues.

An interceptor consists of a rocket that carries a 155-pound “kill vehicle,” which is designed to seek out and collide with an enemy missile warhead. Friday’s test was the first time an interceptor had been fired from one of the two operating sites. In past launchings, the tests had been conducted at Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/02/washington/02missile.html>

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New York Times
September 3, 2006
Pg. 4

Annan Arrives In Iran For Talks On Nuclear Issue And Lebanon

By Warren Hoge

TEHRAN, Sept. 2 — Secretary General Kofi Annan arrived here on Saturday for two days of talks in which he hoped to persuade Iran's leaders to throw their support behind plans for the future of Lebanon and to enter negotiations on the country's nuclear program.

His visit, originally planned as a stop on an 11-day Middle East swing seeking regional backing for Lebanon, began two days after Iran missed a Security Council deadline for suspending its enrichment of uranium.

On Saturday, he held separate meetings with Manouchehr Mottaki, the foreign minister; Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a senior cleric who is in charge of the powerful Expediency Council; and Ali Larijani, the chief nuclear negotiator.

On Sunday, he is to meet with Kamal Kharrazi, a former foreign minister, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president.

Mr. Annan canceled a trip here in November after Mr. Ahmadinejad told students, "Israel must be wiped off the map." Jewish groups in the United States have challenged the secretary general to speak out on this trip against an exhibit of Holocaust cartoons in Tehran that the Iranian government says is in retaliation for the publication last September of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in Danish and other European papers.

Aides said Mr. Annan's goal regarding Lebanon is to gain Iran's commitment to the Security Council resolution for a halt to the fighting and calls, among other things, for the disarming and dismantling of the Hezbollah militia, which Iran backs.

On the nuclear issue, they said, Mr. Annan wants to secure Tehran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear watchdog, which published a report this week concluding that Iran had not provided necessary assurances that its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes and not for making bombs. The report also noted that a sample taken a year earlier had shown traces of uranium processed far beyond what is necessary for energy production.

Hours before Mr. Annan arrived, Mr. Ahmadinejad repeated his warning that Iran would not abandon its nuclear program despite the threat of sanctions from Western powers.

"They should know that this nation will not give up its absolute right to benefit from nuclear energy even one iota," he told a cheering crowd in Miandoab, a city in western Iran, Iranian news agencies reported.

The United States is pressing for sanctions against Iran for defying the Security Council, but European countries have emphasized that the door remains open to negotiations. Mr. Larijani is to meet early next week with Javier Solana, the European Union foreign policy chief, to pursue talks.

"Both sides agree and accept that the best solution to this problem can be found through negotiations," Mr. Larijani said in a joint appearance before reporters after the meeting with Mr. Annan.

One basis for talks is an offer of trade and aid incentives from the five permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and Germany. Iran responded ambiguously to the offer last month.

Mr. Rafsanjani said Iran objected to the six powers' demand that it suspend uranium enrichment as a condition of beginning negotiations. "If you remove the preconditions," he said, "then there is no hesitation on our part to enter negotiations. This is a fair proposition from our side."

United Nations officials emerged from the talks in an upbeat mood, while conceding that the most important meetings lay ahead.

"The tone of the music is appealing," said Terje Roed-Larsen, a special envoy to the Middle East. "But today is only the first act, and I want to listen to the full libretto."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/03/world/europe/03nations.html>

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London Sunday Telegraph

September 3, 2006

EU Backs Away From Sanctions As Iran Makes Atomic Breakthrough

By Philip Sherwell, in New York

The European Union yesterday gave Iran a further two weeks to "clarify" its uranium enrichment activities as Europe backed away from an immediate confrontation with the Islamic regime.

The offer of further breathing space to Teheran will frustrate Washington as the United States tries to win support for sanctions after Iran ignored Thursday's United Nations deadline to halt enrichment.

EU foreign ministers backed yet another rounds of talks as Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, flew into Teheran for a meeting today with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The two men will discuss Iran's nuclear programme and the crisis in Lebanon, where Teheran funds and backs Hezbollah.

In a clear sign that he was not expecting to win any concessions, Mr Annan once again put himself at odds with the US — and previous UN Security Council resolutions — on the eve of his arrival, telling the newspaper Le Monde that patience and negotiations were a better policy than sanctions.

The latest diplomatic back-peddalling came as fresh evidence emerged that Iran has recently made a key breakthrough in its enrichment of uranium — the process which produces material for an atomic bomb or nuclear fuel for civilian purposes. It has clandestinely assembled and started tests on a new breed of sophisticated P2 centrifuge devices at a production site in eastern Teheran, according to a leading opposition group.

UN nuclear inspectors last week also criticised Teheran for failing to come clean about its work on the P2 design, heightening fears that the regime has made greater progress than previously thought in accelerating enrichment. Iran was previously believed to be trying to develop P2 centrifuges from blueprints bought from A Q Khan, the rogue Pakistani atomic scientist, to speed up its limited enrichment with slower P1 machines. But, citing new information from senior sources within the regime, the National Council of Resistance of Iran said Iran has in fact already assembled 15 P2s and was testing them.

The machines are being made in hangars in the Pars district under the direction of Jafar Mohammadi, a veteran of Iran's atomic research, according to the group.

Alireza Jafarzadeh, a senior opposition figure, said the P2 project was an indication that Iran was operating a parallel programme in scattered sites away from locations identified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"We believe that these P2 machines are intended for use in locations other than the known uranium enrichment facility at Natanz," said Mr Jafarzadeh, who first disclosed that Iran had a secret nuclear programme. "The P2 is extremely important to them as it enriches uranium much faster."

Last week's IAEA report, which highlighted Iran's continuing enrichment, also complained that Teheran had ignored its request for new information after Mr Ahmadinejad surprisingly boasted in public that the country was developing more advanced centrifuges. Iran simply re-stated that it was working on "different types of centrifuge research" for civilian purposes. Nicholas Burns, the US assistant secretary of state, will this week meet European counterparts to discuss drawing up limited economic and travel sanctions against Iran and its leaders. John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, is working on a dual-track strategy for a diplomatic "coalition of the willing" to impose sanctions independently if the UN fails to reach agreement.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, reiterated Moscow's scepticism about the role of sanctions on Friday, even though the US and Europe previously thought they had Kremlin support.

In Teheran, Mr Ahmadinejad remained defiant, declaring: "Our nation is a supporter of peace but it will not retreat an iota from its right to nuclear technology."

Meanwhile, his predecessor as president, Mohammad Khatami, arrived in Chicago to begin a controversial US tour by addressing the Islamic Society of North America. He will also speak at a UN conference in New York, deliver an address at Washington's National Cathedral and visit Harvard University.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/09/03/wiran03.xml>

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London Sunday Times

September 3, 2006

Crime Boss Brokered Nuclear-Delivery Missile Sale To Iran

By Robert Winnett, Whitehall Correspondent

THE British government was warned more than two years ago that Iran had illegally acquired a missile system capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

It has emerged that a foreign government delivered the warning to Britain in early 2004.

Separately, it has been disclosed that the system was sold to Iran by a former senior member of the Ukrainian security service. The deal was brokered by an organised crime boss and, it is feared, contributed to the Iranian nuclear programme that is now the subject of an international confrontation.

Iran had also been using large cash payments to lure technical and scientific staff from Ukraine to work on its nuclear programme. Other targets of the bribes included one former head of Ukrainian intelligence, who was offered \$5m (£2.6m) to help the rogue state, but he rejected it.

It has also emerged that in 2004 the Ukrainian government was investigating the transport of weapons from Iraq to Syria and Iran before the war to topple Saddam Hussein. Now that the row over Saddam's weapons has died down, however, it is Iran's nuclear programme that is the more controversial issue.

Britain's policy of trying to use quiet diplomacy to curb the Iranian plans has been in stark contrast to the more bellicose rhetoric coming from America.

British ministers have never disclosed, however, that they were given warnings as long ago as 2004 that Iran had gone to the extent of covertly acquiring missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The latest escalation of the nuclear crisis came last week, when Iran missed a United Nations deadline to stop enrichment of uranium, after which President George Bush said, "There must be consequences", adding that the world faced "a grave threat from the radical regime in Iran".

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, responded by calling the claim that his country aimed to develop nuclear weapons "a sheer lie". Iran insists its nuclear programme is for electricity generation.

Britain is playing a central role in the standoff between the UN and Iran over its nuclear programme, both as a permanent member of the security council and as one of the three European Union negotiators.

The prospect of Iran developing nuclear weapons has alarmed the international community partly because of extreme statements by Ahmadinejad — such as his call for the destruction of the state of Israel — and partly because of the country's funding of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon. Iranian-made bombs and weapons have also been used against British troops in Iraq.

The International Atomic Energy Authority has been repeatedly thwarted in its attempts to establish the scope and purpose of the Iranian nuclear programme. An authority source said the extent of its investigations into Iranian attempts to acquire hardware for nuclear weapons was a "moot point". He did confirm the agency was aware that Ukraine had been a "key player in the process".

Last year, Ukrainian prosecutors announced they were investigating the illegal sale of at least 18 cruise missiles to Iran and China in 2001.

The Ukrainians were supposed to have destroyed or transferred to Russia their share of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal. The Americans funded a massive disarmament project, but considerable amounts of weaponry are thought to have disappeared in the interim period.

Ukraine also inherited hundreds of thousands of tons of conventional weapons from the Soviet Union, some of which have been decommissioned and some sold abroad, either legally or illegally.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-2340572.html>

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Los Angeles Times

September 3, 2006

Activity At Missile Test Site Under Scrutiny

By Times Wire Reports

South Korean and U.S. intelligence officials have detected suspicious vehicle movements at a major North Korean missile test site, a news report said today, amid lingering tensions over the country's weapons program.

"Military intelligence officials have spotted movements by several large vehicles in the North's Gitdaeryeong area," South Korea's Yonhap news agency said, citing an unnamed government official. Intelligence officials did not rule out the possibility that it could be part of preparations for more missile tests, Yonhap said.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-briefs3.4sep03,1,3267848.story>

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Los Angeles Times

September 3, 2006

Bioterrorism Is No Match For Natural Selection

Germes often take eons to mutate, so what will the feds accomplish with their expensive new bioterror defense lab?

By Wendy Orent

IN THIS AGE OF terrorist plots, the Department of Homeland Security's decision to build a super-secret institute to study possible bioterrorist agents seems natural. But the proposed institute at Ft. Detrick, Md., which was the site of a U.S. biowarfare program that was shut down in 1969, is worrisome. Ft. Detrick has been the home of the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, an open biodefense facility, for decades. But according to news accounts, the new \$128-million facility, to be known as the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center, will be "black": Nobody working outside the agency, including politicians, will have a clue about what goes on inside.

Although there is no reason to believe that the U.S. will develop offensive bioweapons at the center, there's another question: How useful will it be?

One of its divisions is supposed to analyze "materials recovered from a biological weapons attack," according to its website. But in its other division, the Biological Threat Characterization Center, scientists will seek to create germ agents that they think terrorists might use against us — and to come up with drugs and vaccines to protect us from them.

In this age of "synthetic genomics," the argument goes, we face a new world of horror. According to biodefense expert Steven Block of Stanford University, "Nature is constantly creating new pathogens, testing out new agents. It seems rather inevitable that if someone is bent on destruction, it should become possible to synthesize entire genes and make chimeras you can mix and match."

That's a lot to expect from strips of genetic information cobbled together in a laboratory.

Despite all the advances in synthetic genomics, making a new germ is harder than it looks. Pathogens don't just happen. They evolve in a particular host, in a particular context.

A germ has to be able to infect, replicate and exploit enough human tissues to kill, never mind spreading from host to host. Re-creating a small, existing virus, as virologist Eckard Wimmer of the State University of New York at Stony Brook showed in 2002 with poliovirus, is possible and easier today. But Wimmer had the polio blueprint in hand. He re-created an agent that had already been through the mill of natural selection.

Scientists in the former Soviet Union's biological weapons program learned that even if you're working with a natural pathogen, it's hard to get the results you want. According to Igor V. Domaradskij, one of the principal designers of the Soviet program, altering a pathogen is easy but maintaining its deadliness isn't. Even the simplest genetic engineering — adding genes for antibiotic resistance to bacteria — is difficult without sacrificing the germ's virulence. These problems can be solved, but it's difficult because you're working with living things.

Still, in 2001, a group of Australian scientists inadvertently made a virus deadlier. They added a mammal gene to a mousepox virus to make the virus produce a chemical called interleukin-4. These scientists discovered that their altered mousepox killed even vaccinated mice. Mousepox is related to smallpox, the most virulent of the highly contagious human diseases. Putting interleukin-4 in smallpox might produce a vaccine-resistant smallpox strain. A terrorist release of such a strain would be a catastrophe.

Or would it? Follow-up experiments performed by Marc Buller of St. Louis University showed, in research he has not yet published, that this strain doesn't spread well because the mice die too quickly. "You'd give them an injection in the foot, and they died," Buller said. Even in experiments in which the mice lived longer, the disease still didn't spread as well as naturally occurring mousepox.

In other words, if interleukin-4 had the same immune-suppressing effect in smallpox as it does in mousepox, a lot of people could be killed. But the disease would end there. You'd essentially have what Buller calls a "one-cycle kill."

This result isn't surprising. For all germs, transmissibility and virulence exist in a delicate balance. If a germ kills the host too quickly, it won't spread. Block admits this but contends that new virulent germs "don't have to work at all well. They don't have to be successful in the wild, they just have to kill a lot of people."

But why would a rogue scientist bother to create a new pathogen if all he wanted was to kill a lot of people? There are guns and bombs and chemicals. There is a proven bioweapons agent — anthrax, as we saw in 2001, perhaps the most durable, and one of the most lethal, of all germs.

Two other deadly agents, plague and smallpox, not only kill, but spread. These three are the "best" threats nature has to offer. There's a handful of second-stringers: tularemia, botulinum toxin, viral hemorrhagic fevers like Ebola and Marburg, perhaps cholera or polio — if we're ever foolish enough to let our immunity wane.

Why waste hundreds of millions of dollars pursuing the fantasy of an engineered disease when deadly agents honed by natural selection are on hand?

The National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center is a potential boondoggle — and a dangerous one. Its work, even if done by our best scientists, isn't likely to produce any genuinely threatening new germ — and thus no new means of defense. The likelihood that rogue scientists elsewhere could do better is vanishingly small.

But if we keep our enemies wondering what the new biodefense center is up to, they may be disposed to try themselves. Secrecy can only make an arms race more likely — a race in which both sides are running after chimeras, where there's plenty to lose in time and talent and money, and little or nothing to be won.

WENDY ORENT is the author of "Plague: The Mysterious Past and Terrifying Future of the World's Most Dangerous Disease."

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-op-orent3sep03.1.320003.story>

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Washington Post

Khatami Arrives As U.S. Weighs Sanctions on Iran

Former Embassy Hostages Criticize Trip

By Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, September 5, 2006; Page A16

The stormy saga between the United States and Iran takes one of its most unusual turns since the 1979 revolution as former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami arrives in Washington to give a major address on Thursday, the same day that the Bush administration holds talks in Europe on new U.N. sanctions on Tehran.

Khatami's five-city U.S. tour this week has ignited both controversy and curiosity -- infuriating former hostages from the 1979-1981 U.S. Embassy seizure and alarming some in Congress but winning praise from foreign policy experts. The former president's speech at Washington National Cathedral is a hot ticket, with attendance now by invitation only.

Khatami's visit has also been controversial in Tehran, where a newspaper called the U.S. visa "suspicious" and a critic suggested the Shiite cleric should be defrocked for committing "worse than a sin" in his trip to the United States. Many Iranian exiles in this country are also enraged, with some threatening protests. Yet Iran's supreme leader and its hard-line current president did not try to block the visit, Iranian sources said.

Khatami's tour comes as the State Department presses for punitive action for Iran's failure to meet a U.N. deadline to suspend uranium enrichment, a process for nuclear energy that can be converted to develop a nuclear weapon. As an incentive, Washington held out the prospect of joining European talks with Iran and ending 27 years of hostility. But Iran spurned the European-designed package.

"We've been trying hard to show there are two paths here," Undersecretary of State R. Nicholas Burns said. "That's why we made the offer to negotiate. They clearly have not accepted that path, so now we have to begin the sanctions process."

Burns will meet in Berlin on Thursday with diplomats from Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia to discuss which sanctions to impose on Iran, the first leg of what may be a heated debate. The administration hopes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be able to wrap up the resolution when she attends the General Assembly opening later this month.

But the administration is not cutting off all forms of dialogue. "We're going to maintain a policy of no contact between the two governments, but at the same time, that doesn't mean that Americans outside government shouldn't be talking to Iranians. Americans should take every opportunity to address the concerns we have over terrorism and nuclear issues with Iranians who visit our country," Burns said.

Khatami, who was president for the two-term limit from 1997 to 2005, is the highest-ranking Iranian to visit Washington since the Carter administration severed ties in 1980. He is also speaking in Boston, Charlottesville, Chicago and New York on the role of the three Abrahamic faiths in the peace process. He turned down an invitation to meet with former president Jimmy Carter, partly because of scheduling conflicts, according to Iranian sources. Foreign policy analysts say the administration is signaling that it will not close the door on reformers such as Khatami who favor a freer press, political openings and dialogue with the world, while it will isolate hard-liners such as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for violating U.N. resolutions and talking about wiping Israel off the map. But human rights groups say Khatami's government also violated human rights and supported extremist groups. He was president when President Bush labeled Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, the "axis of evil" in 2002.

"He never wanted to create instability or a situation that would lead to violent confrontation," said Hadi Ghaemi of Human Rights Watch, an international monitoring group. "He was devoted to preserving the Islamic regime . . . so he never challenged those who had real power."

Many problems -- the crackdown on student protests, banning of new independent newspapers, and arrests and deaths of critics -- were linked to hard-liners in the separate judiciary or vigilantes sanctioned by Iranian intelligence. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, also has veto power over all government actions.

Former hostages are outspoken about Khatami's visit. "Can an ex-U.S. president do the same in Iran?" asked John W. Limbert Jr., former embassy political officer. Kevin J. Hermening, an embassy Marine guard and the youngest hostage, said U.S. officials have "completely lost their minds" in dealing with Iran. "Every time we agree to 'talks' it is seen as another indication of weakness and capitulation," he said.

Giving Khatami a visa was a "despicable" decision by the State Department, said former embassy press attaché Barry M. Rosen. "His dialogue of civilizations is nothing more than a public relations stunt by the oppressive regime."

L. Bruce Laingen, who was the ranking U.S. hostage, said he will attend the speech because he believes in talks, despite serious problems with the regime and doubts that Khatami has any power since Ahmadinejad replaced him.

In a 1998 interview with CNN, Khatami said he regretted that American feelings were "hurt" by the embassy seizure -- adding that U.S. policies had also seriously hurt Iranians. "In the heat of the revolutionary fervor, things happen which cannot be fully contained or judged according to usual norms," he said.

Like other hostages, Laingen said those words were not enough. "The question I would put to him would be: What do you think your government owes the hostages -- and I don't mean money, but something more than what he said to CNN."

Foreign policy experts largely approve of the Khatami visit. Geoffrey Kemp, a Reagan administration national security official now at the Nixon Center, called the decision "quite smart" and added: "We have nothing to lose by listening to Mr. Khatami . . . since he is highly influential behind the scenes."

Ray Takeyh, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said Washington had missed a "huge opportunity" to engage with an "imminently engageable leader" when Khatami was president, all the more striking just a year later under Ahmadinejad's rule.

Senior Clinton State Department official Wendy Sherman said the United States might not be in confrontation with Iran if Khatami's visit had happened six years ago.

But Danielle Pletka, a vice president at the American Enterprise Institute, called the Khatami visit "surreal" and disputed descriptions of him as a "pragmatic mullah."

"If someone at the State Department can prove that the nuclear program didn't improve under Khatami, that terrorists weren't sponsored under Khatami and that arms were not shipped to Hezbollah under Khatami, then by all means let's label him a pragmatist and embrace him," she said.

Congressional leaders also criticized the trip. In a letter to Rice, Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) appealed for the visa to be denied because the State Department had ranked Iran the No. 1 sponsor of terrorism every year Khatami was president.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom wrote the Washington National Cathedral to complain about the "troubling irony" of inviting Khatami to speak on interfaith cooperation when he presided over a government that imprisoned, harassed, tortured and even executed religious minorities.

Commission Chairman Felice Gaer called on the cathedral to appeal to the former Iranian leader to "denounce and express regret" for past violations of religious freedom.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/04/AR2006090400720.html>

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Group says U.S. unprepared for dirty bomb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31 (UPI) -- The organization Physicians for Social Responsibility says the United States health system is woefully unprepared for radiological disaster or attack.

The group evaluated three possible nuclear terrorism scenarios -- a weapons blast in lower Manhattan, an attack on a nuclear power plant near Chicago, and the detonation of a "dirty" or radiological bomb near the White House in Washington, D.C.

"We found that the U.S. government lacks a workable plan to respond to the likely medical needs. Thousands of American civilians injured by a nuclear terrorist attack could survive with better preparedness," said Dr. Ira Helfand, an author of the PSR report, "The U.S. and Nuclear Terrorism: Still Dangerously Unprepared."

The report says the U.S. government should designate a central authority and establish a clear chain of command to direct response and rescue efforts in the event of a nuclear attack.

It also says radiation alarms should be put in place in high-risk target areas, first responders should be trained specially for the job and a National Disaster Medical System should be put in place.

The group also advocates a public outreach and communications plan be put in place to inform the public whether and when it should evacuate or seek shelter.

Finally, the group advocates pre-positioning radiation protection supplies and medical treatments in high-risk areas. PSR is a non-profit that advocates for environmental protections and against nuclear weapons proliferation.

<http://www.upi.com/SecurityTerrorism/view.php?StoryID=20060831-061504-9300r>

(Editor's Note: Please click on link below to access the Physicians for Social Responsibility's homepage to access report *The U.S. and Nuclear Terrorism*.)

<http://www.psr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Home>

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