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MAXWELL AFB, ALABAMA

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London Guardian

Iranian Nuclear Scientist Killed in Tehran Bomb Explosion

Professor working at key nuclear facility dead following series of attacks Iranian regime links to Israel and US

By James Meikle and agencies

Wednesday, 11 January 2012

An Iranian university professor working at a key nuclear facility has been killed in a bomb explosion, the latest in a series of assassinations and attempted killings linked by the country's authorities to a secret war by Israel and the US to stop the development of what Tehran insists would be a peaceful nuclear capability.

Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, 32, a chemistry expert and a director of the Natanz uranium enrichment plant in central Iran, died after two assailants on a motorcycle attached magnetic bombs to his car, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

Two other Iranian nationals were reported injured in the blast, which comes at a time of rising international tension.

Safar Ali Baratloo, a senior security official, was quoted by Fars as saying the attack was the work of Israelis.

"The magnetic bomb is of the same types already used to assassinate our scientists," he said. "The terrorist attack is a conspiracy to undermine the [2 March] parliamentary elections."

Israeli officials have previously hinted about covert campaigns against Iran without directly admitting involvement.

On Tuesday, Israeli military chief Lieutenant General Benny Gantz was quoted as telling a parliamentary panel that 2012 would be a "critical year" for Iran in part because of "things that happen to it unnaturally".

The incident resembles earlier attacks on scientists allegedly connected to Iran's nuclear programme. Tehran University physics professor Masoud Ali Mohammadi was killed on 12 January 2010, when a remote-controlled bomb attached to a motorcycle exploded near his car as he was preparing to leave for work.

In November 2010, a pair of back-to-back bomb attacks in different parts of the capital killed one nuclear scientist and wounded another. Majid Shahriari, the scientist who died, was a member of the nuclear engineering faculty at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran and co-operated with the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran. The wounded scientist, Fereidoun Abbasi, was almost immediately appointed head of Iran's atomic agency.

And in July 2011, motorcycle-riding gunmen killed Darioush Rezaeinejad, whom initial Iranian reports described as a scientist involved in the country's nuclear programme. Officials later denied Rezaeinejad had any links to the programme, but blamed his killing on the US and Israel.

The latest blast is certain to bring fresh charges by Iran that the US and its allies are waging a clandestine campaign of bloodshed and sabotage in attempts to set back Iran's nuclear efforts.

"Instead of actually fighting a conventional war, western powers and their allies appear to be relying on covert war tactics to try to delay and degrade Iran's nuclear advancement," Theodore Karasik, a security expert at the Dubai-based Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis told Associated Press.

He said the use of magnetic bombs bore the hallmarks of covert operations.

"It's a very common way to eliminate someone," he added. "It's clean, easy and efficient."

The US and other countries claim Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons technology. Iran denies the allegations, saying its programme is intended for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/11/bomb-kills-iranian-nuclear-scientist?newsfeed=true>

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British Broadcasting Company – U.K.

OPINION/Analysis

January 11, 2012

Iran and the Undeclared Campaign

By Frank Gardner, BBC security correspondent

The assassination on Wednesday of another Iranian nuclear scientist may now prompt Iran to try to respond in kind.

The murder in Tehran of Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan is the fourth such attack on Iran's scientists in just two years.

It comes on top of a sophisticated cyber sabotage programme and two mysterious explosions at Iranian military bases, one of which in November killed the general known as 'the godfather' of Iran's ballistic missile programme.

No-one is claiming responsibility for these attacks but Iran blames its longstanding enemy, Israel, and occasionally the US.

Whoever is behind them, Iran is clearly being subjected to an undeclared campaign to slow down its nuclear programme, which the West and Israel suspect is aimed at developing an atomic bomb.

The latest Iranian scientist to die was killed by a magnetic bomb, attached to his car, a Peugeot 405, by two men on a motorbike.

Whoever was targeting him clearly knew his route, his car and his timings.

The small, professionally made device was designed to kill its victim but cause only limited damage to the surroundings.

It bears a striking similarity to the bomb used in November 2010 to kill another nuclear scientist, Majid Shahriari.

A motorbike bomb killed a physics professor earlier that year and another device narrowly missed killing the man tipped to be the next head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation.

'Decapitation strategy'

Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, who was killed on Wednesday, was both a university lecturer and a senior supervisor at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility.

In such a secretive country as Iran it is hard to determine how much difference, if any, his death will make to the accelerating nuclear programme which experts in the West believe may now have overcome many of the earlier obstacles to building a bomb.

"It's conceivable it could have an impact on retarding the programme", says Mark Fitzpatrick, an expert on nuclear proliferation at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London.

"There are a few key technical areas that Iran has not yet mastered... so a decapitation strategy is an effective measure for retarding this process. But it may be that Iran is beyond this point".

So who is behind this undeclared campaign?

No-one is putting their hand up, but Israel has made no secret of its delight at any setbacks to Iran's nuclear programme, which it fears may soon become a threat to its existence.

In the past its officials have either denied any part in the attacks or refused to comment. But Israel's overseas intelligence agency Mossad is believed to have one of the best networks of informants and operatives in the Middle East.

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In 2011 an Iranian confessed to being recruited by Mossad to assassinate a scientist earlier in the year, although coerced confessions are commonplace in Iran

The Stuxnet computer virus, stealthily introduced into Iran's nuclear programme in 2009 and which wreaked temporary damage on its centrifuges, is believed to be the work of US, Israeli and possibly British cyber experts.

Retaliation?

So far, Iran has not responded to these attacks, other than loudly condemning them and vowing to continue its nuclear programme.

But this latest killing could prove to be the proverbial straw on the camel's back, prompting Iran's powerful intelligence agency, Etilaat, and the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force to carry out some attacks of their own overseas.

If they wanted to retaliate against the US they certainly have enough operatives in Iraq and Afghanistan to make life difficult for the Americans there.

Striking out at Israel's nuclear scientists would be harder - they are said to be well guarded and Israeli intelligence has been bracing for some kind of Iranian reaction.

Sir Richard Dalton, Britain's Ambassador to Iran from 2002 to 2006 and now an associate fellow at the UK think tank, Chatham House, believes the undeclared campaign against Iran's nuclear scientists is entering a dangerous phase.

"The next step is for Iran to answer like for like" says Dalton.

"If a state is behind this then this is international state terrorism and it's inviting a response. It looks like a further twist that will lead to a tit-for-tat".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16513186>

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Global Times – China

Clinton Denies US Role in Assassination of Iranian Nuclear Staff

Xinhua, January 12, 2012

By Agencies

US State Secretary Hillary Clinton on Wednesday denied that the United States was involved in the assassination of an Iranian nuclear staff and urged Iran to end its provocative behavior, including threatening to close the Straits of Hormuz.

"I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran," Clinton said at a press conference at the State Department alongside visiting Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani.

Clinton's remarks came after a bomb attack killed an Iranian nuclear site staff and his driver in northern Tehran on Wednesday. Local reports said that the passenger being killed, identified as Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, was a staff member of Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment site.

However, earlier in the day at a State Department regular briefing, spokeswoman Victoria Nuland refrained from denying the US involvement in the killing.

When asked by the reporters on this issue, Nuland said "I don't have any information to share one way or the other on that."

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Although she said the United States "condemn the loss of innocent life" and "condemn violence of any kind," she refused to comment on whether the killed Iranian scientist came under her definition of innocent life.

"I'm not going to speak to who may or may not have done this, one way or the other," Nuland said.

Previously, at least three Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated since 2010. Iran's First Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi said Wednesday that Israeli agents were the perpetrators of Ahmadi-Roshan's assassination, local media reported.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said Wednesday that the assassination of the country's nuclear scientist is an indication of Israel's persistence on inhumane terrorist acts, with the support of certain Western states especially the United States, to curb the "peaceful" nuclear activities of the Islamic republic, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

At the press conference with Qatari foreign minister, Clinton also urged Iran to "end its provocative behavior, end its search for nuclear weapons, and rejoin the international community and be a productive member of it."

She also talked about the threatening by Iran to close the Straits of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical oil route, reaffirming the US commitment to keep it open.

"It's part of the lifeline that keeps oil and gas moving around the world," said Clinton. "And it's also important to speak as clearly as we can to the Iranians about the dangers of this kind of provocation."

Tensions between the United States and Iran have reached a new high recently.

On Dec. 31 last year, Obama signed a bill with provisions asking for new sanctions on Iran, targeting foreign financial institutions that do business with the Islamic republic's central bank, the main conduit for its oil revenues.

According to the bill, foreign financial institutions doing business with Iran's central bank are banned from opening or maintaining correspondent operations in the US

The move, aimed at choking off Iran economically, prompted furious reactions from Iran. Recently, Iran has been holding a series of military exercises and threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical oil route, if Western countries impose sanctions on Iran's oil exports.

On Sunday, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said that Washington would "not tolerate" the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, saying that is a "red line" for the United States and "we will respond to them."

In the latest development, Iran had sentenced the alleged "CIA spy" Amir Hekmati, who has a dual Iranian-American citizenship, to death, which has drawn strong condemnation from the United States.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/691863/Clinton-denies-US-role-in-assassination-of-Iranian-nuclear-staff.aspx>

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Daily Star – Lebanon

Iran "Year From" Bomb Material: Former Inspector

January 12, 2012

By Reuters

VIENNA: Having switched production of higher-grade enriched uranium to a new, underground site, Iran is now just a year or so away from having enough such material for a nuclear bomb, a former head of U.N. nuclear inspections said.

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However, Olli Heinonen wrote in an article published on Thursday that building a stock of some 250 kg of 20-percent enriched uranium - a form that could within weeks be further purified to the 90-percent weapons grade - did not automatically mean Iran could deploy a bomb without further engineering work.

Heinonen, a Finn, was deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency until 2010 and is now at Harvard University. He made the prediction days after Iran confirmed the start of 20-percent enrichment inside the Fordow mountain, fuelling Western fears Tehran is seeking atomic arms.

Estimates on when Iran, which says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful, might be able to develop such weapons are significant as they could help determine the time available for major powers to resolve the long-running nuclear row peacefully.

Iran says it needs to refine uranium to that 20-percent level of fissile purity, compared with the 3.5 percent normally needed to fuel nuclear power plants, for a medical research reactor in Tehran producing isotopes for cancer patients.

But Western diplomats and experts question the credibility of that justification and note that acquiring the ability to produce 20-percent uranium is a big step closer to potential weapons material of 90 percent, shortening the time required for any "breakout" bid to produce bombs.

"If Iran decides to produce weapons-grade uranium from 20-percent enriched uranium, it has already technically undertaken 90 percent of the enrichment effort required," Heinonen wrote in a Foreign Policy magazine article.

"What remains to be done is the feeding of 20-percent uranium through existing, additional cascades to achieve weapons-grade enrichment ... This step is much faster from earlier ones."

Iran has until now produced 20-percent uranium above ground at another location but announced last year it would shift this higher-grade activity to the underground site at Fordow, offering better protection against any enemy air strikes.

It also plans to step up the work, conducted by centrifuge machines that spin at supersonic speed to increase the ratio of the fissile isotope U-235. It continues to produce 3.5-percent uranium at its main enrichment site at Natanz.

At current output rates, Heinonen said, Iran can expect to have about 250 kg (550 lb) of uranium refined to 20 percent by the end of 2012 and this could be "turned to weapons-grade material in a month's time". Experts say that about 200 kg of such uranium would be needed to build a single nuclear bomb.

This does not mean, however, that Iran would be able to so quickly assemble a nuclear weapon, a "complex endeavor that requires precision engineering capabilities that Iran may lack".

But, it "would be able to 'break out' of its international obligations very quickly, should it decide to do so," he added.

An IAEA report last year said Iran had produced about 80 kg of 20-percent uranium since launching this work in early 2010 -- still far less than the roughly 200 kg experts say would be needed for one bomb if refined to weapons grade.

Nuclear experts give different estimates for when Iran might be able to build a bomb if it decides to do so, ranging from as quickly as six months to a year or more.

Producing sufficient fissile material is seen as the most time-consuming task, but making the actual weapon could take at least half a year, the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank said in a report last year.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jan-12/159647-iran-year-from-bomb-material-former-inspector.ashx#axzz1jG6Oq8OZ>



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Chicago Tribune

Iran Nuclear Sites May Be Beyond Reach of "Bunker Busters"

By Reuters

January 12, 2012

LONDON (Reuters) - With its nuclear program beset as never before by sanctions, sabotage and assassination, Iran must now make a new addition to its list of concerns: One of the biggest conventional bombs ever built.

Boeing's 30,000-pound Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP), an ultra-large bunker buster for use on underground targets, with Iran routinely mentioned as its most likely intended destination, is a key element in the implicit U.S. threat to use force as a last report against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The behemoth, carrying more than 5,300 pounds of explosive, was delivered with minimal fanfare to Whiteman U.S. Air Force Base, Missouri in September. It is designed for delivery by B-2 Stealth bombers.

Would that weapon, delivered in a gouging combination with other precision-guided munitions, pulverize enough rock to reach down and destroy the uranium enrichment chamber sunk deep in a mountain at Fordow, Iran's best sheltered nuclear site?

While the chances of such a strike succeeding are slim, they are not so slim as to enable Tehran to rule out the possibility of one being attempted, according to defense experts contacted by Reuters.

A "second best" result might be merely to block the plant's surface entrances, securing its temporary closure, some said.

One U.S. official, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, described an attack on the underground site, about 160 km (100 miles) south of Tehran near the Iranian holy city of Qom, as "hard but not impossible."

The United States is the only country with any chance of damaging the Fordow chamber using just conventional air power, most experts say.

Israel, the nation seen as most likely to attempt a raid, has great experience in long range bombing include its 1981 raid on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq and a 2007 strike on a presumed nuclear facility in Syria.

But it lacks the air assets to reach Fordow's depths, and has no MOP-sized bunker buster. An Israeli raid would therefore likely require other elements such as sabotage or special forces.

The vulnerability of the chamber at Fordow, believed buried up to 80 meters (260 feet) deep on a former missile base controlled by the elite Revolutionary Guards Corps, came into sharper focus on Monday when the United Nations nuclear watchdog confirmed that Iran had started enriching uranium at the site.

The same day a State Department spokeswoman declared that if Iran was enriching uranium to 20 percent at Fordow this would be a "further escalation" of its pattern of violating its obligations under U.N. Security Council resolutions.

TURMOIL

Western powers suspect the program is aimed at developing the capacity to build a nuclear weapon. Iran says it is strictly for civilian uses.

Critics of Iran's nuclear program tend to agree that military action against Iran's nuclear work would be their last and worst option. Not only would this risk civilian casualties, but Iran would seek to retaliate against Western targets in the region, raising the risk of a regional war and risking global economic turmoil.

Once it had recovered it would probably decide unequivocally to pursue a nuclear bomb.



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Critics of the military option further point out that non-military pressure is increasing. Apart from tools of statecraft such as sanctions and diplomacy, covert means against Iran's nuclear work probably include sabotage, cyber attacks, measures to supply Iran with faulty parts and interception of nuclear supplies. It may also involve assassinations of nuclear experts such as Wednesday's killing of a scientist in Tehran.

A strike, furthermore, would only delay, not destroy, an Iranian nuclear program whose known sites are widely dispersed and fortified against attack.

But Washington sees the plausibility of a U.S. strike on Iran's main nuclear sites as a vital adjunct to the campaign of pressure. The narrow, technical question of whether such an attack is feasible is therefore central to strategy.

"You don't take any option off the table," U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Pannetta said on CBS's Face the Nation television program on Jan 8.

Asked on the same program how hard it would be to "take out" Iran's nuclear capability, U.S. chief of staff General Martin Demspey said: "Well, I'd rather not discuss the degree of difficulty and in any way encourage them to read anything into that. But I will say that our, my, responsibility is to encourage the right degree of planning, to understand the risks associated with any kind of military option, in some cases to position assets, to provide those options in a timely fashion. And all those activities are going on."

Asked if the United States could act against Iran's nuclear capability using conventional weapons, he replied: "Well, I certainly want them to believe that that's the case."

The credibility of that implicit threat got a freshening-up with the arrival of the big new bomb in the U.S. arsenal.

Military satisfaction was evident.

ENEMIES

As Air Force Brigadier General Scott Vander Hamm explained to Air Force Magazine, the MOP "is specifically designed to go after very dense targets-solid granite, 20,000 (pounds per square inch) concrete, and those hard and deeply buried complexes-where enemies are putting things that the President of the United States wants to hold at risk."

He said MOP "kind of bridges the gap" between conventional munitions and nuclear weapons in terms of the effects that it can create. Whereas in the past, "you'd have to break that nuclear threshold" to attack such HDBT (hard and deeply buried targets), "with the MOP, you don't have to," the magazine reported.

Four months on from the bomb's arrival in the U.S. arsenal, the Fordow announcement has sharpened the Western strategic focus on U.S. military capacity.

Experts differ on the extent of the challenge at Fordow, but all agree it presents greater complexity than Iran's other underground site at Natanz, 230 km (140 miles) south of Tehran where enrichment happens in a chamber estimated to be 20 meters underground, or less than a third of Fordow's presumed depth.

The other likely targets are Iran's uranium ore processing plant at Isfahan, some 400 km (250 miles) south of Tehran and plutonium producing research reactor under construction at Arak 190 km (120 miles) southwest of Tehran. They are both above ground and considered vulnerable to attack.

Austin Long, an assistant professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, told Reuters the arrival of the MOP "does not solve the Fordow problem but it does make it easier".

Many experts are skeptical.

Mark Fitzpatrick, an Iran expert at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, said that Natanz was buried under several layers of dirt and concrete but it was "nevertheless possible to damage it with precision



bombing with one sortie to create a crater and second sortie to burst through the bottom of the crater to the facility below."

But the chamber at Fordow might be "impenetrable", he said, due to its presumed depth.

His doubts were echoed by Robert Henson, Editor of Jane's Air-Launched Weapons, to Reuters, who said it was likely that Fordow had been built to survive a sustained assault.

"We know for a fact - or as near a fact as possible - that you will not be able to stop this program with air strikes. There continues to be a whole lot of hysterical posturing about this. In the meantime, it keeps backing the Iranians into a corner," he said.

"Given that it (Fordow) is a relatively recent development, it has probably been designed with a lot of attention to protecting it against conventional strikes. You don't necessarily have to obliterate it, mind. You could block the exits, block access to power, isolate it from life outside, and then you have effectively switched it off.

DESTRUCTION, OR MERELY A SETBACK?

"But for sure it will have been designed with all of that in mind, and the Iranians will have done the best job they can to make it survivable."

Sam Gardiner, a retired USAF colonel who runs wargames for various Washington agencies, told Reuters a major problem was simply a lack of confirmed information about the Fordow plant.

"With the Natanz facility, as it was being constructed, satellites gave us the information on where and how deep enrichment was to take place. Fordow on the other hand is an unknown. Where is the enrichment chamber? How deep? Which direction does the tunnel go?"

"For Israel, or even the United States, destruction would be very difficult. The entrance to the underground tunnel can be shut, but that would only be a temporary setback."

Diplomats point out that International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors visit Fordow and are familiar with its layout. While their work is confidential, it is widely believed that Western intelligence agencies have some knowledge of the site's interior.

John Cochrane, a defense specialist at the London-based Exclusive Analyst risk consultancy, said he believed the bunker-busting MOP might make a difference. But he suggested Fordow was at the very limit of the bomb's capacities, which he said could reach down to a maximum of 60 meters.

"Repeated strikes by Tomahawk cruise missiles and MOP might be effective in penetrating the site, if it is not as deep as 80m but, even then, we question whether an attack would have the same level of assurance in terms of damage as strikes on other 'softer' sites," he told Reuters.

"We question from what little we have seen of open source imagery whether it is as deep as 80 meters. If it is, we don't know for a fact but we think that is probably too deep for any form of air-delivered munitions, including MOP Cyber attack or physical assault by Special Forces may be the only attack options."

Cochrane noted that the supply of the MOP to Israel, even if the U.S. were prepared to release it, would also require a suitable aircraft to deliver it and Israelis did not have one.

ATTACKING "THE HARD WAY"

In a 2010 study titled "Options in Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program," analysts Abdullah Toukan and Anthony Cordesman of the U.S. think tank the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that, if all peaceful options had been exhausted, the U.S. was the only country that could launch a successful military strike.

Even that study predicated its finding on a strike merely blocking Fordow's two entrances, not destroying the underground chamber.



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But in a November 2011 article in Israel's Tablet magazine, Columbia University's Long concluded that Israel had the ability to attack the Fordow site using 75 bunker busters, each delivering a smaller explosive charge of about 1,000 pounds. However, he said it would require an unprecedented level of precision.

Long's scenario sees Israeli jets having "to do things the hard way", delivering 75 bunker busters on a single point to burrow through the rock.

There were two principal challenges, he said.

First, the weapons themselves, dropped from miles away and thousands of feet in the air, had to arrive at very close to the same angle to create a pathway each subsequent weapon could follow, he wrote. "Otherwise much of the penetrating power of the bombs will be wasted".

The second unknown was the "spoil problem", where the sides of the pathway, destroyed by previous explosions, clog the pathway for subsequent bombs.

Long subsequently told Reuters in emailed remarks the main feedback he had had from military readers was that "the kind of operation I discuss is really, really hard to coordinate."

"I agree, though I don't think that makes it impossible, just very difficult, as I noted."

Additional reporting by Dan Williams in Jerusalem, Phil Stewart in Washington and Fredrik Dahl in Vienna

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-rt-us-iran-nuclear-striketre80b0wm-20120112,0,340358,full.story>

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Deccan Chronicle – India

UN Nuclear Watchdog to Visit Iran: Diplomats

January 13, 2012

By Agence France-Presse (AFP)

(Vienna) - A high-level UN nuclear agency delegation will visit Iran late this month to try to clear up claims of covert weapons activities that have stoked tensions between Tehran and the West, diplomats said on Friday.

The trip led by International Atomic Energy Agency chief inspector Herman Nackaerts and the agency's number two Rafael Grossi would last from January 28 through the first week of February, one Western diplomat told AFP.

Another envoy also said the visit, two months after an IAEA report on Iran took suspicions to a new level that Tehran is developing nuclear weapons, would 'likely' be from January 28, although it was not yet definite.

There was also some 'ambiguity' on whether the delegation would merely be able to hold talks with Iranian officials or whether they will be able to visit sites covered in the IAEA's November 8 report, the second diplomat said.

"It may be that the Iranians just want a short discussion in Tehran, which would not be what the IAEA is looking for," the envoy told AFP on condition of anonymity.

An IAEA spokesman declined to comment. Iran's ambassador, Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, who said in December he would hold talks with the IAEA in Vienna this month about a visit, was not immediately available to say any more.

The delegation would include alongside the Belgian Nackaerts and the Argentine Grossi - the righthand man of IAEA chief Yukiya Amano - the body's senior legal official Peri Lynne Johnson, a United States citizen, envoys said.

"The aim of this mission is to try to get answers once and for all to all the questions raised by the IAEA's report in November," the first diplomat told AFP, without wishing to be identified.

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Iran denies seeking atomic weapons, saying its programme is peaceful, but Western countries strongly suspect otherwise and the UN Security Council has slapped four rounds of sanctions on the Islamic republic.

Ali Larijani, the influential speaker of Iran's parliament, said Thursday during a visit to Turkey that his country stood ready for negotiations with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany.

In its November 8 report, rejected as "baseless" by Iran, the IAEA had said it was able to build an overall impression that Tehran "carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device."

The analysis was based on what the agency called broadly "credible" intelligence provided by several unnamed countries, as well as its own information.

The evidence included a bus-sized steel container visible by satellite for explosives testing and weapons design work, including examining how to arm a Shahab-3 missile, capable of reaching Israel, with a nuclear warhead.

Since the publication of the report, Western countries have sought to increase pressure on Iran, with the United States and the European Union taking aim at Iran's oil industry and its central bank.

Tensions have also been stoked by Iran showing off what it said was a CIA drone it captured using cyberwarfare, while in October Washington alleged Iranian involvement in a suspected plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the US.

Iran, where a judge on Monday reportedly sentenced to death a US-Iranian former Marine for "membership of the CIA", has also threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for 20 percent of the world's oil.

Also on Monday the IAEA said that Iran had starting enriching uranium to purities approaching that needed for a nuclear weapon inside a mountain bunker at Fordo near the holy city of Qom.

Iran says the 20-per cent enriched uranium is for medical purposes but Washington called it 'a further escalation of their ongoing violations with regard to their nuclear obligations'.

On Wednesday meanwhile Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a deputy director of Iran's main uranium enrichment plant, died in a car bomb blast that Tehran blamed on the US and Israeli intelligence services.

The attack was similar to four others in Tehran over the past two years targeting Iranian scientists, three of which succeeded. In the fourth, the scientist - who now heads Iran's atomic energy organisation - escaped.

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/channels/world/europe/un-nuclear-watchdog-visit-iran-diplomats-386>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Iran's Leader Blames CIA, Mossad for Scientist's Murder

13 January 2012

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has accused the U.S. and Israeli intelligence services of the involvement in the killing of an Iranian nuclear scientist, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a deputy director of Iran's largest uranium enrichment plant, died in a car bomb explosion in Tehran on Wednesday. Local police sources said a motorcyclist attached a magnetic mine to his car.

"This cowardly murder, perpetrated by those who do not dare claim their abominable crime by accepting the responsibility, was committed like the other crimes with the planning or support of the intelligence services of the CIA and Mossad," Khamenei said in a message of condolences to Roshan's family on Thursday.

"Such criminal acts show that the Imperialism and global arrogance headed by the US and international Zionism have come to a dead-end in their confrontation with the determined and pioneer Iranian nation," he said.

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The United States has already denied having anything to do with the Iranian scientist's murder, while Israel has not commented on its alleged involvement in the assassination.

The attack on Wednesday was similar to several other attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists in the past two years.

In January 2010 Professor Mahsud Ali Mohamed of Tehran University was killed outside his home. Local police say he died when a motorcycle exploded next to his car as he got into the vehicle.

In November of that year, bomb attacks killed two atomic scientists, Majid Shakhriani, and his colleague Dr. Fereidoun Davani-Abbasi, and injured their wives. In both cases, their cars were attacked by unknown motorcyclists.

Western nations claim Iran's nuclear energy research is a cover for atomic weapons production, which Tehran has consistently denied.

Iran has recently begun enrichment of uranium to 20 percent at its Fordo facility as part of its nuclear program, the IAEA said on Monday. Russia said it was concerned by the move, which was condemned by the Western powers.

MOSCOW, January 13 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120113/170730166.html>

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The Hill

Gen. McCaffrey: Iran Will Have 'a Dozen' Nukes within 5 Years

By Geneva Sands-Sadowitz

January 13, 2012

Retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, an MSNBC and NBC military analyst, said Friday that he predicts Iran will have nuclear weapons with the next five years.

"The existence of Israel is at stake. In the coming five years the Iranians are going nuclear. Within 60 months they'll have a dozen weapons. They've got Shahab-3 missiles. Probably more than a 150 now that can strike Israel," said McCaffrey on MSNBC's "Daily Rundown" Friday.

McCaffrey said the region is "on edge" because of these developments.

"By the way, the Israelis have more than 150 nuclear weapons including thermonuclear capacity, so we are properly concerned," he added.

The general said he doesn't believe economic sanctions and covert operations will prevent Iran from reaching its goal of developing nuclear capabilities.

"We're going to face a nuclear-armed Iran in the very near future. And this is bad news for the region and world peace," he said.

Tensions between the United States and Iran were brought to the forefront again last week with the assassination in Iran of the deputy director of an Iranian nuclear facility.

Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was killed after a motorcyclist planted a bomb under his car, according to Iran's semiofficial Fars News Agency.

The United States has denied involvement in the assassination.

"I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran," Secretary of State Clinton said at a Wednesday news conference.

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When asked whether he thought the United States or Israel were involved in the attack, McCaffrey didn't give a direct answer, but said, "Thank God for the CIA. These are the most competent, clever people on the face of the planet.

"I hope we are doing everything we can in covert operations to signal them that this is a real threat to the region," he said.

McCaffrey pointed out that there was the potential of involvement from other countries in the incident, including Saudi Arabia.

"The Saudis, the Gulf Coast states, the Sunni Arabs are properly horrified at the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran in the near future," McCaffrey said.

<http://thehill.com/video/policy-areas/204043-former-gen-mccaffrey-iran-will-have-a-dozen-nukes-within-5-years>

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Voice of America

South Korea Predicts Nuclear Test by North Korea This Year

Wednesday, January 11, 2012

A South Korean government research agency says North Korea's new leader will either order a third nuclear test or a long-range missile launch later this year.

A report issued Wednesday by the Institute for Foreign Affairs and National Security warns that Kim Jong Un will engage in "military adventurism" to boost his image as a military leader, as well as his grip on power. It predicts the tests will be conducted in late 2012 or early 2013, when both the United States and South Korea will hold presidential elections.

The institute, which is affiliated with the foreign ministry, says the nuclear test could utilize material from the North's uranium enrichment facility, which it unveiled in 2010.

The United States and South Korea, along with Japan, China and Russia, have been negotiating with Pyongyang to shut down its nuclear weapons program in exchange for economic aid. North Korea withdrew from the talks in 2009 and conducted its second nuclear test soon after.

The South Korean research agency predicts the six-party talks could resume in the first half of this year, but would hardly make any progress.

North Korea's powerful military held a mass rally in Pyongyang earlier this week to pledge its loyalty to Kim Jong Un, who was proclaimed the country's new leader shortly after the death of his father Kim Jong Il last month.

<http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/01/11/south-korea-predicts-nuclear-test-by-north-korea-this-year/>

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Korea Times – South Korea

January 11, 2012

Sino-NK Ties: Threat or Opportunity?

By Kang Hyun-kyung

BEIJING — North Korea's dependency on China after the death of Kim Jong-il has drawn fresh attention as experts predicted Sino-North Korea ties will likely intensify during the power transition in the "Hermit Kingdom."

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In a paper presented in December, Choi Sung-kun, a senior fellow of Hyundai Economic Research Institute, said bilateral trade between the two nations hit record-high \$4.7 billion last year.

The bilateral trade has continued to surge since 2006 as the nuclear-armed North underwent several rounds of international sanctions after test-firings of missiles and conducting underground nuclear tests twice.

In 2010, South Korea severed trade with the North after the communist country sank the South Korean ship Cheonan and launched artillery attacks on Yeonpyeong Island near the maritime border in the West Sea in March and November.

Coupled with the suspension of Mt. Geumgang tourism project in July 2008 after a South Korean tourist was shot dead near the resort area, the severance dealt a blow to the impoverished nation.

Sources of hard cash almost dried up.

Choi predicted Sino-North Korea trade will continue to soar in the post-Kim Jong-il era, warning this will allow China, North Korea's decades-long benefactor, to exert greater influence on its neighbor.

President Lee Myung-bak's three-day visit to China, which started from Monday, came within a month after the death of the "Dear Leader."

A question arises whether Sino-North Korea relations will benefit South Korea or not.

During the summit with President Hu Jintao, Lee appreciated China for its effort to convince North Korea to believe that opening up of the country is the key to its survival in the future.

Earlier, Lee urged North Korea to follow a China-style reform.

Drew Thompson, a former director of China Studies at the Washington-based think tank, wrote in a report in 2010 that there are hundreds of small-scale Chinese investments near the China-North Korea border region.

"Investment in China's northeast and the handful of small-scale Chinese investments in North Korea reveal an array of Chinese actors with a common strategy to position themselves for a future opening of North Korea," he said.

South Korea and China share a common interest when it comes to the opening up of the North Korean economy.

If the economy takes off through successful reform efforts, optimists say, it will be easier for the nuclear-armed country to denuclearize.

Analysts say North Korea's possession and development of nuclear weapons is a combined result of its concerns about its security, a national prestige element with its nuclear status and possible use as a bargaining chip in nuclear talks.

As an economic reason is part of its motives to seek nuclear weapons, they conclude, the North would find it easier to seek denuclearization if the economy goes prosper through economic reforms.

But some are skeptical about the role of China in improving inter-Korean relations. They say China would manage Sino-North Korea relations in a manner to prevent a unified Korea.

China wants North Korea to be a buffer state that keeps U.S. troops currently stationed in South Korea at a distance, instead of facing it at the border after a unified Korea.

Park Chul-un, a former Cabinet minister who served as South Korea's secret point man on North Korea during the former Roh Tae-woo government (1988-1992), said South Korea would be negatively affected by deepening Sino-North Korea ties.

He said South Korea will find it very challenging to deal with North Korea if the North relies heavily on China for commodities and food.



"China had difficulties to deal with North Korea when the late Kim Jong-il controlled the country as he was skillful. The elder Kim tried to take advantage of China's concerns about instability on the Korean Peninsula," he said.

"The late Kim was behind the North's nuclear tests and test-firings of missiles, which irritated China. At the same time, he showed willingness to strengthen economic ties with the neighbor. This was part of his tactic to make the most of China."

According to him, Kim Jong-un, the North's new leader, is young and inexperienced and this will make it easier for China to deal with the younger Kim to fulfill China's interests.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/01/116_102646.html

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Yonhap News – South Korea
January 12, 2012

N. Korea Ranked Worst in Nuclear Materials Security

By Lee Chi-dong

WASHINGTON, Jan. 11 (Yonhap) -- North Korea was placed at the bottom of a landmark ranking Wednesday on the security of nuclear materials.

The report was released by a group of experts here working to curb the threat of nuclear terrorism and accidents.

The unprecedented Nuclear Materials Security Index, compiled by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) in Washington, examined the status of nuclear materials security conditions in 176 countries. It was issued ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul in March.

In the survey of 32 nations with one kilogram or more of weapons-grade uranium or plutonium, North Korea ranked 32nd. The index took into account the amount of nuclear materials, sites, domestic commitments, societal factors, and global norms. Iran and Pakistan ranked 30th and 31st, respectively.

In 2008, during talks with the U.S., the secretive North reportedly declared that it possessed roughly 38.5 kg of plutonium.

The NTI said it demanded that North Korean authorities verify information jointly collected with the Economist Intelligence Unit, but Pyongyang said no.

In an interview with Yonhap News Agency, former U.S. Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia, who co-founded the NTI, called for broader efforts to foil possible nuclear terrorism and resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

"This index is really our effort to inspire governments around the world to understand the importance of nuclear materials security, making sure that we prevent catastrophic terrorism," he said.

Nunn is well known for introducing legislation, along with Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, to aid Russia in reducing its nuclear arsenal after the Cold War.

He said the upcoming Seoul summit is a "great opportunity to have dialogue and discussion about the priorities for securing nuclear material" that could fall into the hands of terrorists.

He also held out expectations for North Korea's new leadership and the resumption of talks.

"Dialogue, that kind of discussion, six-party talks, at some point have to resume," he said. "In the meantime, countries have to have a lot more confidence-building measures, and some of the incidents and acts that have come from North Korea have been very disruptive to that process."



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He said there is a chance now for North Korea to change course as the world takes a fresh look at Pyongyang.

"I think we will certainly leave that possibility open," he said.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/12/13/0401000000AEN20120112000100315F.HTML>

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Boston Globe

NKorea Signals It's Open to US Disarmament Deal

By Foster Klug and Matthew Pennington, Associated Press

January 12, 2012

SEOUL, South Korea—At first glance, it seems like business as usual: North Korea issues an indignant statement taking aim at the United States over a proposal to donate food in return for nuclear disarmament.

But between the lines are glimmers of conciliation. In its diatribe this week questioning Washington's generosity and earnestness, North Korea suggests it remains open to suspending a uranium enrichment program if it can get the food it wants.

Deciphering North Korea's intentions is notoriously difficult, and has been made even more so since the death of longtime ruler Kim Jong Il and the subsequent installation of his young, inexperienced son, Kim Jong Un, at the top.

But how it handles talks with Washington over its food crisis and a decades-old standoff over its nuclear weapons program will provide the strongest clues yet about how the country will behave as it extends the Kim dynasty into a third generation -- whether it will lean toward provocation or reconciliation and how tightly it will cling to its nuclear program.

North Korea's neighbors and Washington are watching to see whether Kim Jong Un can consolidate power over a nation that proudly trumpets its efforts to build nuclear weapons and has a history of aggression against its southern neighbor and rival. There are fears that North Korea could seek to build Kim Jong Un's credentials, and generate a sense of national unity, by conducting a missile or nuclear test or staging an attack on South Korea.

Signs so far are that Pyongyang is striving for continuity and maintaining the elder Kim's policies. That has good and bad implications for policymakers in Washington and Seoul.

On one hand, Kim Jong Il's marquee achievement is the North's nuclear program, seen as crucial to the survival of an authoritarian government that struggles to feed its people. Pyongyang conducted nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 and has developed missiles with the potential to attack its neighbors and potentially reach the United States.

Zhang Liangui, a Korea specialist and professor at a Chinese Communist Party training academy, told The Global Times newspaper that the North sees its nuclear program as part of Kim Jong Il's legacy, an indication that it would be impossible for Pyongyang to abandon it -- at least under the present leadership.

But on the plus side, Wednesday's statement from an unidentified Foreign Ministry spokesman in Pyongyang suggests it is open to pursuing an apparent deal with the United States that was in the making before Kim died and could be portrayed as a diplomatic victory for the North.

The Associated Press reported in mid-December that the United States was poised to announce a significant donation of food aid to North Korea. That would have been followed within days by an agreement to suspend North Korea's uranium enrichment program, according to a broad outline of the emerging agreement made known to the AP by people close to the negotiations.

Worries about North Korea's nuclear capability took on renewed urgency in November 2010 when the country disclosed a uranium enrichment facility that could give it a second route to manufacture nuclear weapons, in

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addition to its existing plutonium-based program. At low levels, uranium can be used in power reactors, but at higher levels it can be used in nuclear bombs.

In its statement this week, the North accused Washington of changing the amount and kind of aid it was offering to send, and voiced doubt over U.S. intentions, but concluded: "We will watch if the U.S. truly wants to build confidence."

"For those in the U.S. government seeking to re-engage with the North Koreans ... this may provide the clearest indicator yet that there is more continuity than change in the early post-Kim Jong Il period," said John Park, an expert on North Korea at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

In North Korea's New Year's editorial, which provides a major signal of its policy priorities, Pyongyang appeared to strike a conciliatory tone. The editorial was notable for what it left out: the usual glorification of its nuclear ambitions and harsh criticism of the United States.

While emphasizing strength, unity and the continuation of Kim Jong Il's "military-first" policy under his son, it also acknowledged that "the food problem is a burning issue."

With little arable land and outdated agricultural practices, North Korea has long struggled to feed its people. The United Nations has said a quarter of North Korea's 24 million people need aid and that malnutrition is surging, especially among children.

Addressing the need for food could be essential to stability under the new leadership.

In April 2012, North Korea will mark the centenary of the birth of national founder Kim Il Sung, the new leader's grandfather. According to the country's propaganda, that occasion will herald the North's path toward a "great, prosperous and powerful nation."

Kim Jong Un, like his father, will struggle with feeding his people and settling political differences with Seoul and Washington, according to Haksoon Paik, an analyst at the Sejong Institute in South Korea.

"Those problems are real tough challenges for the new leader in the North, the solution to which requires cooperation from (the) outside world," Paik said.

The path toward reaching a deal on food aid remains unclear.

U.S. officials and North Korean diplomats based at its U.N. mission in New York have remained in touch since Kim's Dec. 17 death, but the two sides have yet to restart formal discussions. The State Department says unresolved differences remain over the assessment of the food the North needs and how its distribution would be monitored.

Before Kim's death, the wartime enemies had also been discussing setting up another round of bilateral talks aimed at restarting six-nation nuclear disarmament talks that the North pulled out of in early 2009. The talks also include China, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

Ralph Cossa, president of Pacific Forum CSIS, a Hawaii-based think tank, said six-nation negotiations would likely resume at some point, as no one has come up with a better way for the parties to talk.

But "their stated intent -- denuclearization of the Korean peninsula -- will remain a pipe dream," Cossa said.

Pennington reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Jean H. Lee in Seoul and Charles Hutzler in Beijing contributed to this report.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2012/01/12/nkorea_signals_its_open_to_us_disarmament_deal/

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Yonhap News – South Korea

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January 13, 2012

N. Korea Test-Fired 3 Short-Range Missiles this Week: Japan Newspaper

TOKYO, Jan. 13 (Yonhap) -- North Korea test-fired three short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea earlier this week, apparently as part of efforts to improve its missile technology, a Japanese newspaper said Friday.

North Korea launched what appeared to be KN-02 ground-to-ground missiles on Wednesday morning, according to multiple Japanese government sources quoted by the Sankei Shimbun.

The communist country also test-fired two short-range missiles on Dec. 19, shortly after it announced the death of its longtime leader Kim Jong-il. South Korean officials said they did not see the launch as anything more than test-firing.

The South's military believes North Korea is developing KN-06 missiles, which are an improvement over the KN-02, and has been test-firing them since last year to check their performance before deploying them.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/13/38/040100000AEN20120113002600315F.HTML>

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Times of India – India

Coup Fears Resurface in Pakistan as Gilani-Kayani Spat Turns Ugly

By Omar Farooq Khan, Tamil News Network (TNN)

January 12, 2012

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan army on Wednesday warned of "grievous consequences" over accusations by the country's prime minister that the top military brass had violated the constitution.

Yousaf Raza Gilani also sacked the defence secretary, considered close to the military, in an apparent tit-for-tat move that worsened ties between the wobbly civilian government of Asif Ali Zardari and the powerful military that has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its existence.

Tensions have risen since a memo seeking US help to prevent a military coup in May and rein in the country's powerful khaki establishment came to light in November. Pak-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz had claimed to have delivered the memo to the Americans that former envoy to US Husain Haqqani had allegedly authored at Zardari's behest. Zardari can face impeachment if his links to the memo are established.

Fired for Kayani statement

Shortly before news that defense secretary Naeem Khalid Lodhi had been sacked, the military released a statement saying allegations leveled against the army chief Ashfaq Pervez Kayani and director-general Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Ahmed Shuja Pasha were very serious and will have grave consequences.

"There can be no allegation more serious than what the PM has leveled against the chief of army staff and the DG ISI and has unfortunately charged the officers for violation of the constitution of the country. This has very serious ramifications with potentially grievous consequences for the country," a statement released by the military said.

The handout stated that PM Yousaf Raza Gilani gave an interview to the People's Daily Online when Kayani was on an official visit to China. Gilani had said that replies of Kayani and Pasha in the SC without the prior approval of the government in connection to the alleged memo controversy were unconstitutional and illegal.

The army has confronted the government over the memo in the SC that has constituted a three-member commission to probe the scandal that threatens to implicate Zardari. The government had asked the court to

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dismiss a plea seeking a judicial probe into the memo, while Kayani and Pasha in their statements took the opposite position, saying the memo was a conspiracy against the army.

The statement, issued after Kayani returned from China, maintained it had passed its response through the defence ministry to the court in accordance with the law.

Naeem Khalid Lodhi, a retired general seen as an army representative within the civilian setup, was dismissed for the "misunderstanding" between Gilani and the top brass. "PM has terminated the contract of defence secretary for gross misconduct," said an official. Lodhi was fired for his role in submitting the statements to the court.

Lodhi was regarded to be more powerful than the defence minister because of his direct ties to the army high command. Nargis Sethi, considered close to Gilani, would replace Lodhi. The PM needs the defence secretary on his side if he sacks the army or intelligence chiefs.

Analysts said the removal of Lodhi and Sethi's appointment shows the government is not in a defensive mode. "Firing Lodhi may be a first step by the government in removing the chief of army staff and the DG ISI," political analyst Ikram Sehgal said.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Coup-fears-resurfaces-in-Pakistan-as-Gilani-Kayani-spat-turns-ugly/articleshow/11454493.cms>

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Economic Times – India

No Assurances Against Military Coup in Pakistan: US

By Press Trust of India (PTI)

January 12, 2012

WASHINGTON: The US today said it has neither sought nor received assurances that the Pakistani army will not stage a coup, even as it made it clear that it supports a "civilian-led government" in the country.

Acknowledging that Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Martin E Dempsey has talked on phone to Pakistani Army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, a Pentagon spokesman said: "I'm not aware that we've sought any assurances, and I don't think we're aware that we've been given any."

"This is a matter for Pakistani officials and the government leaders there, military and civilian, to work out," Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt John Kirby said in first comments by US officials on the ongoing tussle between the army and government in Pakistan.

Echoing the sentiments that the developments were the internal matters of Pakistan, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the US supports a "civilian-led government" as it maintains "strong relations" with the Pakistan military.

"We want to see all parties in Pakistan behave in a manner consistent with the country's constitution with the democratic process and civil discourse," she said after a meeting between Pakistan's new ambassador Sherry Rehman and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the State Department.

Nuland called the meeting a "chance talk" to "getting our relation back on the track in all its elements in the new year.

Asked about Pakistan's political instability, she said US diplomats in Islamabad were monitoring the situation but insisted that these were internal matters.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-01-12/news/30619674_1_pakistani-army-civilian-led-government-sherry-rehman

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Times of India – India

US Confident about Safety of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons

Press Trust of India (PTI)

13 January 2012

WASHINGTON: The Obama Administration has exuded confidence about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons in the wake of political turmoil inside the country.

"We are confident that all of these issues are managed well," Undersecretary of State for Arms Control Ellen Tauscher told Washington-based Defence Writers Group yesterday.

"The administration is very clear that we work very closely with our Pakistani allies. At their requests and at our offering we work closely on issues of nuclear security," Tauscher said in response to a question on the security of nuclear weapons in Pakistan.

The Under Secretary said that safety and security of nuclear weapons and materials is an issue of concern for global leaders.

"This is the reason why the (US) President (Barack) Obama had such a success (on Nuclear Security Summit)," she said adding that the next one is being scheduled for March in Seoul.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/US-confident-about-safety-of-Pakistans-nuclear-weapons/articleshow/11478711.cms>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Fire-Damaged Nuclear Sub to Be Ready in 2014 – Rogozin

12 January 2012

The Yekaterinburg, a Russian nuclear submarine damaged by fire while in dry dock in late December, will be repaired and re-enter service in summer 2014, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin wrote in his twitter account.

"We plan to return the submarine to duty earlier, in summer 2014," Rogozin wrote in his twitter account in response to a question from a blogger who suggested that the repairs would take three or four years.

On December 29, the outer hull of the Yekaterinburg, a Delta-class nuclear submarine, caught fire during repairs at a shipyard in northwest Russia's Murmansk Region. Seven crewmembers and two responders were injured as they battled the fire, which was put out the following day.

The repairs are scheduled to start this summer.

MOSCOW, January 12 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.ria.ru/mlitary_news/20120112/170726267.html

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The Moscow Times – Russia

Russian Nuclear Security Remains a Problem

13 January 2012

The Moscow Times

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Russia remains one of the least-safe countries in terms of nuclear security, although the country is making progress in securing its weapons-usable nuclear materials, a new report released Wednesday found.

The Nuclear Threat Initiative index — compiled jointly with the Economist Intelligence Unit — ranked Russia 24th out of the 32 countries that possess more than 1 kilogram of weapons-grade radioactive material.

The three safest countries were Australia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The United States came in 13th place, while North Korea placed 32nd.

Russia, which possesses more than 500 tons of nuclear materials, fared poorly because of "its quantities of nuclear materials, large number of sites (which could be further consolidated) and the need for stronger regulations regarding the physical security of materials while in transit," the report said.

But despite Russia's low ranking, "today's Russia and the Russia of 20 years ago are completely different," co-chairman Sam Nunn wrote in the report, which was published on the initiative's web site.

Russian authorities have attained "significant achievements" in reducing the nuclear threat and continued their work despite considerable economic difficulties in the 1990s, Nunn added.

The report is the first of its kind to assess nuclear risks on a country-by-country basis and analyzes 176 countries in total, including a separate category of 144 states possessing less than 1 kilogram of nuclear materials.

Its aim is to help prevent nuclear terrorism and encourage governments to take actions to reduce nuclear risks. Nine hundred analysts were consulted for the index.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-nuclear-security-remains-a-problem/451006.html>

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Chicago Tribune

U.S., Russia Arms Negotiators Plan Stability Talks

By David Alexander, Reuters

January 12, 2012

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. and Russian negotiators will hold talks this year on issues ranging from missile defense to cyber security, hoping to set the stage for a renewed arms control push once elections are over in both countries, the top U.S. arms negotiator said on Thursday.

Ellen Tauscher, undersecretary of state for arms control, said a year after the New START nuclear arms treaty with Russia that the United States was still committed to returning to the negotiating table to discuss cuts in strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

But with Europe working on a nuclear deterrence review, elections in Russia and the United States, and Moscow largely satisfied with nuclear stockpile levels following the New START treaty, Tauscher said the timing was not right for a new round of nuclear talks.

"We would like to get back to talks ... but I think we're sanguine about the fact that they're not ready to do it," she told defense writers. "So what we've decided to do is to multitask and to use this next six to eight months to do these ... strategic stability talks."

Tauscher, who would lead the talks with her Russian counterpart, said the two sides agreed in December to focus on 13 topic areas and to meet at least monthly and talk every few days in an effort to identify common concerns, threats and points of agreement.

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The issues include conventional forces in Europe, piracy, cyber security, missile defense and other areas where there is a considerable amount of common interest and agreement but some threat as well. The aim is to define what the two sides mean by strategic stability and what steps they must take to achieve it.

"We're not wasting this year, which is pretty much consumed by ... things that are going to distract people," Tauscher said. "We'll get that work done, and as soon as we get the opening subsequent to their election and perhaps even subsequent to ours, off we go."

Tauscher said the New START treaty ratified last February had been an important step in improving U.S. and Russian relations, which had soured as a result of U.S. efforts to build a missile defense system in Europe and other disagreements.

The accord commits both sides to reduce their deployed nuclear warheads to no more than 1,550 within seven years. While the reduction was modest, the treaty revived much of the inspection and verification system of the original START strategic arms treaty.

The United States has signaled an interest in further nuclear cuts, in part to cut costs. A strategic review released last week to help guide spending reductions at the Pentagon said it was possible that U.S. deterrence goals could be achieved with a smaller nuclear arsenal.

The review was guided by conclusions in a near-complete Pentagon study on how to implement the administration's 2010 Nuclear Posture Review. The classified document also makes recommendations about changes that should be made in future nuclear policy.

'HEDGE WEAPONS'

U.S. President Barack Obama has endorsed a long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, while seeking \$80 billion over 10 years to revitalize the nation's nuclear weapons complex to provide confidence the aging arsenal will work.

Tauscher said the spending was a necessary part of achieving deeper cuts in the U.S. nuclear stockpile because it would give Washington the confidence it needed to eliminate many of its underplayed warheads, which are kept as a hedge in case some weapons do not work.

"As you take weapons down, mostly you're probably going to take down what we call the hedge weapons first," she said. "You have to have a responsive infrastructure to do that."

While ties with Moscow have improved as a result of the New START treaty, the Obama administration's effort to build a missile defense system in Europe continues to be a source of friction in the relationship, Tauscher said.

After he took office in 2009, Obama abandoned former President George W. Bush's plan for a European missile defense shield and replaced it with the so-called phased adaptive approach.

The Obama system relied on smaller missile interceptors initially based on ship and later on the ground in Poland and Romania along with a radar system in Turkey.

Washington says the system is aimed at countering a missile threat from Iran, but Russia is concerned it could be used to undermine Moscow's nuclear deterrent. Russia has demanded assurances that Tauscher said the United States could not give without limiting or eliminating parts of the system.

"The only way they're going to be reassured that ... the system itself does not undercut their strategic deterrent is to sit with us in the tent in NATO and see what we're doing," she said.

"So is it a political leap of faith? Yes. Are they ready to do it? No," she said. "But we're hoping that these strategic stability talks over the next eight months will start to kind of loosen these old ties that have been binding everybody."



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Reporting By David Alexander; Editing by Peter Cooney.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/sns-rt-us-usa-russia-armscontrolre80b292-20120112_0,4381533.story

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Foreign Policy/The Cable

Tauscher: We Will Get a Missile Defense Agreement with Russia

By Josh Rogin

Thursday, January 12, 2012

The United States and Russia will conclude a missile defense cooperation agreement as a result of the "strategic stability" talks between the two powers, according to the State Department's top arms control official.

"We will get a missile defense agreement for cooperation with Russia," Undersecretary of State for Arms Control Ellen Tauscher told a meeting of the Defense Writers Group on Thursday. "I believe that missile defense is the metaphor for the opportunity of getting things right [in the U.S.-Russia relationship]. It's been an irritant in our relationship for 30 years. It's also the place where great European powers, including Russia, can work together cooperatively."

Tauscher talked at length about her ongoing discussions, which she dubbed "strategic stability" talks, with Russian officials over missile defense. These have centered around cooperation on the Obama administration's European missile defense program, known as the European Phased Adaptive Approach, she said.

"Almost everything else that you work with on European security has been settled, decided, and worked on together for decades. The only thing that's new where you can bring the Russians in is missile defense," Tauscher said. "This is the place where we can begin to put aside the Cold War and 'mutually assured destruction' and move toward 'mutually assured stability.'"

Your humble *Cable* guy asked Tauscher why the Obama administration's optimism about a missile defense agreement with Moscow seems so far removed from the pessimism of leading Russian officials. In a November speech, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev suggested talks had broken down and he threatened several retaliatory measures, including Russia's potential withdrawal from the New START nuclear reductions agreement.

Tauscher responded that these statements were part of the Russian campaign season and that progress would speed up once the March Presidential elections in Russia had subsided. She also acknowledged that the Russians are demanding a legally binding document from the Obama administration promising U.S. missile defenses in Europe will not impact Russia's strategic deterrent, which Tauscher said they will never get.

"We will never do a legally binding agreement because I can't do one. I can't get anything ratified. Even if I wanted to I'm not sure I would.... 'Legally binding' doesn't mean what it did before," Tauscher said. "What they are looking for really is a sense that future administrations are going to live by [Obama's commitments]. And you can't really do that."

GOP senators fought hard against during the New START debate against giving Russia any assurances that could be seen as limits on the U.S. missile defense system. Tauscher said the only way for Russia to be assured about the U.S. system was to cooperate fully in its implementation.

"The only way they are going to be assured ... the system does not undercut their strategic deterrent is to sit with us in the tent in NATO and see what we are doing. They will only be their own eyes and ears," she said. "Is it a political leap of faith? Yes. Are they ready to do it? No. But we are hoping that these strategic stability talks over the next 8 months will start to loosen these old ties that have been binding everybody in the old way of thinking."

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Tauscher also said implementation of New START with Russia was going extremely well, one year after ratification. There have been 1,700 notifications [of missile movements, etc] and each side has done near the maximum allowed number of inspections, she said.

"We have a very good treaty. Nobody claimed it was the best or the biggest treaty in the world. But it's a modest treaty that has served us in so many different ways," she said. "New START is just doing great."

Tauscher said the Obama administration hopes the "strategic stability" talks will establish reliability and durability in the U.S.-Russia relationship, which will lead to further nuclear reduction talks following Russia's presidential election, including discussions about reducing Russia's tactical nuclear stockpile.

"We want to get back to the table with the Russians both on strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed. That means everything," she said "We need the elections can pass so that both sides can get back to the table."

Overall, Tauscher disputed the contention that U.S.-Russia relations have peaked, and she dismissed those who have pointed to official comments from either side that seem to indicate the U.S.-Russia "reset" policy is coming to an end.

"While you might pick little data points out and say well there's a little bit of snotty talk here or there... the truth is everything is moving along, nose up, things are good."

http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/12/tauscher_we_will_get_a_missile_defense_agreement_with_russia

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New York Times
January 11, 2012

New Study Ranks Countries on Security of Materials That Fuel Nuclear Arms

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

The 32 nations with materials that can fuel atom bombs are typically mum on security, which looks to the public like a closed world of barbed wire and armed guards. Behind the scenes, atomic insiders have long told horror stories of risky practices and security flaws that might let the crucial ingredients for nuclear weapons fall into the wrong hands.

Now, for the first time publicly, experts have surveyed the precautions each country has in place and ranked the nations from best to worst. The study is full of surprises and potential embarrassments: for instance, Australia takes first place in nuclear security and Japan comes in at No. 23, behind nations like Kazakhstan and South Africa.

The United States? It ties for 13th place with Belgium. Last place goes to North Korea, a police state that the report finds to be seriously deficient on issues of atomic security, and next-to-last to Pakistan.

The edgy ranking is a joint endeavor of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a private advocacy group in Washington, and the Economist Intelligence Unit, a company in London that does risk analyses. Their goals are to stir debate on how to promote security and to encourage governments to strengthen protections against atomic terrorism.

"We'll never get this job done if we continue to operate behind closed doors," Deepti Choubey, senior director for nuclear security at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, said Tuesday in an interview. The analysis was unveiled Wednesday morning and posted online at www.ntiindex.org.

In interviews, the nuclear analysts said they worked from public information that was often poorly known — for instance, general procedures for training guards and protecting sensitive sites.

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“There was no spying,” said Leo Abruzzese, director of global forecasting at the Economist Intelligence Unit. “It was pieced together” from a wealth of obscure data.

Sam Nunn, the former Democratic senator from Georgia and a founder of the threat initiative, said the study “is not about congratulating some and chastising others.” Rather, Mr. Nunn said, its analyses and recommendations are meant to offer “a resource for improvement.”

Those financing the threat initiative and the study include the MacArthur Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The global assessment is an outgrowth of President Obama’s effort to get nations to take more responsibility in locking up bomb materials that are vulnerable to theft and covert sale. In 2010, he held a security summit meeting in Washington that drew attention to the danger. Experts warned that terrorists could buy or steal the makings for nuclear arms from the world’s secretive maze of atomic storage and production sites, which are said to number in the thousands. A second summit meeting is scheduled for March in Seoul, South Korea.

The new analysis centers on security precautions for the two main fuels of nuclear arms — plutonium and highly enriched uranium. It did not try to assess protections for highly radioactive materials that a terrorist might try to scatter with conventional explosives in a so-called dirty bomb.

For each country, the study looked at 18 factors, including known quantities of nuclear materials, physical protections, accounting methods and transportation security as well as larger societal factors like political stability and corruption.

Australia came out on top, the report says, because it has reduced its holdings of weapon-usable materials to “a small amount” and did well on the overall indicators. It received 94 out of 100 possible points.

Among the nine countries known to possess nuclear arms, Britain came out on top with a score of 79. The report credits its high status to concrete security measures as well as “its commitment to and follow-through on international obligations.”

The United States scored 78 — a fairly good ranking, the evaluators said, considering its possession of a sprawling nuclear complex that dates from the earliest days of the atomic era.

Japan received a score of 68 because of its vast stores of plutonium, relatively poor measures with security personnel and lack of an independent regulatory agency.

A surprise nation on the list is Iran. It claims no ambitions for making bomb fuel even while global leaders worry that its growing atomic program seeks just that capability. The study team said that Iran was included in the analysis because of its possession of highly enriched uranium for a research reactor in Tehran.

Iran received an overall score of 46, its standing undercut by what the report judged to be corruption, political instability and poor procedures for nuclear control and accounting. Of 32 nations, it ranked 30th.

Pakistan, with a security score of 41 and a nuclear complex that is undergoing rapid growth, was faulted for poor transportation security, political instability and the presence of terrorist groups eager to get their hands on the nuclear materials.

North Korea came in last with a score of 37. The report cited 10 indicators that came in below the global average, including site and transportation security as well as political stability.

The report said nearly a quarter of the nations with materials that can fuel atom bombs scored poorly on social factors because of “very high levels of corruption.” And it warned that several of those “also scored poorly on the prospect of political instability over the next two years.”

That bleak combination, the study concluded, “significantly increases the risk that nuclear materials might be stolen, with help from corrupt insiders or in the midst of government distraction or political chaos.”

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/12/science/study-ranks-countries-on-nuclear-security.html>

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San Francisco Chronicle

Livermore Lab Bioweapons Center Debated in Court

By Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer

Thursday, January 12, 2012

An opponent of the new biological weapons research center at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory told a federal appeals court Wednesday that government officials approved the project without fully considering the consequences of a possible terrorist attack or disclosing the details of a past release of anthrax.

Research at the center is intended to help the government detect biological pathogens such as anthrax, plague, brucellosis and Q fever. The Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals blocked the facility in 2006, saying the Department of Energy's environmental assessment had failed to study the possibility that terrorists could cause a release of deadly organisms.

The department took another look and found no significant danger from terrorism, a conclusion accepted by a federal judge who allowed the center to open in February 2009. But a lawyer for opponents argued Wednesday that the new review was perfunctory and violated the court's 2006 order.

Attorney Scott Yundt of the antinuclear group Tri-Valley CAREs assailed the Energy Department's main conclusions: that a terrorist attack would pose no greater danger than an accidental release due to equipment failure or an earthquake, which the previous study had considered; and that a theft and release of lethal substances by terrorists was too improbable to analyze.

"They didn't do an impact analysis of (those) credible terrorist events," Yundt told a three-judge panel, referring to possible thefts by outsiders or disgruntled employees.

He also said a separate Energy Department study recognized that an accident doesn't have the same impact as an intentional assault, a conclusion absent from the department's environmental review.

Justice Department lawyer Barclay Samford countered that the department properly found little risk to the public from the "very small amounts of pathogens" at the research center, even in the unlikely event of a terrorist attack.

"A purposeful plane crash would have the same effect as an accidental plane crash," and any microorganisms that escaped would be quickly destroyed by light and heat, Samford said. More than 1,000 U.S. laboratories handle pathogens, he said, and there's no evidence that "a terrorist attack is any more likely in Livermore than anywhere else."

Yundt replied that the Livermore facility is the only one located next to a nuclear weapons laboratory, a potential terrorist target.

He also said the department's report gave short shrift to a 2005 incident in which a former employee returned to the lab and mailed anthrax samples to two other facilities, where some of the samples leaked from their vials. There have been no allegations that the leak was deliberate or malicious.

The report described it as a shipping incident and did not mention anthrax or the monetary fine that was assessed against the department, Yundt said.

The panel did not indicate when or how it would rule, but Judge Milan Smith, the most active questioner of the trio, seemed unpersuaded by Yundt's arguments.

"There was no apparent attempt by the Department of Energy to evade discussion" of the anthrax incident, Smith said, noting that the report contained some details and solicited public comment.

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Overall, he said, "the government did a whole lot of analysis. The question is, at what point is it enough?"

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2012/01/12/BAPM1MO460.DTL&type=science>

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London Telegraph U.K.

OPINION/Analysis

Iran's Nuclear Power: The World Must Prepare for the Inevitable to Happen

Whenever an Iranian scientist is killed or a mysterious explosion takes place inside a sensitive facility, the veil is briefly lifted on an intense covert effort to derail Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

By David Blair

11 January 2012

This campaign appears to be having a real impact: Iran's nuclear programme is not progressing as quickly as Pakistan's for example. Sabotage has already imposed significant delays, certainly measured in months and possibly in years.

Buying time is a perfectly respectable goal of policy, particularly when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will step down as president next year, while Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, is 72 and in poor health.

Yet in the end, covert action can achieve nothing more than delay. If Iran's current leaders or their successors are implacably determined to acquire the means to build nuclear weapons, then they will succeed eventually, even if the West were to launch a war to destroy their key installations.

Eventually, the world may have to live with a nuclear-armed Iran - or at least a nuclear-capable adversary permanently on the threshold of building the ultimate weapon. "There's little in practical or military terms that you can do to stop it," said Paul Cornish, professor of international security at Bath University. "You can never destroy the Iranian capability: all you can do is hold it up."

While no western government, let alone Israel or the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, is prepared to say that it could live with a nuclear-armed Iran, their actions suggest they are preparing for this contingency.

America's plan for missile defence in Europe is explicitly designed to guard against a future threat from Iran. The central purpose of this shield would be to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran from blackmailing America's Nato allies.

Meanwhile, the Gulf states, who live in the shadow of Iran's nuclear-tipped ambitions for regional dominance, are also investing in theatre missile defences. The only rationale for these schemes is to minimise the risks posed by a nuclear-armed Iran.

Even in Israel, experts talk sotto voce about how the country would adapt its security policy if Iran were to cross the vital threshold. The first move would probably be for America to provide an explicit guarantee of Israel's security, akin to the pledge in Article Five of Nato's founding treaty.

However a nuclear-armed Iran might become far more belligerent. Iranian influence in the Middle East could expand as it funnels more weapons and support to extremist allies, particularly Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

In extremis, Iran could provide some nuclear security guarantees of its own. Suppose Hizbollah were to bombard Israel with its Iranian-supplied arsenal of missiles. When Israel prepares to retaliate, Iran issues a pointed reminder that it now has nuclear weapons. What would have been a local crisis then becomes a regional confrontation with the possibility of nuclear escalation.

Meanwhile, the oil price rises through the stratosphere.

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Living with a nuclear-armed Iran might mean enduring just such a scenario.

David Blair returned to the Daily Telegraph to become Chief Foreign Correspondent in November 2011. He previously worked for the paper as Diplomatic Editor, Africa Correspondent and Middle East Correspondent.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9007982/Irans-nuclear-power-the-world-must-prepare-for-the-inevitable-to-happen.html>

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Wall Street Journal
OPINION/Emerging Europe Blog
January 12, 2012

U.S. Likely to Press On With Missile Defense in Poland

By Marcin Sobczyk

The U.S. will likely keep its commitment to place missile interceptors in Poland to counter a military threat from Iran regardless of any opposition from Russia and despite defense cutbacks, a U.S. senator said Thursday.

U.S. President Barack Obama in 2009 scrapped the missile-defense plan drafted by his predecessor, George W. Bush, under which Poland would host a base near its border with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. The U.S. later proposed a new system envisaging 24 interceptors in Poland at the same location.

“Indications are that despite defense cutbacks, we’re going to maintain the commitment to build the Polish missile-defense system, and that is because the threat from Iran is growing, it’s clear that Iran’s nuclear programs are accelerating,” Illinois Republican Senator Mark Kirk told reporters in Warsaw.

“My hope is that we stay on schedule for a 2018 full operational capability of 24 interceptors at Redzikowo to defend NATO and the United States,” he added. “The Russians have been pretty hostile to missile defense. They say that in some way this threatens their nuclear deterrents, but we’re going to build only 24 interceptors in Poland and last I checked Russia has more than 24 nuclear weapons. ... We need to defend a free, sovereign and independent Poland regardless of what Russia thinks.”

Abandoning the missile-shield project in 2009 had irked Polish officials, who saw the move as part of Mr. Obama’s effort to improve relations with Russia while ignoring Poland’s strategic defense choices.

Poland was forced into the Soviet bloc after World War II and joined NATO in 1999, 10 years after the collapse of communism. Its relationship with Russia remains marred by historical disagreements.

The revival of the Polish missile-defense site plan provoked a Russian response last year, including from President Dmitry Medvedev, who in November 2011 threatened to deploy ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad if the U.S. proceeded with its plan.

Russia negotiated with the U.S. to be given access to data and operations of the U.S.-led missile-defense system as a condition for its acceptance of the project. The U.S. Congress passed restrictions on such data sharing, Senator Kirk said Thursday.

“I’ve expressed some concerns here about having Russians enter the NATO defense system. I think that’s a mistake. The Congress has passed restrictions, saying that no classified data, hit-to-kill technology, or telemetry can be given to the Russians, as well as any other data, and if there’s a proposal to give it to the Russians, that a 60-day delay be imposed,” he said.

Russia has a close relationship with Iran and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and shares information it gets from NATO, he added.

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“Dmitry Rogozin, who’s the deputy prime minister of Russia in charge of these affairs, is scheduled to go to Iran. My worry is that anything we give to him is immediately given to the Ahmadinejad government—and the whole point of the Polish missile-defense system is to defend against Iran,” the senator said.

“We should not let the Russians accomplish by diplomacy what they can’t accomplish by espionage, especially given the Russian relationship with the Iranians. I believe everything that we give to the Russians immediately goes to the Iranians,” he added.

He also said Russia’s perception of a military threat from Iran is “probably too low,” and that if Iran manufactures a nuclear bomb, it will be able to share it with others in the Middle East, which will make nuclear weapons harder to control. This could backfire for Russia if a party hostile to Moscow, such as Chechen separatists, obtains access to the weapons, he added.

“You could see a scenario when Chechens might get access to a weapon. At that point, a weapon could be used just as well against Russians as against NATO. I think the Russians inaccurately perceive the danger,” Mr. Kirk said.

Marcin Sobczyk is the Warsaw Bureau Chief at Dow Jones Newswires in the Warsaw Area, Poland.

<http://blogs.wsj.com/emergingeuropa/2012/01/12/u-s-likely-to-press-on-with-missile-defense-in-poland/>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
OPINION/Opinion & Analysis

Can the Yury Dolgoruky Fill the Yekaterinburg’s Shoes?

13 January 2012

By RIA Novosti military analyst Konstantin Bogdanov

Experts believe that while the Yury Dolgoruky strategic ballistic missile submarine is capable of filling in for the Yekaterinburg, which was damaged by fire shortly before the New Year, it will not fix the deficiencies in Russia’s nuclear shield.

The long arm of the Navy

The Yury Dolgoruky, the first Borei-class SSBN carrying Bulava missiles, is one step away from being put into service. The second submarine, the Alexander Nevsky, set sail for testing in fall 2011. A third vessel, the Vladimir Monomakh, is still under construction.

Yet another submarine of the same class is still on the drawing board. Its preliminary name is the Svyatitel Nikolai and it will reportedly have 20 missile silos versus 16 on the earlier models.

In addition to the Svyatitel Nikolai, the Navy will likely receive another four Borei-class subs, bringing the total figure to eight. The number of Bulava missiles on them will be either 128 or 148, if the reports about the 20-silo model prove true.

This will make it possible to decommission the older SSBN’s (667BDR- and 667BDRM-class submarines), which currently constitute the naval component of Russia’s Strategic Nuclear Forces (SNF).

Forced downtime

The end of 2011 sprung an unpleasant surprise for the Navy. Fire broke out on the Yekaterinburg on December 29, destroying the submarine, which was being stored in dry dock at Shipyard #82 for maintenance.

The fire destroyed the sonar complex, cable routes, and the acoustically-treated light hull. Luckily, the weapons compartments and the central station were not damaged.

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According to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the newly appointed caretaker of the military complex, the submarine reconstruction project will be launched in June 2012 along with scheduled maintenance that “had to be carried out in 2013 anyway.”

It might take not so long to return the Yekaterinburg to service: its sonar complex can be replaced rather soon because it was only installed in 2003, a fact that will likely minimize design and manufacturing problems.

But the Yury Dolgoruky will simply fill in for one of the six 667BDRM-class submarines, whose temporary withdrawal from active status can only worsen the unfavorable state of affairs in the Strategic Nuclear Forces.

Decommissioning outpaces new construction

The prospects of the Russian nuclear triad in the next decade can inspire cautious optimism at best among the military-political leadership. The rate of decommissioning of warheads capable of reaching U.S. territory is much higher than the rate at which new ones are being commissioned.

This fact explains the recent vigorous efforts to reform the Strategic Missile Forces and the naval strategic nuclear force. Some results are already in evidence: Russia developed and commissioned the Bulava missile and redesigned the single-warhead Topol-M missile for MIRV'ed warheads (a modification codenamed Yars). There are reports that the new missile systems are undergoing testing.

The same goes for plans to develop new silo-based liquid-fuel carriers. Recall that the majority of Russia's land-based SNF is represented by rapidly ageing Soviet-made missiles.

Slightly over one hundred heavy silo-based R-36M2/MUTTH and UR-100NUTTH missiles capable of carrying 10 and six MIRV warheads respectively account for 80 percent of all warheads in the strategic land component. The rest are single-warhead Topol and Topol-M missiles and a handful of Yars missiles.

To quote Commander-in-Chief of the Strategic Missile Troops Sergei Karakayev, all UR-100NUTTH missiles will be decommissioned by 2017 to be followed by practically the entire R-36M family by 2021. (Earlier it was reported that these missiles could remain in service till 2026, but perhaps this applies only to some well-preserved specimens.) Even in the best of circumstances, the new liquid-fuel missiles will have only just started being supplied to the forces by that time.

The rate of commissioning of Yars missiles (and their potential successors which, as Karakayev hinted, might be tested in 2015) is unlikely to be high enough in the next decade to keep the force unchanged.

A hole in the bottom of New START

Some Russian experts believe it is possible that Russia will reduce its offensive armaments below the level of 1,550 warheads stipulated in the New START treaty to 1,100-1,300 warheads in order to return to 1,550 as a result of the large-scale renovation of its strategic equipment.

Maj. Gen. Vladimir Dvorkin of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of World Economy and International Relations (the former head of the Defense Ministry's 4th Central Research Institute in charge of scientific and engineering support for the strategic forces) quipped at an international seminar last year that Russia would have to actively build new missiles in order to participate in nuclear disarmament in accordance with the New START ceilings.

But it will be difficult to balance the manufacture of Bulavas relative to Yars missiles. Both are produced by the same Votkinsky Plant in Udmurtia, which is also the sole manufacturer of the tactical Iskander missiles that are badly needed by the Land Forces.

The recommended remedies include expanding the scale of production or at least transferring the manufacture of Iskanders elsewhere. But each option will take time and it will be difficult to build up the output of solid-fuel strategic missiles even if implementation begins immediately.



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The situation being what it is, the most active existing part of the naval Strategic Nuclear Forces (667BDRM-class submarines with R-29RMU Sineva missiles) emerges as the crucial element in the effort to maintain the strategic balance of power.

This is why the reaction to the Yekaterinburg fire was so pained. At one stroke this country has lost, even if temporarily, 16 percent of its submarine-based nuclear warheads. The upcoming commissioning of the Yury Dolgoruky will at best serve as a stopgap, halting the downward trend in Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces.

The views expressed in this article are the author's and may not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20120113/170737992.html>

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Banyan

Let Them Eat Yellowcake

Even mass hunger may not drive North Korea into bargaining away its nuclear capability
January 14th, 2012

WHEN even the North Korean press admits it, things must be pretty bad. The traditional "joint new year editorial" carried in all the country's newspapers flourished the usual upbeat slogan: "Glorify this year 2012 as a year of proud victory, a year when an era of prosperity is unfolding, true to the instructions of the great General Kim Jong Il." It did, however, allude to the plight in which the great general left his people when he died last month: "the food problem is a burning issue in building a thriving country." North Korea is hungry again.

After his father, Kim Il Sung, died in 1994, Kim Jong Il presided over a famine in which perhaps 1m of his people perished. Surely his son, the well-upholstered but juvenile Kim Jong Un, will not allow history to repeat itself? His country must have food aid, and its only ally, China, is unlikely to give as generously as North Korea would hope. So he needs other donors: America, Japan, even South Korea. But to win their help, North Korea will have to talk about its nuclear programme, which means resuming the "six-party talks" (with America, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea), which have now been stalled for over three years.

On Kim Jong Il's death, many North Korea-watchers expected that the country would in effect draw down the blinds to mourn the great man, and shut out the outside world. The young Un, meanwhile, would be intent on consolidating the positions bestowed on him by the fawning press: as the Great Successor, leader of the Korean Workers' Party and its Central Military Commission, Supreme Commander of the armed forces and Genius of the Geniuses (though not yet as the country's leading golfer). Since the young Kim has a reputation as a muscle-flexing warmonger, allegedly behind North Korean outrages against South Korean targets in 2010, it was even feared that he might mark his accession with fresh military provocations, or a new nuclear test.

Some analysts, however, now hope that, with the succession apparently going smoothly so far, the disruption to North Korean diplomacy might be minor. In the last few months of Kim Jong Il's life, North Korea had begun sounding out the other parties to the talks. At a regional summit in Bali in July, North Korea's six-party delegate met his South Korean counterpart. Hillary Clinton, America's secretary of state, invited another North Korean official to New York, and dialogue, tentatively, began again.

Last month this led to an agreement on the resumption of American aid. Officially, America rejects any suggestion that food for the starving is a negotiating tool. In practice, as Marcus Noland and Stephen Haggard of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a Washington think-tank, have shown, there is a lengthy list of occasions when American aid offers have coincided with North Korean diplomatic concessions. In this case, the offer of food seems to have helped produce a North Korean willingness to freeze its uranium-enrichment programme.

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That deal is suspended now, but Euan Graham, a former British diplomat now at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, points out that the pursuit of American aid can be portrayed as part of Kim Jong Il's legacy. There is a parallel with the death in July 1994 of Kim Il Sung. Just three months later, North Korea signed an "agreed framework" with America, which had been under discussion before his death, promising to dismantle its nuclear facilities. The unusually frank admission of food problems in this year's new year editorial suggests it wants to keep the door open. Even a North Korean statement this week hypocritically rejecting America's alleged linking of food and politics could be read as part of a continuing negotiation.

As Mr Graham points out, Kim Jong Un also has another pressing need from the outside world: for hard cash to pay for the perks and luxuries that keep the North Korean elite sweet. His family has never shown much interest in the ordinary citizen. But they have always managed to grease the wheels of the patronage networks and corruption that have kept them in power. Further fuelling the demand for cash are two big anniversaries. Next month Kim Jong Il's 70th birthday will be celebrated as lavishly as if he were alive. And April marks the centenary of the birth of Kim Il Sung, an event long foreshadowed as signalling North Korea's achievement of prosperity. Mass hunger would not just be murderous; worse, for this regime, it would be embarrassing.

Guarding the fat boy's sticky buns

North Korea, however, is not going to come begging. A mass rally in Pyongyang this week to swear allegiance to Mr Kim junior on behalf of the 1.2m members of the army, made the pledge to "wipe out the enemies to the last one if they intrude into the inviolable sky, land and seas of the country even 0.001mm." The new year editorial railed against the "group of traitors" in South Korea and the government's defence commission has said the country will have no dealings with them "forever".

That suggests that the government thinks engagement with the South, and by extension the West, can wait until after the South Korean presidential election in December. Whether its people can wait, however, depends on China's generosity. In Beijing this week South Korea's president Lee Myung-bak exchanged, according to a statement, "candid views" with Chinese leaders on this "crucial moment" on the Korean peninsula.

He is unlikely to have come away satisfied that China will push North Korea into making concessions. Another part of Kim Jong Il's legacy is an even closer relationship with China, which he visited four times in the last two years of his life. China may be exasperated with its Korean ally's economic ineptitude, but seems more afraid of the collapse of the regime and Korean reunification. China may not give enough food, but its political support allows North Korea to play hard to get, and, even if it does agree to resume talks, it will cling to its primitive nuclear deterrent, however hungry its people might become.

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