



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER
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MAXWELL AFB, ALABAMA

Issue No. 969, 06 January 2012

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Welcome to the CPC Outreach Journal. As part of USAF Counterproliferation Center's mission to counter weapons of mass destruction through education and research, we're providing our government and civilian community a source for timely counterproliferation information. This information includes articles, papers and other documents addressing issues pertinent to US military response options for dealing with chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats and countermeasures. It's our hope this information resource will help enhance your counterproliferation issue awareness.

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Bloomberg News

Iran's Nuclear Fuel Rod Doesn't Pose Military Threat, U.S. Analysts Say

By Brian Wingfield

January 3, 2012

Iran's development of a nuclear fuel rod for medical research isn't a milestone in a quest for atomic weapons, according to energy analysts in the U.S.

"This has some diplomatic significance and virtually no military significance," James Acton, a senior associate in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, said yesterday in a telephone interview.

Although Iran's announcement sends a signal that the country may have the ability to develop fuel for research uses without external help, such units need uranium that's less concentrated than what's needed to make weapons, he said.

The first fuel rod was inserted into the core of Tehran's atomic research reactor, which makes isotopes used in cancer treatments, Iranian state news agencies reported Jan. 1. The disclosure triggered alarms among U.S. and European Union leaders who say Iran may be developing a covert nuclear-weapons program and are seeking to thwart development.

President Barack Obama on Dec. 31 signed into law sanctions to deter dealings with Iran's central bank, and the EU may decide by Jan. 30 whether to extend its sanctions.

Iran, the world's third-largest oil exporter, denies pursuing atomic weapons and says it's developing nuclear technology for civilian purposes. The country's first nuclear-power plant, a Russian-built 1,000-megawatt facility, was connected to the national power grid on Sept. 12 and then closed for testing in October.

Revolution Milestone

The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said the plant may operate at full capacity in February, to coincide with the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian news agency Mehr reported Nov. 23.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, a Vienna-based organization that promotes the peaceful use of atomic energy, didn't have a comment on Iran's announcement, Gill Tudor, a spokeswoman, said by telephone.

Iran is running out of the 19.75 percent enriched uranium needed to power Tehran's research reactor, Sharon Squassoni, director of the Proliferation Prevention Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said in a phone interview.

Only Argentina and France make this type of fuel, she said. Weapons-grade uranium is at least 90 percent enriched and power-plant fuel is enriched about 3 percent to 5 percent, she said.

Making Medicine

Iran can produce 20 percent enriched uranium, according to Acton, who said he thinks it is pursuing a nuclear-weapons program.

"Twenty-percent-enriched uranium is only for the needs of a reactor that produces medicine," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said at a Sept. 23 news conference in New York. He has said Iran will cease enrichment activities if it can receive a guaranteed source of 20 percent enriched uranium.

Iran's fuel-rod announcement may lessen the likelihood that the country will participate in such a deal, Squassoni said.

"If fuel fabrication succeeds now, there's one fewer incentive" to negotiate, she said in an e-mail.

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Iran's announcement "provides political cover for their continued enrichment of uranium" to just less than 20 percent, according to Squassoni. "It has no connection to a nuclear weapons timeline."

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-04/iran-s-nuclear-fuel-rod-isn-t-a-military-threat-u-s-energy-analysts-say.html>

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The Daily Star – Lebanon

Russia Says Iran Has No Long-Range Missiles

January 03, 2012

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

MOSCOW: Iran has no long-range missiles, a Russian defense official said Tuesday in Moscow's first response to a series of tests conducted by Tehran near the vital Strait of Hormuz oil supply route.

"Iran does not have the technology to create intermediate or long-range inter-continental ballistic missiles," defense ministry spokesman Vadim Koval told the Interfax news agency.

"And it will not get such missiles any time soon," he added.

Iran reported testing three missiles close to the Gulf oil-transit waterway on Monday amid preparations by Western powers to impose more economic sanctions over Tehran's nuclear drive.

Two of the missiles can fly a maximum 200 kilometers (120 miles), generally considered short-range weapons, although the Iranian media and a navy spokesman described one of them as "long-range".

The other, a Nasr anti-ship missile, had a shorter range of 35 kilometers.

Russia has relatively close ties with Iran and built its first nuclear power station in the southern city of Bushehr. Moscow has also delivered the nuclear fuel for the reactor.

Moscow has echoed Western concerns about the nature of the Iranian nuclear program but has stopped short of publicly accusing Tehran of seeking atomic weapons and always said that the standoff should be solved by diplomacy.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/International/2012/Jan-03/158665-russia-says-iran-has-no-long-range-missiles.ashx#axzz1iXIXgxcR>

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Al Jazeera – U.A.E.

US Vows to Stay in Gulf Despite Iran Warning

Pentagon and White House dismiss Iran's threat of closing Strait of Hormuz as sign of Tehran's "weakness".

4 January 2012

The Pentagon has responded to an Iranian warning to keep US aircraft carriers out of the Gulf by declaring that US warships will continue regularly scheduled deployments to the strategic waterway.

George Little, the Pentagon press secretary, said on Tuesday that the navy operates in the Gulf in accordance with international law and to maintain "a constant state of high vigilance" to ensure the flow of sea commerce.

Earlier in the day, Iran's army chief warned an American aircraft carrier not to return to the Gulf. Iran has also said it could block one of the world's key oil tanker sea lanes in response to economic pressures.

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Jay Carney, the White House press secretary, dismissed Iran's warnings as signs of Tehran's weakness and of the international isolation it has faced for pursuing a nuclear programme.

"It's the latest round of Iranian threats and is confirmation that Tehran is under increasing pressure for its continued failure to live up to its international obligations," Carney said. "Iran is isolated and is seeking to divert attention from its behaviour and domestic problems."

The US navy has said the aircraft carrier *USS John C Stennis* and another vessel left the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz a week ago.

Strategic channel

Iran has been holding naval exercises since then near the strait at the mouth of the Gulf, which is a critically important passage for international oil supplies.

"The deployment of US military assets in the Persian Gulf region will continue as it has for decades," Little said in a written statement.

"These are regularly scheduled movements in accordance with our longstanding commitments to the security and stability of the region and in support of ongoing operations."

The US Navy Fifth Fleet has long had its headquarters in the Gulf state of Bahrain.

Asked whether the US intends to send naval reinforcements to the Gulf in response to Iranian talk of closing the Strait of Hormuz, Little did not answer directly but said, "No one in this government seeks confrontation over the Strait of Hormuz. It's important to lower the temperature."

Little reiterated that any closure of the strait would not be tolerated, but he declined to elaborate.

Iran test-fired a surface-to-surface cruise missile on Monday as part of its naval manoeuvres in the Gulf, prompting Iran's navy chief to boast that the strait is "completely under our control".

Asked about the significance of the missile test, Little said: "We are aware of reports of missile tests that are apparently tied to Iranian naval exercises that began in late December. They have the right to conduct exercises."

Little said the US believes that the "Iranian regime should devote its energy and resources to establishing friendly relations with countries in the Gulf region".

Juppe's remarks

Against this backdrop of tensions in the Gulf, Alain Juppe, the French foreign minister, has urged the international community to adopt tougher sanctions on Iran.

He told French broadcaster ITV on Tuesday that "there is no doubt" that Iran is pursuing the development of nuclear weapons, saying the last report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had been "quite explicit on this subject".

Iran denies that its nuclear programme is aimed at producing weapons, insisting it is for peaceful purposes only, such as generating electricity.

The IAEA report, published in November, concluded that some alleged clandestine work by Iran could not be used for any other purpose than making nuclear arms.

"This is the reason why France has blocked all dialogue and negotiations with Iran and of course imposed tougher sanctions," Juppe said.

"The French president has put forward two proposals: the first one is a freezing of the assets of Iran's central bank - which would be a very harsh measure - and the second is an embargo on Iranian oil exports."

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/01/201213184717894927.html>

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Washington Post

Iran Prepares Bill to Bar Foreign Warships from Persian Gulf

By Thomas Erdbrink

January 4, 2012

TEHRAN — Iran's parliament said Wednesday that it was preparing a bill that would prohibit all foreign warships from entering the Persian Gulf unless they received permission from the Iranian navy.

The bill, disclosed by the semiofficial Fars News Agency, surfaced a day after Iran's armed forces commander warned a U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier not to return to the gulf, remarks that rattled commodities markets and helped drive up oil prices.

The proposed legislation suggested that at least some Iranian officials are serious about trying to stop the U.S. Navy from entering the oil-rich gulf waters. Iranian analysts said that the bill probably would not have been introduced if it were not supported by higher authorities.

"If the military vessels and warships of any country want to pass via the Strait of Hormuz without coordination and permission of Iran's navy forces, they should be stopped by the Iranian armed forces," Fars quoted lawmaker Nader Qazipour as saying in explaining the bill. He noted that Iran regards the strait as part of its territorial waters and said the bill would be presented to leaders in parliament next week.

Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi restated Iran's position that "transnational forces" have no place in the region. Vahidi also said that Iran is willing to organize joint military drills with neighboring countries, Fars reported Wednesday.

The news agency, which has ties to Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps, asserted that the carrier USS John C. Stennis, which steamed out of the Persian Gulf last week, had escaped while being "chased by Iranian warships."

The United States has dismissed as overblown rhetoric Iran's threats to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow entrance to the Persian Gulf, in retaliation for Western sanctions over the country's uranium-enrichment program.

Iran's increasingly bellicose tone has coincided with a currency crisis that has forced the government to intervene to prop up the ailing rial. Helping to drive the rial to record lows was U.S. legislation signed Saturday by President Obama that includes a provision for unilateral sanctions against the Central Bank of Iran.

Iran responded by injecting an additional \$200 million into the country's currency markets Wednesday, Fars reported. Although the rial's rate appeared to stabilize, people involved in trading dollars said they were hanging on to their foreign currency for now.

Many Iranians were trying to buy dollars anyway, but sellers were hard to find.

"Nobody is selling their dollars," said one exchange office representative who did not want to be identified. "The current rate is artificial."

The crisis spurred rumors that the job of the governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Mahmoud Bahmani, was in jeopardy. According to Fars, he has asked for more authority to clamp down on "speculation" against the rial.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-prepares-bill-to-bar-foreign-warships-from-persian-gulf/2012/01/04/gIQAhlWYyP_story.html?tid=pm_pop

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Xinhua News – China
January 5, 2012

Iran Will Never Give Up Uranium Enrichment Activities: Spokesman

TEHRAN, Jan. 4 (Xinhua) -- Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said Wednesday that Iran will never give up uranium enrichment activities.

"Enrichment activities will never be given up in our country," Mehmanparast told Xinhua. "The nuclear issue of our country is totally peaceful and is a basic right of our nation."

The spokesman's remarks come as the Islamic republic and the G5+ 1 (five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany) are negotiating to restart new round of talks over Tehran's nuclear program.

Mehmanparast stressed that there is never a talk about giving up "peaceful" nuclear activities in Iran.

The West suspects that Iran's uranium enrichment may be meant for producing nuclear weapons, which has been denied by Iranian officials. In January 2011, six world powers wrapped up crucial nuclear talks with Iran in Istanbul but failed to reach any agreement on the Iranian nuclear program.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-01/05/c_122535809.htm

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Tehran Hails Moscow's Diplomatic Efforts over Iranian Nuclear Program

5 January 2012

MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev during a telephone conversation on Thursday that Tehran backed Moscow's diplomatic efforts to settle the dispute over Iranian nuclear program, the Kremlin said.

"Medvedev noted with satisfaction the Iranian president's positive assessment of the Russian initiative, a plan of gradual restoration of trust to the Iranian nuclear program," the Kremlin said, adding that both leaders had agreed to continue talks on this issue.

The two presidents spoke the next day after the EU officials reached a preliminary agreement, backed by the United States, to impose an embargo on the Iranian oil exports that make up 60 percent of the country's revenues.

The oil embargo may leave Tehran without its second largest market since the EU states buy 450,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day (bpd). China, the main customer of Iranian oil, has already cut its orders by more than half this month.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran aggravated in late December when the Iranian Navy, involved in the Velayat-90 military drills, discovered an American aircraft carrier nearby.

The situation around the maneuvers escalated when Iranian authorities said they might close the Strait of Hormuz which accounts for one-third of the world's tanker-borne oil and 17 percent of all oil traded worldwide. The United States however rejected the threat, saying that its navy would carry on mission in the strait.

Western powers and Israel suspect Iran of seeking to build nuclear weapons. Iran denies this, saying its program is civilian in nature.

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<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20120105/170631657.html>

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SpaceDaily.com

Iran Working 'Flat Out' on Nuclear Arms: British Minister

By Staff Writers

Washington, Agence France-Presse (AFP)

January 5, 2012

Britain's defense minister said Thursday Iran is assumed to be working "flat out" on a nuclear weapons capability and will only be deterred if the cost to its economy becomes too high.

But Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said Britain would not favor a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, and instead will rely on sanctions targeting its oil exports, central bank and general economy.

"My working assumption is that they are flat out," Hammond said in a question-and-answer session at a US think tank here, referring to the Iranian nuclear efforts. "I think they are going as fast as they can."

"And I think our working assumption also has to be that Iran is set on a course that it will only be deterred from if the price for achieving the goal that they set out becomes too high.

"That is what we are in the process of doing by stepping up the pressure on oil revenues, on the operation of the central bank, on the economy generally," he said.

Hammond, who was to meet later in the day with US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, spoke a day after the European Union reached a preliminary agreement on an oil embargo against Iran. The timing of such a move was still under debate.

Iran's has threatened to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world's oil flows, if it is hit with sanctions, and has warned the United States not to send an aircraft carrier back into the Gulf.

The tensions have sent the price of oil soaring.

Hammond said both Britain and the United States would make sure that their response to any provocation was "very measured, that there isn't an accidental escalation. What we cannot answer for is whether there is a plan on the other side to escalate."

In response to a question, he said: "We would not favor a preemptive strike. We have been very clear that we need to maintain the pressure but we also need to engage. And any question of a preemptive strike is abandoning the engagement."

http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Iran_working_flat_out_on_nuclear_arms_British_minister_999.html

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United Press International (UPI).com

Canadian PM: Iran Greatest World Threat

January 6, 2012

CALGARY, Alberta, Jan. 6 (UPI) -- Iran poses the greatest threat to the world with its persistence in acquiring nuclear weapons, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said.

Speaking on CHQR radio in Calgary, Alberta, the Conservative leader said Tehran's recent disclosure it was processing its own uranium to weapons-grade capability, firing cruise missiles in the Strait of Hormuz and warning the United States to keep aircraft carriers away showed a worsening situation.

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"Iran is a very serious threat to international peace and security. In my judgment, it is the world's most serious threat to international peace and security," Harper said Thursday.

"This is a regime that wants to acquire nuclear weapons, it is clearly trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and it has indicated some desire to actually use nuclear weapons."

Harper said "even the Chinese and Russians" were aware of the mounting threat but the international community's various sanctions against Iran so far weren't enough to deter the Iranian regime, Postmedia News reported.

"I think the problem is there's not [international] consensus on what to do about it precisely," Harper said.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2012/01/06/Canadian-PM-Iran-greatest-world-threat/UPI-64461325857023/?spt=hs&or=tn

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Journal of Turkish Weekly – Turkey

Iran, West Say They're Ready to Resume Nuclear Talks

Friday, 6 January 2012

Turkey has delivered a Western offer to Tehran to renew negotiations over its nuclear program, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said, expressing hope that talks stalled a year ago could soon be revived.

As new sanctions from the United States and the European Union added pressure on the Iranian economy, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran was also interested in returning to the negotiating table.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Salehi, Davutoglu said Salehi had "responded in kind" to "an expression of willingness by the West to resume negotiations" that he had brought.

"We are waiting for a good result coming out of the willingness of the two parties to go back to the negotiating table," Davutoglu told the news conference, carried live on Iran's Press TV with English translation.

"As far as negotiations over Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program, we hope that we will gain good results and the unfavorable conditions that have emerged, we hope that they will go away. On the international arena we hope that Iran will be able to have good ties."

Salehi confirmed Iran was ready to return to talks with the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (P5+1) at a time and place agreed by both sides.

He said the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who heads the P5+1 delegation, had suggested to Turkey that it host the talks and that Ankara had agreed.

<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/129517/>

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Yonhap News – South Korea

January 4, 2012

N. Korea's Military Stronger than Ever: Think Tank

SEOUL, Jan. 4 (Yonhap) -- North Korea's military is stronger than ever despite a struggling economy on the brink of collapse, a private think tank said Wednesday, calling for more effective countermeasures to the growing threat.

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In 2011, North Korea operated a 1.02-million-strong army and a record number of tanks, warships and air defense artillery, according to a report by the Korea Economic Research Institute (KERI).

The communist country has fewer combat planes than in 1986, but its air power has been boosted by top-class MiG-29 fighter jets since the 1990s, the report said. It also pointed to an increase in the number of submarines as a notable development.

North Korea is also developing nuclear weapons in order to maintain an upper hand over South Korea's military, making it difficult for the South to defend itself in the event of a North Korean attack, KERI said.

The report added that the communist state is likely to target South Korea's weak points where U.S. forces will have difficulty intervening. It also called for an accurate understanding of North Korea's military threat and preparation of effective countermeasures.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/04/50/0401000000AEN20120104005000315F.HTML>

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Arirang News – South Korea

January 4, 2012

US: Inter-Korean Relations Must First Improve to Resume 6-way Talks

By Han Da-eun, Arirang News

The US state department says North Korea should improve its relations with South Korea first, before talks can resume on the six-party nuclear table.

During a regular press briefing on Tuesday, department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters that the two key preconditions for resuming the stalled six-way dialogue, is a continued improvement in inter-Korean ties, and the North keeping the pledge it made back in 2005 to denuclearize in a deal with the US, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan.

Her remarks came after North Korea's New Year's message which denounced the South, and asserted that Pyongyang would not deal with the Lee Myung-bak administration.

When asked whether another round of US-North Korea talks on food aid will take place anytime soon, Nuland said that Washington is still waiting to hear from the North Korean side.

Regarding the communist state's renewed demand for the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea, the US state department reiterated that Washington remains committed to the US-ROK alliance.

A department officials, during an interview with Seoul-based Yonhap New Agency said, the US-South Korea ties has never been stronger, and that Washington will continue to maintain a force posture that is operationally resilient and politically sustainable.

http://www.arirang.co.kr/News/News_View.asp?nseq=124374&code=Ne8&category=1

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Yonhap News – South Korea

January 5, 2012

U.S. Urges China to Make Clear 'Restraint' by N. Korea's New Leadership

By Kim Deok-hyun and Lee Haye-ah

Issue No. 969, 06 January 2012

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SEOUL, Jan. 5 (Yonhap) -- The United States has called on China to use its influence with North Korea to urge "restraint" by the North's new leadership, a senior U.S. diplomat said Thursday, as the international community keeps a wary eye on the sensitive transition of dynastic power in Pyongyang.

Kurt Campbell, Washington's top diplomat for Asia who arrived in South Korea Wednesday following his two-day stay in China, held talks with South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan and other senior officials to discuss the North Korean issue.

"We urged China to make clear the importance of restraint by the new North Korean leadership," Campbell told reporters. He is the first high-ranking U.S. official to visit Asia since the Dec. 17 death of Kim Jong-il.

Campbell also called for North Korea to improve its ties with South Korea. "We believe an essential component in an improving relationship with North Korea and the international community has to be an improvement in north-south relations."

"So we stand firm on that and we believe that ultimately an improving relationship between the North and the South is essential going forward," he said.

In Beijing, Campbell urged "all parties" to refrain from "any provocations" after the sudden demise of Kim and the succession of his youngest son, Kim Jong-un, to the helm of North Korea.

"In all of our meetings, I underscored the strongest possible commitment of the United States to the enduring partnership between the United States and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the determination to be as tightly aligned as we together face the new leadership transition in North Korea," he told reporters in Seoul.

On Friday, Campbell will leave for Japan before returning to Washington.

The U.S. diplomat said that South Korea, the U.S. and Japan plan to hold a trilateral meeting to discuss the aftermath of Kim's death.

"Our three-way coordination remains strong and we look forward to hosting a trilateral meeting in Washington at an early date," he said.

The situation in North Korea appears stable and the power transfer seems to be running smoothly as Kim Jong-un took up key posts at both the North's military and Workers' Party.

Still, experts remain wary about the leadership transition, given the age of the younger Kim, believed to be in his late 20s, and his lack of preparation to take over the communist regime.

On Wednesday, South Korea's defense ministry said it will soon sign a new joint operational plan with the U.S. to counter any North Korean attacks and hold regular military drills, citing the possibility of a provocation by the North as the new leader may want to demonstrate his empowerment.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain high following the North's two military attacks that killed 50 South Korean people, mostly military personnel, in 2010.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/05/48/0401000000AEN20120105009600315F.HTML>

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Daily Yomuiiri – Japan

N. Korea Tried to Ship WMD Reagent in '09 / U.N. to Launch Probe into Arms Violation

By Michinobu Yanagisawa, Yomiuri Shimbun Correspondent
January 6, 2012

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NEW YORK--North Korea tried to export ampules of reagents for chemical weapons to Syria in 2009, in violation of the U.N. Security Council resolution banning arms shipments from the country, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned.

The United Nations plans to launch an investigation into the violation soon, diplomatic sources said, representing a rare probe into the reclusive communist country's arms trade related to chemical weapons.

The case highlights the close relationship between North Korea and Syria in the development and production of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), diplomatic observers said.

In November 2009, Greek authorities seized a container from a Liberia-registered freighter as it headed toward Syria. Inside the container they found wooden boxes stuffed with several types of ampules believed to be made of glass, each containing liquid or powdered reagents, the sources said.

These reagents are used to identify chemical substances that become airborne after the use of chemical weapons, the sources said. The reagents can be used in chemical weapons attacks and for defending against them, they added.

The Greek authorities also seized about 14,000 anti-chemical weapons suits from the vessel. The suits were the same type as those seized by South Korean authorities in September of the same year, which were determined to be designed for military use as they are extremely airtight, the sources said.

Observers say North Korea tried to build up their foreign currency reserves through the export of reagents and protective suits.

In September 2011, the Greek government reported the seizure of ampules and protective suits to the U.N. Security Council's Sanctions Committee as a violation of the council's resolution adopted in June 2009 that bans North Korea from exporting arms-related materials.

According to unpublicized U.N. data and the sources concerned, the committee's expert panel representing the council's five permanent members plus Japan and South Korea is looking into the possibility of conducting on-the-spot inspections in Greece.

North Korea and Syria are two of the six nations that have yet to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention that took effect in 1997. The convention prohibits the development, production and possession of chemical weapons.

According to estimates by South Korea's National Defense Ministry, North Korea possesses 2,500 to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, including mustard and sarin gases. The Nuclear Threat Initiative, a U.S. private organization, considers Pyongyang's stockpile the third-largest following the United States and Russia.

North Korea and Syria are thought to be cooperating in the development of other WMDs, such as missiles and nuclear arms. The diplomatic sources said the latest case is the tip of the iceberg in their bilateral cooperation in WMD production.

Kim Jong Un, who recently succeeded his father Kim Jong Il as the leader of North Korea, has maintained the country's military-first policy. Pyongyang's close relations with Damascus are thus likely to continue in the years to come, some analysts said.

China's lax checks blamed

The diplomatic sources pointed out the possibility that the attempted export of chemical weapons reagents was conducted through China, as in past smuggling cases involving North Korea.

China's cooperation is indispensable to ensuring Pyongyang's compliance with U.N. sanctions against it, they added. The resolution for the sanctions was adopted following the North's nuclear test in May 2009.

As long as Beijing does not stop neutralizing the sanctions against Pyongyang, it will be impossible to prevent arms smuggling by North Korea, the sources said,



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The U.N. resolution calls for U.N. member nations to take forcible measures to inspect North Korean cargo ships if they are suspected to be in violation of the arms embargo. But it is unclear whether China inspected North Korea's cargo shipments strictly.

According to annual reports submitted by the Sanctions Committee's expert panel to the Security Council in 2010 and 2011, China served as a transit point in at least four of the 10 arms smuggling cases involving North Korea.

<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/world/T120105006117.htm>

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AsiaOne News – Singapore

North Korea Power Shifting from Military to Party

The Korea Herald/Asia News Network

Friday, January 06, 2012

Under the new leadership of Kim Jong-un, the centre of power of the North Korean regime seems to be moving toward the Workers' Party from the military, experts said.

The deceased despot Kim Jong-il, who the North announced died of a heart attack on December 17, was general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and chairman of the National Defence Commission of North Korea. As such, the senior Kim, Jong-un's father, exercised absolute power both in the party and the military.

As the creator of the "military-first" policy, the late Kim tipped the scale of power more toward the military. However, his successor and third son is seeking some balance between the party and the military, said Koh Yu-hwan, professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University.

"In the era of Kim Jong-il, the regime was basically based on the military-first policy, which enabled an excessive and powerful growth of the military. It is clear that the centre of power is moving back to the party from military," Koh told The Korea Herald.

"In a communist state, the military is supposed to follow the leadership of the party. North Korea appears to be establishing the party's unique leadership under the 'supreme commander.'"

Kim Jong-un, presumed to be 29 years old, assumed the title of Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army on Saturday, just two days after his father's memorial service. He is also Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

"The Central Military Commission is expected to play a larger role than the National Defence Commission," Koh said.

Kim Jong-un had prepared in earnest for the takeover of leadership from his father since the third Worker's Party Convention in September 2010, when the party's status was raised one notch higher.

Cheon Seong-whun, a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification, noted that just because power is seen moving closer to the party does not mean the military's significance will be reduced.

While the "military-first" policy is to control the armed forces directly, more weight on the party means controlling the military through the party's grip, he said.

"It can be interpreted as a change in how the regime manages the military but it does not mean that North Korea will be discarding the military-centered policy," Cheon said.

The young Kim's power was reaching all areas of domestic affairs in North Korea even before the death of Kim Jong-il, because the North's military and intelligence institutions have been reporting through the young Kim to

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the senior Kim since late 2009, and the party and state organisations, since 2010, according to Cheong Seong-chang, senior fellow at the Sejong Institute.

"Now, Kim Jong-un is at the top position to make key policy decisions. The 2012 joint New Year editorial shows that North Korea will put top priority on the establishment of Stalinist, absolute dictatorship under which all the senior officials, soldiers and civilians should follow the order of the young Kim," Cheong said.

He said Pyongyang might scrap the post of Chairman of the National Defense Commission, which the deceased Kim Jong-il held, as well as the agency itself in a bid to cement Kim Jong-il as "an eternal Chairman of the National Defence Commission," just like Pyongyang abolished the post of "president" after Kim Jong-il's father, Kim Il-sung, died in 1994.

KINU's Cheon agreed with Cheong, saying it may appear "blasphemous" to North Koreans for Kim Jong-un to use his father's title as is.

"Only Kim Il-sung held the title of president and only Kim Jong-il had the title National Defence Commission Chairman. Likewise, Kim Jong-un might come up with a new title," Cheon said.

Chung Gyu-sup, North Korea expert at Kwandong University, said that moving power from the military toward the party has been sensed since the latest party's convention, but it might not be a big change.

"Unlike South Korea, the North Korean society does not move under the rule of law. On the surface, a power shift could be an issue to be debated in the academic circles. But it is premature to tell how the core power of the North Korean leadership is moving right now," said Chung.

<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20120106-320202.html>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
January 6, 2012

S. Korea Dismisses Rumors of Nuclear Explosion in N. Korea

SEOUL, Jan. 6 (Yonhap) -- South Korea on Friday dismissed as groundless a rumor that a light-water reactor has exploded in North Korea's nuclear complex, sending leaked radiation to Pyongyang and as far as South Korea.

The rumor cited an unidentified secret Japanese intelligence operative in the isolated communist country.

The rumor quickly spread among securities firms in Yeouido, South Korea's equivalent to New York's Wall Street, through instant messenger services on Friday afternoon as ordinary citizens also tweeted messages on the allegation.

South Korean officials quickly dismissed the rumor, saying they received no intelligence on the alleged explosion of the light-water reactor and that there is little probability of radiation leaks from the nuclear blast.

"Nothing has been confirmed," an official of South Korea's intelligence authorities said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity, citing policy.

South Korea's financial watchdog asked police to launch an investigation into the latest rumor that experts say could be part of a scheme by stock market manipulators to make money.

An official of LIG Investment and Securities Co. said those involved in derivatives may be behind the rumor to make illicit gains.

South Korea's benchmark Kospi index fell 20.6 points to 1,843.14.



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In November, North Korea said it was speeding up its production of low enriched uranium for its light-water nuclear reactor as the United States expressed concerns over Pyongyang's construction of a new nuclear reactor.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/06/79/0401000000AEN20120106008300315F.HTML>

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BusinessWeek

N. Korea Vows to Reinforce Nuclear Program After South's Offer

January 06, 2012

By Sangwon Yoon

Jan. 6 (Bloomberg) -- North Korea responded to South Korean President Lee Myung Bak's offer of "a window of opportunity" for inter-Korean dialog with a vow to "further reinforce" its status as a nuclear-weapons state.

"If a change is to be expected in the peninsula, it is only a total ruin of the Lee group, which is as good as the living dead," the North's Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Korea, said in a statement carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency yesterday.

"As long as the enemy is persistent in his moves for aggression, the DPRK will further reinforce the position of the nuclear-weapons state to protect its dignity and sovereignty," it said. DPRK as an acronym of North Korea's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The committee responded to Lee's New Year message, which expressed the possibility of a "new era" in inter-Korean relations if the North shows sincerity in denuclearizing.

The committee statement was the North's first message on the status of the North's nuclear weapons program since Kim Jong Il died and his son Kim Jong Un was installed as leader.

The U.S. urged China, the North's biggest ally and trade partner, to "make clear the importance of restraint by the new North Korean leadership," Kurt Campbell, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Asia, said in Seoul yesterday after meeting South Korean officials.

"We stressed that North Korea should take steps to improve relations with the Republic of Korea and to abide by its international obligations and commitments," Campbell said.

North Korea has twice detonated a nuclear device and in November 2010 fired artillery at an island in the Yellow Sea, killing four people in the first shelling of South Korean soil since the 1950-53 Korean war.

Editor: Joshua Fellman, Terry Atlas

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-01-06/n-korea-vows-to-reinforce-nuclear-program-after-south-s-offer.html>

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United Press International (UPI)

India Rejoins the Nuclear Submarine League

January 5, 2012

NEW DELHI, Jan. 5 (UPI) -- India officially rejoined the nuclear submarine operators' club when the Russian manufacturers handed over to an Indian crew the Nerpa, in Russia's far east.

The crew will set sail for India toward the end of January in the 8,000-ton submarine that will be renamed Chakra, The Times of India said.

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Nuclear submarines are operated also by the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China. India briefly operated a nuclear submarine from 1988-91 when it leased a Charlie class vessel from Russia. It, too, was called the Chakra while in service with the Indian navy.

The Akula II class Nerpa submarine will be with the Indian navy under a 10-year lease from the Russians, The Times of India report said.

Handover of the Nerpa was completed during a signing ceremony at the Bolshoi Kamen shipbuilding yard in Bolshoy Kamen, a small coastal town whose main activity is construction and repair of nuclear subs.

Bolshoy is around 25 miles from Vladivostok in the isolated Primorsky Krai region and is off-limits to foreigners.

The Nerpa leaves Russia after a controversial history, including a fatal on-board fire in November 2008 just after the vessel was made operational by the Russian navy.

The vessel was sailing through the Sea of Japan when the firefighting system was accidentally activated, Russian media reported at the time. Three naval personnel and 17 civilian specialists died after inhaling chemical gases, Russia's Defense Ministry said.

Amur Shipbuilding began construction of the Nerpa at their plant in Komsomolsk-on-Amur around 1993. The ship was intended for the Russian navy but delays and financial problems lengthened the construction schedule.

A \$650 million deal with Indian government in 2004 rescued the program which by then had been stopped. The Nerpa finally was launched in October 2008 and entered service with the Russian navy in late 2009, pending handover to India.

The Chakra will be joined by another nuclear submarine, the Arihant, built by the Ship Building Center in Visakhapatnam. A launch ceremony for the 6,000-ton, 365-foot Arihant was in July 2009 and the ship with a crew of up to 100 is expected to be operational by the end of this year.

A report by the defense news Web site Defense Professionals in July 2009 said the Arihant design possibly is based on the older 5,000-ton Russian Charlie-II class submarine. Russia decommissioned its last Charlie class sub in 1994.

http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2012/01/05/India-rejoins-the-nuclear-submarine-league/UPI-94951325763000/

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Bellona – Norway

January 4, 2012

Photos Shed Light on Cause of Fire Aboard Russian Nuclear Submarine; Questions of Whether Missiles Onboard Remain

Photographs posted by a blogger of the Russian nuclear submarine that caught fire last week while in dry dock have shed more light on what possibly caused the intense 20-hour blaze and demystify some of the initial speculation surrounding the breath of the fire and its implications.

The photographs, which appear on Blogger51.ru show flames belching from the interior of the port side of the Yekaterinburg nuclear submarine while it was located for repairs in dry dock in Roslyakovo near Severomorsk 1500 kilometres north of Moscow. Blogger51 is an alternative news web site covering events in northeastern Russia not carried by the official press.

Another photograph shown by Blogger51 of the submarine, which was taken before the fire, shows that an enormous hole had been cut in the port side of the submarine's forward section, making an opening the submarine's hydro-acoustic chamber.

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The official explanation for the fire was that unsafe welding works set a wooden scaffolding around the submarine ablaze, which then spread to the rubber outer hull of the submarine. The Emergency Service's Ministry reported that it had submerged the submarine up to its conning tower on Thursday night, when the fire broke out, but battled smoldering flames between the outer hull and the inner hull until Friday morning.

According to the analysis by Nikitin, who is also chairman of Bellona's Environmental Rights Center Bellona in St. Petersburg, this explanation is essentially untrue: There was no wooden scaffolding. The scaffolding was made of metal. The hydro-acoustic chamber, he said, is typically filled not only with water, but heavy oils and other contaminants that are found in the waters near naval ports. The antennas themselves also contain a certain amount of oil for isolation. In additions there are high-pressure air tanks located in between the inner and outer hulls.

This, said Nikitin would explain the duration and intensity of the fire: The oil residues that were left behind after the water was taken out of the acoustic chamber would have burned for a long time, and damaged air pressure tanks would have accounted for the intensity and height of the flames reported by witnesses via various internet social networks.

Flames of up to 10 meters at some periods and were seen from kilometers away as the fire blazed. The fire was initially reported to the local branch of the Emergency Service Ministry by civilians, not the navy.

Weapons onboard?

Reports today indicate that the submarine has left dry dock in Roslyakovo and is headed toward the Okolnaya base, to proceed further for extensive repairs at Severodvinsk in Arkhangelsk Oblast.

Okolnaya is a base equipped with cranes designed to remove ballistic missiles from submarines.

According to Nikitin, it is typical to leave weaponry aboard a submarine when it puts in for only short terms repairs, as was the case with the Yekaterinburg as it has now been removed from dry dock so quickly.

But whether the vessel contains intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads or simply test missiles remains in question.

The Defense Ministry when reached by Bellona on Wednesday maintained there were no weapons on board and would not confirm if the vessel was being moved to Okolnaya.

The 18,200 tonne Yekaterinburg, a Delta-IV class submarine, is built to carry 16 intercontinental ballistic missiles with four warheads a piece and 12 torpedoes.

President Dmitry Medvedev has charged Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin with conducting a thorough investigation into the Yekatriburg fire.

http://www.bellona.org/articles/articles_2011/blog_photos

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The Hill

Obama Announces Sweeping New Military Strategy for Pentagon

By John T. Bennett

January 5, 2012

The Pentagon on Thursday unveiled a sweeping new military strategy that jettisons plans for fighting two major wars at once while cutting the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal.

The strategy describes a new approach to fighting al Qaeda and puts China and Iran on notice, while readying the military for reduced funding and more austere budgets.

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It will mean a smaller U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal as the Pentagon enacts \$400 billion in cuts, as well as troop reductions, though these are not spelled out.

“As we look beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — and the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints — we’ll be able to ensure our security with smaller conventional ground forces,” President Obama said in prepared remarks for a Pentagon briefing laying out the new strategy.

“Yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know — the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats,” Obama said.

At the same time, Obama and the Pentagon’s new strategy argue that the U.S. military can effectively fight al Qaeda even with reduced funding.

“We will keep our armed forces the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped fighting force in history,” Obama writes in the strategy.

Republicans in Congress were quick to blast the new plans, accusing Obama of putting America's military dominance at risk.

“This is a lead-from-behind strategy for a left-behind America,” said House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon (R-Calif.). “The president has packaged our retreat from the world in the guise of a new strategy to mask his divestment of our military and national defense. This strategy ensures American decline in exchange for more failed domestic programs.”

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, did not directly criticize Obama, but said the United States cannot have a “budget-driven defense strategy.”

“The United States must continue to lead the world in order to ensure our economic prosperity and national security,” McCain said. “For that reason, when it comes to how we fund and procure our defense programs, business as usual will not cut it. I intend to ensure that our national defense strategy and budgets continue to strengthen America in its position of global leadership.”

The strategy states that as the Afghanistan war winds down, the U.S. operation against al Qaeda will “become more widely distributed.” It also will be designed to include “a mix of direct action and security force assistance,” meaning the U.S. will help allies combat the extremist network.

In the era of smaller Pentagon budgets, the military “must be capable of deterring and defeating aggression ... in one region even when our forces are committed to a large-scale operation elsewhere,” according to the strategy.

The document also vows that Washington will “invest as required” to field the kinds of combat systems that allow U.S. forces to enter and operate where “states such as China and Iran” have weapons intended to deny such access.

The calls for a smaller nuclear arsenal are sure to draw fire from hawkish congressional Republicans.

The strategy argues deterrence goals “can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force,” and suggests a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. inventory as well as their role in U.S. national security strategy.

The call for nuclear weapons cuts is an exception in the strategy, which otherwise does not spell out what weapons systems would be cut as the Pentagon budget shrinks. Those specifics will come next month when the 2013 military spending plan goes to Capitol Hill, officials say.

The new strategy signals troop cuts will be coming — but contains no numbers. “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations,” it says.



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Obama reiterated U.S. plans to shift focus to the Pacific region, with an emphasis on China as the wars in the Middle East near an end.

"As I made clear in Australia, we'll be strengthening our presence in the Asia Pacific, and budget reductions will not come at the expense of this critical region," Obama said.

The so-called "comprehensive review" was ordered last year by Obama, at the behest of former Defense Secretary Robert Gates. The former Pentagon chief wanted to ensure more than \$400 billion in budgets cuts over a decade were made strategically.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey both have said the military can remain lethal and effective if the \$350 billion in cuts through 2013 mandated by the August debt deal stand. (The Pentagon contends that will equal a \$450 billion cut to planned spending.)

The strategy reveals plans to shake up America's military presence in Europe, which will move "from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities."

The document signals the military will continue adding to its cyber arsenal of offensive and defensive systems. It also states the Pentagon will "enhance" its ability to "conduct effective operations to counter the proliferation of [weapons of mass destruction]."

Jeremy Herb contributed to this story.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/defcon-hill/policy-and-strategy/202505-new-pentagon-strategy-ends-plan-to-fight-two-wars-at-once>

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Mainichi Daily News – Japan

January 6, 2012

U.S. Conducted 3rd Plutonium Test to Check Nuke Arsenal Last Summer

WASHINGTON (Kyodo) -- The United States conducted a third experiment using plutonium to examine the capabilities of its nuclear arsenal last summer, according to data from a nuclear research institution.

The test, which did not involve an atomic explosion, was similar to a subcritical nuclear test, but the experiments did not require powder or a nuclear-testing site.

According to the National Nuclear Security Administration, an entity under the U.S. Energy Department, the new test complemented nuclear subcritical tests.

Conducted at the Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico, it followed one in November 2010 and March in 2011.

The United States has conducted nuclear subcritical tests three times since President Barack Obama took office in January 2009. The continued tests aimed at maintaining the country's nuclear arsenal may draw criticism as Obama has called for a world without nuclear weapons.

The NNSA documents showed that the latest test used "Z machine" equipment capable of generating the strongest X-rays in the world to simulate the fusion that occurs in nuclear weapons.

Researchers at the facility studied the behavior of plutonium under extreme pressure and temperature conditions similar to a nuclear explosion.

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The United States has not conducted underground nuclear tests since 1992. But it has continued nuclear subcritical tests since 1997 and new plutonium tests since 2010 to see if its nuclear weapons built during the Cold War era remain in an operational state.

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/international/news/20120106p2g00m0in089000c.html>

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Huffington Post

Fujitsu Cyberweapon Developed In Japan: 'Good' Virus Created For Cyber Defense

By Gerry Smith

January 4, 2012

The Japanese Defense Ministry is developing a computer virus aimed at seeking and destroying cyber attacks launched against the country, according to local media reports.

The malware-fighting cyberweapon, which is being created by defense contractor Fujitsu for an estimated \$2.3 million, has the ability to identify the source of a cyber attack with a high level of accuracy, then replicate itself from computer to computer, cleaning up viruses across the network, according to the Japanese news site The Yomiuri Shimbun.

The cyberweapon, which has been in development since 2008, has been tested in a closed network environment and was developed for defense, but Japanese lawmakers must create new legislation allowing for its use because it would appear to violate current Japanese law, the site reported.

News of the effort comes amid growing concern over cyber attacks in Japan. Last year, Japan's parliament, Japanese defense contractor Mitsubishi Heavy and several of Japan's overseas diplomatic missions were targeted by hackers, according to local media.

Japan's development of a cyberweapon is part of what some experts see as a growing cyber arms race. The Stuxnet computer virus, which damaged Iran's nuclear program in 2010, was one of at least five cyber weapons developed on a single platform, according to Russian computer security firm Kaspersky Lab. Security experts believe the United States and Israel were behind Stuxnet, though the two nations have not accepted responsibility.

In a blog post, Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant for security firm Sophos, said there have been other attempts to create viruses designed for benevolent reasons, such as a computer worm designed to combat child pornography.

But Cluley said the effort in Japan could have unintended consequences, such as being difficult to control or destroying evidence needed to locate the infection on the network.

"An out-of-control 'good' virus could spread randomly or unexpectedly from machine to machine, meaning it may be hard to contain," he wrote in a blog post.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/04/fujitsu-cyberweapon-japan_n_1183462.html

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Chicago Tribune

OPINION/Analysis

Analysis: Nuclear Fuel Test Won't Hasten Iran Bomb: Experts

By Fredrik Dahl, Reuters

Issue No. 969, 06 January 2012

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January 4, 2012

VIENNA (Reuters) - Iran's latest claim of a breakthrough in its nuclear program seems unlikely to bring it any closer to having atomic bombs soon, but serves rather as another defiant message to the West.

This week's announcement that Iran has successfully made and tested fuel rods for use in nuclear power plants appeared designed to show that sanctions are failing to halt its technical advances and to strengthen its hand in any renewed negotiations with the major powers.

Spent fuel can be reprocessed to make plutonium, potential bomb material, but Western worries about Iran's nuclear program are focused on its enrichment of uranium, which can also provide the core of nuclear weapons if refined much more.

"The (fuel rod) development itself doesn't put them any closer to producing weapons," said Peter Crail of the Arms Control Association, a U.S.-based research and advocacy group.

It could be a way of telling Tehran's foes that time is running out if they want to revive an atomic fuel swap deal that collapsed two years ago but is still seen by some experts as offering the best chance to start building badly needed trust.

Diplomats believe Iran has in the past overstated its nuclear progress to gain leverage in its standoff with Western capitals, and the testing of domestically made fuel does not mean the country is about to start using it to run reactors.

"It is a step in the direction of no longer needing supply from other countries," said Associate Professor Matthew Bunn of Harvard University's Kennedy School.

"But it will be a good number of months or years before it will be at the point where they no longer need supply from other countries."

Even if the fuel step is confirmed, it may not add much to already growing Western suspicions that Iran is seeking the capability to manufacture nuclear arms, a charge it denies.

Western powers fear that Iran's uranium enrichment program is part of a covert bid to develop the means to build atomic weapons - suspicions that were given independent weight by a detailed U.N. nuclear watchdog report late last year.

The Islamic Republic says it is refining uranium - material which can have both civilian and military purposes - only for a planned network of nuclear power plants and it could point to the development of fuel rods to back this up.

Iran "still needs to pretend" that it is processing uranium in order to make nuclear fuel and not for weapons, a Western diplomat in Vienna said.

NEGOTIATING TACTIC?

Iran's announcement that it had produced the fuel rods and inserted them in a research reactor core in Tehran coincided with an escalating war of words with the West, in a long-running nuclear row that could spark a wider Middle East conflict.

Tehran has threatened to take action if the U.S. Navy moves an aircraft carrier into the Gulf, its most aggressive warning yet after weeks of saber-rattling as new U.S. and European sanctions take a toll on its economy.

But Iran is also sending out more conciliatory signals: inviting senior U.N. nuclear inspectors to visit and suggesting a resumption of long-stalled talks with the six big powers - the United States, Russia, France, Germany, China and Britain.

That may be a sign of nervousness within the leadership - as the Iranian currency tumbles to a record low against the U.S. dollar - that tightening sanctions might hurt the major oil producer's lifeblood crude exports.



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Nevertheless, Sunday's statement of a fuel breakthrough once again underlined Iran's determination to press ahead with an atomic program its clerical rulers regard as a source of power and prestige.

"They announced the fuel rod production and called for talks at the same time, suggesting the fuel rod is intended more as negotiating leverage," said Crail of the Arms Control Association.

The United States says the drive it leads to isolate Iran has slowed Tehran's nuclear program.

But despite tougher sanctions and suspected sabotage, Iran is pressing ahead with the work and its stockpile of low-enriched uranium would be sufficient for at least two atomic bombs if refined much further.

"Iran's nuclear defiance is ideological and thus cannot be resolved by coercion," said Ali Vaez of the Federation of American Scientists. Washington "should aim for piecemeal solutions that would allow for a face-saving compromise."

Western experts give different estimates of how quickly Iran could assemble a nuclear weapon if it decides to do so - ranging from as little as six months to a year or more.

In 2010, Iran alarmed the West by starting to enrich uranium to a fissile purity of 20 percent, up from 3.5 percent usually required for power plants, bringing it significantly closer to the 90 percent level required for weapons.

Iran said it was forced to take this step to make fuel for the Tehran research reactor after failing to agree terms for a deal to obtain it from the West. But many analysts doubted it would be able to convert its uranium into special reactor fuel.

Harvard's Bunn described Iran's reported nuclear advance this week as "an early test" of whether it could make fuel able to withstand the radiation, temperature and pressure conditions that exist in a reactor.

"It is a long road yet before you would have fuel that you could actually load in the reactor as the fuel that was going to sustain that reactor's operation," he said.

RUSSIAN FUEL SUPPLIES

In Sunday's reports, Iranian media talked both of fuel rods, which are used in nuclear power plants like Bushehr - Iran's only such facility - and fuel plates, which are needed in the Tehran reactor making medical isotopes.

Rods contain small pellets of fuel, usually low-enriched uranium. The research reactor - which is running out of fuel provided by Argentina in the 1990s - uses thin plates with more refined uranium.

Russia has delivered rods for Bushehr, and Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said the plant was likely to keep using Russian-made fuel for many years.

Spent fuel can be reprocessed to extract plutonium - offering a second pathway for bombs besides highly enriched uranium - but Russia will repatriate the material from Bushehr under its contract with Iran.

Neither Bushehr nor the Tehran research reactor is "optimal" for harvesting plutonium, Bunn said.

But Iran is constructing a so-called heavy water research reactor which it hopes to bring on line by the end of 2013.

If fuel for this reactor is made successfully, Iran "will be closer to being able to operate a facility which unlike Bushehr would be better suited to production of plutonium," said Hibbs.

Western diplomats said they were waiting to see whether the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Vienna-based U.N. nuclear watchdog which regularly visits Iranian nuclear sites, could shed more light on Iran's fuel rod announcement.

The IAEA, which has declined to comment on Tehran's move, is expected to issue its next report on Iran in late February.

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In November, it said Iran had begun to irradiate, or bombard with neutrons, a prototype fuel rod at the Tehran reactor.

It also said Iran had started to install "some equipment" at a site near the town of Isfahan for making fuel for the same reactor and that five fuel plates had been produced at a research and development laboratory for testing purposes.

Iranian media said the fuel rods the country had now tested contained natural uranium, not the 20 percent material.

"Even in an advanced nuclear power program with years of experience and lots of fuel fabrication experience - which Iran doesn't have - fuel testing could take a decade or more," Carnegie's Hibbs said.

Edited by Richard Meares and Rosalind Russell

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-rt-us-nuclear-iran-fuelre8030nd-20120104,0,3584988,full.story>

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Al Jazeera – U.A.E.

OPINION/In Depth

Pushing Iran Towards a Nuclear Bomb

Western leaders' current tactics to deter Iran from developing nuclear weapons will likely backfire, writes author.

By Patrick Disney

4 January 2012

New Haven, Connecticut - The United States and its Western allies have utilised nearly every tool at their disposal to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, from sanctions and sabotage to cyber attacks and assassinations. In their zeal, however, Western leaders risk hastening the very thing that they seek to prevent: an Iranian bomb.

It has become increasingly obvious that Iran and the West are now at a state of war, albeit a covert one. Mysterious explosions have rocked the Iranian countryside, while suspected Western intelligence agents have targeted nuclear scientists for assassination.

For Iran's part, recent months have seen a plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, the storming of the British Embassy, the downing of a US stealth drone, and threats to close the Strait of Hormuz. American observers have heard a lot about these events; what they haven't heard about is the high likelihood that Iran will retaliate for what it views as acts of war.

Experts widely believe that if Iran were hit by an Israeli airstrike it would retaliate by, among other things, expelling international inspectors and committing to obtaining nuclear weapons. While an Israeli attack remains a distant possibility, it is more likely that Western intelligence agencies will expand covert actions like the Stuxnet virus and targeted assassinations.

The question, then, is how will Iran respond to these escalations? Based on its past experience, the Iranian regime might seize upon what it views as Western aggression to use as a pretext for building nuclear weapons.

In the 1980s, the revolutionary leaders of the new Islamic Republic of Iran swore off weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as un-Islamic. During the course of the war, however, Saddam Hussein's Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranian troops, spurring Ayatollah Khomeini to reverse his position and restart the country's chemical weapons programme. In the process, Khomeini established the philosophical foundation for a key principle within the Islamic Republic known as "*maslahat-e nizam*" or "expediency of the system", by which the needs of the Islamic Republic as a political institution might trump even Islamic law.

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This suggests that Iran's commitments not to develop WMD in the early 1980s carried an implicit understanding that the religious prohibition on such weapons does not necessarily apply in a state of war.

So far, Tehran's leaders have declared that they have no interest in nuclear weapons, citing the same religious opposition as before. The US intelligence community has repeatedly assessed that if Iran wanted to develop atomic bombs, it has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to do so. Then why hasn't Iran put its technical know-how to use building up a nuclear arsenal? Experts widely agree that Tehran has yet to form a consensus in favour of actually building the bomb, and in the absence of such a consensus prefers merely to keep the option open for the future.

Whether or not Iran builds a nuclear weapon, then, will be based on Tehran's cost-benefit calculation. Fundamentally, the future of Iran's nuclear programme will be decided within the context of Iran's larger foreign policy strategy, which Iran's leaders have characterised as a policy of responding to pressure with pressure. Therefore, the easiest way for Iran to arrive at a consensus in favour of building nuclear weapons would be in response to a provocation from the West.

For the US, the current dynamic with Iran contains a real danger of sleepwalking toward disaster. The goal of Western policy toward Iran is to delay Iran's actual acquisition of a bomb through sabotage, assassinations, cyber attacks and other covert activities. But this is tragically misaligned with the reality of Iranian decision-making.

Trying to dissuade an actor from doing something they don't actually intend to do can easily backfire. The danger in this case is that current Western strategy will trigger a nationalistic "rally round the flag" effect in Iran. Indeed, it already has.

The result of all this may be to actually provoke a more aggressive Iranian response than would otherwise have been the case. The focus of Western policy has been on imposing pressure in order to give Iran's leaders a reason not to weaponise.

Equally important, however, and far too often overlooked, is the need to take care not to give Iran a reason to weaponise - which is exactly what current policy runs the risk of doing.

Patrick Disney is currently a graduate student at Yale University focusing on Iran and nuclear nonproliferation. He previously served as the Assistant Policy Director for the National Iranian American Council.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/20121212653433219.html>

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Yonhap News – South Korea

OPINION/Interview

January 5, 2012

(Yonhap Interview) Regional Powers Must Keep Pressure on N.K. to Denuclearize: British Envoy

By Kim Deok-hyun and Lee Haye-ah

SEOUL, Jan. 5 (Yonhap) -- The British ambassador to South Korea said Thursday that regional powers should not ease pressure on the new North Korean leadership to abandon its nuclear ambitions, despite concerns over stability in the North sparked by the death of Kim Jong-il.

The death of Kim also provides a prospect for the North's new young leader, Kim Jong-un, to improve the livelihoods of North Koreans by engaging with the international community, British Ambassador Scott Wightman said, while conceding it is unclear whether Kim has any interest in seizing that chance.

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"I think it's important that we all maintain pressure on the North Korean authorities to open up and certainly maintain pressure both on them and on those who have influence over the authorities in North Korea to lead to the restarting of the six-party talks process," Wightman said in an interview with Yonhap News Agency.

"That's the way in which denuclearization will happen, that's the way in which the DPRK's relationship with the outside world can really change for the better," he said, referring to North Korea by an acronym of its official name.

The six-party talks have been on hold since April 2009, when North Korea stormed out of the process after a new round of U.N. sanctions, then conducted its second nuclear test a month later.

The North's longtime leader Kim Jong-il was reported to have died of a heart attack on Dec. 17. Since then, his youngest son and designated successor, Kim Jong-un, has taken the helm of Pyongyang by rapidly taking up key posts in both the military and the Workers' Party. Many analysts have questioned whether the inexperienced and young leader, believed to be in his late 20s, can consolidate his grip on power and continue the one-man dictatorship.

Some have suggested the North's new leader might launch another provocation against South Korea this year to resolve internal conflicts and demonstrate his grip on power.

This week, South Korea's defense ministry said it will focus this year on beefing up its defense against possible North Korean attacks, saying, "The possibility of a North Korean provocation still remains as Kim Jong-un is in the process of building his regime."

Asked about the possibility of a North Korean provocation, Wightman said: "I think it's an open question whether they would want to pursue any provocation before the events in April, the hundredth anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth." The birth anniversary of Kim Il-sung, the North's founder and grandfather of Kim Jong-un, falls on April 15.

"What's important for all of us, I think, is that we should be carefully prepared to deal with any particular developments and we can make our best guess about what's most likely to happen," Wightman said.

Britain is one of few Western nations that have established diplomatic ties with North Korea.

Citing information from its embassy in Pyongyang, Wightman said the atmosphere in the capital city was calm and life was beginning to return to normal.

"Shops have reopened, restaurants have reopened and things are broadly continuing as before," the ambassador said.

"For the first couple of days there were visible signs of people paying their respects at different monuments," he said. "But I think much of that has now passed and most people are trying to get on with their daily lives."

http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/n_interview/2012/01/05/51/4801000000AEN20120105002700315F.HTML

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London Guardian – U.K.

OPINION/Julian Borger's Global Security Blog

Iran's First Nuclear Fuel Rod and What It Means

The natural uranium rod appears intended for Iran's heavy water reactor, potentially stoking more tension with the West

Posted by Julian Borger

Thursday, 5 January 2012

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Olli Heinonen, a former IAEA deputy director general and head of the safeguards department (ie chief inspector), has some thoughts about Iran's claim to have manufactured and tested its first uranium fuel rod. This is his guest blog.

In the past few days, at a time of high tension in the Gulf, Iran announced that it had produced and tested its first fuel rod at the Tehran Research Reactor. It also claimed to have mastered the production of nuclear plates.

My understanding is that what is being tested at the TRR is a rod designed to be used at the heavy water reactor under construction in Arak. Making assemblies of plates of the kind required to fuel the TRR itself is still some way off.

Iran has always stated that the TRR is being used to produce radioisotopes through irradiation for industrial and medical purposes. To operate, the reactor needs a core made of fuel assemblies, which contain a total of 30 kg uranium enriched to 20 % U-235. Each fuel assembly is made of thin plates, which contain uranium in form of U₃O₈ (uranium oxide) in aluminium cladding.

It appears from the announcement that what Iran has produced and tested at the hot cells at the TRR is something different: a fuel rod, which typically consists of cylindrical pellets clad in a zirconium tube. The rod Iran claims to have made contains natural uranium, suggesting that it is intended for the IR-40 heavy water reactor at Arak, rather than for a light water nuclear power station like Bushehr, which uses rods of low enriched U-235.

This is a cause for concern as such an action is proscribed by the United Nations Security Council due to its proliferation concerns. Plutonium could be separated from the reactor's spent fuel. Hence this show of ostensibly civilian nuclear progress could end up further stoking international tensions.

Some of the Iranian news articles claim it is easy to manufacture a fuel plate after making a fuel rod. However, manufacturing processes for rods and plates are very different, each with its own challenges, and making a plate using homogeneous 20 % enriched uranium will not be straightforward. Iran has yet to demonstrate it can do this.

If everything proceeds as planned, the first real fuel assemblies can be introduced to the reactor some time next year. That is when current stocks of TRR fuel are due to run out.

The fact that Iran is still a year away from actual production of the first fuel assembly for the TRR provides an opportunity for the P5+1 to negotiate a more comprehensive solution to address the increasing stockpiles of 3.5 % and 20 % enriched uranium.

Iran's current stock of 20 % enriched uranium should be sufficient to provide fuel for next 4-5 years for the TRR. And there is no need for Iran to produce more 20 % enriched uranium. Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili has recently asked to re-launch nuclear talks with the P5+1. What could the P5+1 offer which Iran currently does not have, and what Iran could give in return?

Here's a thought: The P5+1 could provide modern, safe and secure nuclear technology, fuel for the TRR and in the longer term, a more efficient research reactor. Iran could in turn relinquish its stock of enriched uranium.

Iran and the P5+1 should also convert Iran's IR-40 heavy water reactor under construction in Arak to a more proliferation-proof light water research reactor. Such a reactor could use current 3.5 % enriched uranium stock as fuel material, an approach which has recently been demonstrated to be feasible.

Olli Heinonen is now a senior fellow at the Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2012/jan/05/iran-nuclear-fuel>

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CNN.com

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OPINION/CNN Opinion

Time to Ratify Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

By Stephen A. Cheney, Special to CNN

Thursday, January 5, 2012

(CNN) -- It's been a year since the United States ratified the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, and it's time to reflect on its benefits. By allowing us to restart inspections, verifications and the dismantling of nuclear assets, New START has established transparency, predictability and stability that serves the security of the whole world.

We know what the Russians have, and they know what we have, and together we are reducing our arsenals, allowing us all to sleep easier.

Keeping in mind the success of New START, the next logical step would be to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), as Russia did in 2000. The establishment of such a ban on nuclear testing would further strengthen American security.

START I was first proposed by President Reagan. The United States and the Soviet Union signed the agreement in 1991, enhancing stability between the two nations and allowing for a drastic reduction in nuclear weapons. After the dissolution of the USSR, the treaty was inherited by Russia and continued until its expiration in December of 2009.

The expiration of the treaty risked a new arms race that threatened the security gains of the past 17 years. Succeeding the original agreement, New START is the modern recognition that both our nations benefit by fostering transparency between our two strategic nuclear forces.

It is no secret that during the course of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union developed the nuclear capacity to destroy each other, and indeed the very existence of humanity, several times over. At the height of that conflict, the United States and USSR possessed more than 65,000 nuclear weapons between them. Nuclear strategy promoted the concept of "bouncing the rubble," signifying the premise of destruction that nuclear war would unleash.

Yet this era demands thinking outside the conventions of nuclear war. We need weapons for fighting the enemies of today, not the Soviets of yesteryear. In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our greatest threat has not been nuclear weapons fueled by uranium, but buried homemade bombs fueled by fertilizer. Investments in equipment, technology and training designed to combat low technology threats have proven more decisive in protecting the lives of our troops than any of our nuclear assets.

Of course, the United States can and should maintain a strong, credible nuclear deterrent. It also can and should set an example for the rest of the world with responsible ownership of these weapons.

After conducting more than 1,000 nuclear test explosions, the United States has not explosively tested a nuclear weapon in nearly 20 years and instead maintains a stockpile stewardship program to ensure the reliability of the current arsenal. Still the U.S. Senate resists approving the test ban treaty, which would create worldwide networks to apply pressure against states like Iran and North Korea.

These networks of pressure are exactly what we need against rogue states that aren't deterred from nuclear development by the vast American arsenal. These states are more susceptible to pressure outside the nuclear realm, and our strategy must incorporate this understanding to be effective. This means taking a bold diplomatic leadership role. By ratifying the CTBT, at no consequence to our own nuclear capabilities, the United States further establishes an international norm that pressures Iran and North Korea to ratify the treaty as well. We no longer need to test, but these states do in order to bridge their knowledge gaps.

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The success of New START exemplifies the kind of diplomatic leadership the United States must embody. America became a reluctant global leader in the 20th century. But with global power comes global responsibility.

Thrust onto the world stage in periods that demanded leadership, we have seen the consequences of American reluctance to lead. The 21st century is a time of new challenges, be those challenges of economic, environmental or military nature. Leadership doesn't have to be expensive, and there are clear budgetary incentives for reducing our Cold War nuclear arsenal.

As commentators discuss the decline of American influence in the world, we must focus on the power of our example as a staple of international leadership and that means active participation in diplomatic processes and organizations.

Americans firmly believe in their commitment to ideals, principles and morality. New START is supremely representative of that. We should extend that commitment to ratification of the CTBT.

Stephen A. Cheney is a retired Marine brigadier general and the CEO of the American Security Project, a nonpartisan think tank. He spent 30 years in the U.S. military, serving as inspector general of the Marine Corps and commanding general of Parris Island.

http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/05/opinion/cheney-nuclear-weapons-treaty/?hpt=hp_bn9

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New York Times
OPINION/Op-Ed Contributors
January 5, 2012

Iran's Self-Destructive Gamble

By ALIREZA NADER and JAMES DOBBINS

Iran's threats to close the Straits of Hormuz in response to the latest American-led sanctions may be empty posturing. Still, Iran's slow march toward a nuclear weapons capability has dramatically increased tensions between Washington and Tehran. The Obama administration has not taken the option of a military strike off the table, and one must assume that the Iranians have not done so either.

In these circumstances, it is important to realistically judge the nature and extent of the Iranian threat. For all its bluster, the Iranian regime is more vulnerable than at any time in its 32-year history. Internally, Iran is constrained by deep political divisions, civil strife and a woeful economy. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has directly challenged the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, while Khamenei has spoken of eliminating the presidency.

The life of the ordinary Iranian becomes more precarious every day, with rising unemployment, inflation, state repression, and the country's growing international isolation. The regime has maintained a superficial sense of stability through repression.

Legislative elections are scheduled for early March. Leaders of the reformist Green movement are threatening to boycott the ballot, but there will still be a closely fought contest between the more religious and secularist wings of the regime. Both this election and the presidential vote next year could well become occasions for public demonstrations of the sort that threatened the regime three years ago and have since toppled several Middle East governments.

Iran is on the brink of losing its only real ally, Syria, as President Bashir al-Assad looks as if he could be the next Arab dictator to fall. Tightening international sanctions are slowing Iran's nuclear program while limiting its ability to project power. Saudi Arabia, Iran's principal regional rival, is leading the other Gulf states in an ever more

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explicit anti-Iranian coalition. The United States is strengthening its military and political ties with several of these states.

Iran's leaders have watched U.S. forces topple Saddam Hussein and the Taliban with relative ease and NATO help do the same with Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya; Iran's antiquated conventional forces are no match for the U.S. military. And the Iranian regime believes that the United States remains committed to a policy of regime change, even though Washington might not presently have the appetite for a new military intervention.

Iran's leaders believe that having a nuclear weapons capability could deter a U.S. military attack on Iran and safeguard a vulnerable regime. It is unlikely that the regime, concerned with self-preservation, will be the first party to use nuclear weapons in a conflict with the United States or Israel. The actual use of a nuclear weapon by Iran would surely lead to the regime's ultimate end.

Iran is often depicted as an irrational actor, with Ahmadinejad's seemingly erratic behavior and odious rhetoric serving as justification. Yet the clerical-led regime in Tehran is no less rational and calculating than the former Soviet Union or Communist China, both of which were successfully deterred and contained by the United States.

What's more, the Iranian regime faces many internal and external challenges that will facilitate U.S. containment of Iran if it obtains nuclear weapons. The United States possesses the overwhelming diplomatic, economic and military power to cope with an adversary vulnerable to the very same forces that have led to the toppling of regimes across the Middle East.

Threats of American or Israeli military action only intensify the Iranian regime's desire to acquire a nuclear deterrent. An actual attack would likely consolidate domestic support for the regime and promote international sympathy for it, particularly throughout the Muslim world. Conversely, international participation in sanctions would erode, Iranian support for subversive groups like Hezbollah and Hamas would increase, and the containment of Iranian influence throughout the Middle East would become more difficult.

The Iranian regime needs to be persuaded that it will become more isolated, more penalized and more vulnerable to internal unrest if it chooses to test and deploy nuclear weapons. Unilateral U.S. or Israeli action cannot produce this effect. Only a united international front, backed by ever tougher sanctions, and the promise of more to come if Iran crossed such a threshold, can make the regime think twice before doing so.

Over the longer term, Iran will be brought into full conformity with its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty only under a new and more moderate regime. The best way for the United States to promote such a development is to support the democratization of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria, where regimes have fallen or are tottering, and where the United States has the access and the potential influence it lacks inside Iran.

While awaiting such a change in Iran, the United States must continue to demonstrate to the regime that crossing the nuclear threshold will only increase its isolation, impoverish its population and further increase its vulnerability to internally driven regime change.

Alireza Nader is a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation. **James Dobbins**, a former U.S. assistant secretary of state, is director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/opinion/irans-self-destructive-gamble.html>

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China Daily – China
OPINION/Op-Ed Contributor

Don't Ignore DPRK's Concerns

January 5, 2012

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By Wang Junsheng (China Daily)

As international relations scholar Kenneth Waltz said, states seek survival above all else. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is no exception.

The DPRK conducted two nuclear tests, one in 2006 and the other in 2009, and despite the huge international pressure it exchanged fire with the Republic of Korea (ROK) over Yeonpyeong Island in late 2010. These incidents worsened the DPRK's ties with the United States, Japan and the ROK. But these seemingly "irrational" actions by the DPRK were decided by its security concerns, for it lacks a sense of security.

On the international front, former US president George W. Bush labeled the DPRK as part of the "axis of evil" and even threatened preemptive strikes against it. Through sanctions and various other means, the US has tried to topple the DPRK government.

Japan and the ROK have just followed the US' policy toward the DPRK. Lee Myung-bak, president of the ROK, abandoned the "sunshine policy" of his predecessor and adopted a hard line toward the DPRK. Japan, too, has played an important role in imposing sanctions on the DPRK. And US-Japan and US-ROK joint military drills targeting the DPRK have become routine affairs.

Domestically, economic hardship of the past two decades and its widening gap with the ROK are the two biggest concerns of the DPRK. And after Kim Jong-il's sudden death, many Western observers doubt whether Kim Jong-un can lead the DPRK out of its difficulties. So any provocative action from outside will deepen the DPRK's sense of insecurity.

The DPRK has been developing its military forces in an effort to gain security guarantee from major powers, but its weapons are still no match for that of the US and the ROK. The asymmetry of nuclear weapons' deterrence made the DPRK develop its nuclear program, which it sees essential for its survival.

But the more resolute the DPRK is in developing its nuclear weapons, the bigger a threat it becomes for the US, the ROK and Japan, which take more measures to contain it. So it's high time the DPRK and its rivals came out of this vicious circle.

The DPRK doesn't turn to Russia or China for military support to safeguard its national security. Also, the DPRK feels that the US alone has the intention and capacity both to change its government. It knows full well, too, that Japan and the ROK just follow the US on Northeast Asian issues. Kim Jong-un, as well as the DPRK government and army, will believe that outside threat has eased only if he gets a security guarantee from the US.

After the end of the Cold War era, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il tried to normalize diplomatic relations with and get a "no-attack" guarantee from the US. For all we know, the tenure of Kim Jong-un could turn out to be the same.

Perhaps the DPRK wants security guarantee and nuclear weapons both. And if it does not get any one of them, the DPRK will continue to feel threatened. So it is up to the countries that the DPRK considers a threat, including the US, to give it a security guarantee and defuse the situation. Otherwise, it will be impossible to resolve the DPRK nuclear issue no matter how many rounds of Six-Party Talks are held.

But can the DPRK nuclear issue be resolved in steps?

Kim Jong-un's priority in the near future would be to maintain domestic stability. The new leader will accord little attention to foreign affairs in the initial phases, and he needs time to gain more experience in dealing with such issues.

The Barack Obama administration is hostile toward the DPRK, and the US media still sees the DPRK as "evil". And it is difficult for the Obama administration to change its anti-DPRK policy overnight, especially because the US presidential election is likely to make the DPRK a more complicated problem for the US.

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As the only superpower, the US is involved in many issues in different regions. But for the US, the DPRK nuclear issue is less urgent than the Middle East and the war against terrorism. Hence, Washington is likely to adopt a "wait-and-see" policy toward Pyongyang. It wants to observe the developments in the DPRK for some more time after the Kim Jong-il's death. Besides, Washington knows that controllable uncertainty on the Korean Peninsula can push Tokyo and Seoul closer to it.

But since public opinion against the DPRK is strong in Japan and the ROK, and given the two countries' nature of relationships with the US, Tokyo and Seoul have to continue following Washington in dealing with Pyongyang.

China, for its part, is endeavoring to resolve the DPRK nuclear issue once and for all to build a peaceful neighborhood for its economic development. But since the Northeast Asia region is very complicated, it is impossible for China alone to resolve the issue, because Beijing's influence over Pyongyang is limited. So without knowing the true intentions of the US, it is extremely difficult for China to cooperate with it.

China has made great efforts to maintain the status quo on the Korea Peninsula, if not for anything else then to at least prevent tensions from escalating. But the US' attitude and policy remain crucial to resolving the DPRK issue.

From the geopolitical point of view, tensions - even war - on the Korean Peninsula cannot threaten the US or its core national interests, considering the limited capacity of the DPRK. But the DPRK can pose a threat to the ROK and Japan. So it is more important for the ROK and Japan to resolve the DPRK nuclear issue urgently. That's why instead of blindly following Washington's policy on the issue, Japan and the ROK should urge the US to realize the DPRK's security concerns.

And the most suitable strategy for Japan and the ROK to resolve the DPRK nuclear issue is to cooperate with China, for without China's help there can be no resolution.

The author is a research scholar at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, affiliated to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-01/05/content_14383354.htm

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Bloomberg News
OPINION/Editorial

Fewer, Better Nuclear Weapons Can Make the U.S. Stronger: View

By the Editors
January 5, 2012

U.S. President Barack Obama, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Martin Dempsey unveiled a new long-term defense strategy on Wednesday designed to save money while adapting U.S. forces to tomorrow's security challenges.

While short on specifics about individual programs -- those will come later this month in an official budget (USBODEFN) request -- the Defense Strategic Review is realistic about trims in force size and retiree costs, and rightly calls for an increased focus on Asia and the Pacific Ocean, counterterrorism and cybersecurity.

In particular, we applaud the insistence that U.S. "deterrence goals can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force." Unlike many other areas of the Pentagon budget, in which strategists and number crunchers should be able to negotiate their way to fiscal detente, the nuclear issue requires a complete rethinking of long-term strategy and philosophy.

Today's world calls for a two-part nuclear strategy: ensuring that the U.S. has a robust retaliatory force against a major power (a resurgent Russia or a rising China) in a large- scale nuclear war, and maintaining a flexible

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deterrent to deal with regional challenges in a proliferating world (think Iran, North Korea and, perhaps, Pakistan). The key is making certain that the arsenal is optimal in terms of size, cost and, most important, capability.

Check Major Powers

The U.S. has 5,000 or so warheads (fewer than half of which are deployed at a given time), down from 31,225 during the Cold War. Under the 2010 New Start treaty, by 2018 the U.S. will be limited to 1,550 strategic warheads, most of which are on long-range ballistic missiles in U.S. silos or aboard one of 14 Ohio-class submarines. These are the high-yield Strangelovian weapons that we (and any potential enemies) know are very unlikely to be used. They are of little good against, say, North Korea, given that the radioactive fallout would endanger millions in South Korea and, depending on the winds, in Japan or China. We need only maintain enough of them to provide a check on other major powers.

There are plenty of good ideas for achieving cost savings on this front. Senator Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma, has outlined a \$79 billion savings plan that would include cutting the ballistic-missile submarine fleet to 11 from 14 (this could involve increasing the number of missiles per boat or warheads per missile); eliminating 200 of our estimated 500 intercontinental ballistic missiles and limiting reserves to 1,100 weapons. It's a sensible place to start the discussion, although we think the cuts could be deeper.

The second part of the strategy involves the highly accurate, low-yield weapons now carried by bombers and some fighters. These arms are better suited -- because of their limited fallout -- to an age in which weak rogue states increasingly rely on nuclear threats. Obviously, the idea of using a tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield is no less horrifying than employing the strategic variety, but all the same, maintaining the ability to do so is a vital check on the ambitions of a nation such as Iran. And here is where we may have to spend more rather than less, at least initially.

The nuclear-equipped B-52 fleet is creaky and the B-2 bomber's stealth technology is becoming outdated. It's unclear if future F-16 or next-generation F-35 jet fighters will have nuclear capability (if, indeed, the latter will ever see the light of day). Furthermore, the cruise missiles that the bombers use to deliver nuclear warheads are old and failure-prone. The easiest and quickest step would be to upgrade the cruise missiles to improve reliability and accuracy while renovating the current fleet of B-52 bombers. This would have costs, but be vastly cheaper than developing a new generation of aircraft. It is also worth devoting research dollars to improving the accuracy of submarine-borne missiles, using GPS or some other technology, to make them viable for low-yield payloads despite the enormous distances they travel.

Beyond the Pentagon

The benefits of a smarter nuclear-weapons policy will spread beyond the Pentagon. The Energy Department should be able to trim billions as well from its related spending, starting with a halt on a plutonium storage and production facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

The most controversial aspect of the review will probably be its finding that, instead of being able to fight two wars simultaneously, the U.S. will have the capacity only to carry out one major conflict while "denying the objectives of -- or imposing unacceptable costs on -- an opportunistic aggressor in a second region." Deterrence is the key to such a strategy, and it can be best achieved with a smarter, smaller nuclear arsenal.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-06/fewer-better-nuclear-weapons-can-make-the-u-s-stronger-view.html>

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A New Defense Strategy: A New Nuclear Strategy?

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January 5, 2012

By Hans M. Kristensen

The Obama administration today presented a new defense strategy that it says is needed to realign U.S. military forces and doctrine with the reductions in combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the new fiscal constraints created by the financial crisis.

There are few details in the new strategy for how this will be done but more will come in the Fiscal Year 2013 defense budget request expected in early February.

On nuclear forces the new strategy reaffirms the commitment to maintain a “safe, secure, and effective” nuclear arsenal as long as nuclear weapons exist. “We will field nuclear forces that can under any circumstances confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage, both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on America’s security commitments.” The strategy appears heavily focused on the Pacific region and the Middle East. China and Iran, more so than North Korea, appear to be the primary potential adversaries, although Russian is by far the largest potential nuclear adversary.

In Prague in 2009, President Obama forcefully committed the United States “to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons,” that it was necessary to “ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change,” that the “United States will take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons,” and that “To put and end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy....” The New START treaty requires some reductions in deployed strategic forces, and the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) reaffirmed the commitment to nuclear disarmament and further reducing the role of nuclear weapons.

The new defense strategy language comes across as somewhat timid, stating only: “It is possible that our deterrence goals can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force, which would reduce the number of nuclear weapons in our inventory as well as their role in U.S. national security strategy.” This language presumably reflects the preliminary findings of the administration’s so-called Post-NPR Analysis, an ongoing effort within the administration to make “preparations for the next round of nuclear reductions” with Russia through “potential changes in targeting requirements and alert postures.”

FAS has long argued that U.S. nuclear forces can and should be reduced further and that a sufficient nuclear deterrent can be maintained with far fewer weapons, lower operational readiness, and by changing the presidential guidance for how the military is required to plan for the potential use of nuclear weapons.

In Europe, which was the focus of U.S. strategy during the Cold War, FAS has argued that the demise of the Soviet threat and the fundamentally different security challenges requiring NATO’s attention today permit the withdrawal of the remaining U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe. The new U.S. defense strategy concludes that the changed security landscape allows changes in the European posture that, while maintaining the US security commitment to NATO, require development of a smarter posture that is better suited to meet the challenges of today’s world. Whether this language envisions a withdrawal of non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe remains to be seen, but it appears to make it harder to justify continued deployment.

It is important that the commitment in the new defense strategy to maintaining a nuclear deterrent does not overshadow the equally important commitment to reducing the size and role of nuclear forces. The clear message to other nuclear weapons states must be that the *emphasis* of U.S. policy is the nuclear disarmament trajectory described in Prague and that it is in their interest to follow the lead. Billions of dollars can be saved over the next decade by reducing the nuclear forces and removing nuclear doctrine further from the warfighting thinking that characterized the Cold War and which is still prevalent in today’s planning. That, not indefinite nuclear modernizations, ought to be the priority for the 21st century.

<http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2012/01/a-new-defense-strategy.php>

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