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Atlanta Journal and Constitution
September 8, 2000

Air Force Says No Unexploded Nuclear Bomb Lies Off Georgia Coast

By Melanie Eversley - Staff
Washington --- One frosty February night in 1958, two military planes collided over Georgia, one plane sending its explosive cargo plunging into the waters off Savannah.
Now, 42 years later, Air Force officials have cleared up a mystery over whether that cargo was an undetonated nuclear bomb.
Air Force officials declared Thursday that whatever is resting at the bottom of that part of the Atlantic Ocean --- if anything at all --- it is not a nuclear device.
There are two parts to nuclear bombs, officials explained. One part is the 25-pound capsule, which contains the actual nuclear explosives, and the other, larger part is a casing weighing several hundred pounds.

The cargo that plummeted into the waters near Savannah consisted of only a casing, the Air Force said.
"Bottom-line conclusion --- no possibility of a nuclear explosion," Capt. Almarah Belk, a spokeswoman for the Air Force, said Thursday.
The declaration by the Air Force came after Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) was contacted by a constituent about the incident. The lawmaker asked the military to look into it.
The congressman said he is relieved that there is no nuclear device sitting at the bottom of the ocean, though he would like the Air Force to explore whether the casing remains. Casings can be explosive too.
"I feel a lot better knowing there's not a nuclear capability there, but I'm still concerned that there could be a danger and want to feel a little more comfortable about that," Kingston said.
For its part, the Air Force said any explosive potential would be minimal, confined to the mud and silt surrounding the submerged device. Belk said the Air Force has not yet decided on further action to ascertain whether the device is still where it probably landed in 1958, and whether it could blow up.
Back in 1958, a B-47 bomber flying from Homestead Air Force Base in Florida collided in midair with an F-86 fighter coming from Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah.
Mystery surrounds the exact cause of the crash, but military officials at the time said the pilot of the fighter was on a mission to intercept possible enemy aircraft.
The pilot of the fighter was injured and the three-member crew of the B-47 were unharmed, published reports show.

Jerusalem Post
September 11, 2000

Israel's Unclear Nuclear Policy

By Efraim Inbar

Slaughtering sacred cows, particularly in the national security sphere, has become almost a national hobby. The most recent subject of this widespread phenomenon is Israel's nuclear policy. The extremely successful posture of nuclear ambiguity, maintained for over 30 years, has been under attack. Avner Cohen, the author of the best book written on the origins of Israel's nuclear ambiguity, is its spearhead and the focus of media attention.
For the uninitiated in the professional jargon of strategic studies, the notion of ambiguity in this context sounds a bit strange because in accordance with conventional wisdom, Israel is a nuclear power. Yet, it is not so unequivocal.
In order to pursue the nuclear option with as little opposition as possible, Israel had to promise the US, as far back as the 1960s, that it would not cross the threshold of a nuclear test. Refraining from taking such a clear-cut step, Israel could deny the existence of a nuclear arsenal and claim it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the region. This is the formula used since 1965 by all Israeli governments.
The details of the nuclear program were left to Arab imagination, to the curiosity of journalists and researchers, and, of course, to the agenda of spying agencies. This unclarity has been termed nuclear ambiguity.
The main achievement of this policy has been the American acquiescence to it. This is remarkable because American foreign policy has, over time, alternated between missionary impulses to prevent the universal spread of nuclear weapons, and high-handed campaigns that put a stop to nuclear progress in selected countries, i.e. Taiwan and South Korea. The opaque posture allowed Israel to keep its nuclear potential when the international norm (in this case a euphemism for international lip service) has been nuclear disarmament. Thus, the Dimona complex could operate without international interference and/or supervision.
Nuclear ambiguity also enhanced Israel's deterrence by signaling to the Arab opponents that it might be very costly to continue efforts to eradicate the Jewish state. At the same time the Israeli ambiguity spared the Soviets the need to provide its Arab allies with a nuclear umbrella, the bomb, or the technology to produce it. Possibly, it deterred the Soviets from direct military action against Israel.
Israel's nuclear policy probably served also as leverage in securing conventional weapons from the US, which preferred not to let Israel feel so vulnerable as having to resort to nuclear threats. Arab perception of Israel's conventional might and unconventional arsenal was one of the factors that fueled the peace process, which is predicated on a strong Israel.
Questioning the wisdom of Israel's ambiguity is certainly legitimate and even useful when updating strategic doctrine in response to changing circumstances. Fortunately, the changes in Israel's strategic environment do not warrant a revision in nuclear policy yet. A future Iranian or Iraqi nuclear device is the trigger that would require adaptation in Israel's nuclear policy.

This future may not be so distant, however. Therefore, rethinking the issue is mandatory already now. Hopefully, this is done in the appropriate places even without author Cohen's prodding, and even if his strategic arguments against ambiguity are problematic.
Much less compelling is Cohen's claim that nuclear ambiguity is undermining the democratic character of Israel. Noteworthy, democracies that cherish the right of the public to know, also have military secrets. Information on weapon systems, their deployment and the doctrine for their use, is not disseminated freely.
Moreover, with a few exceptions at the margins of the body-politic, the consensus in Israel over nuclear ambiguity is overwhelming. The rich academic literature and the many articles in the local press indicate also that debate over the appropriate strategy is not suppressed. Cohen himself was several times a welcome lecturer at the BESA Center for Strategic Studies in recent years, with no interference from the security authorities.
Cohen's debatable charge against Israeli democracy is probably the result of his own experience. He had an unfortunate encounter with censorship when writing his book. The censor's concerns are legitimate and it is indeed his job to protect the state's secrets, but it is not clear at all that the book contains any serious security breaches. Moreover, going after the author of the book rather than his sources is problematic. Above all, the security authorities put the researcher - who did a good job at integrating the evidence - into an intolerable position by demanding the suppression of the publication of the entire manuscript, rather than to insist on deletions of offensive parts.
It is high time the authorities resumed a serious strategic debate over what to do, if we are condemned to live in a nuclear crowd.

Washington Post
September 12, 2000
Pg. 1

Program To Halt Bioweapons Work Assailed

By Michael Dobbs, Washington Post Foreign Service

STEPNOGORSK, Kazakhstan -- A decade ago, Alik Galiyev had a promising career as one of the Soviet Union's leading biological weapons scientists. Together with his colleagues, he helped design and construct the world's largest anthrax production plant, capable of churning out enough biological agents to destroy all urban life on the planet.
Today, despite a $100 million U.S. program to defuse the Soviet biological weapons threat and engage former germ scientists in peaceful pursuits, Galiyev is angry and disillusioned. He feels that his onetime American enemies have devoted a lot of time and energy to dismantling his extraordinary workplace but have done little to convert the factory to peaceful use or provide long-term employment for hundreds of highly skilled scientists.
"The Americans just want to destroy; they don't want to create anything," complained Galiyev, in comments echoed by other senior scientists at the sprawling bioweapons plant on the outskirts of this crumbling Soviet-era town on the plains of northern Kazakhstan.
While U.S. officials insisted that such remarks are unfair, the comments reflect widespread skepticism both here and in Russia about the benefits of cooperation with the United States on eliminating weapons of mass destruction. Senior Russian officials complained that much of the American money earmarked for retraining former weapons scientists has been frittered away on administrative expenses, and they have retaliated in tit-for-tat games with Washington over access to top secret weapons facilities.
The bitterness felt by Galiyev and his fellow bioweapons makers could pose a significant new proliferation threat for the United States, independent experts say. If the weapons makers conclude that America has nothing further to offer them, they could be tempted to sell their knowledge to countries such as Iran which, according to the Pentagon, has been attempting to recruit Russian scientists to assist with its own clandestine biological weapons program.
The backlash at Stepnogorsk comes when the Clinton administration's cooperative threat reduction program -- one of the centerpieces of America's post-Cold War diplomacy -- is also under attack at home. Congress has forbidden the Pentagon to spend any money on Soviet military conversion and has sharply cut funding for the Department of Energy's nuclear cities initiative, which was designed to find alternative employment for Russian weapons designers, in part because of lack of access to top secret facilities.
U.S. officials point out that they have spent $4 million on "redirection projects" in Stepnogorsk, including the creation of an environmental monitoring center that employs several dozen scientists, in addition to $5 million on dismantling the anthrax plant. At the same time, they concede that converting Soviet weapons facilities to civilian

use has proved much more difficult than expected. A $5.8 million plan to use part of the Stepnogorsk factory for civilian pharmaceutical production ended in failure in 1997, touching off bitter recrimination between the American and Kazakh partners.

Andrew Weber, the Pentagon official in charge of the Stepnogorsk project, insists that the United States will not abandon the 200 or so scientists with critical proliferation knowledge who remained at the plant after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. "We have to deal with their frustration and continue to work with them," he said. "We want these former bioweaponeers working with us, and not with those who would exploit their knowledge for evil."

With its towering fermenters which were capable of churning out two tons of anthrax a day, enough to wipe out an entire city, Stepnogorsk is the most visible evidence of a vast biological weapons program that was a key part of the Soviet Union's strategic arsenal. Although the United States suspected that the Kremlin was developing bioweapons in defiance of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, the scale of the effort only became apparent after 1991, with the emergence of 15 new independent countries, including Kazakhstan.

Even today, much less is known about the Soviet biological weapons program than the nuclear weapons program. While the Kazakh government has been cooperating with the United States on the dismantling of places like Stepnogorsk, Russian officials continue to conceal the full extent of their Cold War bioweapons program. This huge facility -- hundreds of times the size of any comparable bioweapons plant anywhere in the world -- remained undetected by U.S. satellites for almost two decades.

One consequence of this lack of knowledge has been a delay in responding to the bioweapons threat from the former Soviet Union. The $100 million earmarked for bioweapons counter-proliferation programs -- some of which has been spent on cleaning up the former testing ground at Vozrozhdeniya Island in the Aral Sea -- is minuscule compared with the $2.4 billion spent since 1991 on locking up loose nukes and providing work for Soviet nuclear scientists.

Isolated from the changes that have been sweeping big cities like Moscow and the former Kazakh capital of Almaty, the crumbling, half-abandoned town of Stepnogorsk provides an eerie flashback to life in the Soviet Union. Heating pipes are patched together with pieces of fabric; concrete bunkers are covered with weeds; sidewalks and basketball courts are disappearing back into the steppe. The bioweapons plant, which cost an estimated $1 billion to build, looks like an abandoned junkyard full of rusting equipment.

The mood of the scientists who used to work here matches the wretched circumstances of the city in which many of them spent their careers. It is a complicated and potentially explosive mixture of shame, wounded pride, dependence on outside assistance and blind anger at the forces that have reduced them to this state.

In July, the Pentagon organized a conference in Stepnogorsk to showcase its anti-proliferation program's successes and encourage American private investment in Kazakhstan. But none of the dozen or so U.S. businessmen invited to attend the conference showed up: There is little private sector interest in investing in such a remote and undeveloped place. To the embarrassment of U.S. officials, the meeting quickly turned into a forum for the airing of bottled-up grievances by the Kazakh and Russian participants.

"We need real assistance, not just lessons in marketing," exploded Yuri Rufov, the head of an enterprise called Biomedpreparat that was hoping to produce medicines here under a Pentagon-sponsored joint venture. "We gave up everything we had before, and we haven't got anything in return."

The Soviet Union began building this macabre death factory in 1982, at the height of the Cold War, a time when many Soviets were convinced that superpower conflict was inevitable. Mobilization plans called for the storage of up to 500 tons of anthrax -- a powder-like substance that turns to froth inside victims' lungs, depriving them of oxygen -- and its storage in nuclear-proof underground bunkers. In the event of mobilization, the anthrax would have been loaded into bomblets and shipped out of here on reinforced railroad cars to be placed onto SS-18 missiles aimed at the United States.

Stepnogorsk was part of a vast toxic archipelago that included research centers and testing sites, such as Vozrozhdeniya Island. "It was madness of course, but it reflected the madness of the times," said Vladimir Repin, a bioweapons scientist at the Vector research institute in Siberia. "Remember we had nuclear weapons that could destroy the world 100, 200 times over. We were convinced that the Americans were doing the same things we were."

Weber, a former U.S. diplomat in Kazakhstan, has a vivid memory of his first visit to the Stepnogorsk complex in 1995. By that time, Washington had a good idea of what had been going on here, thanks to the testimony of a former plant director Ken Alibek, who defected to the United States in 1992. Even so, the sight of the four-story-high fermenters and airtight testing chamber, where gruesome experiments were performed on dogs and monkeys, was "chilling to the bone," Weber said. "It was then that I understood for the first time at an emotional level what Ronald Reagan had meant by the words 'evil empire.',"

While other countries, including the United States, Iraq and Japan, have experimented with biological weapons, none came remotely near the production capacity of Stepnogorsk. The United States says it halted its offensive bioweapons program in 1972.

At first, the Stepnogorsk scientists insisted in interviews that the plant had been built for "defensive purposes," to produce vaccines in the event of an American bioweapons attack. But, after a few drinks and saunas, they began to loosen up. "We have been hanging noodles on your ears," acknowledged Gennady Lepyoshkin, Alibek's successor as director of Stepnogorsk, using the Russian equivalent of "we have been pulling the wool over your eyes."

Determined to prevent "rogue" states or terrorists from gaining access to such a killing machine, in 1996 the Pentagon launched what became known as the "Stepnogorsk initiative" in cooperation with Kazakh authorities. The implicit bargain at the heart of the deal was that the United States would assist in the retraining of former Soviet weapons scientists in return for the total dismantling of Kazakhstan's offensive bioweapons capability.

The conversion side of the strategy soon ran into difficulties. The Washington entrepreneur chosen by the Pentagon to run the American side of the joint venture to manufacture pharmaceuticals, John Allen, had good political connections but little practical experience. His Kazakh partners say he failed to deliver on his promises and purchased outdated equipment. Under heavy pressure from congressmen sympathetic to Allen, the Pentagon ended up paying the contractor $2.1 million after he accused the U.S. government of breach of contract.

Allen, a former U.S. Army intelligence agent in Laos and Cambodia and Reagan campaign operative, blames both the U.S. government and Lepyoshkin, the facility's director, for the failure of the joint venture. "It was a disaster," he said. "They had no idea what their needs were. They had never made a pill in their life."

Vladimir Bugreyev, director of a biotechnology institute that employs many former Stepnogorsk scientists, said Allen failed to deliver on promises of turning the plant into a major pharmaceutical center. "With money the Americans gave Allen, we could have built a big factory producing medicines," he complained.

In the meantime, U.S. nonproliferation experts were busy playing a cat-and-mouse game with Iran for the hearts and minds of Soviet weapons scientists. According to Pentagon officials, Iranian representatives launched an intensive effort to recruit Russian makers of bioweapons, beginning in the spring of 1997, after the Russian ministry of science participated in a biotechnology exhibit in Tehran.

One of the places that was the target of Iranian recruitment efforts was the Vector Institute in Novosibirsk, where scientists experimented with contagious viruses such as smallpox and Marburg, which causes its victims to bleed to death. According to Russian officials, the Iranians made a sophisticated pitch, insisting that their biotechnology program was strictly civilian. The approach was rejected, in large measure because the Russians understood that cooperation with Iran would mean an end to cooperation with the United States.

Weber said he understands the frustration of the former bioweapons makers. "Just 10 years ago, these people were a pampered elite, the recipients of extraordinary resources. Of course, they feel a sense of dislocation." At the same time, he added, some of the "whining" may have been aimed at putting pressure on the U.S. to come up with more funds.

Pentagon officials said most Stepnogorsk scientists with critical proliferation knowledge are receiving assistance from the United States through academic grant programs administered by the State Department and the Department of Energy. Galiyev, the former bioweapons maker, described the American programs as "miserly." The programs pay an average of $35 a day for original scientific research, a reasonable wage by Russian standards.

For the time being, the Americans seem to be keeping the Iranians and others at bay. The Stepnogorsk plant will be torn down completely by the end of next year. But the long-term future of the scientists who work here and in other parts of the Soviet bioweapons establishment remains uncertain.

"We don't want to cooperate with Iran. We're not stupid. We know what that would mean," said Repin, of the Vector Institute. But he added: "Of course, people need to feed themselves and their families. They will go to wherever the money is."

Fort Worth Star-Telegram
September 12, 2000

Congress Debates Link Between China Weapons Sales And Trade

By Jim Abrams, Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Fred Thompson sought Monday to tie China's weapons proliferation policies to the granting of permanent trade relations. Others warned that linking the two issues could kill the trade bill this year.

The nonproliferation amendment offered by Thompson, R-Tenn., and Sen. Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., is seen as the last major hurdle to smooth passage of the permanent normal trade bill, the most important trade legislation Congress is taking up this year.

"It is inconceivable to me that while we discuss trade issues and a new relationship with China, that we will not address what China is doing to endanger our country," Thompson said.

Supporters of the legislation hope to defeat the Thompson proposal and other efforts to change the bill, setting up a final vote as early as the end of this week.

Congress must approve permanent normal trade status to benefit from the lower tariffs China has agreed to as part of its impending entry in the World Trade Organization. American business groups, who stand to gain billions from a more open Chinese market, have lobbied hard for passage of the legislation.

The House passed the bill by a 40-vote margin last May, and supporters are concerned that Senate changes could doom the bill this year because the House might not return to the legislation before Congress adjourns next month.

"Any amendment added to this bill would likely kill this legislation and kill the benefits of China's WTO commitments for our farmers and our workers," said Sen. William Roth, R-Del., chairman of the Finance Committee.

Thompson said he supported the trade bill but contended it was wrong to give blanket acceptance to the House version when there is growing evidence that Chinese proliferation policy "poses a mortal threat to the welfare of this nation."

He noted a recent CIA report citing China, Russia and North Korea as the key suppliers of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons technology, and reports the Chinese were helping Pakistan, Libya and Iran with their weapons programs.

The Thompson-Torricelli amendment would set up an annual review of the weapons sales of China, Russia and North Korea and require the president to impose non-trade-related sanctions on individuals and companies that violate nonproliferation agreements. The president could also impose additional sanctions on key supplier nations. It also requires the Securities and Exchange Commission to create a procedure to inform American investors when foreign entities on the president's proliferation list invest in U.S. capital markets.

The president would be able to waive the sanctions requirements for national security reasons, but Congress could vote to override that waiver. The administration opposes the amendment as unnecessary because it already has sanctions authority.

"It would cast a pall over American trade interests yet would have no impact on our Japanese and European competitors," said Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., a chief sponsor of the trade bill.

"All senators agree that we must address China's proliferation policies but PNTR (permanent normal trade relations) is not the right vehicle," said Baucus, adding that he was confident the amendment could be defeated.

A time hasn't been set for a vote on the amendment. On Tuesday, the Senate will vote on an amendment by Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., that would require China to disclose information on its compliance with WTO obligations that it end subsidies to state-owned enterprises.

Last week the Senate handily defeated several other amendments that would have required China to ensure religious freedom and would have retained the current practice of annual reviews of U.S.-China trade.

Washington Times
September 12, 2000
Pg. 12

China Fails To Keep Vows On Arms Sales, Senate Report Says

Foreign panel's GOP staff lists clients

By Bill Gertz, The Washington Times

A Senate report made public yesterday charges that China has failed to fulfill promises to the United States not to sell nuclear and chemical weapons material and missile parts to rogue states.

``The People's Republic of China consistently fails to adhere to its nonproliferation commitments," the report by the majority staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee states.

``In many instances, Beijing merely mouths promises as a means of evading sanctions."
The report outlines numerous instances of Chinese weapons sales to Iran, Libya, North Korea and other nations and discloses for the first time that China during July to October 1996 arranged the sale to Iran of missile-guidance packages, gyroscopes and steel used in building missiles.
It details 42 cases of Chinese arms sales to rogue states, ranging from nuclear arms components sold to Pakistan in the 1980s, to Chinese missile technology transfers to Libya in June and July. The latter transfer was first reported by The Washington Times.
``The Clinton administration -- unlike its predecessors -- has shown nothing but consistent disregard for U.S. nonproliferation laws," the report said.
The report was made public during debate in the Senate on legislation granting permanent normal trade relations to China. Senators sparred yesterday over an amendment to the legislation that would punish China for its weapons sales to rogue states, such as Libya, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan.
``No matter how many times the United States raises the matter of China's military exports, the communist leadership in Beijing refuses to cease and desist," Sen. Jesse Helms, North Carolina Republican, said during floor debate on the amendment.
``Indeed, the history of U.S.-Chinese relations on nonproliferation matters is one littered with broken promises. It is a tale of deceit and trickery by communist China."
The amendment was drawn up by Sen. Fred Thompson, Tennessee Republican, who said trade issues with China must be linked to ``what China is doing to endanger our country."
``They [the Chinese] are engaging in activities that pose a mortal danger to the welfare of this country," Mr. Thompson said.
Supporters of the trade bill opposed the Thompson amendment as scuttling the measure to increase business ties.
``Any amendment added to this bill would likely kill this legislation and kill the benefits of China's [World Trade Organization] commitments for our farmers and our workers," said Sen. William V. Roth Jr., Delaware Republican and chairman of the Finance Committee.
The Foreign Relations Committee report quotes from a State Department memo that says high- technology goods were loaded on an Iranian ship in China in violation of the 29-nation Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which China has promised to follow.
Under U.S. proliferation law, international missile-related sales that violate the MTCR require the U.S. government to impose sanctions.
The report states that the Clinton administration has explained away Chinese weapons sales ``in an effort to justify continued or expanding commercial ties with China."
In particular, the report identifies six different explanations used by the administration to avoid imposing economic sanctions on China for the weapons sales that violated U.S. laws.
They include false assertions that China did not violate its pledges and that Congress had misunderstood Chinese assurances. Another ``defense" of Chinese weapons sales by the administration was to say that the transfers could not be ``proven," and that a particular arms sale was ``beyond the scope of various [Chinese] pledges."
``China clearly is aware of the administration's unwillingness to impose sanctions, and has probably decided that various sanctions threats made by State Department officials are not credible," the report said.

Washington Times
September 13, 2000

Albright Blames Saddam In Arms Flap

By Betsy Pisik, The Washington Times
NEW YORK — Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright yesterday criticized the Iraqi leadership for refusing to cooperate with U.N. officials, but ruled out military strikes to force compliance with U.N. resolutions.
Iraq has refused to issue visas or meet with officials of the U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (Unmovic), which is to investigate Baghdad's efforts to build or stockpile weapons of mass destruction.
"No," she said, when asked by reporters whether military force would be used to make Iraq comply. "We have said that they have a way of getting out of the sanctions box by letting Unmovic back in."

Crippling U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990 will not be lifted until weapons inspectors certify that Baghdad no longer has the capability to make or use proscribed chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, according to U.N. resolutions.

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has said he will not let in the new arms inspection team, led by former Swedish Foreign Minister Hans Blix, arguing that Iraq has already destroyed its banned weapons of mass destruction.

Mrs. Albright, who was in New York to address the annual opening session of the U.N. General Assembly, said: "The key here is Doctor Blix and Unmovic and he has said he is ready to go in. It's a little bit like Alice in Wonderland. The key's on the table. All [Saddam] has to do is pick it up."

Mrs. Albright's remarks came one day after U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan lamented that Baghdad had twice refused to allow independent U.N.-appointed experts to evaluate Iraq's humanitarian situation.

"In discussions with the United Nations, the government of Iraq has indicated that it does not intend to cooperate with or issue visas to such experts," he wrote in a report to the Security Council earlier this week.

The evaluation was requested by the Security Council at the urging of France and Russia, two of Iraq's strongest allies inside the organization.

The United States has said that as long as Saddam refuses to let the weapons inspectors in, sanctions will stay in place.

It has, however, threatened military action against Iraq if it tries to rebuild weapons of mass destruction, attacks the Kurdish population in the north or threatens its neighbors.

The United States and Britain bombed Iraq in December 1998, saying Saddam was obstructing the work of the inspectors, who left the country. No inspections have taken place since.

In an interview with The Washington Times on Monday, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said Baghdad would not cooperate with inspectors until the sanctions had been lifted, and allied forces ceased patrolling no-fly zones in the country's north and south.

"We are not discussing the last resolution of Unmovic," he said yesterday. "We are discussing oil-for-food and difficulties with the program."

As the standoff grinds on, Iraq has been selling increasingly valuable oil through the U.N. oil-for-food program, which allows the government to export billions of dollars worth of crude and refined oil every six months to purchase approved humanitarian goods.

The Baghdad-based coordinator of the program, Tun Myet, told reporters yesterday that Iraq could generate $10 billion for food, medicines and repairs if oil prices held to their nearly 10-year highs.

About two-thirds of that money is spent by the Iraqis on purchases approved by an international panel in New York. That panel has held up nearly $1.5 billion worth of contracts, saying that the materials or services could be used to assist proscribed weapons activities. Most of those holds have been placed by the Americans, according to U.N. officials and other diplomats.

But Mrs. Albright yesterday rejected criticisms from Baghdad and sympathetic parties.

"It is not the international community that is keeping the Iraqi children and people from eating. . . . The villain is Saddam Hussein," she said.

Mrs. Albright was one of the only speakers to broach the subject during yesterday's opening debate of the General Assembly, which was overshadowed by last week's Millennium Summit of presidents and prime ministers.

In her final speech in the Assembly chambers, Mrs. Albright said the Iraqi regime's strategy "is to ignore it's U.N. Charter obligations, and seek to preserve at all costs its capacity to produce the deadliest weapons humanity has ever known."

France, speaking on behalf of the European Union, did not mention Iraq yesterday, nor did Mr. Annan in his opening remarks.

Representatives of 183 nations will address the Assembly over the next two weeks, all but seven of them foreign ministers.