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Articles & Other Documents:

[Focus On Iran Causes Unease](#)

[U.S. Alone In Seeking Ouster](#)

[U.N. Nuclear Experts Inspect Egyptian Laboratory](#)

[Nukes Are Defensive, U.S. Lawmakers Told](#)

[Cross-fire on safety at germ labs](#)

[1977 Report Foresaw 9/11 Type Of Terrorism](#)

[Iran Says U.S. Attack Would Be A 'Blunder'](#)

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Los Angeles Times

January 22, 2005

Pg. 1

Focus On Iran Causes Unease

Reaction in Tehran is stern, but analysts abroad see Cheney's warning of a possible Israeli strike as a way to prod Europe. Bush's speech is criticized.

By John Daniszewski, Times Staff Writer

LONDON — The Bush administration's warning that Iran might face military action from Israel raised the ire of Tehran, but politicians and analysts said Friday that it could bolster European efforts to get the Islamic Republic to end its suspected nuclear weapons program.

Israeli politicians were quick to say they had no imminent plan to attack Iran, even as some commentators elsewhere expressed unease at the sweeping and "messianic" tone in President Bush's inaugural speech marking the start of his second term.

Tehran did not respond directly to Vice President Dick Cheney's comments Thursday about a possible Israeli strike against Iran.

Cheney's remarks brought into focus comments Bush made in his address, in which the president said the United States stood ready to defend itself and protect its friends "by force of arms if necessary."

At Friday prayers in Tehran, a forum that often reflects the thinking of Islamic hard-liners who wield power, a leading cleric sounded a defiant note.

Saying he was speaking to "Americans and Zionists," Mohammed Emami Kashani said: "The world will catch you red-handed. If you ask the people in the world, everyone will tell you how despised you are.... People will become increasingly aware of your plots and hopefully you will not achieve anything."

The conservative Tehran Times accused the Bush administration of "belligerent, unilateralist policies [that] brought about nothing but crisis and insecurity for the world."

Israeli and U.S. analysts share the view that Iran is secretly working to acquire or build nuclear weapons and is moving to build longer-range missiles capable of delivering them, a charge the Iranian authorities dispute.

On Sunday, the New Yorker magazine reported that U.S. forces had already gone into Iran seeking to verify targets for a possible military strike. Bush administration officials disputed the accuracy of the report but did not categorically deny it.

Israel has said it will allow negotiations, led by Britain, France and Germany, to try to bring about a verifiable halt in the alleged weapons program. In October, the Europeans won an agreement from Iran to temporarily suspend its efforts at enriching uranium. Enriched uranium can be used to make nuclear weapons.

The U.S., which has no direct relations with Iran, also has given its backing to the European efforts for now.

A senior Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Cheney's remarks were intended to spur European countries to get tougher with Tehran.

What Cheney said "was not intended to warn Iran, or caution Israel, as much as to encourage the Europeans to take a much stronger stance on imposing a more rigid regime of inspection on Iran with regard to its nuclear program," the official said.

"In effect, Cheney was telling the Europeans, 'Hurry up and get your act together, or we can't be responsible.' "

Israel has said that it regards Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, if unchecked, as a threat to its existence. But the Jewish state also says it would consider military action against the country only if all other options had been exhausted.

"We are not going to initiate an attack against Iran at this stage," said Raanan Gissin, an aide to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. "We don't believe that the diplomatic measures and sanctions that can be imposed have been fully tried yet."

Bush's inaugural speech was directed to a world community that remains largely disenchanted with the U.S.

president. A BBC World Service Poll of 22,000 people in 21 countries showed this week that 58% of respondents, and a majority in 16 countries, considered the world more dangerous because of Bush's reelection.

But in France, some commentators expressed confidence that Bush's second term would start with a new emphasis on diplomacy and cooperation, even with regard to Iran.

The U.S. and Europe are pursuing a logical "good-cop-bad-cop" approach toward Iran, with British, French and German negotiators trying to persuade Iran to dismantle its weapons programs or face American military might, said Bruno Tertrais of the Foundation for Strategic Research, a Paris think tank.

"We are not on the eve of a large military operation against Iran," Tertrais said in an interview on Europe1 radio. He said U.S. leaders wanted "to keep the pressure on Iran. They trust the Europeans to conduct negotiations ... but they need to threaten at the same time."

But in Germany, the parliamentary foreign policy spokesman for the opposition Christian Democrats was irked by the comments from Bush and Cheney.

"It would be sensible if the Americans would think not only about potential military strikes. It would be good if they would participate more constructively in the diplomatic efforts of the European Union," Friedbert Pflueger told a Berlin radio station.

Commentators in various regions chided Bush for what they said was his aggressive projection of American power and questioned whether the president was sincere about backing freedom fighters and not dictators, as they say the U.S. does now in the Middle East and Asia.

"The U.S. president issued a blood-curdling cry yesterday" warning America's enemies to expect "an untamed fire of freedom," wrote London's Daily Star. It's up to British Prime Minister Tony Blair to use his influence to make sure the U.S. defends freedom "with a cool head," the Star said.

"Super-Zero Mr. Un-Credible Goes on the Warpath," said the irreverent Daily Mirror, a British tabloid, calling the president's speech "bizarre."

"There is a sense of a man who considers the whole world as his own parish," said Italy's left-leaning La Repubblica.

Belarusian President Alexander G. Lukashenko, the leader routinely referred to as Europe's last dictator and one seen as being in the sights of the Bush administration, was sardonic in his reaction to Bush's call for an expansion of freedom.

"Suppose someone or other didn't really want such 'freedom,' soaked in blood and smelling of oil?" he asked his National Security Council on Friday. (Belarus thumbed its nose at Bush two days earlier when its state television aired "Fahrenheit 9/11," the anti-Bush documentary by U.S. director Michael Moore.)

Britain's conservative Daily Telegraph, generally supportive of Bush, was also skeptical, fearing that Bush would be too bogged down in Iraq to deal with any of the other six "outposts of tyranny" recently mentioned by Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice: Belarus, Myanmar, Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

"With a much strengthened mandate for his second term, Mr. Bush has vaulting ambitions for liberty," the paper said. "The president's ambitions are admirable, but he has got to get Iraq right if they are to have a hope to be realized. That is the unfinished business of his first term, and will doubtless preoccupy him throughout the second." French officials such as Foreign Minister Michel Barnier have taken the inauguration as an opportunity to declare "a new era" in U.S.-French relations that will put the Iraq-related tensions in the past.

Nevertheless, Bush's rhetoric struck some editorialists in France as short on substance.

"No mention of the situation in Iraq was made, nor about the role of the United Nations or Europe," Swiss journalist Richard Labeviere said in an editorial on Radio France International. "His repeated incantations for world freedom do not provide any manual, any program, any policy ... only moral values based on a spiritual revival that has overwhelmed America."

L'Union newspaper in eastern France said the speech was "messianic," and the Sudouest regional newspaper may have best expressed the typical French view.

"With this president, the world feels like it's dancing on a volcano," wrote columnist Bruno Dive. "We're not only talking about his foreign policy, which set Iraq on fire, worsened the situation in the Middle East and loosened the link with European allies.

"We also think about his economic policy based on abysmal deficits which put the USA (and therefore the rest of the world) on the edge of a financial crash."

Alexander Kononov, president of the Institute for Strategic Assessment, a think tank in Moscow, said Bush's ambitions exceeded the reality of U.S. power.

"The words that all the oppressed can count on America's help are just a declaration," Kononov said. "It has been shown quite explicitly that, in reality, not all the oppressed can count on America's stepping in."

Although he doubted that the U.S. or Israel could attack Iran, Viktor A. Kremenjuk, deputy director of the USA-Canada Institute in Moscow, said he felt that Bush's remarks did not bode well for Russia.

"The U.S. is claiming the right to sit in judgment and decide whether Russia conforms to the standards of democracy. And since it is clearly understood that there is less and less democracy in Russia ... it is possible to predict that Russia will be getting plenty of dressings-down in the near future."

Times staff writers Megan K. Stack in Cairo, Laura King in Jerusalem, Sebastian Rotella in Paris, Bruce Wallace in Tokyo, Ching-Ching Ni in Beijing, Maria De Cristofaro in Rome, Petra Falkenberg in Berlin and Alexei V.

Kuznetsov in Moscow contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/la-fg-worldreax22jan22,1,1995180.story>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

January 22, 2005

Pg. 13

U.S. Alone In Seeking Ouster

15 Countries Rebuff Effort to Unseat Head of Nuclear Agency

By Dafna Linzer, Washington Post Staff Writer

A Bush administration campaign to replace the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog agency has faltered after all 15 countries approached by U.S. diplomats -- including Britain, Canada and Australia -- refused to support the plan, U.S. officials said in interviews.

The White House had hoped that at least one of the three English-speaking allies would agree to block Mohamed ElBaradei from a third term as director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

But with the United States proposing no other candidate, no country was willing to turn against ElBaradei, who is admired within the agency for his willingness to challenge the administration's assertions on Iraq and Iran.

That same willingness has put ElBaradei deeply at odds with the White House and has become the driving factor in the administration's efforts to replace him, officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the diplomatic sensitivities involved.

"It's on hold right now," said one U.S. policymaker who was involved in lobbying against ElBaradei. "Everyone turned us down, even the Brits."

A British official confirmed that account, saying, "We can certainly live with another ElBaradei term."

U.S. diplomats had tried to coax several people into challenging ElBaradei, including Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, but no one was willing to run against the 62-year-old Egyptian diplomat, who was asked by a majority of IAEA board members to stay on the job for five more years.

There is still hope among some U.S. officials that an Argentine nuclear specialist will agree to run, although the deadline for submissions was Dec. 31. "There's some thinking that the emergence of a new candidate could encourage members to oppose ElBaradei," another U.S. official said.

Publicly, the administration has said its efforts to replace ElBaradei are motivated solely by a desire to see U.N. executives adopt a two-term limit. But most allies have viewed the campaign as retaliation against someone who questioned U.S. intelligence on Iraq and is now moving cautiously on Iran.

The U.S. effort, led by John R. Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, included sifting through intercepts of ElBaradei's phone calls in hopes of finding material to use against him.

There have also been orchestrated leaks by unnamed U.S. or Western officials who have told reporters that Iran was secretly improving upon a weapons program and that ElBaradei was trying to hide that information from the IAEA board.

Yesterday, diplomats in Vienna, where the IAEA is based, said one of the more recent accusations -- that Iran had bought large quantities of the metal beryllium for a nuclear charge -- had proved to be unfounded.

After the beryllium claim first surfaced in news reports from Vienna, U.S. officials said ElBaradei had concealed the information from the public. But diplomats said yesterday that an exhaustive investigation found that Iran's attempts to buy the material, which has dozens of civilian applications, were unsuccessful.

The new revelations are unlikely to help the U.S. case against the IAEA chief.

In recent meetings in Vienna, Washington and several European capitals, foreign diplomats said they would not join Bolton's effort.

Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Pakistan and South Africa were all approached in addition to Canada, Britain and Australia, U.S. officials said.

Some countries targeted in IAEA investigations, such as Pakistan, South Korea and Brazil, support removing ElBaradei, whom they consider too tough. Iranian officials said privately that they would also like to see ElBaradei go. But without the backing of a powerful and neutral party such as Britain or France, the U.S. strategy faltered.

The Europeans presented a unified response, telling American officials that they appreciate the principle of term limits but that with an empty field they will back ElBaradei.

The U.S. effort may collapse altogether, officials said, if Bolton leaves the State Department in coming weeks, as is expected.

"He was the driving force behind the block-ElBaradei idea," said one official. Bolton's office declined to confirm or deny reports that he is being replaced by Robert G. Joseph, who ran nonproliferation policy at the National Security Council until November and is well liked by his European counterparts.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A27841-2005Jan21.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer

January 22, 2005

U.N. Nuclear Experts Inspect Egyptian Laboratory

Inspectors from the U.N. nuclear watchdog are in Egypt inspecting a laboratory that was designed to reprocess plutonium, a substance that can be used to fuel atomic weapons, Western diplomats said yesterday. Egypt is the most recent country to become the focus of an investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency for failing to inform it of activities and facilities that could be used to produce fuel for atomic bombs.

--Reuters

<http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/nation/10705202.htm>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Times

January 23, 2005

North Korea

Nukes Are Defensive, U.S. Lawmakers Told

SEOUL — A top North Korean official has told U.S. legislators that the communist state possessed nuclear weapons, Radio Free Asia has reported.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan said the country was a nuclear-weapons state, but its nuclear arsenal was defensive in nature and Pyongyang did not intend to possess it forever, the radio quoted U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon as saying. The Pennsylvania Republican led a six-member delegation to North Korea earlier this month. North Korea is believed to possess at least one nuclear weapon and possibly more than eight. It has boasted to have transformed spent plutonium from reactors into materials for nuclear weapons, but has never formally declared it possessed nuclear weapons.

<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20050123-121151-9689r.htm>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

International Herald Tribune

Cross-fire on safety at germ labs

By Scott Shane The New York Times

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Anti-bioterror work has expanded rapidly

Last year, while working on a vaccine to protect against bioterrorist attacks, three laboratory workers at Boston University were exposed to the bacteria that cause a rare disease called tularemia, or rabbit fever.

The workers recovered, though two of them had to be hospitalized.

But the prognosis is less certain for the university's ambitious plan to build a high-security biodefense laboratory, part of a national boom in germ defense research touched off by the Sept. 11 attacks and the anthrax letters of 2001. The tularemia episode, acknowledged by university officials only after inquiries last week from the news media, has outraged opponents of the proposed \$178 million laboratory and reignited a national debate over whether the rapid expansion in work with dangerous pathogens is adequately regulated and scientifically justified.

The Boston case follows other mishaps in germ research, including the accidental shipment of virulent live anthrax from Maryland to California last March, and an investigation that revealed multiple spills of anthrax bacteria in the U.S. Army's biodefense laboratory. Such incidents have led some scientists to ask whether the growing number of germ laboratories - financed from the \$14.5 billion in federal money spent on civilian biodefense since 2001 - may pose a menace to public health comparable to the still uncertain threat from bioterrorism.

Dr. David Ozonoff, a professor of environmental health at the Boston University School of Public Health who originally supported the new laboratory but now opposes it, argues that biodefense spending has shifted money away from "bread-and-butter public health concerns." Given the diversion of resources and the potential for germs to leak or be diverted, he said, "I believe the lab will make us less safe."

Dr. Mark Klempner, associate provost for research at Boston University's medical school, says the proposed laboratory, to be designated a National Biocontainment Laboratory along with one to be built in Galveston, Texas, will pose no public hazard. To be designated Biosafety Level 4, the highest level of security, it will develop drugs and vaccines to protect not only against bioterror agents but also such natural emerging diseases as SARS and West Nile virus, he said.

Such disparate views among scientists reflect deep uncertainty about the scale and imminence of the bioterror threat. Some experts believe an attack that could kill tens of thousands of people is plausible today. Others argue that the known terrorist groups have little sophistication about biological weapons. Instead, these critics say, the biodefense expansion has been fueled by a scramble for federal money.

Currently there are four Biosafety Level 4 laboratories nationwide, with six more planned; 50 laboratories operate at Biosafety Level 3, sufficient to work with anthrax, and 19 more are planned at universities and government institutions, according to the Sunshine Project, a Texas group that is tracking the growth.

In the only major bioterrorist attack in American history - the anthrax-laced letters mailed to news media figures and two senators in fall 2001, killing five people - FBI investigators have focused chiefly on the theory that the anthrax originated within an American biodefense program.

By the same token, the critics say, the tularemia that sickened the workers in Boston would not have existed if not for bioterror research. Richard Ebright, a molecular biologist at Rutgers University in New Jersey, said the disease "has zero public-health importance." Only about 130 cases a year are reported in the United States.

The flood of biodefense financing has drawn hundreds of inexperienced researchers into work with hazardous organisms, Ebright said.

Boston University officials concede that the tularemia vaccine researchers did not follow proper safety procedures and have removed the principal investigator, Dr. Peter Rice, from his post as chief of infectious diseases. Rice was to have had a role training workers for the proposed high-security laboratory.

University officials say the tularemia vaccine researchers thought they were working with a harmless "vaccine strain" of the *Francisella tularensis* bacterium. But for reasons unexplained, the sample was mixed with a virulent strain.

Douglas Wilkins, a Boston lawyer who filed a lawsuit on Jan. 12 challenging the laboratory plan on behalf of 10 neighborhood residents, noted that the university's environmental impact statement claims the medical center has "not had any laboratory-acquired infections."

One scientist who supports the increase in biodefense spending, Dr. Tara O'Toole, does not dismiss the safety issues. In fact, she said, the biodefense expansion has focused attention on long-neglected biosafety rules. But she believes the danger of bioterrorism is so great that the billions being spent on protections may not be enough.

"I think bioterrorism is the biggest national security threat of the 21st century," said O'Toole, director of the Center for Biosecurity of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "So I want a robust biodefense research and development program."

She would argue that the potential toll of a bioterror attack with, say, smallpox puts the risk of laboratory accidents in perspective.

But is such an attack a realistic possibility, when nothing remotely approaching it has ever occurred?

"After 9/11, I don't think anyone would say that just because an attack hasn't happened, it can't happen," O'Toole said. "I keep trying to talk myself out of this. But it just keeps getting scarier and scarier."

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/01/24/news/germs.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

1977 Report Foresaw 9/11 Type Of Terrorism

Miami Herald

January 24, 2005

A panel formed by President Nixon in the 1970s anticipated today's concerns about major terrorist attacks in the United States.

By Frank Bass and Randy Herschaft, Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Twenty-four years before the Sept. 11 attacks, a high-level government panel developed plans to protect the nation against terrorist acts ranging from radiological "dirty bombs" to airline missile attacks, according to declassified documents obtained by The Associated Press.

"Unless governments take basic precautions, we will continue to stand at the edge of an awful abyss," Robert Kupperman, chief scientist for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, wrote in a 1977 report that summarized nearly five years of work by the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism.

PANEL'S CREATION

The group was formed by President Nixon in September 1972 after Palestinian commandos slaughtered 11 Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany. The committee involved people as diverse as Henry Kissinger and a young Rudolph Giuliani, the once-secret documents show.

"It is vital that we take every possible action ourselves and in concert with other nations designed to assure against acts of terrorism," Nixon wrote in asking his secretary of state, William Rogers, to oversee the task force.

"It is equally important that we be prepared to act quickly and effectively in the event that, despite all efforts at prevention, an act of terrorism occurs involving the United States, either at home or abroad," the president wrote. The full committee met only once, in October 1972, to organize, but its experts did get together twice a month over nearly five years to identify threats and debate solutions, the memos show.

INTERVENING EVENTS

Eventually, the group's influence waned as competing priorities, a change of presidents ushered in by the Watergate scandal, bureaucratic turf battles and a lack of spectacular domestic attacks took their toll.

But before that happened, the panel identified many of the same threats that would confront President Bush at the dawn of the 21st century.

The experts fretted that terrorists might gather loose nuclear materials for a "dirty bomb" that could devastate an American city by spreading lethal radioactivity.

"This is a real threat, not science fiction," National Security Council staff member Richard T. Kennedy wrote to his boss, Kissinger, in November 1972.

Rogers, in a memo to Nixon in mid-1973, praised the Atomic Energy Commission's steps to safeguard nuclear weapons. But he also warned Nixon that "atomic materials could afford mind-boggling possibilities for terrorists." Committee members identified commercial jets as a particular vulnerability but raised concerns that airlines would not pay for security improvements such as tighter screening procedures and routine baggage inspections.

"The trouble with the plans is that airlines and airports will have to absorb the costs and so they will scream bloody murder should this be required of them," according to a White House memo from 1972. ``Otherwise, it is a sound plan which will curtail the risk of hijacking substantially."

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/nation/10717693.htm>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)

Washington Post

January 24, 2005

Pg. 9

Iran Says U.S. Attack Would Be A 'Blunder'

TEHRAN -- Iranian officials said Sunday that a U.S. military strike against the country would be a "strategic blunder" but brushed aside tough talk from Washington as psychological warfare rather than a real threat.

Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi called U.S. threats a bluff but warned that the Bush administration would make a big mistake if it attacked Iran.

"The Americans are stupid, but not so much to make the same mistake which they made in Tabas," said Yunesi, referring to a failed U.S. military operation in 1980 to rescue hostages held in Iran, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

President Bush said last week that he would not exclude the possibility of using military force against Iran over its nuclear program, which the United States has said is aimed at producing weapons. Vice President Cheney said Thursday that Iran "is right at the top of the list" of world trouble spots.

Iran has denied allegations of a secret nuclear weapons programs, saying its nuclear activities are for peaceful energy purposes.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, refused to comment on reports that Iran had discovered spying devices from unidentified flying objects shot down by the Iranian military.

IRNA also quoted Yunesi as saying that U.S. planes had been detected over Iran as "part of the espionage which they carry out."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A31599-2005Jan23.html>

[\(Return to Articles and Documents List\)](#)