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Featured Item

"North Korea's Biological Weapons Program: The Known and Unknown". Written by Hyun-Kyung Kim, Elizabeth Philipp, and Hattie Chung; published by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs; October 2017

<https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/north-koreas-biological-weapons-program-known-and-unknown>

Amidst the growing threat of North Korea's nuclear program, the assassination of Kim Jong-Un's half-brother via VX nerve agent in February 2017 brought renewed interest in North Korea's other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs—chemical and biological weapons. If used on a large scale, these weapons can cause not only tens of thousands of deaths, but also create panic and paralyze societies. Nevertheless, the vividness of the nuclear threat has overshadowed other weapons programs, limiting the attention and policy input that they deserve. This paper focuses on North Korea's biological weapons (BW).

Accurately assessing the threat from North Korea's biological weapons is challenging. Whereas North Korea has publicly declared its will to become a nuclear power many times, it has been less overt about its intention or capability for biological weapons. BW capabilities are inherently hard to detect and measure. While nuclear programs can be monitored by the number of nuclear tests and the success of missile tests, weaponizing and cultivating pathogens can stay invisible behind closed doors. Moreover, equipment used for BW production are often dual-use for agriculture, making external monitoring and verification virtually impossible. Limited information on North Korea's BW program leads to a low threat perception that may undermine preparation and response efforts.

Nonetheless, preparation against BW is urgent and necessary, which will also serve as defense against naturally occurring epidemics that increasingly threaten the 21st century. Military and public health sectors should cooperate to urgently prepare for "dual-response" mechanisms. Components of a well-established "dual-response" program should include the best possible threat assessment by military and intelligence communities, a strong public health detection and response system, a well-coordinated crisis communication strategy among multiple stakeholders, and compliance from an informed public.

In this paper, we examine the state of knowledge on North Korea's biological weapons (BW) program. Current literature describes North Korea's BW program with mixed levels of credibility. Using publicly available information, including articles, books, governmental and non-governmental reports, as well as interviews with subject matter experts and former government officials, the authors map the known and unknowns of North Korea's BW program.

Second, we examine where policy on North Korea's BW stands. We focus our analysis on the policies of South Korea and the United States, rather than at an international level, as North Korea has had limited participation in the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

Lastly, we present recommendations on how to improve assessment and surveillance of North Korea's BW program, especially with new technologies, and how to improve current policies regarding North Korea's BW program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

US NUCLEAR WEAPONS

- [U.S. May Send B-2 Bombers and F-22 Stealth Jets to South Korea](#)
- [Washington Resumes Talking About Nuclear War](#)
- [5 Reasons No Nation Wants to Go to War with the U.S. Air Force](#)
- [The Air Force Hasn't Used Nuclear 'Alert Pads' Since the Cold War. Now They're Being Upgraded.](#)

US COUNTER-WMD

- [US Needs Robust Missile Defense Now More Than Ever](#)
- [Blue-Ribbon Panel Finds Shortfalls in Ag Biodefense](#)
- [Smallpox Could Again Be a Serious Threat](#)
- [The North Korea Nuclear Threat and Homeland Missile Defense](#)

US ARMS CONTROL

- [Preventing Iranian Nuclear Weapons Work](#)
- [Iran's Ballistic Missile Development Completely Legal: Minnesota Professor](#)
- [Why There is No Chance a Piece of Paper Will Ban Nuclear Weapons. Zero.](#)
- ['One Last Chance' for Pakistan](#)

ASIA/PACIFIC

- [Japan: North Korea Nuclear Threat 'Critical'](#)
- [S. Korea to build 'Frankenmissile' Targeting the North](#)
- ['Nowhere to Hide': North Korean Missiles Spur Anxiety in Japan Fishing Town](#)
- [Kim Jong Un's Sinister Plot: Biological Weapons for Disaster](#)

EUROPE/RUSSIA

- [Romania Set to Take Delivery of New Missile Defence System](#)
- [U.K.'s Johnson Urges North Korea to 'Change Course' on Nukes](#)
- [Vladimir Putin Says Russia Will Develop New Weapons Systems if US Does the Same](#)
- [Looming Nuke Alert a 'Major Escalation of US Nuclear War Readiness'](#)

MIDDLE EAST

- [Saudi Foreign Minister Backs Trump's Stance on Iran](#)
- [Israel Nuke Arsenal Threatening Region, Beyond: Iranian Diplomat](#)
- [Kuwait to Continue Its Endeavours For Nuclear-Weapon-Free Middle East Zone](#)
- [Egypt Seeks to Rid the Middle East of Nuclear Weapons: Foreign Ministry on Trump's Iran Comments](#)

INDIA/PAKISTAN

- [Donald Trump's Iran Folly and India's Dilemma](#)
- [Polish Envoy Glad Helping Pakistan in Building Missile Programme](#)
- [As Tillerson Heads to Pakistan, Islamabad Wary of Deepening U.S.-India Ties](#)
- [NAM Calls for Convening a Conference on Disarmament](#)

COMMENTARY

- [An Idea Buds in the U.S. That Japan Should Go Nuclear](#)
- [Kazakhstan is Opting for Nuclear Engagement, Not Deterrence](#)
- [North Korea: The Case for Doing Nothing](#)
- [The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Strategy of Hope?](#)

US NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Scout Warrior (Brentwood, TN)

U.S. May Send B-2 Bombers and F-22 Stealth Jets to South Korea

By Alex Lockie

October 17, 2017

Defense officials at the highest levels of South Korea's government told Yonhap News on Wednesday that the US would deploy "strategic assets" to the peninsula amid tensions with North Korea.

"The US has pledged to expand the rotational deployment of its strategic assets near the Korean Peninsula," Chung Eui-young, the chief of the National Security Office said according to Yonhap.

While "strategic assets" can refer to nuclear weapons, it can also mean nuclear-powered submarines, aircraft carriers, or stealth aircraft. Chung said the deployment could happen as early as the end of 2017.

Another South Korean publication, Chosun, reported on Tuesday that a government source said the US may send an aircraft carrier, B-2 stealth bombers, and the world's stealthiest and most lethal combat plane, the F-22 Raptor.

The talk of increased US firepower in South Korea comes after North Korea interpreted some of President Donald Trump's tweets as a declaration of war, and announced it would try to shoot down US bombers flying anywhere near its airspace.

As it stands, the US has B-1B Lancer bombers stationed in Guam that frequently respond to North Korean missile or nuclear tests by doing flybys near its borders accompanied by advanced US, Japanese, or South Korean jets.

But the B-1B isn't nuclear capable, nor is it stealth. The B-2, however, has both.

Although the US already has F-22 and F-35 stealth aircraft stationed nearby in Japan, placing them on the Korean Peninsula could spur further escalation of an already-tense situation.

The B-2 can carry 16 nuclear warheads as well as massive ordnance penetrators — bunker-busting bombs that would be the US's best bet for hunting North Korea's leadership as they hide in underground caves.

NK News recently reported that the US had to tell North Korea about the last flight of the B-1 near its borders, because Pyongyang couldn't really track the supersonic bomber jet. If North Korea struggled with the non-stealth B-1, then it has little hope of spotting a B-2 and virtually no chance of spotting the F-22 on its radar screens.

Still, the move could backfire and destabilize the situation in North Korea, as the US' asymmetrical advantage over North Korea's aging forces could cause an uneasy Kim Jong Un to think he has no choice but to strike first.

"Often times when we think we're sending very clear signals, we can't be sure they're being interpreted that way," Jenny Town, the assistant director of the US-Korea Institute, told Business Insider of the US's attempts to show its strength towards North Korea.

"In South Korea they've talked about trying to scare North Korea into changing their behavior," Town said, referring to the deployment of US military assets to South Korea. But, "the way they change their behavior is not necessarily the way we want them to."

<https://scout.com/military/warrior/Article/US-May-Send-B-2-Bombers-and-F-22-Stealth-Jets-to-South-Korea-108121029>

[Return to top](#)

The Atlantic (Washington, DC)

Washington Resumes Talking about Nuclear War

By Uri Friedman

October 25, 2017

On an unseasonably warm October day recently, Donald Trump's CIA director and national-security adviser appeared one after another at a conference in the nation's capital. They soberly assessed the world's greatest threats below the gentle light of chandeliers in a hotel ballroom. In between their remarks, D.C.'s cognoscenti spilled into an adjoining courtyard to conduct their own threat assessments over wraps and caesar salad. All was normal in Washington—except that two of the president's top aides were signaling, with deadly seriousness, that conflict could soon erupt between two nuclear-weapons powers.

Talk of nuclear war—of the “general and universal physical fear” of being “blown up” at any moment, as William Faulkner once put it—subsided with the end of the Cold War. Americans instead cited “fear of the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer, and Chernobyl as dangers to the future,” a psychoanalyst told The New York Times in 1992, when George Bush and Boris Yeltsin officially concluded the rivalry between the nuclear superpowers. Just a few years ago, former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was observing that while it was good that “our children don't know what the threat of nuclear war really feels like,” this generational divide made it more challenging to convey the urgency of ridding the world of its deadliest weapons.

But as North Korea's nuclear program has rapidly advanced, and as the Trump administration has sounded the alarms about that progress, such talk is creeping back into public discourse in Washington and beyond. The president and his advisers have avoided explicit discussion of nuclear war. Yet they've spoken increasingly openly—and with remarkable stoicism—about the potentially catastrophic toll of a U.S.-North Korean conflict, not only because both countries possess nuclear weapons but because North Korea has formidable non-nuclear arms and shares a heavily militarized peninsula with South Korea.

At the October conference, which was organized by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, CIA chief Mike Pompeo noted that North Korea may be just months away from developing the capacity to place a nuclear warhead on a long-range missile that can reach the United States. The North Koreans are so close, in fact, that U.S. policymakers should “behave as if we are on the cusp of them achieving that objective,” he said. As for what behavior he had in mind, Pompeo stressed that Trump would rather use peaceful tactics—economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure—to deny North Korea this capability. But the president is determined to keep Kim Jong Un from holding America hostage with nukes, he added, even if that requires taking military action against the North Korean leader.

Next, National-Security Adviser H.R. McMaster spoke to the relative probability of peace and war, and the timeline in which one could give way to the other. It is “unacceptable” to “accept and deter” a North Korean government that can threaten the United States with nuclear weapons, he said, even though America has for decades successfully deterred Russian and Chinese governments that can threaten the United States with nuclear weapons. He stated that the Trump administration would only enter into negotiations if North Korea agreed to take initial steps toward dismantling its

nuclear-weapons arsenal, even though North Korean officials claim this precondition is a non-starter.

In banking on a long-shot diplomatic outcome and refusing to tolerate any lesser result, McMaster was hinting that military conflict is a distinct possibility—and not a distant one. He did more than drop hints. “We are in a race to resolve this short of military action,” McMaster acknowledged. As one U.S. official told NBC News, in reference to why U.S.-North Korean diplomatic channels are breaking down, the Trump administration’s message to North Korea appears to be “surrender without a fight or surrender with a fight.”

Trump, for his part, has threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea with a show of force that “this world has never seen before” in order to protect America or its allies. U.S. military action against North Korea isn’t “unimaginable,” Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued earlier this year, even though “anyone who has been alive since World War II has never seen the loss of life that could occur if there’s a conflict on the Korean peninsula.” What’s unimaginable, he continued “is allowing a capability that would allow a nuclear weapon to land in Denver, Colorado.”

Nuclear-weapons powers have very rarely engaged in direct military conflict; setting aside the many U.S.-Soviet proxy battles during the Cold War, the only precedent is brief, non-nuclear war clashes between China and Russia in 1969 and India and Pakistan in 1999. A nuclear war—in the sense of an exchange of nuclear weapons between countries—has never been fought. History is thus of limited help in understanding the stakes of the current standoff between the United States and North Korea. As a result, nobody’s quite sure what to make of the Trump administration’s rhetoric, let alone the Kim government’s blustery warnings of imminent nuclear armageddon.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, for instance, says his diplomatic campaign to counter North Korea “will continue until the first bomb drops,” while the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Corker, accuses Tillerson’s boss of leading the United States toward “world war.” On Twitter, speculation churns about U.S. military preparations in East Asia and whispers of war around D.C. Some analysts argue that even if the Trump administration conducts limited strikes against North Korea’s nuclear infrastructure, Kim Jong Un’s government, following a kind of “use it or lose it” logic, might deploy its nuclear weapons early in the conflict to compensate for its relative military weakness. Others assert that if the Trump administration is intent on eliminating North Korea’s nuclear capabilities and minimizing North Korean retaliation, the United States would likely be the first to use nuclear weapons—in a massive surprise attack. News outlets simultaneously reassure us that “We Shouldn’t Worry About Nuclear War With North Korea Right Now” and warn us that “A Nuclear War Between America and North Korea Is Very Possible.” Journalists are now asking their sources in Washington to estimate the odds of nuclear war with North Korea (10 percent, according to one retired Navy admiral, with a 20 to 30 percent chance of a non-nuclear military conflict); to weigh in on whether the president can be trusted with the nuclear codes (Corker has his doubts); to clear up whether Trump’s military advisers can “tackle him” or “lock him in a room” to prevent him from ordering a nuclear strike (the answer, from a legal perspective, is probably no).

Most of all, however, people are struggling to once again confront the specter of war with unimaginably destructive weapons. In a recent interview with Terry Gross of NPR, the New Yorker reporter Dexter Filkins recounted a conversation he’d had with “a very senior person” about how the U.S. military could use a nuclear weapon to wipe out North Korea’s leaders. “It’s terrifying,” Filkins admitted. “It’s just not even something that you want to think about.” Gross was mystified. “How do you use a nuclear weapon to decapitate the regime?” she asked. “God if I know. I don’t know. I mean, because—I don’t know,” Filkins responded. “I think that the idea, at least in the discussion that I had, was that that would be the only way that you could guarantee that you would

basically obliterate the leadership, wherever it was. The problem with that, obviously, is that you're going to end up obliterating a lot of other things as well." Gross cut to a commercial break.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/north-korea-nuclear-war/543732/>

[Return to top](#)

The National Interest (Washington, DC)

5 Reasons No Nation Wants to Go to War with the U.S. Air Force

By Dave Majumdar

October 23, 2017

The Air Force's tiny fleet of twenty Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit stealth bombers is the only long-range penetrating strike asset in the service's arsenal. No other aircraft in the Air Force inventory has the range to take off from the continental United States and strike at targets on the other side of the globe inside highly contested airspace. The B-2 has an unrefueled range of around 6000 nautical miles, but that can be extended to around 10,000 with aerial refueling.

The U.S. Air Force is by far the most capable air arm on the planet. In addition to proper training and rigorous doctrine, the Air Force needs modern weapons to keep ahead of potential competitors. Over the past decade, America's lead in the air has started to erode as Russia has slowly been recovering from the collapse of the Soviet Union and China has begun to remerge as a superpower. Nonetheless, these following five systems are the backbone of the U.S. Air Force and should continue to hold the advantage for some time to come if ever the unthinkable occurred:

Boeing LGM-30G "Minuteman III" Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

Though strategic nuclear deterrence has become less prominent since the end of the Cold War, the mission remains the single most important one for the Air Force. The backbone of America's nuclear deterrence remains the 1960s-vintage LGM-30G Minuteman III. Some 450 of these missiles form the land-based component of the so-called nuclear triad.

Over the years, the long-serving missile has been modified and upgraded with better guidance systems and new rocket motors. Though originally designed to be fitted with three multiple independent reentry vehicles each carrying a nuclear warhead, the current version of the missile carries only one 300-kiloton weapon. The United States plans to continue to upgrade that missile, but eventually will have to develop a new ICBM to replace the Minuteman. It's not a question of if, it's a question of when.

The readiness of the nuclear-missile force has come into question repeatedly over the past several years. A number of officers have been caught cheating in tests—and a number of senior officers have been dismissed as a result. All of that has cast a shadow over the entire force.

Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit

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Nor does any other warplane in the Air Force inventory have the ability to penetrate the kinds of dense air defenses against which the B-2 was designed to operate. The B-2 was designed to fly deep

into the heart of the Soviet Union to deliver a payload of thermonuclear bombs in the event of a third world war. While the B-2 has never had occasion to fly that doomsday mission, those same capabilities allow the bomber to strike with near impunity against almost any target around the globe. Further, while fighters like the F-22 or F-35 are very stealthy against high-frequency fire control radars, a large flying-wing aircraft like the B-2 is also difficult to track using low frequency radars operating in the UHF and VHF bands.

The problem for the Air Force is that there were only twenty-one B-2s ordered before the first Bush administration terminated the program. Of those twenty-one jets, one has already been lost. Not only is the fleet tiny and in high demand, the bomber has sensitive coatings and is ridiculously expensive to maintain. To make matters worse, potential adversaries like Russia and China are learning to counter the B-2.

The Air Force has a follow-on bomber project called the Long Range Strike-Bomber in the works which is set to become operational in the mid-2020s. The service hopes to acquire between eighty and 100 of the new stealth bombers for a cost of \$550 million per jet, which is less than the B-2's near \$2 billion price tag.

Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor

High flying and fast, the Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor stealth fighter is arguably the best air superiority fighter in existence. In many ways, gaining and maintaining air superiority is the core mission for the service. Only with absolute control of the air and space can ground and sea surface elements maneuver unchallenged.

The F-22 is extremely stealthy and is fitted with advanced avionics. Further, it can cruise at supersonic speeds greater than Mach 1.8 at altitudes up to 60,000 ft for extended periods. When operating at lower speeds and altitudes, it has the ability to vector thrust from its engines—which gives it tremendous maneuverability. In short, the Raptor's combination of sheer speed, altitude, stealth and powerful sensors makes it a lethal killer.

The problem for the Air Force is that there are only 186 Raptors in its inventory—less than half of what it needs. Of those 186, only 120 are “combat coded”—which is Air Force speak for ready for war. There are only six operational Raptor squadrons, one operational training squadron and a handful of test and training assets at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and Edwards Air Force Base in California. Those squadrons are also smaller than the typical Air Force fighter units. Raptor squadrons only have twenty-one jets and two attrition reserve planes. By contrast, a typical fighter squadron normally has twenty-four jets and two spares.

The Air Force is starting to investigate follow-ons to the Raptor with the F-X program.

Boeing F-15E Strike Eagle

The F-15E Strike Eagle is the long-range heavy hitter of the Air Force's fighter fleet. The Air Force has 213 of these dual-role fighters, which replaced the long-serving General Dynamic F-111 strike aircraft.

Unlike the air superiority-focused F-15C/D from which it was derived, the Strike Eagle is primarily a strike aircraft. It has far greater range and payload capacity than any other fighter in the Air Force inventory. But even with the added air-to-ground role, the F-15E remains a respectable fighter—especially in beyond-visual-range engagements.

The F-15E, like many aircraft in the Air Force's ageing inventory, will continue to serve well into the 2030s. The service is upgrading the jets with new Raytheon APG-82 active electronically scanned array radars and other modern hardware, but a number of pilots complained that foreign versions

of the jet are far better equipped. Meanwhile, while the upgrades will keep the Strike Eagle relevant into the 2030s, the Air Force has no plans to replace the venerable jets.

Originally, the Air Force had hoped to replace the Strike Eagle with a version of the F-22 Raptor, but those plans died when then defense secretary Robert Gates cancelled that program. One senior Air Force official suggested that the service should extend the production of the future LRS-B stealth bomber to fill the gap—but said that was his personal opinion, rather than service policy.

Boeing KC-135

While often overlooked, what makes the U.S. Air Force unique amongst the world's air forces is its ability to hit targets around the globe. The KC-135 aerial refueling tanker is what enables American air power to conduct its missions. That's not just for the Air Force; the Navy and Marine Corps' aviation assets are also dependent on the air arm's "big wing" tankers to carry out their missions.

The Eisenhower-era KC-135 is old, and it needs to be replaced urgently. The Air Force has made several abortive attempts to recapitalize part of the fleet over the past two decades. The current Boeing KC-46 tanker effort will replace a part of the massive KC-135 fleet. However, even with the addition of 179 KC-46 tankers by 2028, the bulk of the fleet will remain KC-135s. The Air Force hopes to conduct follow-on competitions to replace the remainder of the fleet eventually.

<http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/5-reasons-no-nation-wants-go-war-the-us-air-force-22863>

[Return to top](#)

Washington Post (Washington, DC)

The Air Force Hasn't Used Nuclear 'Alert Pads' Since the Cold War. Now They're Being Upgraded.

By Dan Lamothe

October 23, 2017

The U.S. military is building new flightline facilities that will enable the Air Force to position pilots and aircrews directly alongside its nuclear-capable B-52 bombers, but officials deny the move is part of any plan to put the warplanes on indefinite alert in response to tensions with North Korea.

The construction at Louisiana's Barksdale Air Force Base includes building renovations near long-vacant "alert pads," where during the Cold War aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons once sat ready on a continual basis. So-called strip alerts were discontinued in 1991 after the Soviet Union's collapse.

In an interview published Sunday by Defense One, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein called the construction a step toward ensuring the military is prepared for all possibilities. The service is "not planning for any specific event, but more for the reality of the global situation we find ourselves in and how we ensure we're prepared going forward," he said.

The effort comes as the Pentagon mulls a multibillion-dollar modernization for its aging nuclear arsenal, and as it grapples with North Korea's steady advancements in fielding a nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile.

U.S. Strategic Command, which oversees the military's nuclear weapons from its headquarters in Nebraska, denied that any discussions are underway to place B-52s on alert. A spokesman said that reports suggesting otherwise were mischaracterized.

“The day we are not prepared is the day something can happen,” said Bekah Clark, a spokeswoman for Strategic Command. “So are we preparing for the worst? Absolutely. But we were preparing yesterday, and the day the before that, and so on. And we’ll be preparing tomorrow, too.”

The Air Force, likewise, downplayed that possibility. The service is neither planning nor preparing to put B-52s on alert, said Capt. Mark Graff, a spokesman. Ongoing efforts to upgrade alert facilities, munition storage areas, dining halls and other infrastructure are necessary to “maintain a baseline of readiness,” he said.

“We do this routinely as part of our organize, train and equip mission so our forces are ready to respond when called upon,” he said.

The Pentagon’s current arrangement for nuclear weapons calls for intercontinental ballistic missile facilities to be kept on alert, along with a number of submarines that carry nuclear missiles at sea. The 2010 New START Treaty signed by the United States and Russia allows the Pentagon to keep bombers loaded with nuclear weapons.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/10/23/the-air-force-denies-it-is-considering-cold-war-style-alerts-for-b-52-bombers/?utm_term=.2031fbd178e

[Return to top](#)

US COUNTER-WMD

The Hill (Washington, DC)

US Needs Robust Missile Defense Now More Than Ever

By George Landrith

October 23, 2017

It’s now an almost weekly headline that North Korea is announcing or conducting highly provocative intercontinental ballistic missile tests. On top of that, Kim Jong Un regularly threatens nuclear annihilation of Guam, Japan and the United States.

Those repeated threats are particularly unsettling when Pyongyang shoots test missiles through the airspace of America’s allies and interests. While North Korea’s provocative actions have made them the focus of our attention, the missile threats from Iran, Russia and China continue to grow.

The good news is that we have developed the technology to defend ourselves from missile attack. The bad news is that during the past decade, our political leaders have lacked the will and foresight to prepare for the dangerous world we now live in.

About a decade ago, the Pentagon estimated our risk and set goals for missile defense capabilities. Even then, those estimates struck me as unduly optimistic. It was generally thought that Pyongyang was a long ways from sufficient nuclear capability and missile technology.

It is now clear that those assessments were indeed too optimistic. North Korea has been advancing both its nuclear capabilities and its missile technology at an alarming rate.

We have a variety of tools to defend our nation from missile attack. We have Ground-based Interceptors (GBIs) deployed in Alaska and California that provide the only protection from intercontinental ballistic missiles. For regional missile threats, we have the Aegis system equipped with standard missile interceptors deployed on ships and ashore.

We also have Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense (THAAD) batteries deployed in Guam and South Korea to protect against North Korea's growing arsenal of missiles and threats against those regions.

These different defensive tools protect and defend against different types of missiles and risks. They are not duplicative. We need each element of these defenses. The problem is that by underestimating the risks, we soon may not be capable of defending ourselves. In the face of a rapidly expanding threat, we are in a tight spot.

It is past time to correct these miscalculations. In the early days of the Obama administration, the number of missile interceptors called for was substantially reduced because the administration didn't see the need. More recently, the stricken interceptors have been added back to our defensive plans.

Soon, we will have 44 missile interceptors, but that is what the Pentagon said we needed about a decade ago when the risks were much smaller. Today, even 44 interceptors are too thin a defense.

Even with 44 ground-based interceptors, that doesn't mean we can shoot down 44 incoming missiles. We will likely shoot three or more interceptors at any incoming missile to make absolutely sure we knock it out. There is no option to shoot and look and then shoot again if needed. If we want to be sure, we must shoot a salvo of interceptors.

That means the 44 interceptors won't go nearly as far as we would like. What's more, it currently takes months to reload once we shoot an interceptor. The bottom line is that we need to expand our defensive shield in order to protect the United States, now and as the threat grows in the future.

We must also maintain our commitment to continually improve our defenses by upgrading the kill vehicle and expanding and improving our radars and other technologies.

Just as importantly, we need to make additional investments in regional defenses to protect our deployed forces and allies around the world. Protecting America means protecting our soldiers deployed overseas just as much as it means protecting U.S. soil.

To do so, we need more THAAD and Aegis systems, and we need to continue building an adequate supply of interceptors to destroy incoming missile threats. The real-world risk assessments make it clear we cannot continue the foolish policies of the past.

But it isn't just a matter of having more interceptors, more rockets, better radars or more defensive launch capabilities. We need to change how we purchase these needed defensive tools. We need to begin making plans and passing multiyear budgets for critical military hardware. One-year budgeting and continuing resolutions rob our military of the ability to properly plan and to get the best prices.

A successful test of both the SM-3 and SM-6 interceptors took place on Oct. 15, along with the dire need to acquire more interceptors for the foreseeable future. These programs are ripe for using multi-year procurement authority.

If Congress will do its job and actually pass real budgets and begin to employ multi-year procurement plans, it will allow military planners to better provide for our defense and to do it at a lower cost. Multi-year plans allow contractors to make investments in their workforce and facilities that would save taxpayers at least 15 percent compared to the current outmoded procurement process.

It is time for the Trump administration to push the Pentagon and Congress to make multi-year procurement the norm for important and expensive defense programs like missile defense. Our

past lack of commitment to defending ourselves from growing missile threats around the globe must change now.

<http://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/356748-us-needs-robust-missile-defense-now-more-than-ever>

[Return to top](#)

Bovine Veterinarian (Lenexa, KS)

Blue-Ribbon Panel Finds Shortfalls in Ag Biodefense

By John Maday

October 20, 2017

A new report cites a need for more leadership, funding and cooperation between government agencies to improve our ability to prevent or respond to biological threats to animal agriculture and our food supply. The report, titled "Defense of Animal Agriculture: A Bipartisan Report of the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense," outlines shortfalls in current preparedness and provides specific recommendations for the Executive and Legislative branches of the U.S. government.

The Blue Ribbon Panel, established in 2014, carries considerable weight, with members including former U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman and former Governor Tom Ridge as co-chairs, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, and the Honorable Ken Wainstein. Hudson Institute is the panel's fiscal sponsor.

The authors note that biodefense efforts to date primarily have focused on infectious diseases directly affecting humans, whether naturally occurring, accidentally released or intentionally introduced. They point out though, that emergence of zoonotic diseases, coupled with the threat of nefarious introduction of livestock diseases, "indicate the necessity to exert more effort to combat threats, eliminate vulnerabilities, and reduce consequences associated with this sector."

The report suggests the Administration must improve agrodefense at the department level, and also define responsibilities and coordinate activities between agencies, particularly the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and USDA. Funding levels, they add, do not currently reflect the scope of the threat. "Agrodefense in many ways appears to be an orphan, with long-view funding and policy priority finding a home in neither DHS nor USDA," the authors note, adding that funds tend to become available when disaster strikes, rather than being invested in preparedness.

The report includes proposals for the Executive and Legislative branches of the federal government, focusing on four key areas.

Leadership

- White House-level political leadership is necessary to elevate biodefense as a critical national and federal imperative.
- Agricultural defense is a broad and complex mission space that necessitates the significant involvement of most federal departments and agencies, with leadership from USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- Federal agencies also must collaborate with non-federal stakeholders.

- The White House should ensure that the National Biodefense Strategy addresses threats to food and agriculture. The President and Congress should ensure that detailed agrodefense expenditures are incorporated into a cross-cutting biodefense budget analysis.

Coordination

- The Panel recommends increased coordination between the USDA and FBI and development of an updated Food and Agriculture Incident Annex (FAIA) with planning for both natural and intentional events.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the FBI should ensure that any update to the FAIA recognizes and addresses the investigative mission of the FBI, and clearly directs other federal departments and agencies to support inquiries into suspected acts of agricultural crime and terrorism.

Collaboration

- Effective overall homeland security, and agrodefense, depends on successful collaboration among federal and non-federal stakeholders.
- Rapid biodetection, diagnosis, and integrated biosurveillance of outbreaks are critical, but are hampered by an insufficient focus on rapid pen-side diagnostics and insufficient investment to develop new wildlife disease detection technologies and validate existing tests.
- Problems with information sharing between private and government entities hampers biosurveillance.

Innovation

- The nation needs new ideas and scientific solutions to drive agrodefense approaches beyond their current limitations. One example would be to increase funding to the National Veterinary Stockpile.
- Far greater investment in advanced research and development is also necessary. The nation requires focused investment in pen-side, innovative diagnostic technology, and in better laboratory-based technology.
- The USDA should further develop its vaccine use policy for avian influenza and other high-consequence diseases, basing these policies on the use of platform technologies for rapid diagnostics and vaccines in response to outbreaks.
- Additionally, DHS and USDA should develop a business plan for the operation of the National Bio- and Agrodefense Facility, considering domestic and global markets for agrodefense research and development and identifying a dollar figure that defines both need and opportunity.

The authors also note that the President's Fiscal Year 2018 budget request would eliminate all agriculture and animal-specific research by the DHS Science and Technology Directorate. "This signals a substantive diminishment of support from the Executive Branch for agriculture and agrodefense research." They add that while food safety and food access account for only 5% of GDP, they affect 100% of the population. "Federal investment in agrodefense must focus on prevention and early identification to reduce or prevent the incursion of major costs and losses."

<https://www.bovinevetonline.com/article/blue-ribbon-panel-finds-shortfalls-ag-biodefense>

[Return to top](#)

Slate (New York, NY)

Smallpox Could Again Be a Serious Threat

By Gregory D. Koblentz

October 19, 2017

If we don't take steps now, synthetic biology could let bad actors re-create the devastating virus.

SynBioBeta, which bills itself as the world's premier forum for innovators and investors interested in synthetic biology, concluded its sixth annual conference in San Francisco earlier this month. Companies from across the country and from around the world delivered presentations on how they are finding biological solutions to human problems. The conference showcased how synthetic biology can be used to develop new drugs, protect the environment, and improve agricultural productivity.

But synthetic biology, like many other emerging technologies, is dual-use. The technological advances that fuel the amazing discoveries and products featured at the SynBioBeta conference can also be misused to cause harm.

The most recent dual-use concern about synthetic biology involves one of humanity's oldest foes: smallpox. Smallpox was eradicated from nature in 1980, and all known stocks of the virus are located at World Health Organization-supervised repositories at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States and at the Vector Institute in Russia.

However, a Canadian scientist funded by the American biotech company Tonix has recently demonstrated the ability to create pox viruses from scratch. In this case, it was horsepox, a once-extinct virus resurrected by stitching together fragments of synthetic DNA to create an intact viral genome. Poliovirus was the first virus created in a laboratory by assembling the chemical building blocks of life in the pattern encoded in the virus' genetic sequence. The synthesis of horsepox virus was a significant accomplishment due to the much larger size of the virus and its more complicated biology.

Although horsepox virus itself is not dangerous, the technology and techniques used to re-create horsepox can also be used construct the closely related smallpox virus. At the Aspen Security Forum in July, Thomas Bossert, President Trump's homeland security adviser, warned that horsepox is "not going to kill any of us, but that suggests that somebody might in the future now possess the capability to produce synthetic smallpox without the live virus. And that scares me to death. ..."

The re-emergence of smallpox would be a global health disaster. Prior to its eradication, smallpox killed an estimated 300 million people, more people than all the wars of the 20th century combined. Most of the world's population is susceptible to this lethal and contagious disease since routine immunization against smallpox was discontinued after the success of the WHO's global eradication campaign.

If resurrecting horsepox virus provides a roadmap to synthesizing smallpox virus, then why would anyone try to synthesize it? Because there are potentially legitimate uses for it. Tonix claims that the horsepox virus is a good candidate for developing a new, safer smallpox vaccine. Horsepox virus, smallpox virus, and the vaccinia virus that is used in smallpox vaccines are part of a closely related group of pox viruses. Vaccinia is the most well-understood of the pox viruses and is popular with scientists because it can stably integrate large segments of foreign DNA. Engineering pox viruses, such as vaccinia, could help create new vaccines and cancer therapies. But any lab that

creates these beneficial applications through synthetic biology would also have the capability to produce infectious smallpox virus from synthetic DNA.

Unfortunately, the current legal and technical safeguards against the synthesis of smallpox virus are weak and fragmented. There is no clear international legal or regulatory framework to prevent the synthesis of smallpox virus. The WHO has a policy banning the synthesis of the smallpox and regulating who can produce and possess large fragments of smallpox DNA, but it hasn't been widely adopted by states. Furthermore, there is no mechanism—at either the national or international level—for detecting or punishing violations of this policy. The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, which outlaws the possession of biological weapons, provides a strong normative bulwark against the acquisition and use of smallpox, but without a verification system it would not present a meaningful obstacle to such an undertaking by a determined scientist, group, or state.

In addition, there is only an uneven patchwork of nonbinding regulations designed to prevent the misuse of synthetic DNA. Leading members of the DNA synthesis industry have formed the International Gene Synthesis Consortium, which oversees a voluntary system for the screening of customers and gene sequence orders. The consortium accounts for 80 percent of the global market for synthetic DNA, which is a good start, but this leaves an uncomfortably large number of companies with no legal obligation to screen either customers or sequence orders for biosecurity purposes. Some companies' idea of screening customers is to make sure they have a valid credit card.

Unless these safeguards are strengthened soon, the capability to produce smallpox will be globally distributed and either loosely or completely unregulated. That will open the door for a disgruntled or radicalized scientist, sophisticated terrorist group, unscrupulous company, or rogue state to re-create the smallpox virus.

But there is still time to act to prevent that from happening. International organizations, national governments, the DNA synthesis industry, and the synthetic biology community all have a role to play in preventing the re-emergence of smallpox.

The first step should be making sure that this kind of research happens only at a small number of approved facilities. The WHO and the U.N. Security Council should create an enforceable international legal prohibition against the possession of smallpox virus outside of the two WHO-designated repositories, synthesis of the virus, and the use of smallpox as a weapon. In addition, governments, scientists, and private firms wishing to generate pox viruses using synthetic DNA should be required to seek the approval of the WHO.

The DNA synthesis industry should declare a temporary moratorium on the synthesis of pox-virus DNA fragments above a specified threshold until the WHO oversight system can be established. The industry should also create a mechanism to allow member companies to better share information about how they screen customers and sequence orders, conduct annual exercises to test these safeguards, and commission third-party audits of their biosecurity practices.

National governments should criminalize the unauthorized possession and synthesis of smallpox. They also need to require that any scientist receiving government funding for life sciences research can purchase synthetic DNA only from companies that adhere to strong biosecurity protocols (like those in place for members of the International Gene Synthesis Consortium). Governments should also sponsor research to increase the effectiveness and reduce the cost of the biosecurity measures adopted by industry.

More broadly, the life sciences community, particularly in the field of synthetic biology, needs to intensify efforts to raise awareness of these dual-use and biosecurity issues as early as possible in the scientific education process. The private sector, which is increasingly commercializing

breakthroughs in synthetic biology, needs to be engaged as a partner in safeguarding the bioeconomy. Finally, the growing number of biohackers and citizen scientists interested in exploring synthetic biology should be nurtured in safe, secure, and transparent working environments.

These measures are intended not to prevent peaceful research on pox viruses, but to ensure that this work is carried out with the maximum level of transparency, safety, and security. The eradication of smallpox was one of humanity's greatest triumphs of the 20th century. Synthetic biology has the potential to revolutionize public health, medicine, energy, and environmental protection in the 21st century. But to reap the promise of this technology, we need to be vigilant about its perils.

http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2017/10/synthetic_biology_could_lead_to_the_re_emergence_of_smallpox.html

[Return to top](#)

Atlantic Council (Washington, DC)

The North Korea Nuclear Threat and Homeland Missile Defense

By Matthew Kroenig

October 23, 2017

In order to effectively address the growing tensions posed by North Korean nuclear capabilities, Washington needs a comprehensive strategy that will include a range of efforts, including, importantly, strengthened homeland missile defenses.

Last week, US President Donald J. Trump, referring to the North Korean missile threat, claimed that “we have missiles that can knock out a missile in the air 97 percent of the time, and if you send two of them, it’s going to get knocked out.” This comment led to a flurry of criticism of the president’s statement and of US missile defense policy in general. However, the critics, who point to technical problems and high costs and oppose improved missile defenses, miss the mark. The president’s statement is technically accurate and homeland missile defense is essential to US defense strategy toward North Korea.

The threat from North Korea’s missiles are real. According to some estimates, North Korea has dozens of nuclear warheads and may have intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of reaching the continental United States. This is only the third potential US adversary, after Russia and China, to acquire the ability to threaten nuclear war against the US homeland. This capability poses a number of threats to US interests.

With the US homeland now at risk, allies in Asia may question whether the United States is still willing to extend deterrence to Asia. Such doubt may weaken US alliances in the region and potentially cause regional partners, such as South Korea, to take unilateral steps, such as building their own nuclear weapons capabilities, that would be contrary to US interests. Emboldened by this shift in the balance of power, North Korean Leader Kim Jung Un may believe that he can deter US intervention on the Korean Peninsula, causing him to behave more aggressively in East Asia, undermining regional stability. Finally, there is a real risk of nuclear war. This latter threat should not be exaggerated, but in crises between the United States and a nuclear-armed North Korea there is always the danger that the situation could spin out of control.

US homeland missile defense plays a key role in countering all of these threats. In the worst-case scenario of a North Korean nuclear attack, US missile defenses can protect the US homeland,

preventing nuclear detonations on US soil and saving American lives. Most importantly, however, missile defenses contribute to deterrence to forestall an attack before it takes place. Kim Jong Un, seeing that the United States has effective defenses, will be less inclined to launch an attack that will likely fail. In addition, US allies, such as Japan and South Korea, will be assured that Washington can still defend them in a regional conflict if Washington is less concerned about the vulnerability of the US homeland.

In recent days, however, many critics have responded to Trump's comments with major objections, leading some to question the value of missile defense for dealing with the North Korean challenge altogether. In particular, critics point to test data showing that the probability of a single missile defense interceptor engaging an incoming warhead is closer to 50 percent, not 97 percent as the president claimed. In addition, they charge that the United States has spent too much on these programs, shelling out billions of dollars for ineffective systems. Therefore, a number of critics argue, Washington should abandon missile defense efforts and focus on other measures to address the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Others go further to argue that reliance on missile defense could be dangerous by incentivizing Washington, Pyongyang, or both to try to strike first.

These criticisms, however, are misguided. Missile defenses do not need to be impenetrable to serve national security interests. Even a partially effective system contributes to deterrence and defense. After all, a system with a 50 percent success rate provides more protection than leaving oneself completely vulnerable to nuclear attack and coercion. These odds are high enough to change the equation for an enemy contemplating a successful nuclear attack.

Moreover, Trump's calculations are roughly correct. This is because the United States would likely launch multiple interceptors at each incoming missile. As even critics acknowledge, the probability of at least one of four interceptors, each with a 50 percent success rate, engaging an incoming missile is roughly 97 percent.

Finally, the problem with US homeland missile defense is not that the United States has spent too much, but the opposite. Since the late 1990s, homeland missile defense has consistently been recognized as a national priority. After all, what is a more important national security interest than protecting the country from strategic attack? However, unfortunately, this priority has not been reflected in the national budget. Over the past ten years, for example, spending on US homeland missile defense has actually decreased by roughly 46 percent from \$3.7 billion to \$2 billion. Given recent developments in the North Korean threat, the spending cuts on missile defense over the past decade look particularly irresponsible.

Fortunately, Trump has announced that his administration will pursue a "state of the art" missile defense system. Better late than never. Making homeland missile defense a priority consistent with the supreme importance of the mission is long overdue.

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-north-korea-nuclear-threat-and-homeland-missile-defense>

[Return to top](#)

US ARMS CONTROL

Brookings Institution (Washington, DC)

Preventing Iranian Nuclear Weapons Work

By Richard Nephew

October 9, 2017

In addition to banning the actual development of nuclear weapons, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) prohibits Iran from working with many of the technologies that would be essential for building a nuclear weapon. And while there are robust verification measures in place to confirm the former, there has been some recent debate over the international community's ability to fully verify the latter. The debate is particularly salient as the congressionally mandated deadline for President Trump to re-certify the deal approaches on October 15.

Although there is some merit to the criticisms, they are exaggerated. The associated provisions of the JCPOA give the IAEA the ability to demand access where evidence of Iranian cheating is found, with a lower burden of proof of illicit nuclear intent, and the threat of sanctions snap-back gives Iran motivation to comply with access requests.

WHAT IS SECTION T?

The argument centers on Section T of the JCPOA, which provides that Iran will not design, develop, acquire, or use computer models to simulate nuclear explosive devices, or multi-point explosive detonation systems suitable for a nuclear explosive device (unless approved by the Joint Commission), or explosive diagnostic systems (again, unless approved), or explosively driven neutron sources or specialized materials for explosively driven neutron sources.

Put in laymen's terms, Iran essentially agreed to not engage in a variety of activities that would permit it to design and evaluate a nuclear warhead. As some of these activities also have limited non-nuclear weapons design applications, there is the possibility of specific permission being granted for individual cases. But, the general principle is that these activities are so intrinsically important for nuclear weapons that they ought to be prohibited outright. Notably, this section has no expiration and, as such, JCPOA proponents have often cited it as one of the ways in which the JCPOA will have salience even after primary nuclear restrictions ease 10 to 15 years after implementation began in 2016.

AMANO'S "ADMISSION"

Some, however, have questioned whether the IAEA has sufficient knowledge to enforce the terms of Section T, and a recent comment by Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano added fuel to the fire.

On September 26, Amano acknowledged in an interview with Reuters that, "our tools are limited" when it comes to verifying Section T. He went on to say: "In other sections, for example, Iran has committed to submit declarations, place their activities under safeguards or ensure access by us. But in Section T I don't see any [such commitment]." He then suggested that this is an area where additional guidance from the Joint Commission (which is composed of the states that negotiated the JCPOA as well as Iran) would be appreciated.

Critics of the JCPOA have latched on to the comment, suggesting that it proves the inadequacy of the JCPOA to guard against Iran's nuclear weapons program.

The most sober of these arguments is that, as Amano implied, it is difficult for the IAEA to carry out its responsibilities under Section T without a baseline declaration by the Iranians of the places in which any such equipment is being stored as well as the uses to which it is being applied. The argument flows that, if a declaration existed, the IAEA could visit the sites in question, confirm that they are not being used for nuclear weapons research, and inform JCPOA participants of its analysis. Others have gone farther, arguing that—taken in combination with generalized Iranian reluctance to provide access to its military sites—the Iranians could very well be working on nuclear weapons at this very time.

MORE LIGHT THAN HEAT

But this is alarmist and exaggerated: In fact, Amano's statement simply underscores the inherent difficulty of negotiating any kind of arms control agreement between adversaries, particularly in as inherently politicized an environment as that facing the JCPOA.

That's not to say that this element of the JCPOA and its verification system is perfect. A declaration of equipment covered by Section T and associated inspection system would be a valuable way of providing additional confidence as to the absence of nuclear weapons-related work in Iran. Iran's longstanding obfuscation about its weapons program and refusal to admit the existence of such a program (at least up until 2003-2004, when the U.S. intelligence community believes the program was suspended) has raised reasonable questions not only as to how close to nuclear weapons Iran has gotten but also as to the future intent of its nuclear program. Given that some nuclear restrictions will start to ease within the decade and that extraordinary transparency steps will end in 2040, it would be useful for non-Iranians and presumably helpful for Iranians to disabuse those skeptical of their intentions of their concerns.

However, Amano never said that he is unable to verify Iran's commitments in Section T. Rather, he said that his tools are limited and that his job could be made easier with an Iranian declaration. This may be true, but that does not detract from the fact that, in the event of indications of illicit work involving these items, the IAEA maintains the responsibility and the right under the deal to demand access to relevant facilities.

It is worth noting, in this context, that the broad nature of the Section T prohibition helps: Unlike centrifuge R&D or work with specialty metals that might have an application for the missile program (which is outside of the JCPOA), there is no accepted use of these items or technologies that does not involve Joint Commission approval. For this reason, any indication that they're involved in ongoing Iranian research activities would be a material breach of the JCPOA—and given the subject matter, a highly significant breach at that.

This also means that confronting Iran over evidence that this work is ongoing is a simpler proposition: It would be limited only by the need to protect intelligence sources and methods, not questions over Iranian intent or research scope. Speaking as someone who has had to confront foreign governments over Iranian nuclear activities in the past, this is an incredibly useful distinction.

To be sure, this means that evidence would have to be found suggesting illicit work, thus prompting inspections, rather than inspections taking place regularly. To me, as an advocate of the JCPOA, regular inspections would be reassuring (though not dispositive). But would some of the same JCPOA skeptics now seizing on this matter be that much more comforted by regular IAEA inspections? After all, one of the primary complaints around the JCPOA is that inspections are themselves insufficient because Iran would naturally engage in its covert work outside of the careful watch of the IAEA. Even the argument that Iran would be unable to procure this equipment from abroad (which of course remains a key JCPOA provision) is apparently of little aid, as some of

these same skeptics have also argued that the invasive process of review and approval of Iranian procurement activity does not go far enough. Given all of this, I find it doubtful that even regular declarations and IAEA access would soothe the worries of those opposed to the JCPOA in principle.

A similar point can be made with respect to the red herring issue of access to Iranian military sites. To be sure, Iran could be using military sites to house such goods but it is highly unlikely that the Iranians would use just any military site. Moreover, it's not even essential that they use a defined "military" site. JCPOA skeptics may say that they want blanket permission for inspectors to access military sites, but they do not mean it in practice (and would probably scoff at a strawman argument that they are insisting on inspector access to random mess halls in Mashad). Even they, while appealing for a general agreement to inspector access "anytime, anywhere," would push for searches on the basis of evidence of illicit conduct. The issue at hand is whether access to suspect sites—military or otherwise—would be possible if indications arose that such access was necessary. This is precisely what the JCPOA already affords.

SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE

Even without IAEA inspector access, the topic of Iranian weaponization remains one of the most central areas of intelligence collection and inquiry. The United States has focused on trying to identify whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons for decades, and the kinds of equipment and activities covered by Section T are of particular interest. Thus far, U.S. intelligence has been able to identify both illicit Iranian activities and the Iranian decision in 2003-2004 to terminate its nuclear weapons program, an analytic judgment that has yet to be adjusted since it was first made in 2007. Based on press reports, the United States does not possess—or, at the very least, has not presented to the IAEA and U.S. partners—information to suggest that Iran is in fact cheating on Section T.

It could be that U.S. intelligence is just missing a crucial piece of data or it could be that no such data exists, but herein lies one of the biggest problems with critics focused on Section T: inference becoming evidence. Leaping to a conclusion of a violation based on past Iranian behavior is deeply problematic, but that is a real risk at the present time. On October 3, Senator Tom Cotton gave a speech in which he noted: "If Iran doesn't have a covert nuclear program today, it would be the first time in a generation." For a U.S. Senator to ask a good faith question about U.S. confidence in Iranian compliance is wholly justified and in his job description, but to make policy on the basis of hypothetical and far from imminent threat is a far riskier proposition.

For this reason, though implementation of Section T could be different, the central question ought to be whether on balance it and the JCPOA structure give the international community the tools it needs to identify and respond to Iranian nuclear weaponization efforts. Prior to the JCPOA, we were reliant on intelligence collection with no way of enforcing Iranian compliance with inspection requests. Under the JCPOA, intelligence collection and the threat of snap-back give the United States and our partners the ability to demand IAEA access where evidence of cheating is found. This is a material improvement over the previous situation.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/10/09/preventing-iranian-nuclear-weapons-work/>

[Return to top](#)

Tehran Times (Tehran, Iran)

Iran's Ballistic Missile Development Completely Legal: Minnesota Professor

By Javad Heirannia

October 23, 2017

Prof. William O. Beeman, head of the anthropology department at the State University of Minnesota, is of the view that Iran's ballistic missile development is completely legal.

Beeman also tells the Tehran Times that "As long as other nations don't reimpose sanctions, including the United Nations and the European Union, Iran will just let the United States do what it wants in complete isolation."

Following is the text of the interview:

Q: Despite many internal and external oppositions, Trump decertified the JCPOA. What were the reasons behind his decision? What signal did he want to deliver both internally and externally by doing so?

A: The "decertification" was the result of a Congressional Bill that was passed in 2015, H.R.1191 - Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015. The Republicans in Congress refused to "approve" of the JCPOA unless this act was approved and signed by President Obama. This act has nothing to do with the actual provisions of the JCPOA (which is a United Nations Resolution). Nor does it have anything to do with Iran's compliance with the terms of the JCPOA. What the act requires the President to do is to "certify" every 90 days that the JCPOA is in "the interests of the United States." President Trump before he was elected promised to "tear up" the JCPOA. He couldn't do that, and in fact he was forced to declare in September that Iran was in compliance with the JCPOA. So under this Congressional Act he declared that the JCPOA was not (or no longer) in the interests of the United States. This throws the question of whether to re-impose sanctions on Iran back to Congress. They have 60 days to decide. This allows Trump to say that he rejected the JCPOA without actually cancelling U.S. involvement in the agreement. If Congress decides to reimpose sanctions, it is unclear whether the United States will be in violation of the JCPOA. Trump would love it if Iran decided to withdraw, because then he could blame Iran for pulling out. But the short answer is that Trump did this solely for his own political purposes, and not because Iran actually violated the act.

Q: A re-imposition of sanctions on Iran by Congress will in fact be tantamount to the violation of JCPOA. In that case, Trump makes Congress responsible for the scrap of the very deal. What do you think?

A: The important word is "tantamount." I don't know what Congress will do. The Senate has voted overwhelmingly for sanctions on Iran in the past. H.R. 1191 passed 99-1 and the additional sanctions on the IRGC earlier this year passed 98-2. This means almost all Democrats voted for this. Congress is in a quandary about this. Some who voted for additional sanctions on Iran believe that reimposing sanctions will put the United States in breach of the JCPOA. Others say no. Still others think that this situation will make it possible for the United States to bargain with Iran about matters that have nothing to do with the JCPOA, like Iran's (completely legal) ballistic missile development, support for Hezbollah and President Assad of Syria and even questions about releasing Iranian-Americans in prison in Iran and other human rights questions. So this is very much up in the air, but Trump has now washed his hands of further responsibility.

Q: In Europe, a single voice concerning the violation of JCPOA cannot be heard. French President Macron had underlined before that it would be necessary to include some articles pertinent to human rights and missile issues within JCPOA. This is somehow similar to Trump's word. Do you think Europe will follow suit?

A: Only President Macron is saying this. The other P5+1 nations don't agree. Moreover, the JCPOA is actually a United Nations Security Council Resolution. At this point France and the United States have no power to renegotiate the JCPOA. However Congressional leaders and perhaps President Macron think that the possibility of reimposing sanctions will compel Iran to enter into negotiations on these non-nuclear issues. ?

Q: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has underscored so far that the JCPOA is deemed a deal when all parties are committed to it. What will be Iran's reaction to possible U.S. withdrawal from the deal?

A: Well, I don't know for sure. You probably know more about the Iranian reaction than I do, but my guess is that as long as other nations don't reimpose sanctions, including the United Nations and the European Union, Iran will just let the United States do what it wants in complete isolation. Technically the United States can claim that it has not broken the agreement, but you know that if sanctions are reimposed this is simply a political sophistry. One thing that will be affected is the sale of Boeing jets to Iran. If Iran wanted to protest, they could immediately note that re-imposition of sanctions would kill this deal, and it would not be Iran killing the deal, but rather the U.S. Congress itself. Iran could also note that combined trade between Iran and the United States is now at about \$120million (imports and exports), and this would stop if sanctions are imposed. A third thing to tell Prime Minister Macron is that Iran is already using French banking sources that have no operations in the United States to process its trade deals, and if France doesn't uphold its part of the agreement, those financial resources will disappear.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/417839/Iran-s-ballistic-missile-development-completely-legal-Minnesota>

[Return to top](#)

The National Interest (Washington, DC)

Why There is No Chance a Piece of Paper Will Ban Nuclear Weapons. Zero.

By Dave Majumdar

October 18, 2017

Earlier this month, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2017 to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). But is the group's doing more harm than good?

The ICAN group has worked tirelessly to bring the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to fruition—which is an effort to legally ban nuclear weapons—to fruition. The United States government, however, believes that the entire effort is counterproductive.

Washington believes that the ban treaty ignores “the crucial role that nuclear deterrence plays in preserving and protecting international peace and security, and the potentially catastrophic consequences were deterrence’s restraining effect to be removed while it still remains necessary,” Robert Wood, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. First Committee said during an October 12 speech at the United Nations.

The United States continues to support the goal of nuclear disarmament, but it does not believe the nuclear weapons ban is a good idea and that it will actually make things worse.

“Its obligations are vaguely worded, imprecise, and sometimes internally contradictory, while offering only an empty shell for verification,” Wood said.

“Worse, it is fundamentally at odds with today’s security challenges. It is not simply an unproductive instrument; it is likely to be a counterproductive one, with the potential to cause lasting harm to the nonproliferation regime and to the cause of disarmament alike.”

One of the fundamental issues that the United States takes with the new treaty is simply a matter of reality. The treaty does not take into account the need for nuclear deterrence.

“The ban treaty is based on the premise that addressing crucial international security issues is not necessary for disarmament,” Wood said.

“Ban treaty proponents would have us believe that we can do away with nuclear deterrence despite - to cite just one example - the danger posed by North Korea’s relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons and associated delivery systems, which stand in flagrant violation of international law.”

Nor does the nuclear weapons ban have any verification method built into the document.

“The Treaty does not contain a credible verification mechanism, demurring on the issue almost entirely,” Wood said.

“It does run counter to decades of progress in nonproliferation verification by endorsing the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement as its standard for safeguarding nuclear material, without also requiring the essential Additional Protocol. Experience has proven that Comprehensive Safeguards alone are insufficient to detect a covert nuclear program. The drafters’ decision to reject the Additional Protocol represents a profound failure of judgment, and is likely to undermine efforts to universalize the Additional Protocol.”

Indeed, none of the planet’s nuclear powers have signed the treaty. Earlier in the year, France and Great Britain joined the United States in condemning the nuclear weapons ban.

“This initiative clearly disregards the realities of the international security environment,” the three Western powers stated jointly on July 7.

“Accession to the ban treaty is incompatible with the policy of nuclear deterrence, which has been essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia for over 70 years. A purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and security. It will do the exact opposite by creating even more divisions at a time when the world needs to remain united in the face of growing threats, including those from the DPRK’s ongoing proliferation efforts.”

Proponents of the treaty nonetheless hope that the ban will have a positive impact.

“The Treaty is an important step towards the universally-held goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. It is my hope that it will reinvigorate global efforts to achieve it,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on Sept. 20.

The Nobel Committee is aware that the ban treaty will not actually help to eliminate even a single nuclear weapon.

“The Norwegian Nobel Committee is aware that an international legal prohibition will not in itself eliminate a single nuclear weapon, and that so far neither the states that already have nuclear weapons nor their closest allies support the nuclear weapon ban treaty,” the committee stated.

“The Committee wishes to emphasize that the next steps towards attaining a world free of nuclear weapons must involve the nuclear-armed states.”

However, nuclear-armed states have little real interest in giving up their weapons. It's not just the United States, France and Britain that see their nuclear weapons as their ultimate trump cards; the Kremlin maintains a formidable nuclear arsenal to ensure the survival of the Russian state.

Russia is highly unlikely to ever consider giving up its nuclear arsenal. Indeed, the Kremlin—to offset its conventional weakness—renounced the Soviet Union's nuclear no-first-use policy in 1993. Moscow's security policy allows for the use of nuclear weapons “in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.”

On the other side of the world, the People's Republic of China—long an outlier amongst the great powers for maintaining a minimal nuclear deterrent—is now working on improving and modernizing its strategic forces.

“China appears to be moving away from an approach to deterrence that deems the ability to impose some risk of a second strike sufficient,” reads a recent RAND report. “It is moving toward a more calculated strategy of assured retaliation.”

Like Moscow, Beijing sees nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of its security and sovereignty. That is also the case for New Delhi, Islamabad and Tel Aviv—nuclear weapons are their last line of defense to ensure the survival of the state. And while North Korea is a totalitarian nightmare of a state, nuclear weapons are Pyongyang's trump card to ensure regime survival.

Thus, the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons will remain a fantasy for the foreseeable future.

<http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-there-no-chance-piece-paper-will-ban-nuclear-weapons-22788>

[Return to top](#)

Arms Control Wonk (Washington, DC)

‘One Last Chance’ for Pakistan

By Michael Krepon

October 24, 2017

The Trump administration has joined its predecessors in warning leaders in Islamabad and Rawalpindi of dire consequences by continuing to harbor groups that are active in Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir and occasionally, with spectacular destructive effect, in major Indian cities. U.S. threats have been articulated for so long that Pakistan's national security community might be forgiven for not taking Team Trump's “one last chance” warning seriously. After all, Washington still needs Pakistan's help to arrive at a political settlement in Afghanistan and to provide logistical support for U.S. troops stationed there. And besides, nothing in diplomacy is forever.

Even so, this particular fork in the road matters: it's an opportunity for Pakistan to improve its fortunes. Pakistan's national security establishment, which is far from monolithic, has to recognize that it has less running room for policies toward India and Afghanistan that haven't served national interests. But asking for fundamental change is asking for quite a lot, as U.S. policy makers have themselves discovered in Afghanistan. How often do nations fundamentally change badly mistaken policies, rather than re-tooling them?

Pakistan's national security managers have yet to turn against the leadership of groups like the Lashkar e-Toiba and Jaish e-Muhammad (or whatever they are calling themselves now) because

they have perceived utility in dealing with India. Despite their baggage, these outfits are cost-effective offsets to India's conventional military power. And besides, they haven't carried out spectacular strikes against India for almost ten years, their leaders can always be placed under periodic house arrest, and they might even be tamed by entering mainstream Pakistani politics. Hope springs eternal.

This line of reasoning can only be inferred by outsiders because the argument used for foreign consumption is threadbare. Ever since 2002, we've heard that taming these wild men will happen but will take time. Everyone knows that the Pakistan Army has the resolve and capability to deal with outfits that are perceived enemies of the state, like the Pakistan Taliban. The surest indicator that anti-India groups, along with the Haqqanis and the Afghan Taliban, aren't viewed as enemies of the state is that they haven't been treated as such.

The first impulse of Pakistan's national security managers will be to try to finesse Washington's latest "test." Pervez Musharraf successfully managed maximal U.S. pressure applied by the George W. Bush administration after the 9/11 attacks by agreeing to terms, only to parse them later.

Successive U.S. administrations have offered carrots to help Pakistan to choose wisely, feeding into the transactional nature of bilateral relations. U.S. generosity toward Pakistan – something that is strongly contested there — has been discredited in Washington. Long gone is the ambitious Kerry-Lugar-Berman approach during the Obama administration. The idea back then was to shore up civilian authority and to induce shifts in military practices. The Obama administration didn't make much of a dent on either account. Congress has now seen fit to reduce large sums from Coalition Support Funding and denied Pakistan preferential terms for big-ticket military purchases.

U.S.-Pakistan relations now seem to be in a post-transactional phase. The Trump administration is calling on Pakistani leaders to do the right thing for their national wellbeing. This is exactly the right message, but it still entails doing what Washington wants. Those who remain wedded to Pakistan's failed policies toward India and Afghanistan can deflect this message and avoid substantive debate by arguing that Pakistan must continue to resist dictation. The extent to which they resort to form will reflect the absence of change in Pakistan's national security policies. If, however, this argument is muted, something interesting may be afoot.

Support for Pakistan on Capitol Hill, think tanks and the U.S. media has cratered. Pakistan blames the India lobby for this state of affairs, but this is far too facile an explanation. For sure, the India lobby is now very powerful, but so, too, is the Israeli lobby – and Egypt continues to receive help from the U.S. Treasury and the Pentagon. The key difference is the policies adopted by Egypt and Pakistan toward a friend of the United States. Egypt signed a "cold" peace treaty with Israel, while Pakistan's national security establishment has been committed to the dead end policy of enduring enmity with India.

If Pakistan's national security leaders were to seek a genuine peace with India, Washington would do an about face. But as long as Pakistan's national security establishment resists change, Pakistan bashers in Washington will set the tone of debate. Their agenda is clear: they seek Pakistan's isolation and punishment. Without changes in Pakistan's national security policies, bashers will continue to hold the high ground.

Noted U.S. analyst Ashley Tellis now goes so far as to argue that it is worthless to call for talks between India and Pakistan because reconciliation is futile until there is a sea change in the Pakistani establishment's hostility toward India. Ashley would even extend this argument to the utility of talks to reduce nuclear dangers that are now growing along several fronts.

Shall we also apply this standard – to reject diplomacy until there is a sea change in the national security policy of problem states – elsewhere? Shall we object to negotiations with North Korea

because U.S. and DPRK national security objectives are so far apart? Shall we also demand fundamental change in Russian and Chinese national security policies as the price for the resumption of negotiations? In circumstances where nuclear dangers are growing, the rejection of diplomacy between states that are one incident away from a serious crisis is a senseless invitation to ugly headlines. The avoidance of conflict and uncontrolled escalation are, in and of themselves, sufficient reasons to engage in diplomacy.

I take Ashley's point: Talks are unlikely to result in breakthroughs until Pakistan's national security establishment changes course. And absent fundamental change, talks become intermittent activities broken off by provocations. Ashley is also correct in noting that whenever New Delhi has sought to turn the page, it has been rebuffed by irreconcilables in Pakistan who aid and abet strikes against Indian diplomatic or military outposts. This has already happened on three occasions during Prime Minister Modi's tenure.

Nonetheless, breakthroughs aren't the only reason for diplomacy – they are the culmination of patient diplomacy. When nuclear dangers are growing on the subcontinent, Washington's rejection of diplomacy can't be a serious policy option. Instead, it makes sense to link Washington's standard talking point calling for the resumption of dialogue with the public message that Pakistan's national security establishment will be held responsible for the actions of groups operating on its soil that seek to foil diplomacy.

This is a tough spot for Pakistan's national security leaders. Donald Trump is advised by distinguished military officers who know a great deal about Afghanistan and about the particulars of Pakistan's behavior there. I wouldn't bet on Team Trump to be as forgiving as the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. Nor would I bet on sea changes in Pakistan's national security policies. But the tide is clearly turning. It's up to Pakistan's national security establishment to recognize this, and to begin to act on this recognition.

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/1204343/one-last-chance-for-pakistan/>

[Return to top](#)

ASIA/PACIFIC

Voice of America (Washington, D.C.)

Japan: North Korea Nuclear Threat 'Critical'

Author Not Attributed

October 23, 2017

The nuclear threat from North Korea is critical and requires a joint response from the United States, Japan, and South Korea, Japan's defense minister said Monday.

"[The] threat posed by North Korea has grown to the unprecedented, critical and imminent level. Therefore, we have to take calibrated and different responses to meet with that level of threat," Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera told his U.S. and South Korean counterparts, speaking through a translator, at the start of talks in the Philippines.

U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis was more reserved in his remarks, but did slam North Korea for defying U.N. Security Council resolutions against its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

"North Korea's provocations threaten regional and global security despite unanimous condemnation by the United Nations Security Council," he said.

North Korea has said many times its nuclear weapons program is not subject to negotiation, and has rejected U.S. calls for its denuclearization.

Tensions between the North and the United States have been escalating following Pyongyang's latest nuclear test last month, its sixth overall. North Korea has also conducted repeated tests of what intelligence officials have assessed to be both intermediate and long range ballistic missiles.

North Korea's nuclear capabilities have also been more widely discussed in Japan, where Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ran for re-election on a platform largely dedicated to his hardline stance against Pyongyang.

The U.S. defense secretary's visit to the region comes just weeks before Donald Trump's first scheduled trip to Asia as U.S. president.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/japan-north-korea-nuclear-threat-critical/4082217.html>

[Return to top](#)

The Straits Times (Singapore)

S. Korea to Build 'Frankenmissile' Targeting the North

Author Not Attributed

October 21, 2017

Powerful weapon will inflict 'unbearable cost' on Pyongyang in a war

SEOUL — South Korea's military plans to develop a "Frankenmissile" to counter North Korea's escalating missile and nuclear capabilities, in a bid to overwhelm the North during the initial phase of a war.

In its report to an annual parliamentary audit by the National Assembly's Defence Committee, the army said it would develop the Hyunmoo IV surface-to-surface missile, powerful enough to destroy North Korea's underground military facilities and command centre.

Combined with indigenous tactical surface-to-surface missiles and Hyunmoo-class intermediate-range ballistic missiles, the advanced pre-emptive strike capability would inflict "unbearable cost" on the North by neutralising its nuclear and missile sites, as well as long-range artillery units, the army said.

"We would use those three types of missiles as the first salvo of the missile strike and concentrate them during the initial phase of war to destroy North Korea's long-range artillery units and missiles located in ballistic missile operating areas," the army said on Thursday.

South Korea has been suspected of working on advancing its ballistic missile capability since it struck a deal with the US to scrap limits on the missiles' payload last month. Previously, Seoul was banned from fitting warheads weighing more than 500kg on its ballistic missiles with a range of over 800km.

The development of such an advanced ballistic missile is a part of the army's effort to establish a "game-changing" operational concept, which is designed to minimise civilian casualties and end the war as soon as possible, the army said.

The "five-pillar" concept calls for the military to develop a high-precision powerful missile, establish agile manoeuvre corps, build units using drones and robots, develop an advanced battle system and create a special warfare brigade for "deception strikes" against North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un.

South Korea's Marine Corps, for its part, announced a plan to establish a new command dedicated to protecting border islands, pledging to defend the sea border against North Korea's potential attacks and infiltration attempts.

During the parliamentary audit, the Marine Corps said the new command will be built around 2020 and based on the current North-western Island Defence Command. It was formed in 2011 following North Korea's artillery attack on Yeongpyeong, one of the farthest islands in the West Sea.

"The Marine Corps will seek to expand the command into a new defence command for strategic islands," said Marine Corps commander Jun Jin Goo. "We will seek to establish a unified command structure for strategic islands in the West, East and South seas."

The Marine Corps said it would establish a unit to defend Dokdo, a set of islets in the East Sea or Sea of Japan that have been the subject of a territorial dispute with Japan. It seeks to build the unit by 2020.

The announcement came amid North Korea's increasing threat against South Korea's border areas. In August, Pyongyang revealed its military training designed to seize the island of Yeongpyeong and its nearby island of Baengnyeong.

Some lawmakers voiced concerns that if North Korea feels confident about its nuclear and missile advantage against South Korea, it might try to forcefully occupy those near-border islands.

Last week, South Korean Defence Minister Song Young Moo acknowledged that it is a plausible scenario.

Asked about those eventualities, South Korean navy chief Um Hyung Sung on Thursday pledged a strong response, saying the military would treat the North's occupation attempt as an "all-out war situation".

"In the event of the enemy's provocations, front-line units can't afford to judge whether this is a localised skirmish or an all-out war. We will retaliate as if it is an all-out war," he told lawmakers.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/s-korea-to-build-frankenmissile-targeting-the-north>

[Return to top](#)

Reuters (New York, NY)

'Nowhere to Hide': North Korean Missiles Spur Anxiety in Japan Fishing Town

By Malcolm Foster

October 19, 2017

ERIMO, Japan — Ever since North Korea lobbed two missiles far above this windswept fishing town on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido, seaweed farmer Mitsuyo Kawamura says she's been on edge.

"Now when I hear a loud sound, I look outside, I look out at the ocean," 68-year-old Kawamura said from her seaside cottage in Erimo, where she lays out long dark strands of kombu seaweed on stones to dry in the sun. "I feel anxious, like I never know when it will come again."

As Japan prepares to vote in Sunday's national election, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called North Korea's escalating threats -- it also conducted a sixth nuclear test last month -- a "national crisis" that only he can lead Japan through.

Yet the missiles that flew over Erimo on Aug. 29 and Sept. 15 created an eerie threat: No one saw or heard them. They streaked by several hundred kilometers above land, too high to see with the naked eye, before splashing into the Pacific more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) to the east.

Warnings of the missiles spread through sirens and government-issued "J-alerts" on millions of cell phones throughout Japan, jolting some out of sleep.

Kawamura has since stocked up on extra food and keeps the radio on to listen for more warnings. Like many residents here -- and across Japan -- she feels helpless, unsure of how to protect herself.

"When it's launched, it could land here just moments later," she said. "There's nowhere to hide."

Abe's rhetoric has grown harsher as North Korea has threatened to "sink" Japan and seems intent on developing nuclear warheads that can reach the U.S. mainland. He has repeatedly backed U.S. President Donald Trump's "all-options-on-the-table" stance and says now is not the time for dialogue.

"They promised in 1994 and again in 2005 that they would abandon their nuclear program. But they have broken their word and developed nuclear devices and missiles," Abe said at a campaign rally last week. "We're not going to be deceived anymore."

To protect itself, Japan has deployed 34 Patriot PAC-3 anti-missile batteries around the country, including one in Hokkaido, and Aegis defense systems on several destroyers. U.S. forces in Japan also have ballistic missile defense equipment that can -- if all goes well -- take out a missile in mid-flight.

'FIRE ONE BACK'

The rockets thrust tiny Erimo, population 4,850, into the global spotlight. Maps on TV broadcasts showed the missiles' flight paths over nearby Cape Erimo, a jagged point that juts into the Pacific where seals frolic.

At the town's docks, where fishermen sorted through the morning's haul of salmon, tossing them into vats of ice water, strong support for Abe was mixed with worries that he's too strident, putting Japan at risk.

"Right now, no one's better than Abe," said Satoru Narita, a 72-year-old fisherman.

If anything, Japan has been too passive, said 23-year-old Ryosuke Kinoshita, who supports Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

"Next time they launch one, I'd almost like to see us fire one back," he said. "We can't live in peace and safety."

But Haruki Suminoya, head of Erimo's fishing union, cautioned that being overly aggressive could provoke North Korea into lashing out.

"Abe's approach is too strong, too hardline," he said. "A more restrained approach is better."

The recent war of words between Trump and North Korea unsettled many residents, who pointed out they were a much closer target than the United States.

While pressure was needed toward North Korea, being too tough could be disastrous, said Mayor Masaki Ohnishi. "If North Korea does something serious, Japan is within shooting range."

So far, it seems that Abe is winning over voters. Nationwide polls show the LDP is headed for a big win this weekend.

REVISING CONSTITUTION

Erimo residents were divided on Abe's signature policy of revising Japan's war-renouncing constitution to clarify the status of the country's military. Critics worry that it could lead to an expanded role for the armed forces overseas and entangle it in U.S.-led conflicts.

But Shinto priest Hirotaka Tezuka, 39, said the constitution had grown outdated. "We need a constitution that's better suited to the present era."

Yoshihiro Naito, 77, opposed the idea. "The commitment we've made not to wage war has kept Japan safe." He plans to vote for an opposition party because he thinks Abe and the LDP have become too powerful.

Town officials said they have not taken any particular precautionary steps following the recent missile launches, nor do they plan any "duck and cover" drills that have been held elsewhere.

The town has loud speakers on 50 tall poles to broadcast warnings for tsunamis, typhoons -- and now missiles. In recent months, they have installed wireless units in 1,500 of the 2,200 homes so people can hear them when they are indoors.

Erimo also has emergency stocks of food, water and other supplies, the mayor said. That's particularly important for Erimo because it is linked to the rest of Hokkaido by only one coast-hugging road, which gets closed several times a year due to heavy rains or massive waves.

Local fishermen are nervous about North Korea's warning that it might conduct a hydrogen bomb test over the Pacific, which they worry would contaminate the water like the Fukushima nuclear disaster did in 2011.

"The radiation would make all the fish inedible," said Narita, the elderly fisherman. "Like in Fukushima, we couldn't do our jobs."

The town's dwindling fishing industry has already been hit hard by a plunge in the salmon catch as well as by a dearth of youngsters to take over the trade.

When young people move away to cities such as Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital, sometimes their parents follow them, residents said. Erimo's population, which peaked above 9,000 in the 1960s, has fallen to nearly half that level.

"We're a fishing town," said Naito, "so if we can't catch fish any more, we're finished."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-election-northkorea/nowhere-to-hide-north-korean-missiles-spur-anxiety-in-japan-fishing-town-idUSKBN1C00L6>

[Return to top](#)

Beijing Bulletin (Beijing, China)

Kim Jong Un's Sinister Plot: Biological Weapons for Disaster

By Sheetal Sukhija

October 24, 2017

PYONGYANG, North Korea - With the world already fretting about North Korea unleashing a nuclear war, what with its sophisticated hydrogen bombs and other nuclear weapons - another fear has now gripped the region.

According to a latest report, the reclusive nation led by Kim Jong Un is now mass producing deadly batches of biological weapons that could kill tens of thousands of people.

A report by the Belfer Centre of Harvard University's Kennedy School has revealed that North Korea is "mass producing deadly batches of smallpox and the plague."

The report stated that the dictator is harvesting agents such as plague, anthrax and cholera.

What is causing more fear is that experts believe the intended targets are thought to be U.S. troops that are present in large numbers on the Korean peninsula, in keeping with America's vow of standing by its allies - in this case, South Korea, which is facing an imminent danger from North Korea's nuclear weapons.

The report pointed out that the hermit kingdom was preparing the stock of lethal potions.

The report quotes the South Korean Defense Ministry as saying, "North Korea has 13 types of biological weapons agents which it can weaponize within ten days, and anthrax and smallpox are the likely agents it would deploy."

It goes on to reveal, "Agents like anthrax could cause mass casualties with a small amount: only a few kilograms of anthrax, equivalent to a few bottles of wine, released into a dense city could kill 50 percent of the population. If used on a large scale, these weapons can cause not only tens of thousands of deaths, but also create panic and paralyze societies."

For months now, the White House and its leader has been embroiled in a war of words with the rogue state as much of the aggressive rhetoric emerging from Pyongyang centring around the nuclear threat.

On Monday, as the report was revealed, North Korea yet again took a potshot at the U.S. President Donald Trump, calling him a "hooligan" and a "lunatic with his finger over a nuclear button."

A statement by the North Korean government quoted in the KNCA said, "Dignitaries of White House, and State and Defense Departments of the U.S. are having a hard time cooling Trump overheated with a war fever, but only the South Korean puppet forces are fanning up the lunatic fingering a nuclear button. What is ridiculous is the puppet forces' poor plight of being treated as a street girl even though they play the coquette with the U.S. and serve it with devotion."

It added, "The darkness drooping low over America is sunset, not dawn, and no force can stop America from rushing headlong into downhill after over-living its era. No wonder, such hooligan as thoughtless Trump is going on the rampage after becoming owner of White House, rendering the world restless. Lunatic Trump is running headlong into ruin, taking America with him, and the poor puppet forces are following him, at the peril of their lives."

KCNA said, "It would be needless to regret when they are about to fall off a cliff of era, together with their master."

<http://www.beijingbulletin.com/news/255128067/kim-jong-uns-sinister-plot-biological-weapons-for-disaster>

[Return to top](#)

EUROPE/RUSSIA

euronews (Luxembourg)

Romania Set to Take Delivery of New Missile Defence System

By Christian Gherasim

October 25, 2017

Romania has signed a deal for a new missile defence system – one of the country's most expensive military acquisitions.

It will see the Patriot missiles delivered to the south-east European country by the end of the year.

The agreement, worth 3.9 billion euros, is regarded as a necessity for Romania's security and a strategic move that will strengthen NATO's eastern borders.

Iulian Fota, a defense specialist and former presidential adviser, spoke about the deal on public television. He said: "Romania needs such military capabilities. Otherwise the country risks remaining exposed to aerial threats."

As a final step to formalise the deal, Mihai Fifor, Romania's defence minister, will submit a draft law to parliament, which is expected to be easily approved.

The minister said Romania would be "acquiring seven Patriot systems in total over the coming years securing the country's entire aerial and terrestrial defense."

He added that by the end of this year, a second military deal will be finalised under which General Dynamics, another US defence contractor, will make Piranha V armoured fighting vehicles at Romania's state-owned Bucharest Mechanical Factory.

Romania is among five other NATO countries that have stepped up their military outlay to meet the requirement – pushed by US president Donald Trump – of spending two percent of GDP on defence.

Poland recently announced that it also intends to acquire the Patriot missile system as part of a larger defence acquisition program which includes submarines, helicopters and a significant number of F-16 fighter jets.

The Patriot systems that are to be deployed in Eastern Europe are intended to complete a defensive line along NATO's eastern border.

Iulian Chifu, a foreign affairs expert, believes that the Patriot missile systems, together with the Deveselu anti-missile shield in Romania, represent a very good deal.

Officials, including Romania's president, regard these as the latest pieces in NATO's security jigsaw that is meant to deter Russia.

Colonel Ion Petrescu, a well-known military analyst and a high ranking officer in the Romanian military, told Euronews: "The 3.9 billion euro spent on the Patriot system is well justified, considering the damage that a full on military aggression will bring upon Romania, encouraged also by the country's current air defence weaknesses.

"Given the strategic partnership between US and Romania, it was only appropriate that the defense system be acquired from the United States."

In response to Romania's increased military expenditure, Valeri Kuzmin, Russia's ambassador to Bucharest, stated that Russia does not hold any risk to the NATO and EU member country and that the Patriot defense system can easily be turned into an offensive weapon.

"This threat is seriously being considered by Russia at the moment as it takes into account options to respond in kind", said the high-ranking diplomat.

<http://www.euronews.com/2017/10/25/romania-set-to-take-delivery-of-new-missile-defence-system>

[Return to top](#)

ABC News (New York, NY)

U.K.'s Johnson Urges North Korea to 'Change Course' on Nukes

By Jill Lawless

October 23, 2017

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said Monday that nobody wants armed conflict over North Korea's nuclear ambitions, but that U.S. President Donald Trump is right to keep the option of military action open.

In a speech on global security in London, Johnson urged the government of Kim Jong Un to "change course" and engage in diplomacy to resolve the crisis.

"By continuing to develop nuclear capabilities, Kim risks provoking a reaction in the region that is at once defensive and competitive, that reduces not increases his security and therefore reduces not increases the survival chances of the regime," Johnson said.

North Korea has dramatically ramped up its nuclear weapons program, launching intercontinental ballistic missiles that can potentially strike the U.S. mainland and a conducting its largest-ever underground nuclear explosion.

Johnson called for North Korea's neighbor China to lead efforts to pile economic pressure on Pyongyang, but also said U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had rightly offered North Korea "sensible reassurances" that it does not seek regime change or invasion.

But he said Trump has an "absolute duty to prepare any action" to keep America and its allies safe.

"I don't think anybody can conceivably want a military solution to this problem," Johnson said. "And yet clearly it must remain on the table."

Johnson told a conference organized by the Chatham House international affairs think tank that diplomacy had succeeded in limiting the spread of atomic weapons beyond a handful of countries.

He said that if North Korea changed tack, "the world can show that it is once again capable of the diplomatic imagination that produced the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty" and the Iran nuclear deal.

In an implicit rebuke to Trump, he said the 2015 accord curbing Iran's nuclear program had avoided the "nightmare" of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

Trump has been fiercely critical of the deal and earlier this month refused to re-certify it under U.S. law, directing Congress to make it more stringent.

The other parties to the accord — Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the European Union — have all urged Trump's administration to stay in the deal.

Johnson said it was crucial the Iran deal survived. He said that "having spoken to some of the most influential figures on Capitol Hill — none of them fans of the Iranian regime — I have absolutely no doubt that with determination and courage the (deal) can be preserved."

Urging more work to curb nuclear proliferation, he said the alternative was a world of high-stakes standoffs and brinksmanship, what he called "a nuclear version of the final scene of 'Reservoir Dogs.'"

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/uks-johnson-urges-north-korea-change-nukes-50653928>

[Return to top](#)

Independent (New York)

Vladimir Putin Says Russia Will Develop New Weapons Systems if US Does the Same

By Mythili Sampathkumar

October 19, 2017

The Russian President warned against 'cornering' North Korea with 'outright boorishness and swearing'

Vladimir Putin has said Russia is ready to develop new weapons systems in response to other countries doing the same – and warned that if the US pulls out of a treaty on intermediate-range nuclear weapons, Moscow will do likewise.

Mr Putin said Russia will adhere to a landmark Cold War-era arms control treaty for as long as America sticks to it.

He said he believes that global nuclear disarmament is a real possibility and that Russia "want[s] it and will be striving to achieve that". It is a statement never heard before from a Russian leader.

However, he noted Moscow is ready to develop new weapons systems, both nuclear and non-nuclear, in response to other countries doing the same but did not specifically mention the US in that part of his comments.

The Russian leader was speaking at the Valdai forum of international policy experts in Sochi, Russia.

He said Russia has adhered to agreed-upon obligations under the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which eliminated all short and intermediate-range – going from 500 to 5000km (3,100 miles) – nuclear and conventional missiles.

The treaty did not cover sea-launched missiles, however, and Mr Putin contended that because Russia's navy and air force did not have the capability at the time, it was basically "unilateral disarmament" to favour the "selfishness" of the US.

Russia has since developed such cruise missiles for its Navy ships and is currently developing “new precision weapons”, according to the Washington Post.

Mr Putin also took the opportunity to talk about North Korea.

He warned against “cornering North Korea”.

The world cannot “fall in to outright insolence” in trying to deal with North Korea, which counts Russia as a major trading partner. “Whether you like the North Korean regime or not, whether it is good or not, you should not forget it is a sovereign state,” he commented.

Russia did cast a vote in the United Nations for the strictest-ever sanctions to be imposed on North Korea regarding oil, seafood and textiles last month, but also called for a “gradual” reform of the world body.

Mr Putin said “threatening to use force or going down to outright boorishness and swearing” would be the wrong approach, in what appeared to be a swipe at Donald Trump.

The president recently tweeted that US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was “wasting his time” trying to negotiate with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, who Mr Trump has repeatedly referred to as “Rocket Man”.

“We’ll do what has to be done!,” tweeted Mr Trump.

On another occasion he took to Twitter again to write that “only one thing will work” to stop the isolated Asian nation from continuing to develop its nuclear weapons programme.

After trading barbs, Kim Jong-un’s state-un news agency issued a statement in which it called Mr Trump a “dotard” and “frightened dog”.

Late last week Russia had also criticised the Trump administration’s decision not to certify the Iran nuclear deal.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Mr Trump’s action “once again underlines the inadmissibility of using aggressive and threatening rhetoric in international relations... it is a hangover from the past.”

Mr Putin also noted that the US has been slow to dismantle its chemical weapons arsenals in line with an international treaty, while Russia wrapped up the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles last month.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-russia-new-weapons-us-mid-range-nuclear-missiles-treaty-withdraw-response-kremlin-a8009466.html>

[Return to top](#)

Sputnik International (Moscow)

Looming Nuke Alert a ‘Major Escalation of US Nuclear War Readiness’

Author Not Attributed

October 24, 2017

Reports that the US is preparing to put B-52 nuclear bombers on 24-hour alert are nothing short of a “major escalation of US nuclear war readiness,” Kevin Kamps, radioactive waste watchdog at Beyond Nuclear said on Monday’s episode of Loud & Clear.

On Sunday evening, Defense One broke a major story that the US Air Force is getting ready for round-the-clock nuclear readiness. "I look at it more as not planning for any specific event, but more the reality of the global situation we find ourselves in," said Gen. David Goldfein, chief of staff for the Air Force.

"I'm racking my brains trying to think of a reason, other than to threaten North Korea, for the military to take an action like this," said John Kiriakou, veteran CIA intelligence analyst and Loud & Clear co-host.

Pyongyang seemed to interpret it the same way. "Dignitaries of the White House, and State and Defense Departments of the US are having a hard time cooling Trump overheated with war fever," according to a KCNA report published in response to the news. "Lunatic Trump is running headlong into ruin, taking America with him," the KCNA report said.

Importantly, though, defense officials have stressed that the order to activate the 24-hour state of alert has not yet been given. The service is ensuring the Barksdale, Louisiana, Air Force Base that is home to the country's nuclear B-52 bombers is prepared for that order. If the B-52s go on alert, they will be relocated to sit on the runway every moment of the day, with crews standing by, waiting for a potential doomsday situation. If airmen receive that order, it will be the first non-stop nuclear alert posture the US has adopted since the Cold War ended in 1991.

What has been omitted from the discussion on North Korea among US officials may be just as significant as the overt threat of nuclear war. "One thing that nobody seems to be talking about here is diplomacy," Kiriakou observed.

The intelligence expert continued, "We have the likes of Jimmy Carter, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, offering to initiate diplomatic exchange with the North Koreans. We have former Governor of New Mexico Bill Richardson, doing the same thing. My God, we could have [former NBA star] Dennis Rodman if we wanted somebody who knows Kim Jong-un personally and has offered to help."

"But we're not at all talking about diplomacy. We're only talking about putting B-52s on 24-hour alert, and sending ships, and committing troops and CIA special operations... it looks like the only trajectory that we're seeing is military in nature," Kiriakou said.

<https://sputniknews.com/military/201710241058481529-alert-major-escalation-us-war-readiness/>

[Return to top](#)

MIDDLE EAST

The Jerusalem Post (Jerusalem, Israel)

Saudi Foreign Minister Backs Trump's Stance on Iran

Author Not Attributed

October 24, 2017

LONDON - Saudi Arabia supports US President Donald Trump's stance on Iran after he decided not to certify that Tehran is complying with a nuclear accord, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said on Tuesday.

US President Donald Trump broke ranks with other major powers this month by refusing to formally certify that Tehran is complying with the deal, even though international inspectors say it is.

Jubeir said the nuclear deal had shortcomings, and that he agreed with Trump's assessment that Iran was working to destabilize the region and was funding militant organizations.

Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia, a US ally, has been at loggerheads with Iran, a Shi'ite Muslim country, for decades, and the countries have fought a long-running proxy war in the Middle East.

"(Iran's behavior) is not acceptable, and there will be consequences to the Iranians. This is what President Trump has said, and we are very supportive of that," Jubeir said at a conference in London.

Following Trump's decision, US Congress has until mid-December to decide whether to reimpose economic sanctions on Tehran that were lifted under the pact.

Jubeir said that new sanctions on Iran would be welcome, and that a delay could mean that by the time sanctions had impact, Iran could have already developed "a dozen" nuclear bombs.

"The international community needs to support those (sanctions) in order to send a very strong message to Iran that your behavior, your nefarious activities, have consequences," Jubeir said.

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and denies it has aimed to build an atomic bomb.

<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Saudi-foreign-minister-says-backs-Trump's-stance-on-Iran-508302>

[Return to top](#)

Mehr News Agency (Tehran, Iran)

Israel Nuke Arsenal Threatening Region, Beyond: Iranian Diplomat

Author Not Attributed

October 23, 2017

Al Habib, Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the UN criticized the anti-Iran propaganda of westerners for ignoring the nuclear arsenal of some countries in the world.

Es'hagh Al Habib, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on Monday.

The Iranian ambassador's speech was focused on conventional weapons. He highlighted that Iranian ballistic missiles are solely capable of carrying conventional warheads come under criticism by some countries while the nuclear arsenal of "Israeli regime" is capable to destroy the whole world.

Here comes the full text of his address:

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the NAM statement delivered by Indonesia.

Iran reaffirms the inherent right of any State to acquire, manufacture, import and retain conventional arms and related parts, components and ammunition for its self-defense and security needs.

Iran shares the concerns over increasing global military expenditure. This is even more alarming in a region like the Middle East, where in addition to nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, a large arsenal of sophisticated offensive conventional weapons of the Israeli regime continue to threaten the peace and security of the region and beyond.

In recent years, such an already complicated security situation in the Middle East has been exacerbated including by manifold increase in the military budgets and arms imports by certain States in the Persian Gulf. Only one example of this trend is the signing of a 110 billion dollar weapons deal by one of these countries with the US in 2017, which is yet separate from a ten-year, 350 billion dollar arms deal that this country signed separately with the US.

Mr. Chairman,

These are only the tip of the submerged iceberg of the security situation, military expenditure and arms import in a region where we live. Yet some countries are criticizing Iran for lunching only a handful missiles that are strictly designed to carry only conventional warheads and are proportionate with its security environment.

Iran's missile program has been developed to meet its defense and security needs. It cannot and should not been seen and assessed in vacuum.

For instance, historically, during the war imposed on Iran by Saddam, not only did the United States and its regional allies provide military, intelligence, logistical, economic and political assistance to Saddam, and offer their support and maintained their silence during his chemical weapons attacks campaign, they also did everything in their power to interdict the acquisition of even the most basic defensive capabilities by Iran.

Through that experience Iran learned that in order to protect its people, safeguard its independence and security, and defend its national honor, it must rely on indigenous capacities; it learned that it should not hesitate in developing the capability to meet its legitimate defense and security needs.

As regards the current security environment in the Middle East, and at a time when the hostile policies of the United States and its regional allies, especially the Zionist regime, as well as the transfer of hundreds of billions of dollars worth of arms into the region have turned the region into a tinderbox, why should Iran remain complacent about its defense needs?

When the US allies in the region, whose combined population is far less than Iran, each spend exponentially higher sums on their military than Iran, why Iran — that has attacked no one in almost 300 years but has been the victim of aggression supported by the US and its regional

partners — shouldn't acquire necessary tools of deterrence in the face the constant threats by aggressors?

While the combined total military expenditure of the Middle East countries in 2016 showed a 19 per cent increase compared with 2007, Iran's military expenditure decreased by 7.3 per cent during that period. This fact alone indicates how Iran exercises maximum restraint in reacting to skyrocketing security challenges in its region. This is also based on the understanding that our security can be achieved by our reliance on our people not by spending billions of dollars to import arms.

It is in this framework that Iran's missile program has a purely defensive and deterrent character. These missiles are strictly designed to carry conventional warheads and their range and precision are proportionate to our security environment and threat perception.

It is based on these facts and understanding that Iran has always stressed that its missile program will continue with full force in accordance with its national defense program and is not, nor will it ever be, negotiable.

Mr. Chairman,

I should also refer to arguments that consider Iran's missile lunches as being inconsistent with the Security Council resolution 2231. This resolution only "CALLS UPON" Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles "DESIGNED" to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology. Iran has repeatedly stated that none of its ballistic missiles has been designed to have such a capability. It is also worth mentioning that when the ballistic missile lunches of Iran was considered by the Security Council in different occasions, according to its own documents, there was even "no consensus in the Security Council on how [such] particular launch related to resolution 2231".

Therefore, arguments in support of inconsistency of such lunches with resolution 2231 are based on the wordings of resolution 1929, which was annulled and terminated by the Council itself in 2015 and therefore is not valid anymore. Making a comparison between the wordings of these two resolutions is recommended for having a better and clear understating of the context of this subject.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

<http://en.mehrnews.com/news/128903/Israel-nuke-arsenal-threatening-region-beyond-Iranian-diplomat>

[Return to top](#)

Gulf Daily News (Bahrain)

Kuwait to Continue Its Endeavours for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Middle East Zone

Author Not Attributed

October 25, 2017

Kuwait City: The State of Kuwait has reiterated its firm stance on the issues of disarmament and international security and to work on eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

This came in Kuwait speech delivered to the meeting of the First Committee on Disarmament and International Security of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, by adviser of Kuwait's permanent delegation to the United Nations, Talal Al-Fassam on Tuesday evening.

Al-Fassam said, "We must remember the experiences we have had together and perhaps find the right way to achieve our common goals of freeing the world from nuclear weapons." Kuwait renews its invitation to the three sponsors of the Middle East Resolution issued by the 1995 Review Conference, which is an integral part of the indefinite extension of the Treaty to assume their responsibilities in implementing that resolution, he added.

He pointed out that the three nations are aware of the strenuous efforts made by the State of Kuwait and the Arab countries and the many concessions they have made over the past seven years in order to hold the postponed Helsinki Conference.

Kuwait is now looking forward to a pivotal role for the three sponsoring countries by taking the initiative to find the appropriate way to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East based on the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

He explained that more than 22 years have passed since the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995. Since that year, the State of Kuwait has joined along with Arab States 13 meetings of the Preparatory Committees for the Review Conference, three NPT Review Conferences and 22 conferences of the First Committee on disarmament and international security.

"After all these efforts, we are still considering the implementation of what was agreed upon in 1995 for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. In 2010, we were very close to achieving specific steps towards implementing what our peoples aspired to when the Action Plan at the Review Conference was adopted," he said.

He said the plan called for convening a conference to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Unfortunately, all these faltered when Israel hampered convention of the conference.

Al-Fassam expressed concern over Israel's continued refusal to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or even sign the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to avoid unveiling the number of its nuclear facilities or even allowing the IAEA's inspectors to carry out their mission.

<http://www.gdnonline.com/Details/280556>

[Return to top](#)

Egypt Independent (Cairo, Egypt)

Egypt Seeks to Rid the Middle East of Nuclear Weapons: Foreign Ministry on Trump's Iran Comments

Author Not Attributed

October 15, 2017

The Egyptian Foreign Affairs Ministry released a statement on Saturday in which it commented on new US strategy on Iran, announced by US President Donald Trump on October 13th, according to the ministry's Egyptian spokesperson.

The US announcement included gave Egypt cause for concern, due to Iranian policies that may jeopardize regional stability, overall Arab national security and the security of the Gulf region, which is an integral part of Egyptian national security.

According to the statement, the spokesperson stressed that Egypt has always called for strengthening confidence in the Middle East, through the adoption of policies and positions by

regional powers that do not pose a threat to regional stability and security, as well as ending all interventions in the internal affairs of other Arab countries.

“The Foreign Ministry Spokesman reiterated Egypt’s steadfast position underscoring the necessity of ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, and respecting the principles of good neighborly policy and non-intervention in the internal affairs of the other Arab countries, so as to enhance regional stability, and achieve sustainable settlements for the region’s crises,” the statement read.

Recently, US President Donald Trump threatened to suspend the Iran nuclear deal, signed in 2015 between Iran, France, Germany, the UK, Russia and the US, under former President Barack Obama’s administration.

The deal puts limitations on Iran’s nuclear energy program in exchange for lifting economic sanctions.

Trump accused Iran of “not living up to the spirit” of the agreement and said that his goal is to ensure Tehran never obtains a nuclear weapon.

“We will not continue down a path whose predictable conclusion is more violence, more terror and the very real threat of Iran’s nuclear breakout,” Trump said

The president’s remarks drew praise from Israel, but were criticized by European allies including Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union, some of which have benefited economically from renewed trade with Iran, according to Reuters.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Friday on live television that Tehran was committed to the deal and accused Trump of making baseless accusations.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/egypt-seeks-rid-middle-east-nuclear-weapons-foreign-ministry-trumps-iran-comments/>

[Return to top](#)

INDIA/PAKISTAN

livemint (New Delhi, India)

Donald Trump’s Iran Folly and India’s Dilemma

By W.P.S. Sidhu

October 22, 2017

On 13 October, US President Donald Trump, in a much-anticipated move, declared Iran a “rogue regime”, a sponsor of terrorism, and an aggressor in the Middle East. Although none of this relates to the hard-negotiated Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear programme, Trump announced that he would no longer certify—as mandated by the US congress’ Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (Inara)—that Tehran was in compliance of the deal. In doing so, Trump may have set the stage for war with Iran and for further nuclear weapons proliferation in the Middle East and North-East Asia. Trump’s pronouncement also has major implications for India.

Trump’s populist speech ignored International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports, which have consistently noted that Iran has been in compliance of its JCPOA obligations. He also disregarded pleas of his own cabinet as well as other parties to the JCPOA, particularly the European allies, who

were also involved in the painstaking negotiations with Iran. Instead, the speech was primarily aimed at appeasing his domestic base and allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia. This is evident from the emphasis on “the regime’s destabilizing activity and support for terrorist proxies in the region”, “financing of terror”, and “proliferation of missiles and weapons that threaten its neighbours”. Although all of these are of concern to Washington, it is not clear how abandoning the deal would compel Tehran to alter its behaviour in the region.

Yet, despite the shrill tone of Trump’s declaration to decertify Iran, he stopped well short of pulling out of the JCPOA—for now. Trump’s speech was, at best, an effort to preserve the JCPOA for the present but also threaten its future. Instead, he warned a Trump-weary, Republican-dominated congress that he would terminate the deal if it did not address the JCPOA’s “sunset clause”, which concludes the deal around 2030, as well as restrictions on Iran’s missile programme. Worse, Trump imposed unilateral sanctions against Iran’s elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the first time that the US has imposed sanctions against the armed forces of another country. This myopic and dangerous move is likely to instigate Iran’s force to step up its activities, particularly in Syria.

Against this backdrop, the US congress has three options. First, it could ignore Trump’s decertification. Given that the IAEA is authorized to regularly report on Iran’s compliance, the congress could simply accept these reports in lieu of certification by the Trump administration. This move, however, would render Inara ineffective. Second, the congress could insist that the administration has to justify with much more evidence its decision to decertify. At present, the administration has offered mere innuendos and argued that Iran “is not living up to the spirit of the deal”, implying that it is in compliance with the letter of the deal. Any intransigence on the part of the White House might compel the congress to block other items put forward before it by the administration. A third possibility is that the congress, which has never been very fond of the JCPOA to begin with, might actually take up the administration’s call to either sanction Iran again or to agree that the deal should be renegotiated. Given the differences within various congress factions and the difficulty of renegotiating a complex multi-party deal, this is the least likely option.

Clearly then Trump’s decertification move is unlikely to have any significant impact on either Iran’s missile programme or its behaviour in the region. Unilateral sanctions have never forced any country to change course. Besides, by disengaging with the deal Washington is also leaving the path open for its European allies as well as Russia and China to benefit from the peace dividend via trade and sale of equipment, such as civilian aircraft.

On the other hand, Trump’s move to renege on the JCPOA will also send a clear signal to North Korea to both step up its nuclear and missile programmes and also treat any US offer of negotiations or an agreement with the deepest of suspicions. Pyongyang has been wary of US deals, given its experience with the poorly executed 1994 framework agreement and the fate of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi after he willingly gave up his nuclear programme. The Iran decertification move will merely offer yet another excuse for North Korea’s regime to ensure its security by building up its nuclear arsenal.

For India, the revival of the US-Iran spat is likely to have geopolitical and geo-economics repercussions. As the second largest importer of crude from Iran, India will be haunted by the spectre of having to drastically reduce its supplies again, just as it was forced to in the pre-JCPOA period.

Similarly, despite the warm speech by US secretary of state Rex Tillerson on the eve of his maiden official visit to New Delhi, hailing India as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific, renewed tensions between Washington and Tehran might also cast a shadow on the burgeoning Indo-US relations. While both countries will seek to manage their differences, as evident from the absence of any reference to Iran in Tillerson’s speech, it may still dampen the otherwise sunny prospects.

Moreover, how India responds to Trump's virtual call to arms against Iran will also have an impact on New Delhi's relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Clearly, Trump's myopic and dangerous move against Iran imposes an additional burden not only on bilateral Indo-US relations but also India's Link West policy in general and the Chabahar project in particular. The price of Trump's folly might prove exorbitant for India.

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/0kloJduszGoj6pi00Q8i7K/Donald-Trumps-Iran-folly-and-Indias-dilemma.html>

[Return to top](#)

Pakistan Today (Islamabad, Pakistan)

Polish Envoy Glad Helping Pakistan in Building Missile Programme

Author Not Attributed

October 21, 2017

Ambassador Republic of Poland Piotr A. Opalinski has said it was his immense pleasure that his country helped Pakistan in building its missile program as well as strengthening its defence capacity.

He recalled that the Polish combat pilots took part in the defence of Pakistan when it was in war with India in 1947-48 over Kashmir and later in 1965. That is the golden part of their bilateral relationship, he said while speaking at a get-to-gather, arranged here by the English Speaking Union of Pakistan (Islamabad) at the residence of its President Khalid Malik who is also the senior vice president of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

It was largely attended by diplomats and other dignitaries. Prominent among those were Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Pakistan Jayanath Lokukathagoda, Additional Secretary Foreign Affairs Shah M. Jamal and head of public affairs Japanese embassy Katsunori Ashida.

Ambassador Piotr revealed that a group of Polish pilots had actively participated in the wars in safeguarding Pakistan's national security. Those pilots are their heroes, he remarked.

Later, the military-to-military relationship remained excellent and the two sides helped each other in consolidating their defence capabilities. "We had been the strong partner in promoting our air forces," he added.

The ambassador who earlier served in Pakistan as Deputy Head of Mission was glad that their diplomatic and defence relationship remained steadfast over the years. Poland also tried to take part in Pakistan's socio-economic uplift, particularly developing its oil and gas resources.

Now, some Polish companies are engaged in helping Pakistan to develop the coal-mining industry. His country is rich in mining-technology that could be shared with the Pakistani side. There is also a great scope of cooperative partnership in other sectors of bilateral interest as well, including health, he added.

Ambassador Piotr also spoke some Urdu words on the occasion stating he enjoys Pakistani poetry and songs. He considered Pakistan as his second home, as received here warm love and hospitality, he added.

The event was also graced by the ambassador's wife Jolanta. Earlier, Khalid Malik and secretary of the Union Retired Squadron leader Abid Ali spoke about their recent activities in promoting harmony, mutual understanding cooperation among Islamabad-based diplomats and their

Pakistani friends and partners. The ambassador has presented a trophy on the occasion in recognition of his outstanding contribution in strengthening Poland-Pakistan brotherly relations.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/10/21/polish-envoy-glad-helping-pakistan-in-building-missile-programme/>

[Return to top](#)

Reuters (New York, NY)

As Tillerson Heads to Pakistan, Islamabad Wary of Deepening U.S.-India Ties

Drazen Jorgic

October 23, 2017

As U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson heads to Pakistan on Tuesday to pressure Islamabad to act over militants targeting Afghanistan from its soil, anxious Pakistanis may be equally interested in dissuading Washington's deepening ties with India.

Nuclear-armed Pakistan, a staunch U.S. Cold War ally and key player in the U.S.-backed invasion of Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, has watched warily as Washington has in recent years pivoted towards its arch-foe.

Islamabad views its much-bigger neighbor as an existential threat and the two nations have fought three wars since their violent separation at the end of colonial rule in 1947.

Tillerson, due to meet Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Pakistan's powerful military chiefs in a one-day visit, is expected to urge Pakistan to do more to root out Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network militants operating on its soil.

But he is also expected to hear Pakistani officials warn him that drawing nuclear-armed India deeper into Afghanistan would destabilise the region and do little to end the 16-year war that is now America's longest military conflict.

"Bringing India into the mix is like adding kerosene to fire," said Miftah Ismail, a state minister and close ally of Prime Minister Abbasi.

"It's a complete red line. India has no political role to play in Afghanistan as far as we are concerned."

Many Pakistanis feel betrayed that its traditional ally is now cosying up to India over Afghanistan.

But the anger runs both ways.

The United States accuses Pakistan of playing a double game since 2001, offering public backing to Washington while turning a blind eye, or even at times assisting, the Afghan Taliban and other militants who carry out deadly attacks against U.S. forces and their allies in Afghanistan.

LAST CHANCE

Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s as a hedge to Indian influence in Afghanistan, and analysts say its military and security services maintained ties long after the Taliban regime was toppled in 2001.

Pakistan denies providing a safe haven for Afghan Taliban and other militant fighters.

Tillerson, during a visit to Afghanistan on Monday, said Washington has made some “very specific requests of Pakistan in order for them to take action to undermine the support the Taliban receives and other terrorist organizations receive”.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis earlier this month said the United States would try “one more time” to work with Pakistan in Afghanistan, before opting for more punitive measures. President Donald Trump has vowed to be tougher on Pakistan than his predecessors.

The United States has threatened further military aid cuts and U.S. officials have mooted targeted sanctions against Pakistani military figures, but in the past two weeks there have been hints of a slight thawing in ties.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and Tillerson last week called Abbasi to thank Pakistan after its army rescued a U.S.-Canadian couple who were held hostage by the Taliban-allied Haqqani network for nearly five years, along with their three children born in captivity.

Relations were further boosted when Omar Khalid Khorasani, leader of the lethal Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) group who Islamabad had been trying to catch for years, was killed by a U.S. drone strike last week.

HOSTILE NEIGHBORS

India has increased aid to Afghanistan in recent years and last year promised to ship more arms. Such moves have aggravating fears in Pakistan that it will find itself wedged between two hostile neighbors.

Islamabad bristles at the idea that India holds the key to ending the Afghanistan conflict, and fears U.S. meddling could unsettle a delicate balance of power in South Asia.

“Promoting a higher involvement of India in Afghanistan will only worsen the historic strategic rivalries playing out in the region,” said Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s former ambassador to United States and a senior member of the opposition Pakistan People’s Party.

Pakistan points to the 3.5 million Afghan refugees it hosts as proof that it has more than anyone else to lose from chaos in Afghanistan, and has emphasized the need for greater cooperation and intelligence sharing with United States and Afghanistan.

But while Pakistan may not like it, India looks set to continue playing a role in Afghanistan, according to Sushant Sareen, a foreign policy analyst at the Vivekananda International Foundation, a think-tank with ties to the government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“The message is very clear that India is an important player when it comes to coordinating policies between Afghanistan and Washington,” said Sareen.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-usa-india/as-tillerson-heads-to-pakistan-islamabad-wary-of-deepening-u-s-india-ties-idUSKBN1CS21H>

[Return to top](#)

New Delhi Times (New Delhi, India)

NAM Calls for Convening a Conference on Disarmament

By International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies

October 18, 2017

Since the inception of the Non Aligned Movement, the NAM Member States have adhered to the principle of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The stance on disarmament has been a recurring theme at all the NAM summits. In multilateral forums like the United Nations too, NAM has been actively participating in the non-proliferation initiatives.

On 26th September 2017, in the High Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapon, NAM Member States supported the convening of an international conference on nuclear disarmament at the United Nations. Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Jorge Arreaza, Venezuela's Minister for Foreign Affairs remarked: "As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of proliferation exist".

Arreaza said that the total and absolute elimination of nuclear weapons must be achieved because the use of such weapons was a crime against humanity. In making efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, NAM reaffirmed support for using multilateral diplomacy in the negotiations to reach disarmament and non-proliferation goals. India, associating itself with the Non-Aligned Movement said that it was committed to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Syed Akbaruddin, India's Permanent Representative to the UN remarked: "There is a need for a meaningful dialogue among all States possessing nuclear weapons to build trust and confidence" and to reduce the salience of such weapons in international affairs and security doctrines".

India reiterated NAM's principled position that the Conference on Disarmament was the only appropriate platform for negotiations. India stood ready to commence talks within that body aimed at developing a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention along the lines of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. India also supported beginning talks on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Noting that increasing restraints on the use of nuclear weapons would reduce the probability of their use — whether deliberate, unintentional or accidental — India pointed out that it's resolutions in the First Committee on measures to reduce nuclear danger and on a convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons had received broad support among Member States.

Bangladesh, associating itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement pressed deep concerns over repeated nuclear weapons testing by a Member State in violation of relevant Security Council resolution and concerned to scale down provocations and de-escalate tensions in the interest of finding solutions through dialogue and negotiations. Jamaica voiced support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as an important addition to the world's existing disarmament instrument and called for a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament to be convened no later than 2018.

Jamaica expressed concerns at the additional risks posed by non-State actors with the means, resolve and determination to secure of weapons of mass destruction. Chile said that that coexistence in a world without nuclear weapons was possible, and that maintaining peace and security without resorting to nuclear deterrence was not only possible, but an ethical imperative. Timor Leste associated itself with NAM's position on convening a conference on disarmament said that the world was facing numerous challenges and injustices, including threats from such weapons, which were "part of our daily reality".

Recalling that the world had once witnessed the catastrophic effects of the use of nuclear weapons, Timor Leste stressed that all methods should be employed to ensure that they were never used again, emphasizing that both dialogue and prevention would be critical in that regard.

NAM Member States have reaffirmed the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament, and reiterated their call to convene such a conference at its earliest by 2018 in order to agree on a balanced and comprehensive program of work by, inter alia, establishing an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament as soon as possible and as the highest priority.

<https://www.newdelhitimes.com/nam-calls-for-convening-a-conference-on-disarmament/>

[Return to top](#)

COMMENTARY

The Japan Times (Tokyo, Japan)

An Idea Buds in the U.S. that Japan Should Go Nuclear

Author Not Attributed

October 24, 2017

Amid mounting exchanges of harsh words between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, there is a rising opinion within certain quarters in the United States that Japan and South Korea should be armed with nuclear weapons.

Pat Buchanan, a conservative commentator, may gain support from some populace when he asks why the U.S. has to defend Japan and South Korea, whose economies are 100 times and 40 times, respectively, larger than the North's. Echoing what Trump said during the campaign last year, Buchanan points out that while North Korea's defense spending accounts for 25 percent of its gross domestic product, the comparable figures are 2.6 percent for South Korea and less than 1 percent for Japan. Under these circumstances, how long will Japan be able to rely on the U.S. nuclear umbrella and maintain its long-standing policy of neither possessing or building nuclear weapons or permitting their introduction into the country?

Triggering the idea of nuclearizing Japan and South Korea were comments made by Susan Rice, former national security adviser under President Barack Obama, and James Clapper, ex-director of national intelligence. Writing for the op-ed page of The New York Times on Aug. 10, Rice said Trump's mention of "fire and fury" against Pyongyang was in total disregard of 23,000 U.S. military personnel and 200,000 family members living in Seoul among the 26 million population of the South Korean capital, which lies within the North's shooting range. Calling a pre-emptive strike against the North — said to be among Trump's options — a reckless idea, Rice proposed that the U.S. should recognize the North as a nuclear power while controlling its behavior so that it would never use the weapons. Three days later, Clapper said in a CNN interview that denuclearizing the North is not the only solution. Both Rice and Clapper have thus favored de facto recognition of the North's possession of nuclear arms, which in turn would lower the hurdles for negotiating with the North — thereby playing right into Kim's hands.

Those arguments were rebutted not only by the Trump administration but also by the Wall Street Journal, which in its Aug. 30 editorial said the North's firing of an intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan is changing the security landscape in Northeast Asia and pushing Japan toward owning its own nuclear arsenal. Noting that Japan had enough plutonium to build more than 1,000 nuclear warheads and sufficient know-how to do so within months, the Journal said Japanese leaders might change their minds against possessing nuclear weapons once they feel the U.S. cannot be depended on in the event of a major crisis.

On Aug. 3, Christopher Wallace, anchorman of the Fox News, said the need for arming with nuclear weapons is being felt by a growing number of people in Japan — an idea which he said had been utterly unthinkable in the past. Regardless of whether such arms are to be developed independently or to be supplied from another country, Wallace said, such thinking is no longer monopolized by extremists. It is not clear how much he is knowledgeable about what's happening in Japan, but it should be borne in mind that the idea of nuclearizing Japan has started being discussed in an influential media outlet deemed close to Trump.

Writing for the Sept. 1 issue of "azcentral.com," a digital outlet of the Arizona Republic newspaper, columnist Robert Robb renewed his support for Trump's idea of arming Japan and South Korea with nuclear weapons, which the president fanned as candidate in the 2016 campaign, and said that once the North became capable of firing intercontinental ballistic missiles to the U.S. mainland, the deterrent power of the American nuclear umbrella for the two allies would weaken.

How many isolationist Americans are there who think that should the U.S. withdraw from Asia even to a small extent, the resulting vacuum should be filled by Japan and South Korea? A part of the answer may be found in a column written for the Sept. 5 issue of the Wall Street Journal by Walter Russel Mead, professor of foreign affairs at Bard College and distinguished scholar at the Hudson Institute.

Mead says there are two schools of thought within the U.S. government about Japan having nuclear weapons.

One advocated by top White House advisers, he says, is that it is in the best interest of the U.S. to maintain the status quo in the Pacific region while keeping Japan as it is.

The other group, which follows Trump's "America First" doctrine, would think the American diplomacy will have succeeded, and not failed, if Northeast Asian countries start arming themselves with nuclear weapons, according to Mead.

He goes on to say that China's geopolitical ambitions would be contained if Japan, South Korea and Taiwan became nuclear powers, enabling the U.S. to withdraw its troops from South Korea. If this scenario leads to making America's allies pay more for containment of China, he says, that would be an ideal situation under the "America First" slogan.

The Trump administration is demanding allies such as Japan, South Korea and the NATO member nations not just to boost their defense spending but to play greater roles to alleviate burdens on the U.S. As Mead has said, Trump is not alone in believing that arming the Northeast Asian countries with nuclear weapons would spell a success for the American diplomacy.

South Korea, meanwhile, is reacting much more seriously than Japan to the North's behaviors. An opinion survey conducted shortly after Pyongyang's nuclear test on Sept. 3 showed that 68 percent of the South Koreans said American tactical nuclear weapons, which had been taken out of the country in 1991, should be brought back, while 60 percent thought their country should develop its own nuclear arms. That subject was discussed when South Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo met with his American counterpart James Mattis in Washington in early September. Later,

both a high-ranking White House official and Senator John McCain said such possibility could not be ruled out.

Whether South Korea should either develop nuclear weapons on its own or buy them from another country was discussed by Lee Choon-geun of the Korean Institute for International Economic Policy during a debate session on March 3, 2011.

His statements can be summarized as follows: (1) if South Korea had its own nuclear weapons, Japan would almost automatically follow suit; (2) that would put Japan on equal footing with Britain and France with hundreds of nuclear warheads; (3) that in turn would have a devastating impact on China's ambition of building a global hegemony; and (4) with Japan armed with nuclear weapons, China would find it hard to be a ruler of Asia, let alone the world.

Lee went on to say that the easy way for China to prevent South Korea from having nuclear weapons is to use its influence over Pyongyang and force Kim and his cohorts to abandon their nuclear ambitions. This is exactly what is being attempted by the U.S. and the international community today.

Japan must think seriously of what to do in the event of an emergence of a unified Korea armed with nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, before China followed France in joining the nuclear club, Gen. Pierre Gallois, a French nuclear strategist and one of President Charles de Gaulle's advisers, had an exclusive interview with a major Japanese newspaper, in which he said Japan, too, would soon arm itself with nuclear weapons.

Although his prediction did not come true, there existed a sense of mission in Japan's journalism — though as a minority opinion — to query the public as to what is the theory behind nuclear armament.

Half a century later, the situation in Northeast Asia demands the same question asked by Gallois. Japan can no longer keep seeking to duck whenever difficult national security problems arise.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/10/24/commentary/world-commentary/idea-buds-u-s-japan-go-nuclear/>

[Return to top](#)

The Hill (Washington, D.C.)

Kazakhstan is Opting for Nuclear Engagement, Not Deterrence

By Ariel Cohen

October 23, 2017

With North Korea wreaking havoc by testing nuclear weapons and missiles, and with Iranian nuclear program becoming once again the focus of U.S. foreign policy, Washington is searching for solutions to both crises. It is important to keep in mind that there are alternative, safer nuclear energy policies. Pyongyang and Tehran should take note and consider pursuing peaceful nuclear options.

It can be done. For over two and a half decades, the president of a country in the direct neighborhood of Russia and China has been leading by example. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan made the decision to renounce the nuclear weapons his country inherited from the Soviet Union after its collapse and has been sticking to that path — championing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

This was not just a symbolic gesture. In 1991, Kazakhstan hosted one of the largest nuclear test sites of the Soviet empire, as well as the fourth largest nuclear arsenal in the world, larger than those of the United Kingdom, France, and China combined. Although wedged between two nuclear-armed giants, Kazakhstan chose to accede to START-I, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. Under these, Kazakhstan relinquished all nuclear warheads to Russia instead of maintaining and building up an independent deterrent it could ill afford. This was vastly consequential — and highly controversial.

As one study suggests, when full-fledged political and economic chaos immediately ensued after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's leadership not only lacked a clear vision of how to proceed with the massive nuclear arsenal but also the information and capacity to administer it. In that unprecedented and uncertain historic moment, Nazarbayev opted for strategic ambivalence to gain time. But after weighing the decision for half a year and the political and economic costs of both keeping and getting rid of the nukes, the Kazakh leadership finally decided to take a chance and opt for a nuke-free future.

Nazarbayev not only embraced nuclear disarmament but made it a part of his country's brand. The new international identity for Kazakhstan is widely associated with safe and responsible nuclear policy. For example, Kazakhstan brokered the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, which established the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone comprised of all five former Soviet republics of the region, and disposing of highly enriched uranium in cooperation with the U.S.

Nevertheless, as the largest producer of uranium ore in the world, Kazakhstan has not renounced civilian nuclear technology. The capital, Astana, recently hosted Expo 2017. The international exposition's theme was "Future Energy", featuring nuclear energy rather prominently. To combine its lucrative nuclear energy business and uniquely determined non-proliferation foreign policy, Nazarbayev's government also came up with an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)-sponsored low enriched uranium (LEU) bank — the very first of its kind in the world. By creating this, Kazakhstan seeks to store low enriched uranium (the fuel for civilian nuclear reactors) in their country instead of in other countries under a guarantee of international supervision to assure the uranium hexafluoride is only processed for peaceful civilian purposes, and then shipped back to the customer. The LEU bank is operated by the IAEA in agreement with nuclear powers, including the United States, and neighboring Russia and China, who hold key strategic positions when it comes to transportation of the nuclear material.

Many hail the first LEU bank as a significant achievement for Kazakh foreign policy and for global non-proliferation efforts. Realization of the project enhances nuclear security and potentially exposes proliferators, such as North Korea. It can become an abiding example of international non-proliferation and cooperation. Some also suggest that initiatives like this could be the solution to nuclear proliferation crises such as the one in Iran: by ensuring that nuclear material can only be utilized for peaceful purposes, the LEU bank can eliminate a great deal of uncertainty regarding a country's nuclear ambitions. No more cheating under the banner of civilian nuclear research and energy production — and developing nukes "under the table".

However, proliferators still abound, especially in South Asia. While Kazakhstan is to be commended for its foreign policy and actions, Pakistan achieved its nuclear arsenal with China's help, while India had Soviet nuclear technology support. Iran has pursued a nuclear program since the time of the Shah, and boosted it under the ayatollahs. President Trump's de-certification of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and referring it to Congress focuses the world's attention on Tehran. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Roukhani would do well to pick up the phone to President Nazarbayev to get advice on how to modify their current nuclear stance and make it entirely peaceful for their people's benefit.

In order to follow a more peaceful path away from deadly arsenals and potential nuclear conflict, the example of Kazakhstan's non-proliferation policy should inform decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic.

<http://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/356687-kazakhstan-is-opting-for-nuclear-engagement-not-deterrence>

[Return to top](#)

The National Interest (Washington, DC)

North Korea: The Case for Doing Nothing

By John Mueller

October 19, 2017

There have been instances in the past when the weapons were taken on by countries with leaders who were certifiably deranged—countries far larger and more scary than North Korea.

For seventy years now, we have repeatedly been told that the proliferation of nuclear weapons can only lead to disaster.

But in fact, since World War II, none of the handful of countries with nuclear weapons has “used” them for anything other than for stoking the national ego, or deterring real or imagined threats.

North Korea seems highly likely to follow the same approach. The hysteria its nuclear program has inspired is simply not justified.

North Korea sports perhaps the most pathetic, insecure and contemptible regime in the world, and survival is about the only thing it has proved to be good at. It surely knows that launching a nuclear bomb somewhere against a set of enemies that possess tens of thousands is a pretty terrible idea. This would be the case even if the missile actually manages to complete the trip and even if the warhead actually detonates, neither of which is very likely given the country's technological prowess: 88 percent of the flight tests of some of its missile have failed (5 to 10 percent is normal). And North Korea does continually insist that its nuclear program is entirely for “defensive” purposes.

Moreover, if its goal were to commit self-destructive mayhem, it has long possessed the capacity to do so. With the artillery it has amassed in its south, it could pulverize much of South Korea, including its capital city, Seoul.

North Korea's ego-stoking has, of course, already started. And the threat it needs to deter has not exactly been difficult for it to identify. Since the 1950s, the United States has persistently and unambiguously wanted to take out the regime, and it has, at times, actively schemed to do so.

Although a quick perusal of the front pages might suggest that Donald Trump has a lock on irresponsible, even infantile, presidential bloviating, the art form has a long history. A prime example, and the one that essentially started the current phase of hysteria over North Korea, occurred shortly after 9/11 when President George W. Bush announced that America's “responsibility to history” was now to “rid the world of evil”—rather outdoing God who once tried with that flood of His.

Then, a few months later, Bush specified in a major speech that, while evil could presumably be found everywhere, a special “axis of evil” existed, and it lurked, in this order, in North Korea, Iran

and Iraq. As Bush geared up to attack number three in early 2003, North Korea announced that it would be withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

North Korea's wariness about negotiating away its nuclear capacity can only have been enhanced by the experience of Libya's dictator, Muammar el-Qaddafi, who cut a deal with the Americans to do that in 2003. When Qaddafi was confronted with an insurrection in 2011, the Obama administration militarily intervened, speeding his downfall and brutal execution.

It is commonly argued that we have to worry because the North Korean regime is exceptionally crazy. However, there have been instances in the past when the weapons were taken on by countries with leaders who were certifiably deranged—countries far larger and more scary than North Korea.

Thus, when he got his bomb, the Soviet Union's Stalin had been plotting to "transform nature" by planting lots of trees and was given to wandering around the Kremlin mumbling that he could no longer trust anyone, not even himself. And when China's Mao got his bomb, he had recently launched an addled campaign to remake his society that created a famine killing tens of millions. Yet neither country used its nuclear weapons for anything other than deterrence and ego-boosting.

That was not the common anticipation at the time. For example, when China began building a bomb—impelled, like North Korea, primarily by incessant threats from the United States—President John Kennedy very seriously considered bombing the Chinese nuclear facilities. He was heard to declare that "A Chinese nuclear test is likely to be historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s."

Instead, the United States essentially did nothing. China ended up building far fewer of the bombs than it could have, its foreign and domestic policy eventually mellowed very substantially and the existence of its arsenal has proved to be of little historical consequence.

And it turned out that "historically the most significant and worst event of the 1960s" stemmed not from China's nukes, but from Kennedy's tragically misguided decision to begin to send American troops in substantial numbers to Vietnam largely to confront the Chinese threat that he came to believe lurked there.

<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/north-korea-the-case-doing-nothing-22816>

[Return to top](#)

The Strategist (Barton, Australia)

The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Strategy of Hope?

By Malcolm Davis

October 24, 2017

Ramesh Thakur presents a strong case for challenging the Trump administration's decision not to recertify the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). I'm in broad agreement with the points that he makes. His concluding thought about removing the requirement for recertification suggests a good path forward out of a potential disaster in which the US faces not only an aggressive and unpredictable nuclear-armed North Korea, but an Iran slipping back towards nuclear ambitions.

However, Ramesh's fifth and sixth justifications for opposing President Trump's stance in fact highlight critical weaknesses with the JCPOA, and expose the reality that it's based on a strategy of hope. He states: 'The JCPOA brought a 15-year respite from the threat of an Iranian bomb. The focus in this grace period should be to ensure Tehran's full implementation and to change its incentive

structure against nuclear weaponisation’, and he then notes that ‘The JCPOA gives political cover to moderates in Iran. An Iran re-engaged with the international community will reinvigorate a growing middle class and could give ballast to moderation and stability in Iran and the Middle East.’

The key challenge is how to achieve those goals. The main risk with the JCPOA is that it ‘sunsets’ in the 2026–2031 period—a mere 10 to 15 years from now. At that point, most restrictions are lifted (though IAEA monitoring will continue for an additional period), which means that Iran could, if it chose to do so, resume its path towards nuclear weapons acquisition. Iran can also exploit the letter of the agreement to make progress in key areas such as centrifuge technology, accelerating a breakout when the time is right. A legitimate question to ask is whether Iran may circumvent the JCPOA over time.

It’s also important to note that, in the interim, Iran will have benefited from the restoration of billions of dollars in funds previously withheld through sanctions, and it would be free in 2020 to begin acquiring advanced military capabilities and in 2023 to develop long-range ballistic missiles. That would imply an Iran that is militarily strong with advanced long-range weapon systems by the middle of the next decade.

Certainly the JCPOA buys the world time. Without it, Iran would rush to a nuclear-weapon capability now, as Ramesh notes. His analysis of US choices in that scenario—either accept Iran as a nuclear weapons state or go to war—is convincing. But lifting sanctions against Iran under the JCPOA doesn’t guarantee that a future Iranian regime won’t decide to pursue nuclear capabilities once the deal sunsets.

Furthermore, there’s no evidence that the Iranian state will shift its broad foreign policy objectives in a direction that’s more focused on cooperation and engagement with the region, and with the broader international community, and in doing so, preclude a perceived need for Iranian nuclear weapons in the future. Iran has demonstrated a willingness to intervene in conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen to assert its influence along two corridors to the Mediterranean Sea. Iran also poses a direct challenge to Arab Gulf states and, of course, to Israel.

The deal, as it stands, is probably the best option at the moment to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon in the next 15 years, but it shouldn’t be seen as a panacea to all the challenges posed by Iran, and it most certainly doesn’t prevent a future Iranian regime from emulating North Korea’s actions to test the resolve of the US and its partner. The North Koreans withdrew from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in 2003, after almost 10 years of supposed arms control cooperation under the 1994 Agreed Framework.

The way to avoid history repeating itself is to ensure that Iran is made aware of the costs of such a breakout through a mix of dissuasion and deterrence. In terms of dissuasion, inducements provided through careful economic and diplomatic engagement need to be complemented by a US–EU agreement for effective coordination in rapidly imposing sanctions in the event of an Iranian nuclear breakout. Military cooperation between NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council could help to counter-balance Iran’s growing influence. Establishing deterrence by denial through NATO and regional ballistic missile defence system needs to be a priority. Existing sea- and land-based missile systems such as the European Phased Adaptive Approach employing systems like Aegis Ashore would make it more difficult for a future nuclear-armed Iran to coerce its neighbours. Missile defence also needs to be supported by non-nuclear prompt-strike capabilities that could threaten Iranian ballistic missiles potentially carrying nuclear or other warheads. New technologies such as hypersonic cruise missiles would fit that role nicely, and are likely to be emerging as possible options by the mid- to late 2020s. Finally, the US, UK and France need to think about the role nuclear deterrence can play in discouraging an Iranian nuclear breakout.

The objective shouldn't be to replace the JCPOA but to mitigate risks after the Iran deal sunsets in the next decade, and to make an Iranian nuclear breakout at that time an unappealing and costly option for Tehran. This approach of generating greater cost for Iran if it chooses to challenge nuclear non-proliferation must be matched at the same time by political and economic inducements that help moderates in Iranian politics reinforce their power.

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-iran-nuclear-deal-a-strategy-of-hope/>

[Return to top](#)

ABOUT THE USAF CUWS

The USAF Counterproliferation Center was established in 1998 at the direction of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Located at Maxwell AFB, this Center capitalizes on the resident expertise of Air University, while extending its reach far beyond - and influences a wide audience of leaders and policy makers. A memorandum of agreement between the Air Staff Director for Nuclear and Counterproliferation (then AF/XON), now AF/A5XP) and Air War College Commandant established the initial manpower and responsibilities of the Center. This included integrating counterproliferation awareness into the curriculum and ongoing research at the Air University; establishing an information repository to promote research on counterproliferation and nonproliferation issues; and directing research on the various topics associated with counterproliferation and nonproliferation.

The Secretary of Defense's Task Force on Nuclear Weapons Management released a report in 2008 that recommended "Air Force personnel connected to the nuclear mission be required to take a professional military education (PME) course on national, defense, and Air Force concepts for deterrence and defense." As a result, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, in coordination with the AF/A10 and Air Force Global Strike Command, established a series of courses at Kirtland AFB to provide continuing education through the careers of those Air Force personnel working in or supporting the nuclear enterprise. This mission was transferred to the Counterproliferation Center in 2012, broadening its mandate to providing education and research to not just countering WMD but also nuclear deterrence.

In February 2014, the Center's name was changed to the Center for Unconventional Weapons Studies to reflect its broad coverage of unconventional weapons issues, both offensive and defensive, across the six joint operating concepts (deterrence operations, cooperative security, major combat operations, irregular warfare, stability operations, and homeland security). The term "unconventional weapons," currently defined as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, also includes the improvised use of chemical, biological, and radiological hazards.

The CUWS's military insignia displays the symbols of nuclear, biological, and chemical hazards. The arrows above the hazards represent the four aspects of counterproliferation - counterforce, active defense, passive defense, and consequence management.