



USAF Center for Unconventional Weapons Studies

(CUWS) Outreach Journal

Issue No. 1157, 20 March 2015

Welcome to the CUWS Outreach Journal! As part of the CUWS' mission to develop Air Force, DoD, and other USG leaders to advance the state of knowledge, policy, and practices within strategic defense issues involving nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, we offer the government and civilian community a source of contemporary discussions on unconventional weapons. These discussions include news articles, papers, and other information sources that address issues pertinent to the U.S. national security community. It is our hope that this information resource will help enhance the overall awareness of these important national security issues and lead to the further discussion of options for dealing with the potential use of unconventional weapons. **All of our past journals are now available at http://cpc.au.af.mil/au_outreach.aspx.**

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FEATURE ITEM: "US Nuclear Forces, 2015". Authored by Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris; published by The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists; March/April 2015 vol. 71 no. 2 107-119; 12 pages.

<http://bos.sagepub.com/content/71/2/107.full.pdf+html>

As of early 2015, the authors estimate that the US Defense Department maintains about 4,760 nuclear warheads. Of this number, they estimate that approximately 2,080 warheads are deployed while 2,680 warheads are in storage. In addition to the warheads in the Defense Department stockpile, approximately 2,340 retired but still intact warheads are in storage under the custody of the Energy Department and awaiting dismantlement, for a total US inventory of roughly 7,100 warheads. Since New START entered into force in February 2011, the United States has reported cutting a total of 158 strategic warheads and 88 launchers. It has plans to make some further reductions by 2018. Over the next decade, it also plans to spend as much as \$350 billion on modernizing and maintaining its nuclear forces.

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

US Fails to Find Funding for Next-Generation Nuclear Submarines – Reports

A web portal reported that the US Navy and Congress have not yet managed to find funds to pay for the next-generation nuclear submarines due to begin deployments by 2031.

19 March 2015

MOSCOW (Sputnik) – The US Navy and Congress have not yet managed to find funds to pay for the next-generation nuclear submarines due to begin deployments by 2031, the Military.com web portal reported.

The Ohio Replacement Program is in charge of replacing the US aging Ohio-class submarines with 12 more advanced subs.

The US Navy named the program as its top priority.

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"We need to have some processes in place in order to make sure you are ready to go and there is money in this fund," Hawaii Democrat Mazie Hirono said Wednesday at a Senate Armed Services Committee's Navy shipbuilding hearing as quoted by the Military.com.

Under the 2016 US Navy's budget, the Ohio Replacement Program needs \$1.4 billion on research and development, the funds are due to be allocated by the US Congress. The delay in fund allocation could affect the next generation of nuclear submarines, as the construction set to begin in 2021.

The first Ohio replacement submarine is expected to cost \$12.4 billion, according to the plan.

<http://sputniknews.com/military/20150319/1019751403.html>

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The Fiscal Times – New York, NY

Pentagon Plans Hard Look at Missile Defense Programs

By Andrea Shalal, Reuters

March 17, 2015

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Defense Department has launched a major review of missile defense programs and capabilities, after military commanders called the current strategy "unsustainable" given tough budget pressures and rising threats around the world.

Former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel described the review in a Feb. 4 memo to top officers in the U.S. Army and Navy, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters.

This year's review would also cover regional ballistic missile defense issues, the global reach of the U.S. Patriot missile defense system, and U.S. power projection capabilities.

Hagel said a strategic review by top Pentagon officials last fall had concluded the current ballistic missile defense policy was sound, but recommended an update of a 2011 joint study to help shape the Pentagon's fiscal 2017 budget process.

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert and Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno, in a memo dated Nov. 5, had called for a reassessment by the Pentagon. The Pentagon's current focus on forward-deployment of assets was too costly, they wrote, urging a shift to a more holistic approach that included use of non-kinetic "left of launch" technologies such as electromagnetic propagation and cyber.

They said it was critical to develop a more cost-effective and sustainable long-term approach that addressed homeland missile defense and regional missile defense priorities.

In his response, Hagel said the department would continue to look for "innovative" ways to address challenges, and urged Greenert and Odierno to play an active role in the various reviews.

Kingston Reif, head of disarmament and threat reduction policy at the Arms Control Association, said the concerns raised by the Army and Navy underscored the myriad problems still facing the current system.

Riki Ellison, founder of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, said various Pentagon officials and others had worked for years on a "left of launch" strategy that lowered costs by targeting the electronic radar signatures of enemy command and control systems, or the targeting systems of incoming missiles.

But he said relying on such capabilities to defend against potential missile attacks by North Korea or Iran - instead of the current ground-based interceptors - was problematic, since it would entail "preemptive strikes" that could have grave political and strategic consequences.

Reporting by Andrea Shalal; Editing by Simon Cameron-Moore

<http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/latestnews/2015/03/17/Pentagon-plans-hard-look-missile-defense-programs>

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The Daily Mail.com – London, U.K.

U.S. Eyes Iran, N.Korea Missile Threats, Boosts Testing Tempo

By Andrea Shalal, Reuters
18 March 2015

WASHINGTON, March 18 (Reuters) - The U.S. Missile Defense Agency, citing growing missile threats from North Korea and Iran, said on Wednesday the United States was carrying out increasingly realistic tests of its missile defenses while also beefing up cybersecurity.

MDA Director Navy Vice Admiral James Syring said North Korea has fielded hundreds of missiles that could reach U.S. forces based in South Korea and Japan, while Iran was stepping up work on more sophisticated missiles.

Both countries could achieve the ability to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile as early as this year, he told a hearing of the defense subcommittee for the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Syring said the agency was carrying out more war games and exercises to prepare for possible attacks, while increasing the tempo and complexity of its testing, reducing costs and investing in new technologies.

"I believe we are turning the corner with our homeland defenses," he told the subcommittee, which is considering the agency's \$8.1 billion budget request for fiscal 2016.

But Syring warned that failure by U.S. lawmakers to lift congressional budget caps that are due to resume in fiscal 2016 could jeopardize funding for two key programs, a redesigned warhead and a new long-range radar. He said both are urgently needed to improve the capabilities of the ground-based homeland missile defense system.

Syring said the agency would carry out 12 flight tests of various parts of the multi-layered system in fiscal 2015, after seven tests from October 2013 to now. Seven more tests were planned in fiscal year 2016, which begins Oct. 1.

The agency is also working closely with the Pentagon's chief weapons tester and the military commands that operate missile defense systems to ensure the ability to defend against escalating cyber attacks, Syring said.

He said the agency completed dozens of complex tests and inspections to improve the cyber defenses of its weapons systems, guard against attacks by insiders in the system and ensure that its contractors and suppliers do a better job protecting their own computer networks.

"We have seen too many instances where malicious cyber actors attempt to exfiltrate information from them, especially from their unclassified, commercial networks that have exposure to the Internet," Syring told the subcommittee.

He gave no details, but said the agency would continue to work with industry and federal law enforcement officials to track down attackers.

Reporting by Andrea Shalal; Editing by Dan Grebler

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3000997/U-S-eyes-Iran-N-Korea-missile-threats-boosts-testing-tempo.html>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

Russian Strategic Bombers to be Redeployed to Crimea Amid Snap Check — Source

Russian officials have recently sharply criticised EU foreign ministers' statements on military build-up in Crimea

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March 17, 2015

MOSCOW, March 17. /TASS/. Strategic missile carriers Tupolev TU-22M3 will be transferred to Crimea within the snap check that began on Monday, a source in the Russian Defense Ministry told TASS on Tuesday.

"Strategic missile carriers TU-22MS will be transferred to Crimea in the course of a surprise combat readiness inspection", the source said.

In addition to that, jet fighters and bombers will be relocated to the Kaliningrad region. "Ground troops in the Baltic region will be boosted by the Iskander missile systems of the western military region. They will be delivered by big assault landing ships of the Baltic Fleet," the source added.

To strengthen the borders in the Arctic Region two reinforced regiments and special task units of Russian airborne troops will be transferred there as part of the inspection, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

A surprise combat readiness inspection of the Northern Fleet, a number of units of the western military region and airborne troops began on Monday and will last until March 21. It involves 38,000 troops, 3,360 weapons units and military equipment, more than 55 warships and submarines and 110 aircraft and helicopters. The basic aim of the inspection is to evaluate the capability of the Northern Fleet to ensure Russia's military security in the Arctic Region.

EU foreign ministers have recently expressed concern over military build-up in Crimea. Russian officials reacted with criticism saying Moscow can decide on military presence in Crimea as it's Russian territory.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview with the authors of a documentary about Crimea said Coastal antimissile systems Bastion were deployed to protect Crimea. Besides, the head of the Foreign Ministry's non-proliferation department last week said Russia can deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea.

<http://tass.ru/en/russia/783207>

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

Russian Iskander Missiles to Be Deployed to Kaliningrad for Snap Drills

Russian ground troops on the Baltic will receive Iskander missile complexes in the framework of snap combat readiness exercises involving fighters and bombers.

17 March 2015

MOSCOW (Sputnik) – Russia will deploy fighters and bombers to the country's western exclave of Kaliningrad for snap combat readiness exercises, a source in the Russian Defense Ministry said Tuesday.

"Fighter and bomber aviation is to be redeployed to the Kaliningrad Region, and ground troops on the Baltic will be reinforced with Iskander missile complexes in the Western Military District that will be delivered on large landing ships from the Baltic Fleet," the source said.

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin gave the order to bring Russia's Northern Fleet, separate units of the Western Military District and the Airborne Troops to full alert in snap combat readiness exercises. The drills involve a total of 38,000 troops, 3,360 military vehicles, 110 aircraft and helicopters, 41 ships and 15 submarines.

Snap military exercises will be held in the sea, as well as on the ground and in the air until March 21. Their ultimate goal is to improve the military capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces, according to the Defense Ministry.

<http://sputniknews.com/military/20150317/1019595700.html>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

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Russia, US Unlikely to Agree on New START Treaty Soon

Nuclear weapons of Washington's NATO allies should now also be taken into account, Russian deputy defense minister says

March 17, 2015

MOSCOW, March 17. /TASS/. Russia and the United States are unlikely to reach new agreements on reduction of strategic offensive arms soon, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"It seems to be unlikely to reach new agreements between Russia and the United States in the near future, if ever. Russia's security now depends not only on the balance of strategic nuclear weapons of Russia and the United States. It depends on many other factors, such as US global missile defense plans, the situation in the area of sea-based long-distance cruise missiles and other types of long-distance high-precision systems," he told journalists.

He said that nuclear weapons of Washington's NATO allies should be taken into account too. "Other important aspects are the balance of conventional forces and numerous military bases with developing military infrastructure in the proximity of the Russian borders," Antonov noted.

Of special concern, in his words, are plans to deploy weapons in outer space.

"All nuclear powers are being involved in the process of reduction of nuclear forces. Can Russia ignore all these factors? Of course, no," he said. "Serious consultations on the entire spectrum of these problems are needed before serious talks."

Deputy Director of Russian Foreign Ministry's Department on Security Affairs and Disarmament Vladimir Leontyev said last week Russia was not looking at reviewing its obligations under the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty). "At a certain stage [in the future], Russia will probably have to analyze observance of START treaty in connection with [NATO's] plans to deploy a missile defense system in Europe," Leontyev said. "However, the issue is not on the agenda at the moment. "We are attentively following and analyzing the situation, and will continue doing so."

<http://tass.ru/en/russia/783381>

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Newsweek –New York, NY

U.S. Omits Iran and Hezbollah from Terror Threat List

By Jack Moore

March 16, 2015

An annual security assessment presented to the U.S. Senate by James Clapper, the director of National Intelligence, has excluded Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah from its list of terror threats to U.S. interests, despite both being consistently included as threats in previous years.

The unclassified report, issued by Clapper on February 26 and entitled the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Communities, was published by the *Times of Israel* amid Israeli concerns that Iran was omitted simply because of Tehran's efforts to combat ISIS.

In a previous report from January 2014, Clapper included Iran and Hezbollah in the 'Terrorism' section, writing that both "continue to directly threaten the interests of U.S. allies. Hizballah [sic] has increased its global terrorist activity in recent years to a level that we have not seen since the 1990s". Iran was also given its own sub-heading in the 'Terrorism' section of such assessments in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Yet in the latest report, Clapper omits both Iran and Hezbollah from this section, only mentioning the Shiite Muslim militant group once in reference to the threat it faces from radical Sunni groups - such as ISIS and the al-Nusra Front - on Lebanon's borders. In regard to Iran, the report names it as both a cyber and regional threat to the U.S. because of its support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

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However, the report speaks of Tehran's assistance in preventing "ISIL [another term for ISIS] from gaining large swaths of additional territory" in Iraq. It adds that the Islamic Republic has "intentions to dampen sectarianism, build responsive partners, and deescalate tensions with Saudi Arabia".

The report fails to mention that Hezbollah is labelled as a terrorist organisation by both the U.S. and the European Union, while it receives the majority of its funding from Tehran. The omission comes as Washington and other world powers continue to negotiate with Iran to strike a deal over its nuclear program and capabilities.

The assessment adds that Iran has "overarching strategic goals of enhancing its security, prestige, and regional influence [that] have led it to pursue capabilities to meet its civilian goals and give it the ability to build missile-deliverable nuclear weapons, if it chooses to do so."

The Israeli thinktank Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center has claimed that the removal of both actors from the U.S. terror assessment comes amid Iranian support in the fight against ISIS, where Tehran's shadowy former spymaster Qasem Soleimani is directing the offensive on the Sunni-majority city of Tikrit.

"We believe that this results from a combination of diplomatic interests (the United States' talks with Iran about a nuclear deal) with the idea that Iran could assist in the battle against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and maybe even in the battle against jihadist terrorism in other countries," the NGO's assessment of the report said.

Max Abrahms, professor of political science at Northeastern University and member at the Council of Foreign Relations, believes that the omission signals a "quid pro quo" between Washington and Tehran.

"I think that we are looking at a quid pro quo, where Iran helps us with counter-terrorism and we facilitate their nuclear ambitions and cut down on our labelling of them as terrorists," says Abrahms. "The world has changed. The Sunni threat has gotten worse, the Islamic State is a greater danger than al-Qaeda ever was, and the Iranians have really come up big in terms of helping us out in combating the Islamic State."

Hezbollah has been accused of responsibility for a number of terror attacks against U.S. or its partners interests, such as the 1983 bombings of the U.S. embassy and American military barracks in the Lebanese capital, Beirut; the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Argentina and the 2012 Burgas bus bomb on Israeli tourists in Bulgaria.

http://www.newsweek.com/iran-and-hezbollah-omitted-us-terror-threat-list-amid-nuclear-talks-314073?piano_t=1

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Sky News – London, U.K.

North Korea Nuke Threat Frightening - If True

It is widely accepted that North Korea has "the Bomb," but does Kim Jong-Un now have the ability to deploy it?

Mark Stone, China Correspondent

Friday, 20 March 2015

North Korea's ambassador to the UK has told Sky News that his country could fire a nuclear missile "anytime".

This is a big deal and a frightening prospect - if it's true.

Ambassador Hyun Hak-bong made the claim in an interview with Sky's Defence Correspondent Alistair Bunkall from the country's London embassy.

"We are prepared," the ambassador said. "That is why I say if a sparkle of a fire is made on the Korean peninsula, it will lead to a nuclear war.

"We don't say empty words. We mean what we mean. It is not the United States that has a monopoly on nuclear weapons strikes."

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Bunkall sought clarification: "So can I just be clear: you are telling me that the North Korea has the ability now to fire a nuclear missile?"

"Anytime, anytime, yes." the ambassador said.

It is widely accepted that North Korea has "the Bomb". But possessing a nuclear bomb is one thing; having the ability to deploy it on a missile is quite another. That is what the ambassador seems to be claiming North Korea can now do.

For years, North Korea has been trying to marry two distinct technologies: it wants to bring together its ballistic missile programme (which it often claims is part of its project to put satellites into orbit) with its nuclear weapon programme.

To deploy a nuclear weapon, North Korea needs to make its nuclear devices "small" enough to fit in the tip of its ballistic missiles - it needs to "miniaturise" them. That's the tricky bit.

The country's nuclear weapons programme itself appears to be successful. It carried out apparently successful underground nuclear tests in 2006, 2009 and 2013. Analysts believe that the country could have enough weapons-grade plutonium for at least six bombs.

Shortly after the 2013 test, North Korea claimed its scientists had used a miniaturised nuclear device. No proof was provided but, nonetheless, it prompted the alarm bells in Washington DC and Seoul, South Korea.

Recently, American military sources have said North Korea has probably managed some form of miniaturisation. Sources have told Sky News that China, the country with the closest ties to North Korea, holds similar views.

The ambassador's comments to Sky News would, on the face of it, confirm that they have successfully miniaturised their weapons. However, they come at a time when North Korean nuclear or missile tests have been unnervingly absent.

The last flight test of a long range rocket was in December 2012. In July 2013, Sky News was in Pyongyang to see the country's Musudan and KN-08 missiles being paraded through the streets. They have not been seen since.

But a lack of a headline grabbing fourth nuclear test or missile launch could mask quiet activity. Those who study satellite images of North Korea's known missile launch sites have reported expansion and infrastructure construction.

"I'd say there is a consensus forming that North Korea has miniaturised and weaponised at some basic level," Professor John Delury, senior fellow at the US-China Centre in Seoul, told Sky News.

"There's always room for improvement, of course," he said.

And that's the point: whether or not the ambassador was telling the truth about the ability to fire a nuclear missile, we know that they are trying desperately hard to achieve the capability to do so. The Korean peninsula is already a dangerous place.

Unless North Korea can be brought back to the "Six Party" denuclearisation talks, things could be about to become far less predictable and considerably more dangerous.

<http://news.sky.com/story/1448922/north-korea-uke-threat-frightening-if-true>

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

US to Deploy Missile Defenses to South Korea in Emergency

The United States will supply an advanced missile-defense system to South Korea in the event of an emergency situation on the divided peninsula, a South Korean military source said Sunday.

15 March 2015

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"The US plans to deploy a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in case of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula," a military source told Yonhap News Agency.

Washington currently maintains approximately 28,500 troops on the ground in South Korea as a means of military support for Seoul in its long-running standoff with the North.

South Korean politicians remain divided on whether or not to host the American missile defense system, with some fearing its presence would undermine the country's sovereignty.

The United States insisted the battery is purely defensive in nature.

The THAAD system slated for deployment can shoot down a wide variety of ballistic missiles flying at higher altitudes than any other defense system owned by South Korea.

Seoul has also come out against the deployment of the AN/TPY-2, an early missile warning system able to detect threats up to 2,000 kilometers away, which would include China's military facilities.

"Our military has our own missile warning system, the Green Pine, which has a range of 600 km, so we don't need AN/TPY-2," a source within the South Korean government said.

<http://sputniknews.com/us/20150315/1019523479.html>

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Japan Times – Tokyo, Japan

U.S. Official Dismisses China's Concern over Missile Defense System in S. Korea

Agence France-Presse (AFP)-JJI
March 17, 2015

SEOUL – A senior U.S. official Tuesday brushed off Beijing's objection to the possible deployment of a U.S. missile defense system in South Korea, saying North Korea's missile program poses a "significant threat."

The comments by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel, who is visiting Seoul, came after China's Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Liu Jianchao expressed concern Monday over the idea of a U.S. missile defense system on South Korean soil.

Liu's statement followed similar comments made by Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan during his visit to Seoul last month. China sees the system as designed to curb its own military might.

"I find it curious that a third country would presume to make strong presentations about a security system that has not been put in place and that is still a matter of theory," Russel told journalists after meeting with South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Kyung-soo.

U.S. military authorities say they have conducted "informal studies" to find suitable sites for a possible future deployment of a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery. But they have stressed that no decisions have been made to deploy such a system.

Russel said South Korea and the United States face a "significant threat from North Korea's growing ballistic missile program," which he said the North pursues in violation of international laws.

"Our military authorities have responsibility to consider systems that would protect Republic of Korea (South Korea) citizens, protect the United States from that threat."

"How they do it when they do it is something that the experts will have to determine but I think that it is for the Republic of Korea to decide what measures it will take in its own alliance defense," he added.

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Walking a diplomatic tightrope between China and the United States, South Korea remains ambivalent on the sensitive security issue, saying there have been neither consultations with the United States nor a decision on the matter.

South Korean Defense Ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok on Tuesday condemned China's attempt to "influence" South Korea's security policy.

"Neighbors can have their own positions on the (possible) deployment of the THAAD system here by the U.S. Forces Korea. But they should not try to influence our security policy," the spokesman told a regular briefing.

He did not mention China by name, but the message was clear.

"We will make a decision based upon our own judgment after putting security interests before anything else if the U.S. government asks for consultation," Kim stressed.

South Korea hosts some 28,000 U.S. troops.

Separately, Russel also made a fresh call for China to present evidence that the China-proposed Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) meets international standards for governance and transparency.

"We would like to see that done in ways that are consistent with the principles, the standards, good governance and the transparency that have become hallmarks of truly multilateral development banks," he said.

China's Lui expressed hope Monday that South Korea will join as a founding member of the AIIB — which Washington fears could be a rival to the World Bank and extend Beijing's power.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/17/asia-pacific/u-s-official-dismisses-chinas-concern-over-missile-defense-system-in-s-korea/#.VQn4eSxARDw>

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Want China Times – Taipei, Taiwan

China Gets its First Mobile-Launched ICBM: Russian Media

By Staff Reporter

March 18, 2015

Beijing successfully carried out a launch test for the DF-31B, an intercontinental ballistic missile, from a mobile launcher. The US is on alert since the missile is difficult to detect and intercept and is able to hit targets across the Pacific Ocean, reports China's *Global Times*.

China may soon replace France as the world's third largest nuclear power behind the US and Russia as its nuclear attack capability increases, according to Russian experts.

US admiral Cecil D Haney expressed concerns over the DF-31B, which has a range of 11,200 kilometers, since it may change the attitude of the US toward China's nuclear capabilities. The solid fuel-powered missile can carry multiple warheads and give the country a second-strike capability, according to the Russian media.

The missile was launched from a four-door, sixteen-wheel mobile launcher that looks similar to its Russian counterpart. A former Russian official responsible for nuclear weapons research said China is nearing nuclear capabilities similar to the US and Russian nuclear triad — strategic bombers, ICBMs and ballistic missiles launched from submarines — a challenge to the dominance of the two countries in nuclear weaponry.

Details of the DF-31B have yet to be revealed but the Russian expert said its greatest advantage is its short launch time. It only takes five minutes for the missile to launch and enter its trajectory, making detection by US reconnaissance satellites difficult. The missile can also avoid interception since it flies in an S-shaped curve.

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It is China's first intercontinental ballistic missile able to be launched from a mobile launcher. Such a combination is ideal for China since it can be deployed across a vast region, making it difficult to detect the location of its launch, said Viktor Yesin, former head of Russia's strategic missile force.

The US would not be able to detect the missile with all 21 reconnaissance satellites, said the report. The number of mobile-launch ballistic missiles in China could reach 140 this year and may exceed France's 240.

<http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20150318000157&cid=1101>

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The Korea Herald – Seoul, South Korea

U.S. Commander says He Believes N. Korea Already Miniaturized some Nuclear Weapons

March 20, 2015

The United States believes North Korea has already succeeded in making some nuclear weapons small enough to fit atop missiles, a top American military official said Thursday.

"We know North Korea's ambitions in terms of their demonstrated cyber, their ambitions for nuclear weapons, the tests that have already occurred. And we think they already miniaturized some of this capability," Adm. Cecil Haney, commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

In October, Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, said that as USFK commander, he assumes the North has the capabilities to miniaturize nuclear warheads and that the country has "the technology to potentially actually deliver what they say they have."

Early this year, South Korea's Defense Ministry said in its "white paper" report that it believes the communist nation has reached a "significant" point in efforts to mastering the warhead miniaturization technology.

The U.S. Department of Defense later said, however, that there is no evidence the North has mastered the miniaturization technology, and what Scaparrotti said was that it is prudent for him as a commander to prepare for such a contingency.

North Korea has conducted three underground nuclear tests so far, in 2006, 2009 and 2013. The country has also conducted a series of long-range missile or rocket launches since 1998. In its latest launch in late 2012, the North succeeded in putting a satellite into orbit.

Experts have warned that it is only a matter of time until the North develops nuclear-tipped missiles. Joel Wit, editor of the website 38 North, and David Albright, head of the Institute for Science and International Security, also said that they believe the North can miniaturize warheads sufficiently to place them on the Nodong medium-range ballistic missiles.

The two experts on North Korea's nuclear program made the claim in an article while rejecting criticism of their surprising estimate announced late last month that the North's nuclear arsenal could expand to 100 weapons by 2020. (Yonhap)

<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150320000162>

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Birmingham Post – Birmingham, U.K.

Spellar: UK Nuclear Deterrent Vital in Face of Russian Threat

Russia's bullying of its neighbours illustrates why the UK must keep its nuclear deterrent, according to a Midland MP.

By Jonathan Walker

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15 March 2015

Russia's bullying of its neighbours illustrates why the UK must keep its nuclear deterrent, according to a Midland MP.

Shadow Foreign Minister John Spellar (Lab Warley) said Russia wasn't just threatening the Ukraine but also Baltic states.

But in a sign that historic rows over nuclear weapons haven't been entirely banished from the Labour Party, he clashed with one left-wing backbencher who called on Britain to scrap its nuclear weapons .

Paul Flynn, who represents Newport West in Wales, pointed out that the general election on May 7 could result in a hung Parliament in which Labour depended on the support of SNP MPs – who oppose renewing the Trident nuclear weapon system – to form a government.

Regardless of who is in power, the Government will have to decide next year whether to go ahead with building new submarines to deliver nuclear warheads, at an estimated cost of £25 billion.

A new warhead, costing an estimated £6 billion, will also be needed.

Mr Flynn told the Commons: "We cannot hold back terrorism with nuclear weapons. We cannot hold back global warming with nuclear weapons. We cannot provide clean water to our planet with nuclear weapons."

But Mr Spellar replied: "My honourable friend the Member for Newport West repeated what has been said in other debates that have been based on the proposition that nuclear weapons are an inappropriate response to many of the very real contemporary threats that we face, such as terrorism, insurgencies, cyber-attacks and climate change.

"Of course, they were never designed for that purpose. That is not their role. They are focused on state-on-state conflicts.

"In Europe, given the increasing assertiveness of Russia, we are starting to see the re-emergence of that scenario."

He added: "It is not only the actions in Ukraine that are causing concern; they are merely the most extreme symptom of a number of problems that have been manifesting themselves.

"There are, for instance, increasing pressures on countries in the 'near abroad', especially the Baltic states."

Russia had tested the military capabilities of the UK and other European countries by sending planes close to UK airspace, he said.

Mr Spellar said it was "important for Britain to play a constructive role in working for a nuclear-free world by not removing itself from the equation through nuclear disarmament".

He added: "ours is not a unilateralist party."

Mr Flynn said Labour should be ready to do a deal with the SNP – and warned that Labour MPs would not agree to a "grand coalition" with the Conservatives, an idea suggested as one potential option by Birmingham Edgbaston MP Gisela Stuart.

He said: "Although I hope and will do all I can to make sure that colleagues in my party in Scotland are re-elected , the message I see day after day is that we are likely to have a group of people here who have put the ending of Trident at the top of their agenda.

"That will be a very significant change in this place. The suggested alternative of a grand coalition, if it went ahead, would not include many Labour members."

<http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/news/local-news/spellar-uk-nuclear-deterrent-vital-8834735>

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Huffington Post (U.K. Edition) – London, U.K.

Labour Government Could Reduce Britain's Nuclear Deterrent

By Paul Vale

15 March 2015

A Labour government would consider reducing Britain's nuclear-armed submarine fleet, according to Ed Balls. However, the shadow chancellor said the party was committed to renewing Trident and providing a continuous at-sea deterrent.

The fleet of four Vanguard-class submarines which carry the Trident missiles are due to be replaced from 2028, with a final decision on whether to replace all four due to be taken in 2016 - after the 2015 election.

But Balls said difficult questions need to be asked during the next defence review - including whether the job could be done with three boats. The SNP is committed to scrapping the nuclear weapons system, with the issue proving a major election issue north of the border.

Labour's support for maintaining the nuclear deterrent could be a stumbling block to any post-election deal with the SNP.

Speaking on BBC Radio 5 Live's Pienaar's Politics, Balls reiterated Labour's commitment to providing Trident while offering the greatest value for money.

Told that means having four boats, Balls replied: "Not necessarily. It may well mean four boats - that's what our strategic defence review will look at.

"We will look to see if there are ways in which we can make savings in the procurement process. Of course, if I'm going to government I'm going to challenge the strategic defence review to answer that question in the toughest way - that if it turns out the only way strategically to deliver continuous at sea is four boats, then absolutely we will have four boats.

"But my job is to ask those questions and therefore we're going to challenge to see whether there's any way you could do it with three rather than four. I think many of the experts think in the end not, but it's a good thing for us to do, to ask the difficult questions."

In a statement, SNP MSP Bill Kidd said: "One submarine armed with Trident nuclear weapons of mass destruction is one too many - and a recent New Statesman survey showed three quarters of Labour's Westminster candidates agree as they don't support Trident renewal.

"An absolute priority for a strong team of SNP MPs at Westminster will be to use their clout to make sure that we don't waste £100 billion on putting a new generation of nuclear weapons on the River Clyde - with the money saved invested in health, education and childcare."

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/03/15/labour-government-could-reduce-britains-nuclear-deterrent_n_6873054.html

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The Moscow Times – Moscow, Russia

Putin's Rattling of the Nuclear Saber Shows Ukraine Is Non-Negotiable

By Ivan Nechepurenko

March 16, 2015

The revelation Sunday that President Vladimir Putin had been prepared to bring Russia's nuclear weapons into a state of alert last year amid soaring tensions over the Crimean Peninsula makes one thing clear, analysts told The Moscow Times: Russia won't give up on Ukraine, even if faced with the threat of nuclear war.

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Asked about Russia's nuclear preparedness, Putin told state television channel Rossia-1 that concerns of a potential Western intervention into Crimea last year forced him and his top security officials to consider putting Russia's nuclear arsenal on combat alert. "We were ready to do this. I spoke to my colleagues and told them that [Crimea] is our historic territory, Russians live there. They were in danger. We couldn't abandon them," Putin said in an interview, filmed for a documentary produced to celebrate the one-year anniversary of Crimea's annexation.

He went on to explain the ultimate decision not to make that bold step: "Despite all of the difficulties and the drama surrounding the situation, the Cold War is over, and we do not need international crises like the [Bay of Pigs]," Putin said. "Moreover, the circumstances did not call for such actions, which would have been contrary to our own interests."

According to Andrei Burbin, the head of the central command headquarters of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces, said in comments to radio station Russian News Service on March 1 that Russia's nuclear forces are "on constant combat alert."

"In peacetime our primary strategic task is deterrence, but if the need arises to make a nuclear missile strike, we will fulfill this task in a fixed time. We are absolutely certain," Burbin said.

In accordance with the country's 2014 military doctrine: "Russia reserves the right to use its nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction against Russia or its allies, and also when the very existence of the Russian state is put at risk due to aggression with the use of conventional weapons."

A year ago, as the Crimea crisis sputtered to a boiling point, Dmitry Kiselyov — head of state-run news agency Rossiya Segodnya and host of a popular weekly news show on Rossia-1 — boasted during a broadcast: "Russia is the only country in the world that is realistically capable of turning the United States into radioactive ash." As he spoke the words, an image of a massive mushroom cloud loomed in the background. His program that evening was aptly titled: "Putin Can Destroy NATO With a Single Phone Call."

Kiselyov — who at that point had already become a household name for his liberal deployment of controversial and inflammatory remarks, particularly against the West and the international LGBT community — has since been placed on the European Union's sanctions list.

A Political Message

According to Vladimir Dvorkin, a distinguished military fellow with the Carnegie Moscow Center's nonproliferation program, Putin's statements on nuclear preparedness during Sunday's program lacked military sense, and were thus purely political.

"I don't understand this statement for the simple reason that strategic nuclear forces are always on high combat alert, or at least the land-based missiles and ballistic missile submarines are," Dvorkin — a retired Russian army major general — told The Moscow Times in a phone interview.

"The concept of mutually assured destruction is constantly at work, so there's no real need to bring it up. All these statements are political; they don't carry any strategic military meaning," he said.

If that's the case, what political signal was Putin hoping to send?

Raising the Stakes

The nuclear preparedness remark was a message to the West that Ukraine and Crimea are far more important for Russia than they are for the West, according Vladimir Yevseyev, director of the Center for Social and Political Research think tank.

"Putin is saying that under certain conditions, Russia will be ready to use nuclear weapons to defend Crimea," Yevseyev, a retired Russian army colonel, told The Moscow Times. "The question of its sovereignty is shut. It's non-negotiable."

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According to Yevseyev, as the U.S. busies itself dispatching training missions to Ukraine and mulling the option of pumping Kiev full of lethal aid, Putin's willingness to raise the stakes to the nuclear level demonstrates Russia's willingness to defend its interests in its southwest neighbor, no matter the cost.

"Putin is basically letting it be known that Crimea and Ukraine are far more important to Russia than they are to the West, which would never consider going nuclear over Ukraine," he said.

A Projection of Weakness

According to prominent media analyst Vasily Gatov, Putin's nuclear preparedness statement is "a performance."

"He is basically saying that he is scared and feels insecure," Gatov told The Moscow Times. He noted that the Soviet leadership sent similar signals in the 1970s — exaggerating the external threat in a bid to boast their own defense capabilities.

"Putin today is a pale shadow of the Politburo. But his messaging remains perfectly Soviet — don't trouble us, let us trouble you," Gatov said.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putins-rattling-of-the-nuclear-saber-makes-it-clear-ukraine-is-non-negotiable/517511.html>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

Two Borei Class Nuclear Submarines to Replace Old Kalmar Class Subs in Russia's Far East

Borei class submarines of Project 955 will no longer be built, Project 955A will continue Project 955
March 17, 2015

LANGKAWI (Malaysia), March 17. /TASS/. Two fourth generation Project 955 Borei class strategic nuclear submarines will replace in Russia's Pacific Fleet the old strategic nuclear submarines of Project 667BDR (Kalmar class), director general of the submarine design bureau Rubin Igor Vilnit said on Tuesday.

The submarines' decommissioning will be phased, the head of the Rubin Central Design Bureau for Marine Engineering said at the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA-2015) in Malaysia.

"Both series - 667BDRM (Dolphin) and 667BDR in the East have had a long life already. Submarines of the BDR project are actually at the final stage, so it is planned to deliver two Borei class subs there this year," said Vilnit.

However, he said, the Borei class submarines of Project 955 will no longer be built. "Project 955 is over. Three boats have been built and delivered to the Navy. Now Project 955A will continue Project 955," Vilnit said.

All contracts on the construction of the Borei-A class submarines of Project 955A have been concluded and the work is going on schedule, he said. A total of five such submarines are planned to be built.

Russia's Navy currently has three Borei class submarines - the Yuri Dolgoruky, Alexander Nevsky and Vladimir Monomakh boats that have been commissioned in recent years. They are armed with the Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles.

According to the Russian military, Borei-class are state-of-the-art submarines, featuring characteristics superior to any submarine currently in service worldwide. The Borei-class subs are replacing outgoing nuclear subs of the previous generation and are set to become the backbone of Russia's sea-based nuclear defences.

A Borei-class sub is 170 metres long and 13.5 metres wide, and can dive up to 450 metres. They have a compact, hydro-dynamically efficient hull for reduced broadband noise and are the first to use pump-jet propulsion among Russian submarines. Their submerged cruise speed is at least 30 knots (56 kilometres per hour). Safety measures for the subs include a rescue chamber that can host all 107 crew members.

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<http://tass.ru/en/russia/783282>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

Russia to Upgrade Ten Strategic Bombers Tu-95MS in 2015-2016

Around 70% of the Russian Armed Forces' strategic aviation is expected to be modernized by 2020

March 17, 2015

MOSCOW, March 17. /TASS/. Russia in 2015-2016 will upgrade at least ten strategic bombers Tu-95MS, the press-service of the United Aircraft-building Corporation told TASS on Tuesday.

"Last year the Russian Air Force received eight upgraded Tu-95MS bombers, and at least ten more will re-enter duty in 2015-2016," the UAC press-service quotes the chief of the flight test and tune-up base at Zhukovsky, Alexander Kosarev, as saying.

The Zhukovsky upgrade base (an affiliate of Tupolev) replaces radio-electronic equipment and improves the parameters of the navigation complex and landing systems.

"In the process of modernization some fundamentally new technological processes had to be mastered and new equipment and tools employed. Everything was accomplished within tight deadlines and with high quality," the Zhukovsky base's deputy chief for production, Vladimir Khokhlov, said.

The Russian Air Force has several dozen Tu-95MS bombers carrying strategic cruise missiles X-55. At the end of 2014 Air Force commander Viktor Bondarev said that in 2014 eight planes of this type were returned to the Air Force after overhaul and upgrade. In 2015, Russia's fleet of Tu-95MS will grow to 43.

Around 70% of the Russian Armed Forces' strategic aviation is expected to be modernized by 2020, according to the defense minister.

<http://tass.ru/en/russia/783192>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

Russia Eliminates 86% of Chemical Weapons Stockpile — OPCW Chief

Russia earlier planned to destroy all stockpiles of chemical weapons by April 2012 but the process was delayed till 2020

March 18, 2015

THE HAGUE, March 18. /TASS/. About 86%, or 40,000 metric tons of chemical weapons produced mainly in the 1940s have been eliminated in Russia, Ahmet Uzumcu, the director general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), told TASS on Wednesday.

"For the past 18 years those stockpiles of weapons have been destroyed under the verification of OPCW experts and considerable progress has been achieved," Uzumcu said.

"Fortunately, none of them [chemical weapons] was ever used," Uzumcu said.

"We expect that out of five facilities which are now operational four of them will complete their destruction by the end of this year and only one facility will continue for the next four years," he added.

Uzumcu said it would be "a much welcomed development for the OPCW and its member states."

Russia earlier planned to destroy all stockpiles of chemical weapons by April 2012 but the process was delayed till 2020.

<http://tass.ru/en/russia/783591>

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

Russian Nuclear Submarines Step Up Patrols Over Past Year - Navy Commander

Russian Navy Commander Adm. Viktor Chirkov said that from January 2014 to March 2015 the intensity of patrols by submarines rose by almost 50 percent as compared to 2013.

19 March 2015

MOSCOW (Sputnik) – The number of patrols by Russian submarines, including nuclear ones, has risen by 50 percent over the past 15 months, Russian Navy Commander Adm. Viktor Chirkov said Thursday.

"From January 2014 to March 2015 the intensity of patrols by submarines has risen by almost 50 percent as compared to 2013. This is logical and necessary to guarantee the security of the state," he said.

Chirkov added that the increase in nuclear submarine patrols is dictated solely by the necessity to "prevent threats to Russia's security."

Following Crimea's reunification with Russia in March 2014, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has increased its military presence close to Russia's borders. The United States and its allies have accused Russia of meddling in Ukraine's affairs.

Moscow has repeatedly refuted the accusations, expressing concern over the build-up of NATO forces near its territory.

March 19 marks 109th anniversary of the foundation of the Russian Navy's submarine force. Festive ceremonies will be held in the country's Northern, Pacific, Baltic and Black Sea Fleets.

<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20150319/1019714161.html>

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The Moscow Times – Moscow, Russia

Russia's Strategic Bomber Fleet on Global Intimidation Drive

By Matthew Bodner

March 19, 2015

Russia is expanding strategic bomber flights around the globe in a bid to intimidate other nations and assert its geopolitical influence.

As tensions rise with the West over Ukraine, Russian bombers forced NATO to scramble jets to intercept Russian military aircraft over 400 times last year — more than twice as often as in 2013, according to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

The flights have infringed on Air Defense Identification Zones — a buffer where foreign aircraft are asked to identify themselves for national security reasons — across Europe and North America, sparking media frenzies as Russia's actions are interpreted in the most ominous terms.

Such behavior is likely to increase, if the words of senior Russian defense officials are to be taken at face value. The Defense Ministry has doubled down on its rhetoric and pledged to expand Russian strategic bomber flights well beyond Russia's borders.

The drive to cover more of the globe with their bombers — sometimes loaded with nuclear bombs and cruise missiles — "gives them wider strategic options to threaten NATO assets," Ben Moores, a senior aerospace analyst at global defense consultancy IHS Aerospace, Defense & Security said Thursday.

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The Third Prong

Russian strategic bombers are part of a three-pronged nuclear force that includes missiles and submarines.

For nearly 15 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian bombers were essentially grounded. Only in 2007, when Russia was flush with oil wealth, did President Vladimir Putin order the Air Force to resume regular combat patrols.

The bombers project offensive power. Their military role is “to provide a level of [nuclear attack] flexibility not offered by missile systems alone,” said Douglas Barrie, a Russian military aviation expert at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

“Bomber aircraft equipped with cruise missiles — conventional or nuclear armed — provide a potent combination,” Barrie said.

Putin has justified the strategic bomber flights in the context of the ongoing standoff between Russia and the West over Ukraine by saying the U.S. never stopped its bomber patrols along Russian airspace after the Cold War.

U.S. bombers fly regular combat patrols around the world, using a network of foreign air bases to stop at for refueling. Some of their routes take them close to Russian airspace.

Moore said Russia’s patrols were propaganda tools aimed at “appearing to be more dangerous than they are” to intimidate other countries.

Russia’s Reach

According to Moscow Defense Brief, an industry publication produced by the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), a Russian defense think tank, Russia’s current standard bomber routes are the same ones flown by the Soviet Air Force’s long-range bombers before 1992.

These routes are typically flown out of Russia’s main bomber bases — Engels, a city near Saratov in the West, and Ukrainka in the Amur region in the Far East.

These bases house regiments of Tu-95 “Bear” propeller-driven bombers, and the larger Tu-160 supersonic bombers.

With minor deviations, the standard flight paths take Russian bombers out of Engels over Scandinavia, toward Britain, and then into the North Atlantic, according to Moscow Defense Brief. Bombers flying from Ukrainka in the Far East fly up to Alaska, over the Aleutian Islands, and then into the Pacific and Sea of Japan before returning home.

Recapturing Soviet Scale

Recently, flights have been expanded beyond the Soviet flight paths and bombers have flown further south, toward Venezuela and the Caribbean, carrying Russian offensive weapons into the U.S. neighborhood.

To do this, Russian bombers have to link up in the air with refueling aircraft to expand their range — which is generally around 10,000 kilometers, depending on the type of aircraft flown.

These flights are rare, and do not yet represent any reliable expansion of bomber coverage. The Air Force has only a limited number of long-range Ilyushin Il-78 Midas tanker aircraft needed on such missions, Barrie said.

But they are likely to become more frequent. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in November responded to criticism that Russian bomber flights are provocative and potentially dangerous to civilian traffic by promising expansion.

“We need to ensure a military presence in the western Atlantic and eastern Pacific oceans, [as well as] the waters of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico,” the BBC quoted Shoigu as saying.

Shoigu said Russia is looking to establish air bases in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba, which would remove the problem of in-flight refueling and increase bombers’ range.

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General Yevgeny Buzhinsky, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Moscow-based PIR Center military think tank, said Russia was negotiating with these countries "on the possibility of using their air bases for refueling our long-range aircraft, resting the crews and conducting minor repairs, nothing more than that."

But these plans mask underlying problems in Russia's ability to field a meaningful bomber threat. Its planes are old, and their increasingly regular use demands correspondingly regular maintenance and hardware upgrades, said Ruslan Pukhov, CAST's director.

"If you fly extensively, if you go to Venezuela and so on and so forth, it kills the resource and one day when you really need it, you simply can't use it," Pukhov said.

But Buzhinsky said that it's only a matter of time before Russia begins building a new generation of bombers. The Defense Ministry has launched a development program known as PAK DA for a future long-range bomber, expected to begin testing around 2020, but no details about the form of the aircraft have yet emerged.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russias-strategic-bomber-fleet-on-global-intimidation-drive/517749.html>

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

US Strategic Command Calls Russian Show of Nuclear Capability 'Provocative'

US Strategic Command Commander Admiral Cecil Haney also said that Russia has upped the number of long-range strategic aircraft flights penetrating United States and ally air defense identification zones.

19 March 2015

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) — Demonstrations of Russia's nuclear capability during a time of crisis with the West are provocative and concerning, US Strategic Command Commander Admiral Cecil Haney said on Thursday.

"The demonstration of their capability during crisis such as long-range strategic aircraft flights, their violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), etc., really shows where we are as a world, including the United States, and where Russia is trying to ascribe to be in terms of coercion including using weapons of mass destruction," Haney stated.

Haney explained that Russia's use of "various signaling" through statements and media reports "associated with their strategic nuclear capabilities... is very provocative."

Russia has upped the number of long-range strategic aircraft flights penetrating United States and ally air defense identification zones, he added.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the country's Northern Fleet to hold snap combat readiness drills. Some 76,000 troops are taking part in the exercise, held in the Norwegian and Barents Seas. The exercises, scheduled to end on Saturday, aim to check the troops' ability to protect Russia's Arctic borders. Military exercises have also been carried out in the Black Sea and the Far East.

Putin said earlier that Russian military drills have been conducted in international zones only, with strategic aircraft flight being resumed as an answer to US actions near Russian borders. Russia's plans came as NATO has stepped up its activities near the Russian border, including in the Black Sea and Baltic waters.

<http://sputniknews.com/world/20150319/1019743111.html>

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RT (Russia Today) – Moscow, Russia

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Iraqi Kurds: 'Desperate' ISIS Using Suicide Bombers Laden with Chemical Weapons

March 14, 2015

The Kurdish Regional Government says its peshmerga fighters came under attack from an Islamic State (formerly ISIS) suicide bomber driving a truck filled with toxic chlorine gas, in the latest chemical weapons accusation against the jihadist group.

"The fact ISIS relies on such tactics demonstrates it has lost the initiative and is resorting to desperate measures," the Kurdish authority declared in a statement.

While footage of the attack emerged only recently, the attack took place on January 23, when Kurdish fighters tried to reinforce their positions on a highway between Mosul and the Syrian border. The Kurds have been in an all-out war against the Islamic State since last year.

The video provided by Kurdish authorities shows an attacker driving a truck at full speed into the Kurdish positions, as he comes under heavy fire. Authorities say their forces destroyed the truck with a rocket before it had a chance to detonate near soldiers. But the fighters then began experiencing *"nausea, vomiting, dizziness and weakness"* – all common symptoms of chlorine poisoning – and soon found *"20 empty canisters"* in the back of the vehicle. The Kurds said they sent the remains of the suicide bomber to a laboratory, which said *"the samples contained levels of chlorine that suggested the substance was used in weaponized form."*

Chlorine, a widely available household and industrial substance, was most famously used in warfare during World War I, and is on the banned list of chemicals under the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention.

But the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the chemical weapons watchdog, says it is not aware of the incident.

"We have not had a request from Iraq to investigate claims of use of chemical weapons in Iraq, and the OPCW cannot immediately verify the claims," it said in a statement.

The OPCW conducted a fact-finding mission in neighboring Syria last year, where ISIS is also a major force fighting against the government of Bashar Assad. Afterwards, it concluded that chlorine was used *"systematically and repeatedly"* in that conflict.

There were also allegations of ISIS chlorine attacks in Iraq, made by government officials last September, and Kurdish authorities say they have seen *"plumes of orange smoke"* during recent battles in Tikrit.

The US says it killed the jihadists' main chemical weapon maker, Abu Malik, on January 24, also near Mosul. Meanwhile, OPCW officials told Reuters that the Islamic State unsuccessfully attempted to recruit chemical experts in the large city after conquering it last year.

ISIS's plans to establish a caliphate stretching through the Middle East appear to have been reversed, partly due to better-organized resistance from the Kurds and the Iraqi army, and also due to airstrikes unleashed by the US and its allies. The Pentagon says it has killed 8,000 ISIS fighters in 2,800 strikes since September last year.

<http://rt.com/news/240817-kurds-chlorine-chemical-isis/>

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Saudi Gazette – Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Prince: Iran Deal Could Prompt Nuclear Fuel Race

Monday, March 16, 2015

Saudi Prince Turki Al-Faisal warned on Monday that a possible deal on Iran's nuclear program will prompt Saudi Arabia and other states to seek the development of atomic technology.

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"I've always said whatever comes out of these talks, we will want the same," he told the BBC in an interview.

"So if Iran has the ability to enrich uranium to whatever level, it's not just Saudi Arabia that's going to ask for that," he added.

Ongoing negotiations between Tehran and six world powers are aimed at securing the outlines of a deal that limits Iran's nuclear activity and seeks to assuage fears that it is using the fuel enrichment to covertly develop a nuclear weapon.

Saudi Arabia sees Iran as a regional rival and fears that an atomic deal would leave the door open for Tehran to gain nuclear weapons. There are also Saudi concerns that a deal would ease political pressure on Iran, giving it more space to back Arab proxies opposed by Riyadh.

Tehran, on the other hand, continues to deny that it is building nuclear weapons and wants to lift heavy international sanctions that have been levied against its economy.

"The whole world will be an open door to go that route without any inhibition, and that's my main objection to this P5+1 [the six world powers] process," said Prince Turki, who served as Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief and Riyadh's ambassador to Washington and London.

US Secretary of State John Kerry flew to Riyadh earlier this month to reassure Saudi Arabia that the United States will not accept a deal that would allow Iran to build nuclear weapons.

During his visit, Kerry and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, warned of Iran's "destabilizing" policies in the region and stressed on ensuring Tehran doesn't acquire nuclear weapons.

On that note, Prince Turki said: "Iran is already a disruptive player in various scenes in the Arab world, whether it's Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, or Bahrain.

"So ending fear of developing weapons of mass destruction is not going to be the end of the troubles we're having with Iran."

The prince also spoke of Iran's role in Iraq fighting militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). He stressed on Iran's support for Iraqi Shiite militias fighting against ISIS.

"Now it seems that Iran is expanding its occupation of Iraq and that is unacceptable," said Prince Turki. — *Al Arabiya*

<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20150316237108>

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The Daily Star – Beirut, Lebanon

West Hopes for Concessions in Nuclear Talks with Iran

Reuters

March 16, 2015

LAUSANNE, Switzerland: Western powers are hoping for concessions from Tehran that could help clinch a political agreement in nuclear talks this week, after the United States and European powers voiced a willingness to compromise on suspending U.N. sanctions, officials said.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had been due to meet in Lausanne, Switzerland, Sunday to try to break the logjam ahead of a crucial round of talks between Iran and six major powers.

But a senior U.S. State Department official later said that meeting would be delayed until Monday due to extensive U.S.-Iranian consultations early Sunday between nuclear and Foreign Ministry officials.



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Kerry has urged Iran to take decisions now to enable them to clinch a political framework agreement for a deal that would lift sanctions in exchange for curbs on Tehran's nuclear program ahead of a late March deadline. Parties have set a June 30 target to finalize an accord.

"Serious gaps still remain," Deputy Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi was quoted by Iran's ISNA student news agency as saying. "We have had progress in the recent talks and during this round of talks we will see whether more progress can be achieved."

"We hope to narrow the gaps on important disputes," he added.

Kerry told CBS news Saturday he hoped "in the next days" it would be possible to reach an interim political deal with Iran if Tehran can show that its nuclear power program is for peaceful purposes only.

It is not yet clear when the talks between Iran and the six powers will begin in Lausanne.

Reuters reported last week that the United States, five other powers and Iran have begun talking about a possible draft resolution to endorse any future deal and address the lifting of U.N. sanctions. The U.N. penalties could be eased quickly in the event of an agreement, Western officials said.

Officials close to the talks said this was a major new concession on the part of the United States, which had long insisted that U.N. sanctions would remain in place for years after a nuclear deal was signed, while unilateral U.S. and European measures might be lifted more swiftly.

"This was a quite a shift in the U.S. position and we hope the Iranians will follow with concessions on their end," a Western official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "So far the concessions have been mostly one-sided, though there has been some limited progress recently."

Iranian officials have privately welcomed the new position on U.N. sanctions in the talks on the part of the United States and France. Diplomats say the other members of six power group back the idea of a swift suspension of U.N. nuclear sanctions if there is a deal, though they caution that many U.N. restrictions would stay in place.

"Iran knows that it will not happen overnight but the fact that it is being discussed at the [six powers'] capitals and having a resolution is a sign of their willingness to resolve the issue," a senior Iranian official told Reuters.

Iran, which rejects Western allegations it wants an atomic weapons capability, wants the U.N., EU and U.S. sanctions lifted all at once. A nuclear accord that ends the decadelong standoff with Iran is seen as crucial to reducing tensions in the region.

Officials on both sides of the talks said it will be very difficult to get a political agreement this week. Iranian officials say a signed agreement this week is unlikely, though they do not rule out some kind of verbal understanding.

In his CBS interview, Kerry also redoubled his criticism of Republicans, who said that seeking U.N. Security Council resolutions that endorse any deal and lift U.N. sanctions before seeking approval of Republican-led Congress would be wrong.

He said a letter from 47 Republicans to Iran's leadership, warning that any deal with President Barack Obama bypassing the Senate would not be binding and could be rescinded later, was an unprecedented intrusion on executive authority.

<http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Mar-16/290927-west-hopes-for-concessions-in-nuclear-talks-with-iran.ashx>

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Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) – Tehran, Iran
17 March 2015

90% of Issues Resolved in Iran-US Nuclear Talks: Salehi

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Tehran, March 17, IRNA -- The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says Tehran and the Washington have resolved their differences over 90 percent of the issues in the talks on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

"We have reached mutual understanding on a majority of issues [in the negotiations], there just remains a single sticking point, which is very important," Ali Akbar Salehi told IRIB News on Tuesday.

The AEOI chief added that Tehran and its negotiating sides will try to resolve the remaining disputed case in the evening session of discussions, which is underway in the Swiss city of Lausanne.

Salehi is in Lausanne as part of the Iranian negotiating team, led by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in the third day of talks with the American team, led by US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Helga Schmid, the deputy of EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, is also attending the evening session of the negotiations on Iran's nuclear file.

"If that one case could end in the desired result for the two sides, it could be said that more or less, the technical issues have been clarified in their entirety," Salehi added.

The talks between the US and Iran are part of broader negotiations between Tehran and the P5+1 group of countries, namely Russia, China, the US, the UK, France and Germany, to reach a comprehensive agreement on Tehran's nuclear program as a deadline slated for July 1 draws closer.

Before attending talks in Lausanne, Salehi held two rounds of negotiations with US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz in Geneva and Montreux.

The former Iranian foreign minister was added to the team of negotiators in recent talks in order to discuss the technical issues between the two sides and help settle them.

<http://www.irna.ir/en/News/81545191/>

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Press TV – Tehran, Iran

Iran's Deal should be Subject to UN Approval: Source

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

A final deal between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries on Iran's nuclear program should be endorsed under the Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, a source close to the talks between the two sides says.

According to the source on Wednesday, if Iran and its opposite sides in the negotiations want to strike a binding comprehensive accord, they should try to obtain the required approval from the United Nations, so that the terms of the agreement could not be violated in the future.

The unidentified source said putting the deal under a UN oversight and have it approved by a UN Security Council resolution is the "main request of the Islamic Republic of Iran from its negotiating sides."

He added that such a move by the Security Council would also guarantee the removal of the unfair sanctions which were imposed on Iran under the terms of Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

"A resolution [by the Security Council] under Chapter VII will naturally be a part of the comprehensive solution," he said, adding that if the final deal is not adopted as a UNSC resolution, "it would be useless and would fail to change the system set up by previous Chapter VII resolutions."

The official denied that Iran's insistence on the issue had anything to do with a recent letter by some Republican senators, who tried to sabotage a potential deal on Tehran's nuclear activities.

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In an unexpected move on March 9, 2015, 47 Republican senators issued a desperate warning to the Iranian officials on the validity of a potential nuclear deal, describing such an agreement as “nothing more than an executive agreement” which could be cancelled by the next US president “at a stroke of a pen.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently elaborated on Iran’s intention to subject a potential deal with the P5+1 states to a UN endorsement, so that future governments of the parties to the deal could not change it.

A “resolution under Chapter VII of the UN charter is an international and binding treaty for all the member states,” Zarif said in an interview with Persian-language Seda magazine.

Zarif said once the countries strike a deal, that deal should be approved and confirmed by the United Nations Security Council, adding that in such a situation, “any deal is binding for the current US government and for the future US governments.”

Officials in the United States, one of the major parties to the talks with Iran, have declared that they have no intention of using the UN to cement the Iran deal.

Jen Psaki, a spokeswoman for the US State Department, said Thursday that Washington seeks a nonbinding deal in order to keep Congress out of the debate in the near term.

Iran and the P5+1 countries – the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia plus Germany – are seeking to seal a comprehensive nuclear deal by July 1.

<http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2015/03/18/402443/UN-chapter-VII-cements-Iran-deal>

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Al Arabiya – Dubai, U.A.E.

Iran Limited to 6K Centrifuges in Draft Accord

The Associated Press, Lausanne

Thursday, 19 March 2015

A draft nuclear accord now being negotiated between the United States and Iran would force Iran to cut hardware it could use to make an atomic bomb by about 40 percent for at least a decade, while offering the Iranians immediate relief from sanctions that have crippled their economy, officials told The Associated Press exclusively on Thursday.

As an added enticement, elements of a U.N. arms embargo against Iran could be rolled back.

The very existence of a draft in circulation provided perhaps the clearest indication the sides were nearing a written agreement as they raced to meet a March 31 deadline for a framework pact. The deadline for a full agreement is the end of June.

Officials said the tentative deal imposes new limits on the number of centrifuges Iran can operate to enrich uranium, a process that can lead to nuclear weapons-grade material. The sides are zeroing in on a cap of 6,000 centrifuges, officials said, down from the 6,500 they spoke of in recent weeks.

That's also less than the 10,000 such machines Tehran now runs, yet substantially more than the 500 to 1,500 that Washington originally wanted as a ceiling. Only a year ago, U.S. officials floated 4,000 as a possible compromise.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2015/03/19/AP-Exclusive-Iran-limited-to-6K-centrifuges-in-draft-accord.html>

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The Times of Israel – Jerusalem, Israel

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US says Deal would Bar Iran Nuclear Bomb in ‘Perpetuity’

Deputy secretary of state rejects the claim that Tehran could restart nuke program after 10 years, as lawmakers push back over involvement in deal

By Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Associated Press (AP)

March 19, 2015

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration insisted before skeptical lawmakers Thursday that any deal with Iran would ensure in “perpetuity” that it could not develop nuclear weapons.

A comprehensive accord would also see “phased, proportionate” relief from tough sanctions that have severely constrained Iran’s economy, but such relief could be swiftly reversed should the Islamic republic violate any final deal, said Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Several members of Congress and other critics have warned that the ongoing negotiations between world powers and Tehran would lead to a deal that would sunset after 10 years.

Once the deal ends, critics fear, the Islamic Republic could once again freely crank up its nuclear program and develop a bomb.

“That is simply not true,” Blinken told a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

“To the contrary, Iran would be prohibited from developing a nuclear weapon in perpetuity — and we would have a much greater ability to detect any effort by Iran to do so.”

He said that while some constraints would be lifted after a “significant period,” others would last “indefinitely, including a stringent and intrusive monitoring and inspections regime” by the United Nations’ International Atomic Energy Agency.

And should Iran violate the agreement and begin a rush to a bomb, a process described as “breakout,” Blinken stressed that restrictions on centrifuges and uranium mills would prevent Iran from completing a nuclear bomb for at least a year.

“That would provide us more than enough time to detect and act on any Iranian transgression,” he said.

A report from the Associated Press Thursday claimed a draft agreement called for Iran to scale back to 6,000 centrifuges in exchange for immediate sanctions relief.

However, US administration officials denied any draft paper was being passed around.

Blinken’s testimony, less than two weeks before a deadline for the outlines of a major deal, came as Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and US Secretary of State John Kerry reported progress in their talks Thursday in Switzerland, but with much work remaining.

Blinken said Iran would be indefinitely barred under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty from developing or acquiring a nuclear weapon.

Democrats and Republicans alike scoffed at the suggestion that such NPT restrictions would hold back Iran, with committee Chairman Ed Royce warning that Iranians “have been violating those commitments for years.”

Adam Szubin, acting undersecretary of treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence, said if a nuclear deal is struck with Iran, lawmakers should leave congressionally imposed sanctions in place for years.

Royce, a Republican, said that sounded like part of a White House strategy to keep Congress out of the process for years. Lawmakers wary of Iran are pushing to weigh in on any prospective deal and impose new penalties on Tehran.

The administration argues that congressional action now would scuttle the delicate international negotiations underway in Switzerland.



“If we are able to secure a comprehensive understanding, we will structure the nuclear-related sanctions relief in a way that is phased, proportionate and reversible,” said Szubin. “We will need to see verified steps on Iran’s part before sanctions are lifted and we believe that powerful US legislative sanctions should not be terminated for years to come so that we continue to retain important leverage years into a deal.”

He said if a deal is not reached, the administration would work with Congress to ratchet up sanctions pressure on Iran.

Royce pushed back, saying Secretary of State John Kerry has said that any agreement would have to pass muster with Congress.

“Yet that commitment has been muddied by the administration’s insistence in recent weeks that Congress will not play a role. And that’s not right,” Royce said. “Congress built the sanctions structure that brought Iran to the table and if the president moves to dismantle it, we will have a say.”

Royce said it seems as if the Obama administration plans to push the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution to “basically bless” this agreement and relax sanctions. “But at the same time, you are pushing off Congress. Why push for UN action and not Congress?”

Rep. Eliot Engel, the top Democrat on the committee, also defended Congress’ role if the US signs any agreement.

“There really cannot be any marginalization of Congress. Congress really needs to play a very active and vital role in this whole process and any attempts to sidestep Congress will be resisted on both sides of the aisle,” Engel said.

Blinken said the administration is not “pushing off” Congress.

“Congress will have to exercise its authority to lift sanctions at the end of an agreement if Iran complies,” Blinken said. “And indeed, keeping that until the end — until we see that Iran is complying, is the best way to sustain leverage.”

Lawmakers also pointed to the need to include restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missile program in any nuclear deal, as reinforcement against the country using such a delivery system for an atomic bomb.

“The critical question of the possible military dimension of Iran’s program... would have to be part of any agreement,” Blinken acknowledged.

Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany are currently seeking an accord meant to ensure that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons under the guise of its civilian program — an aim it denies having.

The deal is due to be finalized by July.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-says-deal-would-bar-iran-nuclear-bomb-in-perpetuity/>

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Tasnim News Agency – Tehran, Iran

Iran Nuclear Talks in Lausanne End, to Restart on Wednesday

March 20, 2015

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Diplomats from Iran and six world powers wrapped up the latest round of negotiations on Tehran’s peaceful nuclear program in the Swiss city of Lausanne on Friday and agreed to resume the talks on March 25.

Speaking to reporters in Lausanne on Friday, Iran’s senior negotiator and deputy foreign minister, Abbas Araqchi said delegations from Iran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the US, Britain, France and Germany) held “very serious and intensive” negotiations over the past six days.

Given the need for more consultations and coordination, US Secretary of State John Kerry and his counterparts from the G5+1 European members will meet in Berlin on Saturday, Araqchi explained.

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He said the talks will resume on Wednesday after the Iranian New Year holiday of Nowruz, which falls on March 21.

Diplomats from Iran and six world powers launched a decisive round of diplomacy in the Swiss city on Sunday to pave the way for a landmark nuclear agreement ahead of a June 30 deadline.

Iran and the Group 5+1 (also known as the P5+1 or E3+3) are in talks to hammer out a comprehensive accord that would end more than a decade of impasse over Tehran's civilian nuclear activities.

<http://www.tasnimnews.com/english/Home/Single/691846>

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TASS Russian News Agency – Moscow, Russia

Sanctions Relief Remains most Sensitive Issue at Iran Nuclear Talks — Russian Diplomat

The problems are almost the same as before although there is some progress

March 20, 2015

LAUSANNE/Switzerland/, March 20. /TASS/. The timeframe for lifting Western sanctions imposed on Iran is one of the most difficult issues at talks on Tehran's nuclear program, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on Friday.

"The problems are almost the same as before although there is some progress here," Ryabkov said. "First, this is the order, the sequence and the extent of lifting the sanctions. Second, these are the restrictions on Iran's nuclear program during the agreement's validity period," he said.

"As we understand, these restrictions should not create invincible obstacles in this sphere, but this is a very complex and sensitive issue," the diplomat said.

Most issues - the Arak uranium enrichment facility, the enrichment level, the experimental-design works, the transparency of Iran's nuclear program and its past military dimension - "are very politicized," he said.

"That's why the decision on any of these issues is difficult. The sanctions issue the most difficult and also tricky one," he said.

The United Nations has imposed several rounds of sanctions on Iran since December 2006 saying that Tehran failed to fulfill its commitments in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation.

The issue of their gradual lifting is being currently discussed at the negotiations between the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France - plus Germany (P5+1) and Iran.

No need for Russian foreign minister at Iran nuclear talks

The diplomat said there is no reason for Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to attend talks over Iran's nuclear program.

"It is true that some European ministers are due to arrive in Lausanne. But that doesn't mean there will be a full-fledged ministerial meeting there and that doesn't mean that agreement has been reached," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told journalists.

"As far as we understand, the ministers' arrival is connected to a certain extent with the meeting Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held with three European foreign ministers and [the EU's foreign policy chief] Federica Mogherin on Monday," Ryabkov said. "It seems that the European ministers there will discuss issues of particular interest to European delegations."

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"I see no reason why the Russian minister could travel there in the course of the next day or two," the diplomat said.

"We should understand that such decisions are certainly made by ministers, and the situation may change dramatically over the next few days," he added. "But so far, as his representative, I can't say I would recommend him to travel to Lausanne."

<http://tass.ru/en/world/783999>

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AsiaOne News – Singapore

Pakistan Sacked some Nuclear Workers to Keep Programme Safe

Baqir Sajjad Syed, Dawn/Asia News Network

Thursday, March 19, 2015

ISLAMABAD: An official disclosed on Thursday that "some people" working with the country's nuclear programme were sacked to keep it safe.

Retired Brig Tahir Raza Naqvi, who works for Strategic Plans Division, the administering body for the nuclear programme, was speaking at a seminar on 'Future Security Outlook of South Asia: Trends and Challenges'.

The seminar was organised by an Islamabad-based think tank, Centre for International Strategic Studies, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung of Germany.

The sacked nuclear workers could not clear the Personnel Reliability Programme that was started in mid-2003/04 to screen the employees working on the sensitive programme. All employees of the nuclear programme are periodically checked for family background, education, political affiliation and religious inclinations.

Take a look: US confident of Pakistan's nuclear security

Fears expressed about nuclear safety and security in Pakistan are related to insider threat.

Brig Naqvi would not say how many were sacked over the years or why they failed to clear the screening.

"We filtered out people having negative tendencies that could have affected national security," Brig Naqvi told Dawn. Those sacked were the "incorrigible" ones, he said, and quickly added: "Our checks are very solid."

At least 12 people linked to Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan were removed when the proliferation scandal surfaced in 2003. But those firings took place before Personnel Reliability Programme was instituted.

Prof Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University said Pakistan had real security concerns and its perceived need for a robust strategic deterrent was now recognised by the West. However, he added that concerns remained about the increase in fissile material production and development of diverse delivery systems (missiles).

He said Pakistan must keep its nuclear weapons, material and know-how under strict government control.

"Safety and security is paramount to manage nuclear enterprise," he maintained, adding that safety and security was "not a destination, but a journey ... and the first line against nuclear terrorism".

The seminar also discussed other security challenges facing South Asia, particularly Pakistan.

A former chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, retired Gen Ehsanul Haq, in his keynote address gave an overview of global as well as regional security.

The Ukraine crisis, conflict in South China Sea, turmoil in the Middle East, heightened Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry, the self-styled Islamic State threat and growing Islamophobic sentiments, he said, were behind the major changes taking place in Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific.

<http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/pakistan-sacked-some-nuclear-workers-keep-programme-safe>

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Sputnik International – Russian Information Agency

South Africa Rebuffs US Attempts to Take Over its Nuclear Materials

The United States wants South Africa to get rid of several hundred pounds of uranium, but Pretoria is saying not a chance.

16 March 2015

South Africa has enough nuclear fuel for about six bombs – each of them would wipe out Washington, DC, or large sections of New York City. After apartheid officially ended with the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela as president, South Africa started extracting the uranium from the apartheid government's cache of nuclear weapons. Some of that has been used to make medical isotopes, but close to 485 pounds remain.

That means South Africa could conceivably develop nuclear weapons again, but Washington says it is most worried that the uranium could be stolen and used by militants or terrorists. In 2007, thieves managed to break into the site where the uranium is stored and got pretty far until they were finally stopped by a guard who called for reinforcements.

Pretoria calls it nothing more than a minor robbery attempt, but US officials tell the watchdog group Center for Public Integrity that the thieves appeared to know what they were doing and were after the uranium to make bombs. Plus, South Africa, say observers, has a significant problem with crime, and this kind of attempted heist could happen again with dire consequences.

Since that attempted robbery, Washington has been quietly lobbying South Africa to get rid of what the US considers highly vulnerable uranium, but like previous leaders, South African president Jacob Zuma is not biting. President Obama has offered US help in changing the South African uranium into non-lethal reactor fuel, but Zuma says South Africa needs its nuclear materials and can keep them secure.

South African officials also say that the US shouldn't be "obsessing" about what amounts to a small amount of nuclear fuel when Washington is stockpiled to the teeth, and going after South Africa puts a damper on their plans to focus on peaceful and profitable nuclear technology in South Africa and the rest of the developing world.

Ironically, it was the US that helped South Africa build their first nuclear reactor under a program called Atoms for Peace in the mid-1960s, and trained scientists to run the system using uranium fuel that the United States supplied. Washington stopped the flow of uranium in 1976 when it believed that the South African government was secretly building nuclear bombs.

<http://sputniknews.com/africa/20150316/1019572591.html>

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The Wall Street Journal – New York, NY

OPINION

Why the 'Nuclear Utopians' Are Wrong

Unilaterally reducing or eliminating America's nuclear arsenal will not make the world a safer place

By Keith B. Payne

March 15, 2015

A debate over the future of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is at a pivotal moment. Last month the Obama administration proposed a budget that calls for modernization of the "nuclear triad" of missiles, submarines and bombers. This is crucial because since the end of the Cold War the U.S. nuclear arsenal has been cut by 80% and after decades of neglect each leg of the triad is aging.

Nevertheless, the Defense Department's \$15.9 billion nuclear modernization budget for fiscal year 2016, up slightly from 2015, has met strong disapproval from analysts and others whom I call nuclear utopians. This group

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insists that the U.S. should delay or skip modernization, make further deep reductions in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, or even eliminate it.

By contrast, nuclear realists believe that, given the belligerence of Russia and China and their buildup of nuclear forces, prudence now demands that the U.S. modernize and make no further reductions below those already scheduled in the 2010 New Start Treaty. The congressional defense-budget hearings now under way will have far-reaching implications for U.S. national security and international order.

Nuclear utopians tend to believe that international cooperation, not nuclear deterrence, has prevented nuclear war since World War II. As Rose Gottemoeller, U.S. undersecretary of state for arms control, claimed in a speech last month: "We have been spared that fate because we created an intricate and essential system of treaties, laws and agreements." The U.S. can lead the world toward nuclear reductions, the utopian thinking goes, by showing that Washington no longer relies on nuclear weapons and seeks no new capabilities.

This U.S. example, says George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, will "induce parallel" behavior in others. But if the U.S. attributes continuing value to nuclear weapons by maintaining its arsenal, says Stephen Young of the Union of Concerned Scientists, "other countries will be more inclined to seek" them. In short, the U.S. cannot expect others to forgo nuclear weapons if it retains them.

Nuclear realists respond that the U.S. already has cut its tactical nuclear weapons from a few thousand in 1991 to a few hundred today, while deployed strategic nuclear weapons have been cut to roughly 1,600 accountable weapons from an estimated 9,000 in 1992, with more reductions planned under New Start. Robert Joseph, a former undersecretary of state for arms control, notes that these reductions "appear to have had no moderating effect on Russian, Chinese or North Korean nuclear programs. Neither have U.S. reductions led to any effective strengthening of international nonproliferation efforts."

Realists point out that foreign leaders base their decisions about nuclear weaponry largely on their perceived strategic needs, not in response to U.S. disarmament. Thus a close review of India by S. Paul Kapur, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, concluded that "Indian leaders do not seek to emulate U.S. nuclear behavior; they formulate policy based primarily on their assessment of the security threats facing India."

The same self-interested calculation is true for those nuclear and aspiring nuclear states that are of security concern to the U.S. They seek nuclear weapons to coerce their neighbors, including U.S. allies, and to counter U.S. conventional forces to gain a free hand to press their regional military ambitions.

Moreover, many U.S. allies have given up the nuclear option because America protects them with a "nuclear umbrella." Some allies, including the Japanese and South Koreans, have said that if the U.S. nuclear umbrella loses credibility, they may consider getting their own. Further U.S. reductions may thus inspire nuclear proliferation.

Nuclear utopians and realists also perceive international relations differently. Utopians see an orderly system that functions predictably and increasingly amicably. Based on this perception they make two confident predictions.

The first is that U.S. deterrence will work reliably even with a relatively small nuclear arsenal, or even nuclear zero. In 2010 the authors of an essay in *Foreign Affairs* predicted confidently that a U.S. capability to retaliate "against only ten cities" would be adequate to deter Russia.

A second prediction is that differences between the U.S. and Russia or China will be resolved without regard to nuclear threats or capabilities. The 2012 report by the Global Zero Commission claimed that, "The risk of nuclear confrontation between the United States and either Russia or China belongs to the past, not the future."

Nuclear realists have no confidence in these predictions. Before the nuclear age, great powers periodically came into intense conflict, and deterrence relying on conventional forces failed to prevent catastrophic wars. Since 1945, however, a powerful U.S. nuclear arsenal appears to have had a decisive effect in deterring the outbreak of World War III and containing regional crises and conflicts. Further deep U.S. reductions now would likely increase the risks of war, possibly including nuclear war.

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Today as for millennia, international relations are fluid, unpredictable and dangerous. Russia's shocking aggression in Europe is a cold reminder of this reality. In January prominent Russian journalist Alexander Golts warned, "The West has forgotten how it had used nuclear deterrence to coexist with the Soviet Union. Now it will have to open up that playbook once more."

Further erosion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal would take decades to reverse, create fear among key allies, and inspire foes to challenge an America that appears less able to deter conflicts, nuclear or otherwise, in the hard times ahead. These are the stakes in the current debate over nuclear modernization.

Mr. Payne is the director of the Graduate School of Defense and Strategic Studies at Missouri State University, and a former deputy assistant secretary of defense.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/keith-payne-the-nuclear-utopians-are-wrong-1426457846>

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The Diplomat – Tokyo, Japan

OPINION/The Koreas

Why North Korea Won't Have Its ICBM Anytime Soon

Evidence indicates North Korea is actively developing a true ICBM. But when will it be ready?

By 38 North, John Schilling for *The Diplomat*

March 16, 2015

This article was first published at 38 North, a blog of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins SAIS. It is republished with kind permission.

The past year might seem to have been one of conspicuous inactivity in North Korea's long-range rocket program. The last flight test was the December 2012 launch of an Unha-3 carrying North Korea's first successful satellite. Since then we have seen only the usual Scuds and Nodongs and possibly an improved variant of the short-range, solid-fueled KN-02 "Toksa." The Musudan and KN-08 missiles so proudly displayed in July 2013 have not been seen since, and neither has been flight tested. In short, one might be tempted to conclude that the regime has given up its pursuit of long-range weapons.

But conspicuous inactivity can mask quiet activity, visible mainly to the sort of people who spend their hours scrutinizing satellite imagery of obscure corners of the DPRK. I'm not one of them, but I am on their mailing lists. And these observers have seen interesting developments lately. Possibly most significant in the near-term have been reports of the continuation of the rocket engine ground testing that has been underway at the Sohae Satellite Launching Station since 2012, if not before. There has also been significant infrastructure construction at that facility, including a recently modified gantry tower sized for a space launch vehicle (SLV) much larger than the Unha-3. Most recently, a potential test facility for a submarine missile launch system was identified, which, while certainly not suited for long-range rockets, indicates active exploration by the North of possible new launch platforms. It is worth emphasizing, however, that such a development is likely far in the future.

The possibility that North Korea may have begun to move on from the Unha-3 SLV is not surprising; most nations retire their first SLV after one to three successful flights. After demonstrating basic spaceflight technology at minimum cost, a more sophisticated and capable design is usually developed for operational space missions. With a larger gantry waiting at Sohae, this appears to be the North's plan, and it will be interesting to see what sort of space missions are on Pyongyang's agenda. A North Korean astronaut may be far in the future but communications satellites in geostationary orbit or spy satellites may not.

That said, an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) using the basic Unha design, does not appear to be part of Pyongyang's plan. We first mistook that rocket (from grainy satellite photos) as an ICBM, and gave it the delightful name "Taepodong-2." But the Unha is clearly not optimized for military use; it is too large and cumbersome, and its upper stages would have more thrust if they were meant to carry heavy warheads. If the plan were to evolve the Unha-3 into a capable ICBM, or even to use it for technology development for other ICBM-class systems like

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the KN-08, they would most likely continue testing the current design and eventually a more sophisticated but not larger system.

Still, it is possible that, in a pinch, the DPRK might deploy a limited number of these systems as a stop-gap measure to demonstrate an ICBM capability. Other countries, like China, have done just that. Moreover, there have been reports dating back to the 1990s about North Korea exploring building missile silos, most recently at Mt. Paektu, near the Chinese border. It is not clear that the Unha rocket — 8 ft in diameter and nearly 100 ft tall — could even fit in those silos. And we have not seen the reentry vehicle testing that would be necessary to turn the Unha into a weapon. With large rockets, what goes up does not necessarily come down, at least not in one piece. However, we cannot rule out limited deployment of an Unha-derived ICBM as an interim capability.

Ground testing of rocket engines could give insight into what long-range missiles North Korea may build, and there is evidence of extensive activity since about 2012. Unfortunately, it is not always clear what engines are being tested. The most obvious possibility is the Isayev 4D10 engine North Korea is believed to have acquired from Russia along with a number of surplus R-27 submarine-launched missiles in the 1990s (that's the SS-N-6 to all you old-school cold warriors). This is likely the only high-performance liquid-fueled engine available to North Korea, but in over 15 years, no North Korean rocket using this engine has been successfully flown. Without a high-performance engine in this class, North Korea cannot hope to build an ICBM smaller or less cumbersome than the Unha.

As indicated by the spectacular loss of a U.S. Antares rocket in October of last year, ex-Soviet rocket engines that have been sitting in warehouses since the early 1970s are troublesome at best. It should be noted that four out of five Antares launches with the Russian NK-33 engine were successful; North Korea would likely be satisfied with missiles that can match that performance. However, requalifying the old Russian engines for U.S. use required approximately 15 series of ground tests over a three-year period, with direct Russian assistance. If North Korea is getting serious about using its old R-27 engines, they are probably having more trouble than anticipated and may have another year or more of testing to do. Other possibilities for the observed testing include integrated clusters of North Korea's demonstrated Scud and Nodong engines, and possibly new engines of North Korean design.

Of chief concern to the United States is the KN-08 road-mobile ICBM first spotted in April 2012 in a parade in Pyongyang. The availability of high-resolution imagery from the July 2013 parades allowed for a more refined assessment of the KN-08 missile than was previously available. The parade articles were mock-ups, but of a more advanced design than was seen a year earlier, with items like fuel ports and interstage structural reinforcement visible in consistent locations. Figure 1 shows an image from the parade, and Figure 2 the model derived from that image.

Figure 1: KN-08 mock-up from a July 2013 parade.



Figure 2: KN-08 external configuration.

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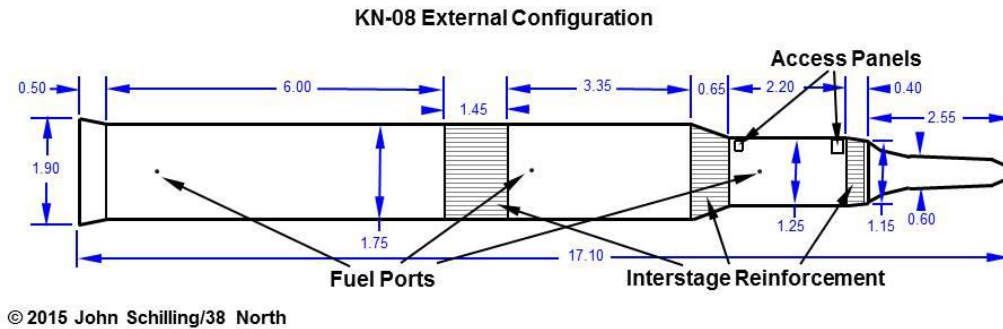
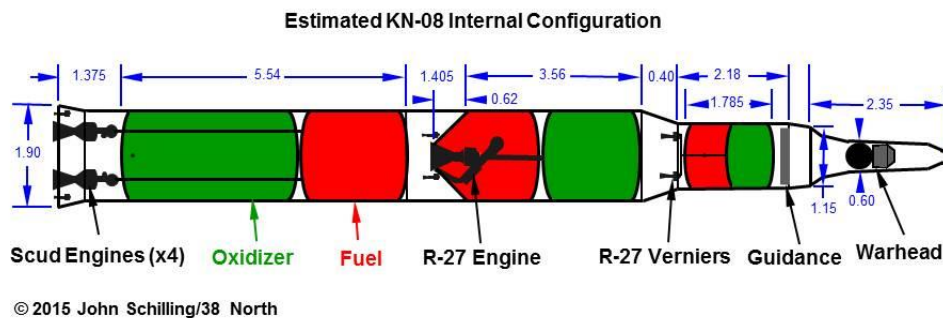


Figure 3: Estimated KN-08 internal configuration.



The missile is slightly smaller than first estimated — only 1.9 m in diameter rather than 2.0 meters, and 17.1 m long. Figure 3 shows the current best estimate for the internal configuration of the KN-08. The fuel ports and interstage reinforcement limit the size of the engine bays, and the only known North Korean engines that would fit these bays while still providing adequate thrust are a cluster of four improved Scud engines for the first stage, a complete R-27 engine for the second stage, and a set of R-27 vernier engines for the third stage. The KN-08 also sports a triconic reentry vehicle at the business end. This is a simple and robust design well suited for novice rocket scientists, though not conducive to great accuracy. And, importantly, not tested in North Korea. There is no way to fit that test between the Yalu River and the 38th parallel; and no way to get the results back without a North Korean ship somewhere downrange. So any test with a North Korean ship parked near the impact zone is something we are going to want to look for.

The KN-08 (along with the North's new Musudan intermediate-range and old Nodong medium-range missiles) is sized for a warhead of about 60 cm in diameter, consistent with a total warhead weight of 500 to 700 kg. It is plausible that North Korea's nuclear testing to date has produced a low-yield (~10 kiloton) fission warhead in this class. With such a warhead, the KN-08 could achieve a range of 7,000 to 9,500 km, probably enough to reach parts of the west coast of the United States. (The Musudan, by comparison, would have a range of only 3,000 to 4,500 km, capable of reaching Guam but not the U.S. mainland.)

It has been repeatedly suggested that the KN-08 parade models are simply fakes and that there is no real missile being developed. Indeed, until there is a test flight — even a failed one — there is no way to be sure. However, if they are fakes, they are now sophisticated and technically credible ones, representing a substantial investment of money and engineering talent. North Korea has in other programs (such as the Unha) demonstrated almost everything it would need to make a real KN-08 except the second stage engine and the reentry vehicle. They are also busy with ground tests of an unknown large rocket engine that they don't need for any of their other programs. The safest assumption is that the DPRK is doing exactly what it looks like it is doing — building a real KN-08 ICBM. The question is whether, and when, they will succeed.



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Without flight testing, the KN-08 will not be an operational weapon. Even under ideal conditions, flight tests of early ICBMs have a high failure rate; the probability of success if the first flight attempt is a combat launch is extremely small. In order to field the KN-08 as an operational weapons system, North Korea will need first to complete its engine ground test program and achieve reliable operation of the R-27 engine. Then, Pyongyang will have to complete a series of flight tests, with each incorporating design modifications based on what has been learned. At least one of these will need to include reentry vehicle testing with a downrange recovery ship. Only when the full test sequence is complete can the production of operational missiles begin.

The pessimistic scenario (from a U.S. viewpoint) is that North Korea aggressively pursues these developments and encounters no major difficulties. Even in this case, the earliest plausible timeframe for operational deployment would be 2018 for the more complex KN-08 missile. North Korea might deploy as many as 50 of these missiles using stockpiled R-27 components, and eventually learn to manufacture equivalent systems themselves, allowing a second-generation KN-08 with improved performance to be deployed circa 2025. Foreign assistance could play a critical role, providing technical advice and maybe specialized parts and materials. A schedule this aggressive allows little room for mistakes, and that really calls for expert assistance. If the North Koreans are teaching themselves rocket science, they are likely to make quite a few mistakes before they get it right.

The most realistic scenario sees operational deployment of the KN-08 shortly around 2020. North Korea might choose to deploy a small force of Unha-derived ICBMs as an interim capability; these would be large and cumbersome weapons subject to preemptive attack. The number of KN-08 missiles would be limited to one or two dozen and no second-generation system would be seen before 2030. First-generation missiles would be transportable rather than mobile, limited to paved roads and prepared sites and requiring hours to ready for launch. They would be generally unreliable and inaccurate, incapable of targeting anything smaller than a large city, and equipped with low-yield fission warheads.

We could, however, see North Korea struggle with the challenges of developing long-range missiles for a decade or more. For example, domestic political, economic and technical constraints could all impede North Korea's progress, as could more effective economic sanctions and other diplomatic efforts (that prevent further long-range tests). The North could still deploy a few Unha-derived ICBMs. And, of course, the substantial force of Nodong missiles — some almost certainly nuclear-armed — would pose a continued regional threat, along with shorter-range tactical systems. North Korea can certainly cause a world of grief if the regime is desperate enough, even if it can't directly target American cities.

Which of these will come to pass is something we should expect to learn from North Korea's long-range missile tests. The North will soon reach the point, if they have not already, where they can learn little more about missiles from ground tests or from satellite launches. If Pyongyang does not test long-range missiles, or if it does and the tests persistently fail, we should have little to fear. A pattern of success, including reentry vehicle tests with a downrange support ship, would be a clear warning sign of dangerous developments to come.

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<http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/why-north-korea-wont-have-its-icbm-anytime-soon/>

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Carnegie Moscow Center – Moscow, Russia

OPINION/Article

An Unnoticed Crisis: The End of History for Nuclear Arms Control?

By Alexei Arbatov

March 16, 2015

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The Ukrainian drama has occupied the world's attention for more than a year, in competition only with the military offensive and Internet-broadcast atrocities of the Islamic State. Another crisis is, however, looming in the background. While not currently associated with mass casualties and material damage, this crisis may eventually have no less destructive consequences. It is the unraveling of nuclear arms control, both in regard to the limitation of nuclear weapons and their nonproliferation.

Taking the first real limitation on nuclear weapons, the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, as the starting point for the history of nuclear arms control, today marks the first time in a half century that there is a real prospect of losing the legal regime for managing the most horrific instrument of devastation ever created. Although arms control has faced difficulties in the past, never before have virtually all negotiating tracks been simultaneously stalled, existing treaties been eroded by political and technological developments, and the planning for next steps been so in doubt.

It is true that the two key treaties—the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty—are still in force. However, both are under severe pressure and their futures are by no means assured. The United States rejects any limitation on its ballistic missile defense (BMD) program and has no intention of ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) of 1996. Russia refuses any limitations on its substrategic nuclear arms. In the Russian expert community, there are calls for Moscow to withdraw from the INF Treaty, New START, the CTBT, and even the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) itself.

During the Ukrainian crisis there has been loose talk about nuclear weapons by senior officials on both sides of the conflict and even provocative “conceptual” speculation over the employment of nuclear arms in a local conflict, to a degree not heard since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

The seven nuclear-armed states besides Russia and the United States have not moved an inch toward limiting their own nuclear forces. They condition such limitations on the “Big Two” coming much closer to their numerical levels, implying another order-of-magnitude reduction on top of the 80 percent cuts already undertaken by Russia and the United States since 1991.

Nuclear nonproliferation is also in trouble. Barely a single point of the action plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference has been implemented, including the agreement to hold a conference on the establishment of a weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the Middle East. The November 2013 interim agreement on Iran's nuclear program has not yet been turned into a long-term, comprehensive one. Negotiations with North Korea have been in limbo for many years and there is no prospect of their revival. There is a high risk that the NPT Review Conference in May 2015 will be another fiasco, possibly triggering the general demise of the NPT regime.

Meanwhile, negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty have been deadlocked for many years. U.S.-Russian cooperation on the safety and security of nuclear sites and materials was ended in 2014, and Russia has declared that it will not attend the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit.

The Ukraine crisis has greatly exacerbated—but did not cause—the unraveling of nuclear arms control, which became obvious in 2011 but probably started as early as the late 1990s. There are many causes of this crisis.

International politics is one cause. In the post-Cold War world order, nuclear-arms limitations are no longer in the foreground of international security as the principal means of preventing the greatest threat to mankind—global nuclear apocalypse. Local conflicts, international terrorism, and nuclear proliferation have taken their place.

Moreover, global and regional powers with quite different points of view, ambitions, and political and military experiences from Russia and the United States are now important international players. As a result of all these factors, the nuclear arms limitation process has, since the late 1990s, suffered from neglect and the absence of clear priorities and consistent goals.

Other reasons for the current crisis are technological. Developments in non-nuclear BMD systems and long-range, precision-guided offensive weapons, as well as their proliferation, have complicated nuclear arms control. The

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development and buildup of nuclear arms and ballistic missiles by many states besides the United States and Russia has had a similar effect.

The proliferation of nuclear technologies and materials is blurring the line between the peaceful and military uses of nuclear energy. Nuclear energy programs are changing from a reward for non-nuclear states for accepting the NPT to a legal way of developing the potential to obtain nuclear arms quickly—and of getting to the “nuclear threshold” to satisfy prestige or security ambitions.

The “end of history” for nuclear arms control may be avoided only if a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine crisis is achieved, and if all parties learn the necessary lessons to avoid a repeat. But this, by itself, will not be enough.

An aggressive search for new formats, concepts, and methods is urgently needed to adapt nuclear arms control to the new realities. One possible way forward may be to disentangle the present knot of problems by treating as separate questions further strategic arms reductions; assurances about the capabilities of BMD systems; limitations on existing and emerging long-range, precision-guided offensive forces and programs; and reductions in substrategic nuclear arms.

A search should also start for innovative ways to build confidence about limitations on the nuclear forces of third states. Doing so would help to strengthen the NPT and enhance the nonproliferation regime for missiles and missile technologies.

As difficult as this task is, the main challenge is to restore cooperative relations among key global and regional powers and alliances. These relations should be adapted to the emerging new post-post–Cold War world order. Relationships in this order should be molded through patient negotiations, not through arbitrary resort to military force or economic sanctions. And one of its central pillars should be nuclear arms control—restored and modernized.

This is an abbreviated version of a longer paper that will be published in the coming months on Carnegie.ru.

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<http://carnegie.ru/2015/03/16/unnoticed-crisis-end-of-history-for-nuclear-arms-control>

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The National Interest – Washington, D.C.

OPINION/Feature

Overblown: Russia's Empty Nuclear Sabre-Rattling

Current Russian nuclear programs present no cause for undue alarm.

By Steven Pifer

March 17, 2015

As the Ukraine-Russia crisis deepened and West-Russia relations plunged to their lowest point since the Cold War, Moscow has rattled its nuclear saber. Russian strategic rocket forces have conducted an increased number of exercises, Bear bombers have probed the air defenses of NATO members, and Vladimir Putin has engaged in nuclear chest-thumping.

All this aims at getting attention, and it has done so. Analysts have sounded the alarm in Washington as Russia upgrades or develops plans to upgrade all legs of its strategic triad.

The Pentagon must closely track trends in Russian strategic nuclear forces. Russia is America’s only peer competitor when it comes to nuclear weapons. The size and structure of Russian strategic nuclear forces will affect decisions regarding the size and structure of U.S. strategic nuclear forces.

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One should, however, keep Russian strategic force developments in perspective. That means taking a number of factors into account: the overall strategic balance, the fact that Russian modernization is taking place after a lengthy pause, the difference between Russian and U.S. strategic modernization cycles, and the longer service lives of U.S. strategic weapons systems.

Consider first the balance of U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces. The 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) requires that, by February 2018, the United States and Russia each reduce its strategic forces to no more than 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and strategic bombers and no more than 1,550 deployed strategic warheads.

According to data exchanged under New START, as of October 1, 2014 the United States had 1,642 deployed strategic warheads, compared to 1,643 for Russia. The number of deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and strategic bombers for the United States was 794, compared to 528 for Russia. There exists a balance in deployed strategic warheads, with the U.S. military holding a substantial numerical advantage in the number of deployed strategic delivery vehicles. That advantage will persist for many years.

These numbers conceal an additional area of U.S. advantage. The U.S. military has “downloaded” all of its ICBMs and most, if not all, of its SLBMs. As a result, the missiles carry fewer warheads than their maximum loadings.

The Trident D-5 SLBM can carry eight warheads. Under New START, the Trident D-5s carry an average of only four to five warheads. All Minuteman III ICBMs have been downloaded to carry a single warhead, even though two-thirds of them could carry three.

The U.S. military also maintains a large number of non-deployed nuclear warheads in storage. If New START were to break down, the United States could add hundreds of nuclear warheads—well over 1,000—to its strategic ballistic missile force. The Russian strategic ballistic missile force has nowhere near the capacity to match that.

Russia has an array of strategic modernization programs underway. It has launched the first three of what are planned to be eight Borey-class ballistic missile submarines, which carry the new Bulava SLBM. Russia is also deploying the SS-27 Topol-M ICBM and its multiple-warhead variant, the RS-24 Yars, and plans to begin deployment of the RS-26 ICBM in 2016. The Russian Air Force is developing a new strategic bomber, the PAK-DA, to augment or replace its Tu-160 Blackjack and Tu-95 Bear-H aircraft.

Russia’s strategic modernization programs and strategic activities are indeed far more robust today than they were ten or fifteen years ago. But much of that is playing catch up. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian economy went into freefall. Defense spending crashed, and the Russian military bought little in the way of new strategic weapons in the 1990s and early 2000s. Many missiles, such as the SS-18 and SS-19 ICBMs—which today still carry about one-half of Russia’s deployed strategic warheads—have reached and passed their service warranty dates.

The combination of retiring old systems and deploying a limited number of replacements brought the level of Russian strategic forces steadily down from 1991 until 2010. Russian strategic delivery vehicle and accountable warhead numbers fell well below the limits established in the 1991 START I Treaty (which expired in late 2009).

Rising oil prices in the early-mid 2000s boosted the Russian government’s revenues and prompted a rebound in defense spending. Increased funding led to the new missiles and submarines that are coming online now. Growing revenues also allowed Moscow to restart activities that had been on a long hiatus, such as a resumption of global flights by Russian long-range bombers.

A second consideration is that the United States and Russia are on different cycles when it comes to strategic force modernization. We have seen this before. The Soviet Union deployed significant numbers of (then) new strategic systems in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Those included the SS-18 and SS-19 heavy ICBMs and Blackjack bomber, as well as the Typhoon-class ballistic missile submarine (of “*Hunt for Red October*” fame), which was armed with the R-39 SLBM.

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U.S. strategic modernization peaked some years later. The U.S. military deployed the new Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine, Trident D-5 SLBM, MX ICBM and B-1 and B-2 bombers in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Russia's strategic modernization program today appears to far outpace U.S. efforts. Flash forward ten years, and the picture will look very different.

By the early 2020s, barring delays brought about by a slowing economy, the Russian military will have completed most of its strategic update programs, with the possible exception of a new bomber. In the mid-2020s, the U.S. military will be building new ballistic missile submarines to replace the Ohio-class boats, a new long-range strike bomber and perhaps a new nuclear-armed cruise missile. It will also be preparing either to build a new ICBM or to modernize and further extend the life of the Minuteman III ICBM, a less expensive option. The United States will then dominate on strategic modernization.

A third consideration is that the U.S. and Russian militaries have different philosophies when it comes to how they build, maintain and operate strategic offensive systems. Russia, like the Soviet Union before it, builds a strategic missile, generally keeps it in the arsenal for a shorter time than its American counterpart will spend, and then retires the missile and builds a new one.

The U.S. military tends to keep missiles in the force for considerably longer periods of time, using life extension programs to ensure their continued longevity as well as to modernize them. That is a Pentagon policy choice, which balances cost, reliability and effectiveness factors.

For example, the U.S. Air Force first deployed the Minuteman III ICBM in 1970. Under the New START Treaty, the Air Force intends to maintain 400 deployed Minuteman III missiles. The missile will remain operational until 2030, and one option for modernizing the ICBM force is simply to extend the life of the Minuteman III beyond 2030.

The Minuteman III's Russian counterpart is the SS-25. First deployed in 1985, fifteen years after the Minuteman III, only about fifteen of these ICBMs remain in the Russian inventory. The remainder will be retired from service by 2020, if not earlier. Most SS-25s have served only about one-third as long as the Minuteman III will serve.

Consider the two countries' respective SLBMs. Russia has begun to deploy the Bulava SLBM, which made its first flight test in 2005. The U.S. Navy's SLBM is the Trident D-5, first flight-tested in 1987 and deployed in 1990.

Newer does not always equate to better. The Bulava missile has failed in roughly 40 percent of its 21 flight tests over the past ten years. The older Trident D-5, on the other hand, has a stunning record of more than 140 consecutive successful flight tests.

None of this is to suggest that the United States can ignore Russia's ongoing program to modernize its strategic forces. Some elements are troublesome.

For example, the Russian military is developing the new Sarmat ICBM, which will reportedly be capable of carrying as many as ten-fifteen warheads. Too large to be mobile, the liquid-fueled Sarmat will be silo-based. Russian analysts have criticized the planned program as destabilizing, particularly in a crisis. They note that large, multiple-warhead ICBMs in silos present attractive targets for a preemptive strike. Indeed, the U.S. Air Force decision to download its Minuteman III ICBMs was driven in part by the calculation that a single-warhead ICBM in a silo would, in a crisis, offer a less inviting target.

Russia remains the only country that could physically destroy the United States, so Russian strategic forces matter. Washington needs to make wise investments in its own strategic forces. If it does, current Russian programs present no cause for undue alarm—particularly as Moscow continues to adhere to the limits of the New START Treaty.

And if there is a senior American military officer who would like to swap U.S. strategic nuclear forces for those of Russia, he (or she) has yet to speak out.

Steven Pifer directs the Brookings Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative.

<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/overblown-russias-empty-nuclear-sabre-rattling-12432?page=show>

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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.

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