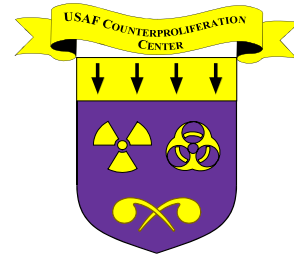


#276

21 July 2003

USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER

CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL



Air University

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Maxwell AFB, Alabama

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Focus on Smallpox Threat Revived

Experts Say Immunization Program Is Crucial to Homeland Security

By Ceci Connolly

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, July 17, 2003; Page A03

National security experts inside and outside the Bush administration, fearing the president's smallpox immunization program is all but dead, have begun a major public relations campaign to inject new life into a project they describe as vital to homeland protection.

In a series of interviews and published articles, Pentagon officials, conservative thinkers and a few public health officials argue that without a sizable network of inoculated health care workers, the United States remains ill-equipped to respond to a smallpox attack. And, they contend, anxiety about the dangerous side effects of the vaccine should be quelled by the success of the military in immunizing nearly a half-million personnel with few serious complications.

"Our goal at this point should be to meet [President Bush's] plan and to vaccinate the number of people originally targeted in the health care community of between 400,000 and 500,000," said William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. "I would certainly be more comfortable if we had that number of civilians prepared to respond."

At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Director Julie L. Gerberding said she hopes to unveil a strategy soon to "reaffirm the importance of the smallpox program because of the dreaded consequences" of an attack. The agency plans to distribute \$100 million to states to step up vaccinations.

But even some supporters of the Bush policy say the opportunity to vaccinate millions before an attack has been missed, with the effort plagued by mixed messages, safety fears and the lack of evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed stocks of the deadly virus.

"People are now back in dumb-and-happy mode," said Tara O'Toole, director of the Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies at Johns Hopkins University. Gone, she said, is the sense of urgency that people felt last winter "when we were going into Iraq, and the possibility of a smallpox attack was seen as much more plausible."

Seven months after the president announced he was resuming smallpox inoculations, after a 30-year hiatus, as part of the effort to protect the United States against biological attacks, the program is in danger of virtually vanishing. In recent months, top officials such as Bush, Vice President Cheney and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge have rarely mentioned the threat of a smallpox attack or the need to vaccinate millions of emergency responders. Neither has Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) or Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, although both were immunized in front of cameras to publicize the effort in March.

With few exceptions, state and local health departments have shifted their attention to more immediate concerns, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), West Nile virus and back-to-school shots. And two respected groups -- the Institute of Medicine and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices -- have called for a halt to smallpox vaccinations, citing concerns about heart complications related to the vaccine.

To date, fewer than 40,000 public health and hospital employees have been immunized. And despite Bush's promise to make vaccine shots available to the general public this summer, Gerberding said yesterday that a new vaccine will not be ready for another year. Nearly 50,000 doses of smallpox vaccine have been discarded because the opened vials had passed their expiration dates.

All of that frightens William Bicknell and Kenneth Bloem, two smallpox experts who drafted a position paper for the libertarian Cato Institute warning that the United States has not done enough to prepare.

"We should be well on our way to protecting the nation's civilian population by vaccinating up to 10 million health, emergency and public safety workers. However, we are stalled," the pair wrote. "We call on CDC to do a far better job in publicizing the safety of vaccination for healthy adults and we call on the Bush administration to revitalize our preparations for a smallpox bioterrorist event."

The sharpest criticism of the vaccination campaign has been that Bush and his deputies failed to articulate -- and continually reinforce -- a rationale for using a vaccine known for its side effects. Though she is well-versed and plugged-in, even O'Toole said: "To this day, I don't know what the purpose was."

Some now fret that Bush's declaration that hostilities in Iraq have ended left the mistaken impression there is no longer a threat.

"We know that the former Soviet Union had large quantities of weaponized smallpox or smallpox that could be used in an offensive manner," Winkenwerder said. "All of those stores are not accounted for, to our knowledge."

He and Army Col. John D. Grabenstein, a physician overseeing Pentagon vaccinations, published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association detailing the results of the military program in an attempt to encourage participation in the civilian program.

"It is our hope and desire that in relating our experience to the broad general public the point can be made that what we accomplished can be accomplished by others in the civilian sector," he said. "There is nothing unique in what we did."

The CDC calculated last year that it would take 1.25 million immunized health workers to run enough emergency clinics to immunize the U.S. population within 10 days in the event of an attack. Yale University professor Edward Kaplan said he has seen no evidence the country is near that capability.

"If you believe it's a serious threat -- and plenty of credible folks do believe it is a threat -- then it makes sense to be ready to push the button" on mass immunization, Kaplan said. "We are not in a position to respond rapidly if we have to."

Michael T. Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, said that he would prefer to have the 1.25 million health workers immunized in advance but that it would "not be a major crisis" if officials spent the first day of an outbreak doing that.

Gerberding said she feels frustrated by the emphasis on the small number of people immunized so far. She said the CDC has not been given credit for its accomplishments, including purchasing 150 million doses of vaccine, educating and training the medical community, upgrading state laboratories, expanding hospital capabilities and overseeing emergency drills.

"Can we stand up clinics across the country tomorrow to immunize our nation in 10 days? No," she acknowledged. Still, we "have made enormous progress."

Ultimately, Gerberding said, it is up to the states to decide how they will prepare for terrorism, including a possible smallpox attack.

That helps explain the wide variation in inoculation rates across the country. Some states, such as Arizona and Nevada, have immunized fewer than 50 people, while Tennessee has immunized 2,500.

Washington state initially estimated that it would vaccinate 7,000 medical personnel, said Health Secretary Mary C. Selecky, who is president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. But concerns over liability and reports of heart complications in some vaccine recipients dampened enthusiasm, and just 543 have been immunized. She said she has shifted her strategy to identifying people who are ready and willing to be immunized at the first report of a smallpox case.

Florida Health Secretary John O. Agwunobi pushed hard to recruit a corps of 3,900 immunized medical workers spread evenly across all 67 counties -- and he hopes to continue.

"We are working on the premise the threat remains," he said. "We're open for business."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A2647-2003Jul16.html>

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How anthrax evades attack

Scientists have discovered how anthrax avoids attack by the immune system.

They hope the finding could lead to more effective treatments for the deadly infection - and for auto-immune diseases such as multiple sclerosis.

The researchers have found out that the key is one of three poisonous proteins produced by anthrax - called lethal factor.

This chemical is able to disable dendritic cells, which in normal circumstances are mobilised by the immune system to attack an invader.

Researcher Dr Bali Pulendran, of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, said: "This is the first study that demonstrates any interaction between bacillus anthracis (anthrax) and dendritic cells.

"When dendritic cells are compromised, such as in our study, the innate immune system is unable to stimulate the immune response, thus permitting the microbe to spread unchecked."

Combination of poisons

Lethal factor and two other toxins, protective antigen and edema factor, increase the deadly potency of anthrax.

The edema factor causes the release of fluid into the lungs and is deadly on its own.

Protective antigen shields the other two toxins from the immune system, allowing them to enter target cells, and lethal factor destroys immune system cells.

When they die, they trigger a reaction in the body that can cause septic shock and death.

Dr Pulendran said: "Our ultimate goal is to apply this novel finding to develop better anthrax treatments and to shape future research into controlling immune responses more appropriately."

The researchers hope that as lethal factor has the ability to disarm the immune system it could potentially form the basis of drug that are able to block inappropriate immune reactions in autoimmune diseases or in transplant patients. The study is published in the science magazine Nature.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3074061.stm>

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Wall Street Journal

July 18, 2003

Pg. 1

Iraqi Scientists Recount Effort To Make Weapon Out Of Ricin

Program, One of the Threats Cited by the U.S., Was Dropped in '91, Baghdad Pharmacists Say

By David S. Cloud, Staff Reporter Of The Wall Street Journal

BAGHDAD -- Weeks before the first Gulf War, a group of Iraqi scientists gathered in the desert to test a crude biological weapon. They put an artillery shell filled with a poison called ricin on the ground and placed caged guinea pigs, mice and rabbits nearby.

Watching from a distance, they detonated the shell, spewing a dense vapor cloud. About a dozen animals not killed by the blast were taken away for observation. Over the next two months, three died from suspected ricin poisoning, according to two Iraqis involved in the experiment. Most of the animals, however, showed no ill effects. Soon, the head of the program now says, the attempt to make ricin into a weapon was scrapped.

That late-1990 test in the desert became part of the Bush administration case for war. The ricin saga is particularly relevant now, as President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in a dramatic joint appearance in Washington Thursday, vigorously defended their arguments that Iraqi weapons programs were a sufficient threat to justify this year's war to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Bush stood behind the quality of prewar intelligence and said the mere threat that Mr. Hussein had weapons of mass destruction was too important to ignore.

"The regime of Saddam Hussein was a grave and growing threat," Mr. Bush said. "Given Saddam's history of violence and aggression, it would have been reckless to place our trust in his sanity or his restraint." He expressed confidence that more evidence of weapons activities would be found eventually.

A close look at the history of the ricin program shows how difficult it is to sort out the truth about Iraq's weapons programs, and why the controversy over them is likely to live on for some time. Defenders of the decision to go to war will note that the ricin case shows Iraq had an intense appetite for chemical and biological weapons and worked diligently and secretly to try to acquire this particular strain of them. But skeptics will say the case shows that the Iraqis weren't as successful in developing them as the U.S. assumed, and that American claims were exaggerated. Ricin, a poison derived from the castor-bean plant, certainly was cited as a genuine concern. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, in a January speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, said that for the 1990 field test, "Iraq had produced and weaponized at least 10 liters of ricin. In concentrated form, that quantity of ricin is enough to kill more than one million people."

The Central Intelligence Agency warned in a prewar report to the public that a castor-oil plant in Fallujah, Iraq, might currently be making ricin. Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, asserted at a Pentagon briefing in February that Iraq had given terrorist groups "help in making explosives and poisons, such as ricin." Now, some Iraqi scientists who researched ricin are challenging the prewar claims about ricin. Turning it into a battlefield weapon took know-how Iraq never had, according to Shakir al-Akidy, who says he took the lead in trying to develop a ricin weapon. In an interview in Baghdad, he contends that the less-toxic ricin Iraq managed to produce was all either consumed in tests or destroyed.

"Ricin is very difficult to isolate," he says. "What we made was very crude, not useful for military applications. We threw everything away and that was the end."

Though it's impossible to be certain of Dr. al-Akidy's credibility, his claims were verified in most respects by another ricin-project scientist, Loay Abdul Rathman, now dean of a Baghdad pharmacy college. Some details of the Iraqi ricin program, including Dr. al-Akidy's involvement, were also corroborated by current and former United Nations weapons inspectors and by an unreleased 1998 U.N. report, which summarized Iraqi documents and interviews with others who worked in the ricin project.

Iraq admitted in the mid-1990s that before the 1991 Gulf War, it had made chemical weapons capable of killing on a mass scale, plus various biological poisons including anthrax and botulinum toxin. In the case of ricin, if Drs. al-Akidy and Abdul Rathman are to be believed, Iraq never moved past early and unsuccessful research. But Iraq's refusal to answer many U.N. questions about such weapons made it impossible for U.N. inspectors to be confident

the unconventional-weapons programs had ended. In the face of this silence, the Bush administration tended to assume the worst.

"Iraq had demonstrated a capacity to produce ricin and the capacity to put ricin into weapons. And we know that during the 1990s, Iraq had an active [biological weapons] program -- at least that was our assessment," says Pentagon spokesman Larry DiRita. He says "it's too early to tell" if that assessment was accurate.

Dr. al-Akidy, a 56-year-old who earned a doctorate in pharmacology in Britain, now sits behind the counter of a looted Baghdad pharmacy he owns, a forlorn figure dispensing pills and lotions from nearly bare shelves. Fifteen years ago, he says, he was an ambitious junior scientist doing cancer-drug research at a government-run lab in Baghdad. He says a friend in Iraq's internal-security forces suggested he work on making a ricin weapon. The friend, Jassem Mohammed Hussein, couldn't be located. But five years ago, he told U.N. inspectors of collaborating with Dr. al-Akidy. Mr. Hussein claimed to be the internal-security representative on a health panel that was updating a brochure on poison treatment, including poisoning due to castor beans. The inspectors suspected other motives.

Dr. al-Akidy says he had no great qualms about weapons work: "We were doing something for the country," he says. He also hoped the regime would reward him if he succeeded.

Iraq's scientists, in the wake of the country's disastrous eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s, were under pressure to help in rebuilding military strength. The Iraqi Defense Ministry had proposed an effort "to obtain biological weapons and ... delivery methods and storage sites," according to a 1988 document that a U.N. report says inspectors later found. A copy of the ministry's proposal went to the internal-security agency that employed Dr. al-Akidy's friend Jassem Hussein, according to documents the U.N. recovered.

A crude poison can be made from castor beans simply by crushing them and skimming off the castor oil, leaving a mash that's 3% to 5% ricin. But to make a weapon, the ricin protein must be extracted in relatively pure form and refined into particles tiny enough for inhalation. Ideally, that would be 1/50th the width of a human hair.

Given the technical hurdles, ricin has proved "a less desirable biological-warfare agent" than many others, says David Franz, a former U.S. Army expert in chemical and biological arms. Instead, ricin is often viewed as an agent for assassination. It was the lethal poison jammed into a Bulgarian defector on the tip of an umbrella in 1978, in a hit widely attributed to the Soviet KGB. Ricin causes red blood corpuscles to stick together and prevents cells from making proteins, but the precise cause of death from ricin poisoning is unknown.

Dr. al-Akidy says he began his work by simply buying a bag of castor beans. A lab assistant would mash them into a paste that was then mixed with water, and put into a small centrifuge to squeeze out the oil. Dr. al-Akidy says it took more than a month to extract an ounce of clear liquid that appeared to contain some portion of toxic ricin.

He then wrote to military authorities, explaining his work and suggesting they test the sample. The letter touted "the benefits of research in offensive warfare," according to a U.N. summary. Dr. al-Akidy says he stressed that Iraq could make ricin without any foreign help. Castor beans are abundant in Iraq.

He also passed along foreign reports on ricin's potential as a weapon. "I found several reports saying it could be weaponized, so I translated them," he says. "That's what encouraged them."

Dr. al-Akidy's liquid was sent to Salman Pak, Iraq's main biological-weapons research facility south of Baghdad. Scientists there "asked him if he could produce a larger quantity, and he explained the extraction methods to them," says the unreleased U.N. report, compiled nearly 10 years later. It adds that Salman Pak officials "proposed to prepare a sample in their own laboratories using the same procedure."

Nine scientists worked on the project at Salman Pak for two years, according to Drs. al-Akidy and Abdul Rathman and the U.N. report. Dr. al-Akidy says he spent two days a week there, overseeing the research. Dr. Abdul Rathman, 50, says he was there fulfilling his military-service duty after earning a doctorate in chemistry in England.

The program had problems from the start. The team tried crushing the beans using hammers, but that was time-consuming and messy. They bought two electric food processors. For each grinding, they put a handful of beans into the small machines, collecting the resulting mash. Sometimes the hard beans would cause the grinders to jam, forcing the scientists to return to crushing by hand.

Once they had a paste, processing each batch into a liquid sample was even harder. The mash was dissolved in salty water and refined to produce a liquid sample. Small batches were produced throughout 1989 and early 1990, then further refined and tested on small animals. Dr. al-Akidy says Iraq never succeeded in extracting highly concentrated ricin.

The team did have some success. Mice injected with the ricin liquid died. But the scientists say that unless the liquids was refrigerated, it became inert within 24 hours. And according to Iraqi accounts assembled by the U.N., when the mixture was freeze-dried, it proved ineffective in killing test animals in inhalation tests.

The goal was a ricin powder that would keep indefinitely and had small enough particles to be inhaled. Dr. al-Akidy says his team lacked the sophisticated equipment needed to refine the particles, although Iraqi scientists working on anthrax and other agents appear to have had such equipment.

According to Dr. Abdul Rathman, when a sample from Salman Pak was sent to the Muthanna State Establishment, another weapons facility north of Baghdad, officials there said it would be useless in warfare. The desert field test supported that judgment, when a detonated 155-millimeter shell failed to douse most nearby caged animals with a lethal dose.

Dr. al-Akidy blames his inability to concentrate the toxin. Dr. Abdul Rathman says that when the test results were presented to the head of biological research at Salman Pak, Ahmed Murthada, he ripped up the document in anger, saying: "You haven't got the protein isolated. You were bluffing us."

Dr. Murthada later told U.N. investigators he had ordered the ricin program shut down after the poor field test. Soon thereafter, all work on ricin stopped, according to Drs. al-Akidy and Abdul Rathman. Dr. Murthada, who is believed to be in U.S. custody in Iraq, couldn't be reached for comment.

Dr. al-Akidy says he received no rewards for his two years of ricin research and took a teaching job. He adds that he wrote to Hussain Kamal, a Saddam Hussein son-in-law who headed Iraq's unconventional-weapons programs, complaining that the ricin project had received insufficient resources.

U.N. inspectors learned about the ricin project in 1995, when Mr. Kamal briefly defected to Jordan and revealed many details of Iraq's bioweapons efforts. (He was later lured back to Iraq and executed.) Officials in Baghdad then acknowledged to the U.N. they had worked on ricin. They said they were looking into its potential as an anti-cancer drug, an avenue explored in Western countries.

The U.N., however, had documents about the ricin program's real purpose. They included papers describing preparations for the 1990 desert trial. These were found in the rubble of the Muthanna weapons lab, destroyed in the 1991 Gulf War. In 1996, the inspectors summoned Dr. al-Akidy, who was teaching at Baghdad University's college of pharmacy. Confronted about the trial by U.N. inspector Richard Spertzel, Dr. al-Akidy acknowledged the nature of the research, both he and Mr. Spertzel say.

A little over a year later, a U.N. team paid a surprise visit to Baghdad University intending to search Dr. al-Akidy's office. An inspector stationed in a stairwell of the building intercepted Dr. al-Akidy coming down carrying documents, says Terence Taylor, who led the inspection. He says Dr. al-Akidy claimed the documents were his wife's medical records, but a search showed he was taking away a report he and Jassem Hussein had written about their ricin work. The inspectors found more documents under piles of papers in the scientist's office.

For Dr. al-Akidy, the discovery had severe consequences. In June 1997, he says, Iraqi security agents jailed him in a tiny cell at their Baghdad headquarters, known as Hakmayah. In several interrogations, he says, agents accused him of helping the U.N. team in hopes of a reward. He told the agents he had taken the documents to his office after Dr. Abdul Rathman asked for help writing a paper about their ricin research in hopes of getting a promotion, a story that Dr. Abdul Rathman confirms.

Dr. al-Akidy says he was imprisoned for more than four months, fed just once a day. But agents then freed him, saying his explanation had checked out. "You made a mistake, but you are a good guy," he says they told him. Inspectors returned to Iraq last December, after the Bush administration pushed through a U.N. resolution giving Iraq one last chance to come clean on weapons of mass destruction. U.N. inspectors summoned Dr. al-Akidy for another interview. He says Iraqi officials advised him to take a government minder if he went. He decided not to cooperate with the U.N. "I didn't want to go back to Hakmayah," he says. Many other Iraqi scientists also refused to be interviewed.

The report the U.N. compiled in 1998 concluded that "intent to develop ricin could well remain an objective for Iraq." Current and former U.N. weapons inspectors say they have never found any hard evidence that the ricin work continued. At the same time, neither they nor Bush administration officials accept that Iraq completely abandoned work on ricin after the 1990 desert experiment.

In Iraq, U.S. weapons investigators last month searched the Fallujah castor-oil plant considered suspicious by the CIA and found bags of stored castor beans. They are trying to verify Iraq's claim that it destroyed castor-bean mash that was a byproduct of oil products the plant made. They've also been examining whether, before the war, Iraq helped Islamic militants at camps in northern Iraq in making ricin. British police in January found traces of ricin at a London apartment linked to the militant group. A spokesman at the CIA wouldn't say whether any new evidence that Iraq continued ricin work after 1990 has been uncovered.

Dr. al-Akidy says that as Iraq's leading expert on ricin, he would have known of any active ricin production and any decision to share the research with terrorist groups. But he says there are some questions he can't answer. Among them is what happened to another senior scientist in the ricin program, Amer al Mahdidi. He says he thinks Dr. al Mahdidi went to Libya sometime in the 1990s.

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Wall Street Journal
July 18, 2003

China Says Pyongyang Has Material For Bomb

By Charles Hutzler, Staff Reporter Of The Wall Street Journal

BEIJING -- China believes North Korea has reprocessed enough plutonium to complete a nuclear bomb -- a finding Beijing isn't publicly acknowledging but one that is prompting urgent Chinese diplomacy to defuse Pyongyang's standoff with the U.S.

Chinese intelligence services have concluded in recent weeks that North Korea is producing weapons-grade plutonium in sufficient quantities and has all the necessary components to assemble nuclear-tipped missiles, according to diplomats in Beijing and a European official.

The diplomats and the official, who have seen internal Chinese reports on the finding or were briefed on their contents, said the reports estimate that the reprocessing is enough to make at least one nuclear device, though the European official says Pyongyang hasn't fashioned the plutonium, triggering devices and other components into a bomb.

The assessment offers another glimpse into whether North Korea has carried out its claimed reprocessing of all 8,000 fuel rods stored at its Yongbyon nuclear complex -- something the U.S. has warned would heighten tensions. South Korea's National Intelligence Service said on July 9 that North Korea has begun reprocessing a "small number" of the rods. Beijing's finding suggests the program is more advanced, because experts say that 1,000 or so spent fuel rods are needed to produce enough plutonium for one bomb.

Chinese officials refused to confirm the finding. The Foreign Ministry says "the Chinese side doesn't know about this matter." But the official silence underscores how the assessment is complicating the task Beijing has set itself in the impasse: mediating a diplomatic solution and avoiding hostilities.

A full-blown conflict could undo the regional stability China deems crucial to meeting its overriding objective, economic development, and could force Beijing into making an unwanted choice between its neighbor and ally and its crucial relationship with the U.S.

"The Chinese are scared," said a Western diplomat in Beijing. "It's in their interests to keep open the process of negotiations for as long as possible."

Confirmation that Pyongyang is making steady progress in developing nuclear weapons is likely to strengthen calls among hawks within the Bush administration to take an even harder line with North Korea, possibly scuttling Chinese diplomatic efforts just as they appear to be gaining ground.

China's most experienced interlocutor with North Korea, Vice Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo, arrived in Washington Thursday for two days of talks. Mr. Dai is the second Chinese official in a month to travel to Washington expressly to discuss the North Korean standoff. Mr. Dai is fresh from a visit to Pyongyang, where on Monday he held a rare meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, handing over a letter from Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Chinese officials have refused publicly and privately to divulge the contents of the letter and provide details on the Pyongyang meeting or the agenda in Washington. But Beijing's overall thrust is evident. "What China is trying to do is lower the temperature and promote talks," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan told reporters in Beijing Thursday. "It's important to get the parties back to the negotiating table."

Keeping the Chinese intelligence finding under wraps works to Beijing's advantage by keeping its options open and forestalling an open disagreement with Washington. China has twice in recent weeks foiled U.S. attempts to bring North Korea's nuclear program and its withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty before the United Nations Security Council.

Acknowledgment that Pyongyang has a new nuclear capability -- beyond the one or two bombs the U.S. believes it developed in the early 1990s -- would make it more difficult for Beijing to argue that diplomacy be given a chance. China, after all, helped marshal the U.N. to criticize India and Pakistan after they tested nuclear devices in 1998.

Says an Asian diplomat: "China needs this strategic ambiguity."

In a sign of the jitters the situation is causing, Korea Development Bank Thursday shelved plans for bond issues of \$500 million and €500 million, partly because of rising tensions on the Korean peninsula, say people familiar with the deal.

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New York Times
July 18, 2003

China Pushes North Korea And U.S. Talks

By Joseph Kahn

GUANGZHOU, China, July 17 — China stepped up its efforts to broker negotiations between the United States and North Korea today, dispatching a senior diplomat to Washington and urging both sides to revive a discarded 1994 accord on ending North Korea's nuclear program.

China's unusual public campaign suggested that it intends to play a more assertive mediating role in a new round of talks, which some experts say could be held as soon as August, probably in the Chinese capital of Beijing.

"China hopes to see the quick resumption of the peace talks," Kong Quan, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said at a news briefing today. "The purpose of the Beijing talks would be to seek a final settlement to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo left Beijing today for Washington, where he is expected to meet with Bush administration officials to discuss terms for new talks. Mr. Dai had just returned from a four-day visit to Pyongyang, the North Korean capital.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said on Wednesday that the United States was open to discussions with North Korea. He said he expected to see very soon the reopening of a diplomatic channel.

If talks do get under way, China indicated that it would urge the United States and North Korea to return to the 1994 accord, known as the Agreed Framework, negotiated by the Clinton administration to try to stop North Korea from developing nuclear weapons.

Under the accord, the United States and its allies agreed to provide fuel to North Korea and help it build two light-water nuclear reactors. North Korea agreed to shut down its existing nuclear reactor and abandon all plans to build atomic bombs.

After taking office in 2001, the Bush administration expressed skepticism about the agreement, which collapsed after North Korea acknowledged that it had been pursuing a nuclear arms program in violation of the 1994 accord. North Korea has since fired up its five-megawatt nuclear plant, pulled out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and expelled inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Administration officials also said this week that North Korea boasted that it had begun reprocessing 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods to make plutonium. If that is true, the country could begin building a small arsenal of nuclear weapons within months.

Some administration officials have rejected the possibility of reviving the 1994 agreement as the basis for future negotiations, saying that it amounted to blackmail.

North Korea, administration officials say, must unilaterally and verifiably give up its nuclear program before the United States will discuss economic or diplomatic incentives.

The Chinese, however, say that the earlier agreement should remain the basis for new negotiations.

"The 1994 Agreed Framework played a role for a certain period of time, for 10 years," Mr. Kong said. "We hope that the agreement can be continued, but it will be up to the parties concerned."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/18/international/asia/18KORE.html>

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Washington Times
July 18, 2003
Pg. 17

Heartbeat Away From Jihadi Nukes?

By Arnaud de Borchgrave

While Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was in the U.S. last month to reassure his interlocutors about his pro-American bona fides, his own chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Committee, Gen. Mohammed Aziz Khan, said, at a public meeting, "America is the No. 1 enemy of the Muslim world and is conspiring against Muslim nations all over the world."

As the Army Chief of Staff, Mr. Musharraf outranks Gen. Aziz Khan. Backed as he is by other Islamist generals in the army, Gen. Aziz Khan must have felt sufficiently secure to, in effect, challenge the president for his pro-American policies.

Clearly referring to his chief of army staff, Gen. Aziz Khan said politics should not be practiced while in "uniform." Sensing Mr. Musharraf, with President Bush's financial sweetener, is looking for a way out of the Kashmir morass, he added that even with a solution to the long-running dispute, India and Pakistan could never be friends.

Reporters were stunned by Gen. Aziz Khan's salvo. Before the newspapers went to press, the Inter-Services Public Relations of the military sent out advisories to kill the story. Editors were reminded Gen. Aziz Khan's position is largely ceremonial. Still, the general never would have taken on Mr. Musharraf unless convinced he had the support of some of the 10 corps commanders who control the country.

As a member of the fundamentalist Islami-e-Talaba (the youth wing of Jamaat-e-Islami) in his college days, Kashmir-born Gen. Aziz Khan was known as a zealous Islamic radical. Throughout his career, he kept in close touch with militant groups outside the army while developing a wide following among junior officers. He always addressed them as "son."

Mr. Musharraf owes his life and his job to Gen. Aziz Khan. When word spread that then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was about to replace army Chief of Staff Musharraf — who was flying back from Sri Lanka in Oct. 1999 — with a general junior to both of them, Gen. Aziz Khan, then chief of general staff, decided to mount a rebellion. He convinced the Islamabad corps commander, who, like him, had been passed over, that this would be the end of their careers. The bloodless coup that followed not only kept Mr. Musharraf in place, but also elevated him to chief executive and then president.

Following September 11, 2001, and the abrupt about-turn of Pakistan's foreign policy, when Mr. Musharraf — "either you're with us or against us," Mr. Bush had told him on the phone — ditched Taliban in Afghanistan and backed the U.S. unconditionally, Gen. Aziz Khan and his following among politico-extremist groups became security risks. So Mr. Musharraf kicked him upstairs where he was neutralized. At least so Mr. Musharraf thought. He has used his ceremonial job — and loyal following among field-grade officers in the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) — to organize army opposition to Mr. Musharraf.

This demonstrates yet again that Pakistan is still a heartbeat away from becoming the world's first Islamist nuclear power. Pakistan's arsenal is variously estimated at between 35 and 60 nuclear weapons.

Mr. Musharraf has survived at least six assassination plots. His support for the U.S. war against terrorism is unpopular in many segments of society. Some 500 al Qaeda suspects have been arrested in Pakistan and most have been handed to the U.S., according to the government. Mr. Musharraf also put the squeeze on the army's support for the anti-Indian guerrillas in Kashmir. For Pakistan, they're "freedom fighters"; for the Islamist clergy, "jihadis (holy warriors); and for India, "terrorists."

Fact is many of them are terrorists who were trained in al Qaeda's Afghan camps. They switched to the Kashmir front after Taliban's defeat in November 2001. ISI organized their transfer from Afghanistan to Kashmir.

Kashmir is the Pakistan army's principal *raison d'être*, as a former Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. put it.

"Demonstrate that your support for the liberation of Kashmir is waning, and you automatically curry disfavor among senior officers," the ex-envoy explained. And Mr. Musharraf has done just that. Infiltrations from Pakistan-held Kashmir into the Indian side continue, but are much reduced.

Mr. Musharraf also is preparing his public opinion for Pakistan's recognition of Israel if the Bush peace plan becomes reality. "If Arab nations can recognize Israel, why not Pakistan?" he asked. By acquiescing to U.S. wishes and sending troops into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for the first time since independence half a century ago, where they are not allowed to go by treaty commitment, Mr. Musharraf triggered much grumbling in the ranks.

Some tribal leaders in FATA-land have told government troops to butt out. They like Taliban and admire al Qaeda. The recent sectarian carnage in a Shi'ite mosque in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan, killed 50 and wounded more than 300, and was immediately exploited by another redoubtable Musharraf opponent. In a July 9 interview with *Nawa-e-Waqt*, an Urdu daily, retired Gen. Hamid Gul, a former ISI chief and now "strategic adviser" to politico-religious leaders, said: "America is directly involved in all terrorist attacks in Pakistan, including the Quetta bloodbath."

Gen. Gul's calcinatory rhetoric accused the U.S., India and Israel — the three archvillains in the Islamist lexicon — of establishing "more than 20 base camps in Afghanistan from where these powers foment civil unrest in Pakistan. Their aim is to crush jihad."

MMA — the extremist coalition that governs the Northwest Frontier Province, shares power in Baluchistan, and has 20 percent of the seats in the federal assembly — is staging countrywide demos to protest Mr. Musharraf's legal challenge to disqualify national and regional assembly members who do not have the required bachelor's degree. The government contends degrees awarded by madrassas (Koranic schools where religion is the only discipline taught) do not meet the same standards.

If the Supreme Court rules against MMA, religious extremists will lose control of the regional government in NWFP, and mob violence will return with a vengeance. And if the court rules against Mr. Musharraf, Muslim extremism will consolidate its power along the entire length of the Afghan frontier and enforce the recently introduced Sharia (Islamic law) in NWFP.

For the general with the ceremonial position of chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, it's heads his Islamist cronies win, tails Mr. Musharraf loses. The Pakistani president's fight to stay in power does not necessarily conjugate with America's war on terror. Broken so many times in the past, no one trusts U.S. pledges and promises. Mr. Musharraf can still dissolve parliament and declare martial law or call new elections.

The billing and cooing between the two presidents at the Camp David Summit in June is already a faint warble in July.

Arnaud de Borchgrave is editor at large of The Washington Times and of United Press International.

<http://www.washtimes.com/commentary/20030717-081241-1951r.htm>

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New York Times

July 18, 2003

New Warning Was Put Off On Weapons Syria Plans

By Douglas Jehl

WASHINGTON, July 17 — The Central Intelligence Agency and other agencies blocked a Bush administration plan to deliver sharp new warnings this week about Syria's efforts to develop unconventional weapons, according to United States government officials.

The C.I.A. and the other agencies raised strong objections to testimony that John R. Bolton, an under secretary of state, had planned to present to Congress on Tuesday.

The hearing was postponed, and Congressional officials and other government officials said one reason was the dispute over Mr. Bolton's plan to say in a classified portion of his testimony that Syria's development of chemical and biological weapons had progressed to the point that they posed a threat to stability in the Middle East.

The dispute is the latest between intelligence agencies and the Bush administration over issues involving unconventional weapons.

Government officials said they had no doubt that the separate controversy surrounding President Bush's use of disputed intelligence about Iraq's suspected nuclear weapons program had caused the intelligence agencies to be particularly rigorous in scrutinizing the testimony that Mr. Bolton had prepared about Syria.

A call to Mr. Bolton's office was referred to the State Department press office. A spokeswoman, Brooke Summers, said Mr. Bolton's testimony had been postponed because he "had to attend a White House meeting at the time that he was scheduled to attend the subcommittee meeting." She said the hearing was likely to be rescheduled to September. Another State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Mr. Bolton had decided to postpone his testimony, not just because of the White House meeting but because there was not time to resolve the interagency disagreements over his draft statement.

A C.I.A. spokesman, Bill Harlow, declined to comment on his agency's role in the matter. The C.I.A.'s objections to the testimony, first reported today by Knight Ridder newspapers, were informally spelled out in a memorandum that exceeded 35 pages, one government official said.

A second government official said the assertions spelled out in Mr. Bolton's prepared testimony went well beyond what the United States had previously said about Syria's weapons programs. The official said the extent of objections from the intelligence agencies meant that "there wasn't time to move it along."

Mr. Bolton, the under secretary of state for arms control and international security, ran into controversy in May 2002 when he delivered a speech saying that Cuba had a biological weapons program. A State Department intelligence official, Christian Westermann, recently told the House and Senate intelligence committees that the conclusion was not supported by available intelligence data, Congressional officials have said.

In the last year, Mr. Bolton has been among the administration officials who have been most publicly critical of Syria, identifying the Damascus government as being among those whose pursuit of chemical and biological weapons made them international threats. His statements have described those weapons program as a more significant problem than did a declassified American intelligence assessment that covered the first six months of 2002.

In testimony last month before the House International Relations Committee, Mr. Bolton offered a considerably darker view of Syria's weapons program than the C.I.A. had in a report to Congress two months earlier.

For example, Mr. Bolton said in June that American officials were "looking at Syria's nuclear program with growing concern and continue to monitor it for any signs of nuclear weapons intent." The C.I.A. report to Congress in April said only: "In principle, broader access to Russian expertise provides opportunities for Syria to expand its indigenous capabilities, should it decide to pursue nuclear weapons."

In June, Mr. Bolton also said that American officials "know that Syria is pursuing the development of biological weapons." The C.I.A. report in April, using an abbreviation, said only that it was "highly probable that Syria is also continuing to develop an offensive BW capability."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/18/international/middleeast/18WEAP.html>

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Washington Post

July 21, 2003

Pg. 1

Oct. Report Said Defeated Hussein Would Be Threat

By Walter Pincus, Washington Post Staff Writer

Last fall, the administration repeatedly warned in public of the danger that an unprovoked Iraqi President Saddam Hussein might give chemical or biological weapons to terrorists.

"Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists," President Bush said in Cincinnati on Oct. 7. "Alliance with terrorists could allow the Iraqi regime to attack America without leaving any fingerprints."

But declassified portions of a still-secret National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) released Friday by the White House show that at the time of the president's speech the U.S. intelligence community judged that possibility to be unlikely. In fact, the NIE, which began circulating Oct. 2, shows the intelligence services were much more worried that Hussein might give weapons to al Qaeda terrorists if he were facing death or capture and his government was collapsing after a military attack by the United States.

"Saddam, if sufficiently desperate, might decide that only an organization such as al Qaeda, . . . already engaged in a life-or-death struggle against the United States, could perpetrate the type of terrorist attack that he would hope to conduct," one key judgment of the estimate said.

It went on to say that Hussein might decide to take the "extreme step" of assisting al Qaeda in a terrorist attack against the United States if it "would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him."

The declassified sections of the NIE were offered by the White House to rebut allegations that the administration had twisted prewar intelligence on Iraq's nuclear weapons program. The result, however, could be to raise more questions about whether the administration misrepresented the judgments of the intelligence services on another basis for going to war: the threat posed by Hussein as a source of weapons for terrorists.

The NIE's findings also raise concerns about the dangers posed by Hussein, who is believed to be in hiding, and the failure to find any of his alleged stocks of chemical and biological weapons. If such stocks exist, a hotly debated proposition, this is precisely the kind of dangerous situation the CIA and other intelligence services warned about last fall, administration officials said. A senior administration official said yesterday that the U.S. intelligence community does not know either "the extent to which Saddam Hussein has access or control" over the groups that are attacking U.S. forces, or the location of any possible hidden chemical or biological agents or weapons. Asked whether the former Iraqi leader would today use any chemical or biological weapons if he controlled them, the senior official said, "We would not put that past him to do whatever makes our lives miserable."

The official said the judgment of last fall's intelligence estimate -- that a desperate Hussein, in hiding and with U.S. troops searching for him in Iraq, could turn to al Qaeda -- "had not been supplanted."

L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. civil administrator in Iraq, said yesterday on NBC's "Meet the Press" he believes Hussein is alive. "I think he is in Iraq, and the sooner we can either kill him or capture him, the better."

On "Fox News Sunday," Bremer also said Hussein appeared to have pre-positioned weapons and made plans to carry out an insurgency should his forces, as expected, lose a war with the United States. "There has been some evidence of planning for the possibility of losing the war militarily and going into some kind of insurgency or organized resistance," Bremer said, without explaining what the evidence is.

Bremer said he does not believe Hussein could make a comeback: "Dead or alive, this guy is finished in Iraq. There is no public support for him."

Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) said in an interview that despite what Bush has said, the war is not over until Hussein is captured or killed. "He could come back like Napoleon if we don't watch out," said Markey, who added that the former Iraqi leader remains a threat because he, if anybody, knows where any chemical or biological weapons might be.

Last fall, as Congress began debating a resolution giving Bush authority to go to war against Iraq, CIA Director George J. Tenet ordered six intelligence services to develop over a 10-day period a common assessment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs and the threat they posed. A few days after the NIE began circulating, at the request of members of Congress who wanted material they could use in public debate, the administration released a 25-page unclassified summary of the 90-page classified report.

Two days later, in response to pressure from Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.), then chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, Tenet released three pages of additional information from the NIE and a classified hearing that for the first time suggested that Hussein might only use chemical or biological weapons when under threat of attack.

Friday's declassified material from the NIE gave a much more complete picture of the intelligence in the form of all the key judgments of the intelligence community.

One of the judgments was that Hussein "appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or [chemical or biological weapons] against the United States fearing that exposure of Iraqi involvement would provide Washington a stronger case for making war."

Another judgment was that Iraq would "probably" attempt a clandestine attack against the United States, as mentioned by Bush -- not on "any given day" as the president said Oct. 7, but only "if Baghdad feared an attack that threatened the survival of the regime were imminent or unavoidable."

Today the situation is changed. Hussein is alive but in hiding, and his alleged stocks of chemical or biological weapons or agents have not been found. Meanwhile, the president and other leaders have yet to mention publicly the intelligence assessment that Hussein may be a potentially bigger threat now than before the United States attacked. In fact, Bush, in his May 1 speech from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, appeared to take just the opposite position. "We have removed an ally of al Qaeda," Bush said. "No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20698-2003Jul20.html>

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London Times
July 21, 2003

Weapons Evidence Will Be Revealed Within Six Months

By Stephen Farrell, in Baghdad

THE head of the task force hunting for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction has indicated that he expects to begin to disclose evidence of Saddam Hussein's weapons programmes within six months.

In a rare public appearance, David Kay, a former United Nations weapons inspector appointed by the CIA to oversee the search, claimed that he had found enough evidence to convince him that Saddam had been operating such programmes.

"I think in six months from now we will have a considerable amount of evidence, and we'll be starting to reveal that evidence," Dr Kay told the NBC television network.

Pressure on President Bush and Tony Blair increased last week after a House Intelligence Committee report based on Dr Kay's briefings concluded that evidence so far "does not point to the existence of large stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons".

However, asked if he believed that their strongest case would eventually cover nuclear, biological or chemical material, Dr Kay, 63, who was installed last month as Special Adviser for Strategy on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), said: "I think we'll have a very strong case on all of those. I think we'll have a strong case on missiles as well."

The Pentagon's 1,300-strong Iraq Survey Group now provides "direct support" to him. After predecessors' claims of supposed "major" biological or chemicals "finds" that were later discredited, the cautious Dr Kay is determined that none of the findings should be leaked, despite the intense political spotlight on WMD.

The team is understood to fear that such disclosures could tip off former Baathist officials about the investigation's progress or direction and compromise existing or potential informants.

The Iraq Survey Group has a staff of American, British and Australian military and intelligence experts and is based within the top-security perimeter around Baghdad international airport. There, data is collated and Iraqi scientists,

detainees and witnesses are questioned. It has offices in Washington and a base in Qatar, where much of the recovered material is analysed.

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New York Times

July 20, 2003

Pg. 12

A Chronicle Of Confusion In The Hunt For Hussein's Weapons

By Judith Miller

On paper, the Pentagon's plan for finding Iraq's unconventional weapons was bold and original.

Four mobile exploitation teams, or MET's, each composed of about 25 soldiers, scientists and weapons experts from several Pentagon agencies, would fan out to chase tips from survey units and combat forces in the field. They would search 578 "suspect sites" in Iraq for the chemical, biological and nuclear components that the Bush administration had cited time and again to justify the war. The Pentagon said the weapons hunters would have whatever they needed — helicopters, Humvees in case weather grounded the choppers, and secure telecommunications.

But the "ground truth," as soldiers say, was this: chaos, disorganization, interagency feuds, disputes within and among various military units, and shortages of everything from gasoline to soap plagued the postwar search for evidence of Iraq's supposed unconventional weapons.

To this day, whether Saddam Hussein possessed such weapons when the war began remains unknown. It is the biggest mystery of the war and a thorny political problem for President Bush. His administration has expanded the hunt and has urged patience, expressing the belief that some weapons may still be found. Others believe that to be increasingly unlikely.

Interviews with soldiers and government officials over three months with the Pentagon's 75th Exploitation Task Force, known as the XTF, identified a number of problems that might explain why the search has produced so little. The flaws are serious enough, according to some participants, that the searchers might indeed have overlooked weapons or their components — if they were there to be found.

Some participants said the Bush administration used flawed intelligence to plan and conduct the search. They said planners had assumed that either chemical or biological weapons would be used against American forces in the field, proving their existence to the world. Or they assumed that if the armaments were not used, they would be easy to find.

Some said that promising sites were looted — or cleared of evidence — before Americans could search or secure them.

"Because we arrived at sites so late, so often," said Capt. J. Ryan Cutchin, the leader of the team known as MET Bravo, "we may never know what was there, and either walked or was taken away by looters and Baathist elements under the guise of looting."

A senior Iraqi military intelligence official, a source some of the weapons hunters considered their most promising find, said Mr. Hussein had destroyed his stockpiles of chemical and germ weapons, continuing the destruction up until a week before the war.

Several officials asserted that bureaucratic rivalries were partly to blame. There was strife between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, and arguments between the MET weapons-hunting units and their commander; and some said that Special Operations forces alienated potential Iraqi sources through midnight raids and other harsh tactics.

Underlying those problems, experts and soldiers said, was the Pentagon's reluctance to make the mission an urgent priority as the risky occupation of Iraq unfolded.

"Though it may be now, I don't sense that this was much of a priority," said Fred C. Ikle, an under secretary of defense in the Reagan administration.

By the middle of June, according to weapons experts and administration officials, the searchers had interviewed only 13 scientists among some 200 people on the government's black list of "high-value targets" or among the thousands of midlevel people on the so-called gray list. Collectively, those people could have had extensive knowledge of Iraq's unconventional weapons programs.

Only after the administration came under political fire for failing to find the weapons and was accused of distorting intelligence to build a case for the war did the White House put David Kay, a former international weapons inspector and envoy from the C.I.A., in charge of invigorating a task force that had already been restructured once. Several analysts said that although the task force's weapons-hunting teams were highly motivated and innovative, the Pentagon initially erred in putting a field artillery brigade in charge of the hunt.

"Unlike Marine or infantry units, field artillery units are full of procedures, lists and box-checking," said a veteran military analyst. "They are not known for flexibility."

Col. Richard R. McPhee, 47, a West Point graduate and veteran of the Persian Gulf war in 1991, said he learned only in late December that his brigade had been selected to lead the search, leaving him only a month to prepare.

Drawing Up the Plan

The plan for the hunt, drawn up mainly by United States Central Command in Tampa, Fla., with the Defense Intelligence Agency, put too much emphasis on site searches, officers said. In September, defense planners, former inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission, or UNSCOM, and officials from several Pentagon offices, including Central Command, had concluded in a secret session at the Pentagon-run National Defense University that while compiling a definitive list of suspect sites to be surveyed was important, recruiting Iraqis involved in unconventional weapons programs was the key to success.

They also agreed that financial and other incentives, like lenient treatment, should be offered to induce cooperation from wary Iraqi scientists and military officers. Finally, participants said, they agreed that former inspectors from UNSCOM, especially those who had interviewed Iraqis involved in the program, should be involved in the hunt.

But the task force had virtually no inspectors and few analysts who knew Iraq or its weapons programs well, said Richard Spertzel, a former weapons inspector who had helped assemble a list of more than 20 former American inspectors who were ready to help. No financial incentives for cooperation were offered until recently.

The number of MET teams hunting for unconventional weapons was reduced to two from four before the war was even over, lowering the number of active weapons hunters to fewer than 50 from 100, far fewer than the 200 United Nations inspectors.

"To seize and secure facilities took time and manpower, and they did not want to do it," said Master Sgt. Thomas Boon, a weapons hunter traveling with the Third Infantry Division. By the time Sergeant Boon's team reached Karbala in late April, the soldiers had turned up nothing at the 38 sites they had surveyed, sometimes hastily, as the maneuvering forces pressed on to Baghdad, team members said.

Most sites had already been heavily looted by the time the forces arrived, Sergeant Boon said.

Interviews vs. Searches

Chief Warrant Officer Richard L. Gonzales, the head of MET Alpha, said in a recent interview that he became convinced of the need to concentrate on human sources, rather than site visits, after his unit secured the cooperation of two senior Iraqi participants in Iraq's unconventional weapons programs.

One of them, Dr. Nissar Hindawi, a leading figure in Iraq's biological warfare program in the 1980's, said in an interview in April that the explanations he and other scientists had continued giving the United Nations about Iraq's efforts to produce poisons and germ weapons were lies. He said, for instance, that he told inspectors that he was the head of a single-cell protein plant which, he said after the war, actually had made botulism toxin and anthrax.

Administration officials said MET Alpha's second source — a man who originally identified himself as a scientist but who turned out to be a military intelligence officer who said he oversaw part of Iraq's chemical weapons program — remained one of the highest-ranking Iraqis to volunteer to help the United States government in its search for unconventional weapons. Col. McPhee called his recruitment a "turning point" for the task force. According to officers and officials interviewed in Baghdad and Washington, the Iraqi asserted not only that stockpiles of banned weapons had been destroyed from 1995 to a few days before the war, but also that the weapons programs were devised to continue research and development after the chemical stockpiles were gone. Military experts and administration officials who confirmed that the military spent hours debriefing the Iraqi said similar claims had also been asserted by other deposed Iraqi officials now in detention. But they declined to comment on what proportion of the stockpiles he said had been destroyed early on or why the intelligence agencies did not know of the stockpile destruction.

On April 24, less than a week after the Iraqi met with American officials in Baghdad and White House officials were given a report about his claims, President Bush said publicly for the first time that the military might not find Iraqi unconventional weapons stockpiles because they they might have been destroyed.

A White House spokesman declined comment on whether Mr. Bush's statement was a result of the Iraqi source's assertions, but officials in Iraq and Washington confirmed that White House officials had hotly debated the Iraqi's assertions, which they said had startled them.

"The Iraqi remains a cooperating source whose life would be endangered were his identity known in Iraq," a senior administration official said.

Despite the discovery that Iraqis like the military intelligence officer were willing under the right circumstances to cooperate, the MET units were ordered to stick to searching the list of suspect sites.

"We said this is useless," said Captain Cutchin of MET Bravo. "It's toilet paper for us."

Faulty Leads and Frustration

The intelligence on sites was often stunningly wrong, one senior officer agreed.

"The teams would be given a packet, with pictures and a tentative grid," he said. "They would be told: 'Go to this place. You will find a McDonald's there. Look in the fridge. You will find French fries, cheeseburger and Cokes.' And they would go there, and not only was there no fridge and no McDonald's, there was never even a thought of ever putting a McDonald's there. Day after day it was like that."

Throughout their mission, MET units members expressed frustration that they were not permitted to discuss with Iraqi scientists and security officials either the amnesty for war crimes or the sizable monetary rewards that had been authorized to offer in exchange for cooperation, despite the Iraqis' obvious reluctance to participate as long as Mr. Hussein might be alive. Then the MET units were sent home two months before a normal rotation, though they had volunteered to stay.

Officials charged with cultivating Iraqis as sources remained unhappy with raids by Special Forces on their potential sources' homes in the dead of night. "Knocking down a scientist's door at 3 a.m., putting a bag over his head, and flex-cuffing his family while you search for hidden weapons or documents is hardly a way to induce his cooperation," one weapons expert said.

On Friday, Colonel McPhee said he was proud that his teams had inspected more than 350 sites "without getting a single soldier killed" and had provided a smooth transition for the 75th XTF, which was merged into a larger, supposedly more agile task force known as the Iraq Survey Group. The number of weapons hunters and support troops has grown to more than 1,500 from 1,000. Once expected to be operating in May, officials said the new group would not be fully operational until August.

But MET Alpha's final mission underscores the continuing problems that plague the hunt. Sent to Basra to investigate what senior Iraq Survey Group intelligence and weapons experts called highly suspicious equipment that could be components for a nuclear weapons program, the team collected what turned out to be oil production equipment and a handful of large, industrial-scale vegetable steamers. The contents of the crates containing the suspect equipment were all clearly marked, in Russian.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/20/international/worldspecial/20SEAR.html>

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Time

July 28, 2003

Pg. 38

The Next WMD Crisis

New evidence suggests North Korea is advancing its nuclear-weapons plans. What can the U.S. do?

By Massimo Calabresi, Washington

Just after dawn last Thursday morning, four bullets whistled across the Demilitarized Zone from North Korean positions near the town of Yonchon, 35 miles north of Seoul. Three of the rounds struck the concrete wall of a South Korean guard post; the fourth was found nearby. South Korean soldiers replied a minute later with K-3 machine guns, firing 17 rounds back across the DMZ. It was the first exchange of fire since late 2001 by forces that have remained technically at war since 1953. It was also the latest sign of a deepening crisis on the Korean peninsula — and one that involves ordnance far more deadly than bullets.

Over the past two weeks, U.S. and South Korean officials have released fresh evidence that North Korea is advancing its program to build miniaturized nuclear weapons. Pyongyang claims to have converted enough plutonium from spent nuclear fuel rods for at least five or six bombs. The U.S. and South Korea say the North has conducted recent tests to perfect high-explosive detonators used to trigger a nuclear explosion. Ongoing work at the North's nuclear plant at Yongbyon is well known. But over the weekend, the New York Times reported that American and Asian officials say there is strong evidence that the North has built a second, secret plant for producing weapons-grade plutonium. If left unchecked, Pyongyang could test a nuclear weapon by the end of this year, according to U.S. and South Korean experts. In 1994 the U.S. almost went to war with the North to stop it

from building such a nuclear arsenal, but with the U.S. military stretched thin around the globe, war is an even less attractive option now than it was then.

But the alternative is awful: not just that North Korea might one day threaten the U.S. directly but also that the cash-strapped regime in Pyongyang could decide to sell its nuclear material to other rogue states or to terrorists. Last week Chinese diplomats shuttled between Pyongyang and Washington trying to restart talks among the U.S., China and North Korea, but internal divisions between hard-liners and moderates in all three capitals are stalling progress. The crisis has been years in the making. In early 2001 President George W. Bush abandoned the talks the Clinton Administration had pursued with the North. Then, last summer, the U.S. learned that Pyongyang had been secretly trying to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons all along and had bought specialized centrifuge cylinders from Pakistan. When Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly confronted North Korean officials about the program last October, they happily admitted to it, according to U.S. officials, and asked what the U.S. intended to do next. If the U.S. thought Pyongyang's bad behavior would gain it allies for a tougher line, though, it was wrong. The Bush team said the uranium program was proof that Pyongyang could not be trusted, but critics argued that Washington's hard line had driven the North to pursue enrichment. South Korea's President at the time, Kim Dae Jung, who had pursued a "sunshine" policy toward North Korea, urged caution and more direct talks between the North and the U.S. Pyongyang's longtime protector, China, refused to support U.N. sanctions against the North despite its concerns about a nuclear-arms race on the peninsula.

In fact, China's leadership is divided on how to handle North Korea's threat. President Hu Jintao and his still influential predecessor, Jiang Zemin, must balance the country's powerful military and security ministries against the Foreign Ministry, which has been brainstorming to find ways to increase pressure on North Korea. The diplomats' hands were strengthened when the North walked away from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty last January, broke into a stash of plutonium that had been secured by the U.N. and ousted inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency. To force Pyongyang to the table, Beijing last March cut off North Korea's energy lifeline — an oil pipeline from northeastern China — for three days.

Not that it did much good. During three-way talks that Beijing had organized in April, North Korean delegates waited until the Chinese were out of earshot to tell the Americans they not only had nuclear weapons but would also consider selling nuclear material to other countries. Since then, China has not objected to new Bush Administration moves to punish the North. "China has delivered some hard messages privately" to North Korea, says a senior U.S. official involved in the negotiations. But if anyone was hoping for better behavior from the North, it hasn't happened yet.

Washington's strategy has been to increase the cost of North Korean defiance. Last week hard-liners within the Administration tried to commit the U.S. to giving asylum to large numbers of North Korean refugees. (They already have guarantees of safety in South Korea.) The intent: to encourage the sort of mass exodus from the North that helped bring down East European communist regimes in 1989. At the same time, 10 countries have agreed to join the U.S. in cracking down on the export of weapons technologies from North Korea, and the Administration is trying to stop the North's illegal sales of drugs too.

In public, the Bush Administration has always scorned a deal under which the North would be rewarded for its blackmail tactics. Hawks like Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld think an agreement of that type during the Clinton Administration allowed Pyongyang to further develop its nuclear programs, and they have resisted direct talks with the North. Instead, they favor increasing sanctions and the interdiction of materiel vital to the North's programs.

Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo last week returned from a four-day trip to Pyongyang, where he met with Korean leader Kim Jong Il and other officials. The next day China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Kong Quan, said that "China hopes to see the quick resumption of the peace talks." U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said last week that he expected some diplomatic developments soon. Senior State Department officials say Pyongyang has accepted the idea of three-way talks. On Friday Dai met with Powell, Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. But Administration sources say that Powell has so far been unable to secure the agreement of hard-liners to resume meetings with China and the North.

Some in the Administration would like a really ambitious deal to provide the security guarantees and energy supplies the North demands in exchange for the verifiable denuclearization the U.S. requires. In the talks on any such deal, the U.S. would insist the North Koreans jump first by scrapping its nukes. But even so, an Administration hard-liner says, the White House has still not endorsed the hope for a grand bargain.

Even if talks start, there are enormous risks. Washington could miscalculate how much diplomatic pressure to apply to the North or run such a tough interdiction regime that Pyongyang responds with more provocations like the one along the DMZ last week. That in turn could prompt China to abandon its efforts to nudge the North into making concessions. Overhanging all this is the suspicion that in the end, North Korea is simply dead set on getting nukes,

no matter what the cost. "We need nuclear weapons to survive if the U.S. continues to isolate and pressure us," North Korea's deputy ambassador to the U.N. told a South Korean newspaper on July 14. If that is truly the North's intent, military action might yet be required to remove the threat.

With reporting by Perry Bacon Jr./Washington, Matthew Forney and Susan Jakes/Beijing, and John Larkin and Donald Macintyre/Seoul

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1101030728-465824,00.html>

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USA Today
July 21, 2003
Pg. 5

N. Korea May Be Building Second Plant

Evidence suggests that there is a secret site that's processing weapons-grade plutonium

By Bill Nichols, USA Today

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials would not confirm or deny reports Sunday that North Korea is suspected of having a second, secret plant to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

White House, State Department and Central Intelligence Agency officials all declined to comment on a *New York Times* report that gases suggesting plutonium production have been detected in areas that would seem to rule out the main North Korean reprocessing plant at Yongbyon as the source.

"We do not discuss intelligence matters, so I'm not going to get into specifics about the report," White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters traveling with President Bush in Texas.

The development, if true, would be the latest escalation since North Korea admitted last October that it was carrying on a secret program to produce another bomb fuel, uranium. Since then, a 1994 U.S.-North Korea agreement meant to curb the country's nuclear weapons development — in return for economic aid and political concessions — has unraveled.

The United States already suspected North Korea was trying to produce plutonium. North Korean officials told the Bush administration 10 days ago in New York that they had reprocessed enough used nuclear fuel into plutonium to build a half-dozen nuclear bombs, according to U.S. officials.

The Bush administration is still investigating the North Korean claim. A U.S. intelligence official said last week that atmospheric tests by the United States last month detected the presence of krypton gas over North Korea. The gas is produced when used nuclear fuel is treated to separate out plutonium, a key ingredient for some nuclear weapons.

The existence of a second North Korean nuclear reprocessing plant would further complicate the Bush administration's efforts to shut down the nuclear program of the reclusive North Korean regime. It also would present obstacles to any U.S. plans to destroy North Korean nuclear facilities.

The administration has insisted it wants a diplomatic settlement with North Korea, but the United States has refused to engage in one-on-one talks. It says that would be giving in to blackmail. North Korea, after one meeting with U.S. and Chinese diplomats in Beijing in April, has balked at holding another session. The White House would like South Korea and Japan to participate in new talks.

North Korea is believed by U.S. intelligence to already have one or two nuclear bombs. The latest developments put new pressure on the Bush administration to try to resolve the situation before North Korea's regime builds an arsenal sufficient to test nuclear weapons or to sell nuclear material to the highest bidder.

In Seoul, South Korea, President Roh Moo Hyun on Sunday played down concerns about suspicions that Pyongyang may have begun producing plutonium.

"When we compare the current situation with six months ago, I think some of the dangers have subsided" on the Korean peninsula, Roh said. Roh's comments came after he met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Contributing: Barbara Slavin and wire reports

<http://www.usatoday.com/usatoday/20030721/5339230s.htm>

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New York Times
July 20, 2003
Pg. 1

North Korea Hides New Nuclear Site, Evidence Suggests

By David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON, July 19 — American and Asian officials with access to the latest intelligence on North Korea say strong evidence has emerged in recent weeks that the country has built a second, secret plant for producing weapons-grade plutonium, complicating both the diplomatic strategy for ending the program and the military options if that diplomacy fails.

The discovery of the new evidence, which one senior administration official cautioned was "very worrisome, but still not conclusive," came just as North Korea declared to the United States 11 days ago that it had completed reprocessing 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods, enough to make a half dozen or so nuclear weapons.

American officials have said they cannot verify that claim, though they confirm that sensors set up on North Korea's borders have begun to detect elevated levels of krypton 85, a gas emitted as spent fuel is converted into plutonium. What concerns American, South Korean and Japanese analysts, however, is not simply the presence of the hard-to-detect gas but its source. While American satellites have been focused for years on North Korea's main nuclear plant, at Yongbyon, the computer analyses that track the gases as they are blown across the Korean Peninsula appeared to rule out the Yongbyon reprocessing plant as their origin. Instead, the analysis strongly suggests that the gas originated from a second, secret plant, perhaps buried in the mountains.

American officials have long suspected that North Korea would try to build a second plant to protect itself against a pre-emptive strike by the United States. The United States even demanded an inspection of one underground site five years ago, only to find it empty, but this is the first time evidence has emerged that a second plant may be in operation.

"This takes a very hard problem and makes it infinitely more complicated," said one Asian official who has been briefed on the American intelligence. "How can you verify that they have stopped a program like this if you don't know where everything is?"

Indeed, there may now be at least two hidden facilities with the capacity to produce material for nuclear weapons. In October, confronted with American evidence, North Korean officials admitted that they had clandestinely built a plant intended to produce uranium, another fuel for a bomb. (It is the same approach Saddam Hussein tried in the early 1990's, and that Iran is pursuing today.) American officials say they have never found that plant, though they believe it is still a few years away from full-scale production.

If it turns out that the current evidence is being properly interpreted, and a second plutonium plant also exists, President Bush may not even have the option that President Bill Clinton briefly considered in 1994: using a military strike or sabotage to prevent North Korea from producing significant amounts of weapons-grade material. Still, Mr. Bush has vowed that he "will not tolerate" a nuclear North Korea.

American intelligence officials say they are wary about making any final judgments about the new evidence. They are keenly aware that C.I.A. assessments of Iraq's nuclear program have touched off a national debate over whether intelligence was exaggerated, and have made all the agency's findings suspect.

That issue has also put the White House at odds with George J. Tenet, the director of central intelligence, who knows that the White House is going to extraordinary lengths to avoid calling the nuclear confrontation with North Korea a crisis. So far, White House officials have been told only informally of the new evidence and have not been fully briefed about its potential implications, administration officials say.

But each week the White House's effort to sound low-key is being undercut by both North Korea's aggressive statements and new evidence that the country is now driving toward production. On Friday, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, who angered the White House by questioning its evidence about Iraq, expressed grave concerns about North Korea.

The situation in North Korea "is currently the most immediate and most serious threat to the nuclear nonproliferation regime," he said from his headquarters in Vienna. It is not clear if he was aware of the newest evidence when he spoke.

North Korea's stance regarding its nuclear program is strikingly different than Iraq's was. After the North Korean government threw out I.A.E.A. inspectors on New Year's Eve, its government acknowledged — even boasted of — its nuclear weapons program. The Bush administration has suspected that some of the claims amount to bluffing, an effort by North Korea to force the world to give it aid on its terms in return for re-freezing, or perhaps dismantling, its program. Mr. Bush has called the country's efforts "blackmail," and he said he would not give in.

But behind the scenes, the North Korean declarations have hardly been dismissed. American intelligence officials have been pouring tremendous resources into solving a mystery: how could North Korea claim that it has reprocessed all of its 8,000 rods if the one known reprocessing plant, at Yongbyon, has been operating only sporadically?

At the C.I.A. and the National Security Council, senior officials have long expressed concern that they could be missing something, that a second plant could be buried somewhere, though that would pose a number of technical challenges. Those fears have been heightened by reports from South Korean intelligence that one of its agents — whose reliability is unknown — reported the existence of a second plant, northeast of Yongbyon.

North Korea has an estimated 11,000 to 15,000 deep underground military-industrial sites, according to one American intelligence estimate, and the nation's leadership has a history of constructing duplicate facilities for such important capabilities as tank production or command-and-communications systems.

"If you follow their logic, if we find a second reprocessing location, maybe there are more," said one American official. "It is a reasonable assessment, given North Korea's proclivity to have multiple facilities for every critical aspect of its national security infrastructure."

Similar logic, of course, led the American intelligence agencies to some of their conclusions about Iraq. But North Korea has a far more sophisticated nuclear program, built over the years with the help first of China and Russia, and in the case of uranium production, Pakistan.

China has now become fully engaged in trying to come up with a diplomatic solution that would not cause chaos on its border with North Korea, or an influx of refugees. A senior Chinese official, Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo, who has long experience with North Korea, spent an unusually long time — two and half hours — meeting with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and other American officials on Friday. He also saw Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, and Vice President Dick Cheney.

The issue is the administration's demand that South Korea and Japan be part of any negotiations with North Korea, which wants to deal only with the United States.

But some administration officials, especially at the Pentagon, believe that negotiations, while necessary, will ultimately prove fruitless. They do not believe that North Korea will ever trade away all of its nuclear program, the only card the starving country has to play to compel the world's attention.

Mr. Bush has said he would not settle for another nuclear freeze, like the one Mr. Clinton approved in 1994, and he has insisted that all North Korean nuclear facilities must be dismantled. Mr. Bush has also come under increasing criticism for letting the problem fester too long as he dealt with Iraq, a view voiced by former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry this week.

Yet it is unclear what Mr. Bush may consider if diplomacy fails. He is already organizing more intrusive inspections of ships and planes, hoping to step up economic pressure on North Korea.

But for military planners, should Mr. Bush decide that American security requires a pre-emptive attack, any confirmation of additional weapons facilities vastly complicates the work of singling out those facilities, since there may be no certainty that all of the important locations have been found.

If any secret facilities have been operating, their production of fissile material may have already spread in small quantities to any number of other locations. The C.I.A. concluded in the early 1990's that North Korea might possess two crude weapons already, but it has never confirmed that.

Such uncertainties remain. The worst case is that the spent fuel rods have been moved to a previously undiscovered reprocessing plant, where the plutonium has been extracted and already shipped around the nation in five- to eight-kilogram packages for weapons production.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/20/international/asia/20KORE.html>

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Newsweek
July 28, 2003

Walking Into Trouble

Spy flights prove North Korea is making plutonium. It may have four nukes already. But don't panic ... yet

By Richard Wolffe and B. J. Lee

The phone rang at 5 a.m. in early July at the home of a North Korea expert in the Bush administration. The caller had serious news from the U.S. Air Force's nuclear-detection team. For months the team had been sampling the air above the Yongbyon nuclear complex, looking for evidence that the facility was back in the arms business.

Now there was no doubt: the team's sensors had detected the radioactive gas Krypton-85—proof that the North was turning its stockpile of spent fuel rods into weapons-grade plutonium, just as dictator Kim Jong Il had been threatening. And what was the reaction to the dawn alert? "I was back to sleep in 30 seconds," the expert told NEWSWEEK.

If Bush's advisers are at all worried by North Korea's doomsday behavior, they're doing a great job of hiding it. South Korea's military analysts are predicting that military conflict could come before winter. The warning was echoed in a Washington Post interview last week by former Defense secretary William Perry. Yet U.S. officials seem utterly calm. Some Bush aides, diplomats especially, are sure everything will end peacefully with a bit of friendly (and self-serving) intervention from Beijing. "They don't want a nuclear North Korea next door," said one senior State Department official.

But the administration's hard-liners are smiling for reasons that are radically different. They're certain Pyongyang can't win. The worse the North acts, they figure, the easier it will be to isolate and strangle the regime by shutting off its illicit sources of cash, like weapons, drugs and counterfeit goods. The noose is already tightening. Last month John Bolton, the State Department's senior arms-control official and a close ally of Vice President Dick Cheney, toured the Middle East with a message for Egypt, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates: stop buying North Korean missiles; we view your purchases as a direct threat to U.S. security. The listeners are said to have responded positively.

The sense of calm may also have a more unsettling explanation: it's too late to panic. Until recently, U.S. officials thought Kim had no more than one or two nuclear devices. But administration aides now tell NEWSWEEK that he likely has three or four—primitive, but dangerous nonetheless. The new estimate changes the geopolitical calculation. If the North already has a mini-arsenal, the latest threats—including the claim that it has already finished reprocessing 8,000 fuel rods—lose their power to shock. "The clear intention is to try and drive the process with blackmail," says one senior U.S. official. "That is why we make clear we will not be intimidated."

That may sound OK from Washington's side of the globe, but South Koreans are scared. North and South Korean soldiers at the demilitarized zone exchanged shots last week for the first time in 20 months. Nobody was hurt, but it added to the jitters. And South Korea's military experts predict that its neighbor's next nuclear step will come soon. One expert at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses says the reprocessing will probably be finished in October, followed by a nuclear test. Paik Jin Hyun at Seoul National University is more pessimistic. He thinks Pyongyang could announce possession of nuclear weapons in time to celebrate the anniversary of the Workers' Party on Sept. 9. Neither side seems ready to blink. Still, the White House cannot ignore the risk that a cornered Kim might try to raise cash by selling the bomb to another rogue leader or to terrorists. Although the Bush administration insists it has no plans for military strikes on the North, one senior aide says the North could trigger war by exporting its nukes or fissile materials. Officials in Washington may still be sleeping tight. The worry is that they could be in for a very rough awakening.

<http://www.msnbc.com/news/941429.asp>

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London Financial Times

July 21, 2003

Pg. 8

Iran's Ballistic Missile Goes Into Service

By Najmeh Bozorgmehr

Iran's revolutionary guards were yesterday officially armed with the Shahab-3 ballistic missile, capable of hitting Israel, in a show of military might and defiance of international pressure to stop the programme.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, who has the final say in all state affairs, attended the inaugural ceremony, broadcast on state television, in which at least five Shahab-3 missiles mounted on portable launchers were on display.

The official adoption of Iran's controversial missile programme, after successful tests, is expected to fuel international suspicions that the Islamic republic might seek to develop nuclear weapons. Iran insists its missile programme is merely for military deterrence, while denying any efforts to seek nuclear arms.

The first test flight of Shahab-3, with a range of 1,300km and the ability to carry a one tonne warhead, was in July 1998. The missile is reportedly based on North Korea's No-Dong-1 missile but has been improved by Russian technology.

"Today, the Iranian nation and armed forces are ready to stand against the enemy with firm determination anywhere," Ayatollah Khamenei told thousands of revolutionary guards.

He said that Iran's power was not only military but also "spiritual" - as manifested in Lebanon and Palestine, in a clear reference to the resistance by Iranian-backed Islamic groups against Israel. The US accuses Iran of sponsoring terrorism and sabotaging the Middle East peace process.

The Shahab-3 missiles are believed to be held at the moment only by revolutionary guards, who backed the programme.

So far, the army has been denied access.

The revolutionary guards, which function independently of the army and are accountable only to the ayatollah, were also armed yesterday with an undisclosed number of Russian-built Sukhoi-25 aircraft and attack and transport helicopters.

Iran's political structure - which is divided between reformists, who dominate the government and parliament, and conservatives in the non-elected bodies - appears united over the missile programme. "Like all other countries, Iran wants to strengthen its defence might within the framework of international conventions," said Reza Yousefian, a pro-reform member of the parliament's National Security Commission.

The US, European Union and Israel suspect Iran may be seeking to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

However, Abdullah Ramezanzadeh, the government spokesman, yesterday denied recent reports that Iran might have enriched uranium to make nuclear arms.

http://search.ft.com/search/article.html?id=030721000925&query=Iran%27s+Ballistic+Missile+Goes+Into+Service&vsc_appId=totalSearch&state=Form

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New York Times

July 21, 2003

Scientist Was The 'Bane Of Proliferators'

By Judith Miller

Dr. David Kelly, the British microbiologist who committed suicide last week while caught up in a dispute about whether the British government doctored intelligence reports on Iraq's weapons programs, played a key role in Western efforts to uncover biological warfare programs in the former Soviet Union and Iraq.

A Oxford-educated scientist who took pride in his status as a civil servant, Dr. Kelly was Britain's leading specialist on biological weapons.

Donald H. Mahley, the Bush administration's special negotiator for control of chemical and biological weapons who traveled to former Soviet biological facilities with Dr. Kelly in the early 1990's, said Dr. Kelly possessed "that rare combination of technical skill and political savvy that made him the bane of proliferators."

With a background in agricultural science, Dr. Kelly had been the chief science officer of Britain's Natural Environment Research Council of Virology. In 1984, he became the head of microbiology after rising through the ranks of the Ministry of Defense's chemical research center at Porton Down.

In 1989, he was one of two British officials who first debriefed Vladimir Pasechnik, then the most senior biologist ever to defect from the Soviet Union's biological warfare program.

Dr. Pasechnik's assertions that the Soviet Union had produced long-range missiles to deliver germs and had made a genetically modified version of plague that was impervious to vaccines and antibiotics stunned policy makers in London and Washington.

Dr. Kelly's analyses helped persuade Britain and the United States that the Soviet Union had an advanced covert germ weapons program. His work also confirmed Western suspicions that Moscow was cheating on the 1975 biological weapons treaty, officials and experts said.

"He helped uncover the biggest, most secret and horrendous biological warfare program ever mounted," said Tom Mangold, the co-author of "Plague Wars: A True Story of Biological Warfare," which described Dr. Kelly's role in deciphering the Soviet program. After Dr. Pasechnik's disclosures, there began a series of exchange visits to Russian and American biological facilities; Dr. Kelly took part in those visits for three years starting in 1991.

During one of the visits, he badgered a scientist into acknowledging that the Soviet Union had experimented with smallpox at a lab at Vector. The admission confirmed Western fears that the Soviets were trying to develop a smallpox weapon.

Col. David R. Franz, who worked with Dr. Kelly on missions to Russia and Iraq, said Dr. Kelly "had a unique ability to store and process knowledge.

"But he was so quiet about what he knew and what he was thinking," Colonel Franz said, "that you never knew what it was until he said it."

During one visit to a bioweapons site at Omutninsk, Colonel Franz said, the Soviet scientists stonewalled the Western experts. Shy and self-effacing, Dr. Kelly thanked the midlevel manager who had shown them the facility,

saying he knew that the tour had been difficult for him. "And the scientist just melted and said, I'm so sorry I can't be honest with you," Colonel Franz said. "It was poker, and David had set that up."

Dr. Kelly later joined the United Nations commission that was authorized to monitor Iraq's pledge to disarm itself of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

He played a central role in uncovering Iraq's biological weapons program, former inspectors said. In 1995, after four years of denial, senior Iraqi officials conceded that Baghdad had produced thousands of gallons of liquid anthrax and botulism.

According to Rolf Ekeus, the Swedish diplomat who was the first chief of the United Nations inspection team, that disclosure prompted Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, to flee to Jordan, a move that led to later disclosures about Iraq's germ warfare program.

After visiting Baghdad after the fall of Mr. Hussein's government, Dr. Kelly told associates that he believed that Mr. Hussein operated advanced chemical and biological research and development programs, and probably had chemical weapons.

He said it was conceivable that deadly weapons and other material were still buried in Iraq, but he was critical of the way in which American armed forces had gone about hunting for them, and expressed the fear that material might have been looted, hidden or carried away. "It may be virtually impossible to construct through traditional forensics what Iraq had done," he once said.

He also expressed frustration that the weapons hunters in Iraq included so few people who were knowledgeable about the country and its scientific and weapons experts.

"And we have now have lost one of the most knowledgeable of them," Debra Krikorian, a former American inspector, said of Dr. Kelly.

Dr. Kelly's wife, Jan, said he had been under enormous pressure, but in e-mails sent hours before his death, he gave no hint of that, telling an associate, for instance, that he looked forward to returning to Iraq.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/21/international/worldspecial/21KELL.html>

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