



USAF COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER
CPC OUTREACH JOURNAL
MAXWELL AFB, ALABAMA

Issue No. 974, 24 January 2012

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Khaleej Times – U.A.E.

Major Powers Open to Serious Talks with Iran

By Reuters

21 January 2012

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN - Major powers signaled on Friday their willingness to reopen talks about curbing Iran's suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons but said Tehran must show it is serious about any negotiations.

The focus on diplomacy follows weeks of rising tensions between the West, which is seeking to cut Iran's oil sales, and Tehran, which has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz through which almost one-fifth of oil traded worldwide flows.

Alarmed Arab neighbors made a plea to avoid escalating the dispute over Iran's nuclear program, while an ally of Iran's supreme leader called for Israel to be "punished" for allegedly killing an Iranian nuclear scientist.

The West suspects Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a cover to develop atomic weapons and has pursued a two-track approach of sanctions and diplomacy to try to rein it in. Iran says its nuclear program is solely to produce electricity.

While major powers stressed their openness to renewed talks, diplomats said they remained divided on their approach, notably on whether to let Iran keep enriching uranium at some level.

The group, known as the P5+1 and as the EU3+3, includes Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who represents the group, issued a statement making clear that a diplomatic path remained open to Iran despite tougher sanctions and fresh speculation of a military strike on its nuclear facilities.

"The EU3+3 has always been clear about the validity of the dual track approach," Ashton's spokesperson said in a statement that included her Oct. 21 letter to the Iranians laying out the possibility of talks. "We are waiting for the Iranian reaction."

The release of the statement and letter appeared to reflect frustration at Iran's statements hinting at a willingness to resume talks but Tehran's failure to formally respond to the letter and commit to discussing the nuclear program in earnest.

In Beijing, China leaned on a visiting Iranian delegation, led by Supreme National Security Council Deputy Secretary Ali Baqeri, to return to nuclear talks, saying it was a "top priority," the Xinhua news agency said on Saturday.

"China believes the Iran nuclear issue should be resolved peacefully through dialogues and negotiations, and that sanctions and military means will not fundamentally address the problem," Xinhua said, citing Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Wu Hailong at the Friday meeting.

Xinhua said the Iranian side "expressed its willingness to resume talks" and to "strengthen cooperation" with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's energy watchdog.

Conciliatory tone from Clinton

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton struck a decidedly conciliatory tone at a news conference with German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle in Washington.

"We do not seek conflict. We strongly believe the people of Iran deserve a better future," she said. "They can have that future, the country can be reintegrated into the global community ... when their government definitively turns away from pursuing nuclear weapons.

"We have to see a seriousness and sincerity of purpose coming from them."

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Westerwelle said, "One thing is clear: the door for serious dialogue remains open but the option of nuclear weapons in Iran is not acceptable."

Diplomats said major powers were divided over what incentives to offer Iran if talks were to resume.

A central issue is whether the group might ask Iran to cease enriching uranium to the higher level of 20 percent but allow it, at least for a time, to continue enriching at lower levels - a stance partly at odds with the group's past positions.

Uranium enrichment is a process that at low levels can yield fuel for nuclear power plants or, if carried out to much higher levels of purity, can generate fissile material for bombs.

To let Iran enrich at lower levels would be something of a concession by the P5+1, although it has previously offered a temporary "freeze-for-freeze" in which Iran would not expand its nuclear program and the powers would not pursue more sanctions.

Iranian calls for punishing Israel

After Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei paid his respects to the families of two scientists assassinated on what Tehran believes were Israel's orders, one of them just last week, a close ally demanded retribution.

"Terrorism has a long history in some countries like the Zionist regime," Ali Larijani, speaker of Iran's parliament and a former nuclear negotiator, said of Israel, which views an atomic bomb in Iran's hands as a threat to its survival.

"The Zionist regime should be punished in a way that it can not play such games with our country again."

Such threats have been made before in Tehran and it is unclear how or when they might be carried out. Israel, widely assumed to have the only nuclear arsenal in the Middle East, is on guard against attacks on its borders and within, notably by Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, which is supported by Iran.

Obama's top military official, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, briefly visited Israel and was quoted by its Defense Ministry as telling officials there that Washington was keen to coordinate on strategy.

"We have many interests in common in the region in this very dynamic time and the more we can continue to engage each other, the better off we'll all be," Dempsey was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the Israeli Defense Ministry.

The comments may reflect US concerns about the possibility that Israel, which has previously bombed nuclear facilities in Iraq and in Syria, might launch an attack on Iran.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said on Friday that time was running out to avoid a military intervention and appealed to China and Russia, veto-wielding UN powers that have been reluctant to tighten sanctions, to support new sanctions.

"Time is running out. France will do everything to avoid a military intervention," Sarkozy told ambassadors gathered in Paris. "A military intervention will not solve the problem, but it will unleash war and chaos in the Middle East."

"We need stronger, more decisive sanctions that stop the purchase of Iranian oil and freezes the assets of the central bank, and those who don't want that will be responsible for the risks of a military conflict," Sarkozy warned.

"We really need you," he said in an appeal to Moscow and Beijing.

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?col=§ion=middleeast&xfile=data/middleeast/2012/January/middleeast_January563.xml

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Press TV – Iran

'Lifting Iran Sanctions Condition for Talks'

Saturday, January 21, 2012

A senior Iranian lawmaker says in order to hold constructive talks with Iran over its nuclear program the West must lift its “illegal sanctions” against Iran.

“The UN Security Council [has] adopted anti-Iran resolutions based on illegal preconditions; therefore, it is expected that the West put an end to the sanctions in order to hold constructive and bilateral talks [with Tehran],” Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Saturday.

Boroujerdi, who is Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, went on to say that since Iran acts within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Western states must create an atmosphere for “mutual cooperation.”

Iran and the P5+1 -- Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany -- have held two rounds of multifaceted talks in Geneva in December 2010 and in the Turkish city of Istanbul last January.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies accuse Tehran of pursuing military objectives in its nuclear program and have used this pretext to impose four rounds of sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran has refuted the allegations, arguing that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Tehran has a right to use nuclear technology for peaceful use.

Boroujerdi, accused some of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) nuclear inspectors of leaking Iran's confidential information to media and intelligence agencies in the past, adding that the agency must “answer for such a policy and take responsibility [for its actions].”

<http://presstv.com/detail/222372.html>

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Washington Times

Assad's Fall Could Solve Iraqi Weapons Mystery

By Rowan Scarborough, The Washington Times

Sunday, January 22, 2012

If Syria's regime falls, the U.S. will be in a better position to answer one of the lingering questions from the long Iraq War: Did Baghdad ship weapons of mass destruction components to Syria before the 2003 American-led invasion?

An opposition leader tells The Washington Times that a new, secular democracy in Syria would allow outside inspectors to survey and ensure destruction of what is believed to be one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the Middle East.

Western and Israeli intelligence suspect that Bashar Assad's regime in Syria also owns weaponized nerve agents.

Spy satellites tracked a large number of truck convoys moving from Iraq to Syria in the weeks before the 2003 invasion, raising suspicions that some carried weapons of mass destruction.

The invading Americans never found stocks of such weapons in Iraq, despite two years of searching by the Iraq Survey Group.

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The result spurred the political left to attack President Bush with slogans such as "Bush lied, troops died," but nonpartisan national security figures said there was evidence that material may have been moved to Syria. There was just no way to get inside the Iranian-supported dictatorship to take a look.

Zuhdi Jasser, a Syrian-American physician who co-founded the group Save Syria Now, is working to bring an elected secular government to Damascus. He said the Assad regime, which has used brutal repression to remain in power, can fall within a year if the popular uprising comes to the capital.

"As far as making sure there is a public transparent disposal of [weapons of mass destruction], I believe so," Dr. Jasser told The Times.

He said an emerging group, the Syrian Democratic Coalition, is preparing a pledge by pro-democracy members.

"Many of us are banking on the fact they will not protect any arsenals there and allow a transparent change so they can be welcomed into the world community and not simply exchange one fascist government for another," he said.

Disposing of Syria's chemical weapons "has to be part of the transition," he said.

Research groups say the Assad regime maintains large stocks of chemical weapons, including mustard gas.

"Over the past three decades, Syria has acquired an arsenal of chemical weapons (CW) and surface-to-surface missiles, reportedly has conducted research and development in biological weapons (BW), and may be interested in a nuclear weapons capability," said a 2003 report by the Congressional Research Service.

Iraq at one point did possess large stocks of chemical weapons and used them on Iran and the Iraqi Kurdish population.

After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, U.N. inspectors destroyed huge caches. But U.S. intelligence agencies always believed that Saddam Hussein clung to some materials because of his regime's efforts to evade and confuse U.N. inspectors.

Suspicious lingered during the administration of President Clinton, who ordered five days of airstrikes on Iraq in 1998 to destroy what he said were remaining stockpiles that could fall into the hands of terrorists. Mr. Bush offered a similar rationale for war in 2003.

"Their mission is to attack Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs and its military capacity to threaten its neighbors," Mr. Clinton told the American people.

Among those who suspect a Syrian connection is retired Air Force Lt. Gen. James R. Clapper Jr., who is now the most senior U.S. intelligence officer.

He told The Times in 2003 that U.S. satellites documented waves of truck traffic out of Iraq and into Syria.

"I think personally that those below the senior leadership saw what was coming, and I think they went to some extraordinary lengths to dispose of the evidence," said Gen. Clapper, who then headed the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and now is director of national intelligence. "I'll call it an educated hunch.

"I think probably in the few months running up prior to the onset of combat that ... there was probably an intensive effort to disperse into private homes, move documentation and materials out of the country," he said. "I think there are any number of things that they would have done."

On the activity on the Syrian border, Gen. Clapper said: "There is no question that there was a lot of traffic, increase in traffic up to the immediate onset of combat and certainly during Iraqi Freedom. ... The obvious conclusion one draws is the sudden upturn, uptick in traffic which may have been people leaving the scene, fleeing Iraq and, unquestionably I'm sure, material as well."



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Such suspicion also found its way inside the Iraq Survey Group, the joint Pentagon-CIA organization formed to hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Charles Duelfer, who headed the Iraq Survey Group, filed a final addendum in 2005 to his exhaustive report. He said his investigators found "sufficiently credible" evidence that material for weapons of mass destruction was shifted from Iraq to Syria.

"[The Iraq Survey Group] was unable to complete its investigation and is unable to rule out the possibility that [weapons of mass destruction were] evacuated to Syria before the war," he said.

"Whether Syria received military items from Iraq for safekeeping or other reasons has yet to be determined," Mr. Duelfer said. "There was evidence of a discussion of possible ... collaboration initiated by a Syrian security officer, and [the Iraq Survey Group] received information about movement of material out of Iraq, including the possibility that [weapons of mass destruction were] involved. In the judgment of the working group, these reports were sufficiently credible to merit further investigation."

He said all senior Iraqis then in custody denied knowledge of any weapons of mass destruction moving into Syria.

"Nevertheless," the inspector said, "given the insular and compartmented nature of the regime, [Iraq Survey Group] analysts believed there was enough evidence to merit further investigation."

Libya's new transitional government has set a precedent for allowing Western arms inspectors into the country.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, based at The Hague, is an independent group that monitors compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It filed its most recent report on Libya on Friday, saying all of Libya's newly declared quantities of sulfur mustard and related chemicals are stored at the Ruwagha depot in southwestern Libya and are to be destroyed by April.

The same scenario could play out in a post-Assad Syria, along with detective work to determine, once and for all, whether any weapons components came from Iraq in 2003.

Michael Luhan, a spokesman for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, told The Times that inspectors could enter Syria "only if the new regime joins the Chemical Weapons Convention, thereby making Syria an OPCW member state and legally subject to our verification measures."

http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jan/22/assads-fall-could-solve-iraqi-weapons-mystery/?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS

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The Star – Malaysia

U.S. Aircraft Carrier Enters Gulf without Incident

By David Alexander

Monday, January 23, 2012

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A U.S. aircraft carrier sailed through the Strait of Hormuz and into the Gulf without incident on Sunday, a day after Iran backed away from an earlier threat to take action if an American carrier returned to the strategic waterway.

The carrier USS Abraham Lincoln completed a "regular and routine" passage through the strait, a critical gateway for the region's oil exports, "as previously scheduled and without incident," said Lieutenant Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fifth Fleet.

The Lincoln, accompanied by strike group of warships, was the first U.S. aircraft carrier to enter the Gulf since late December and was on a routine rotation to replace the outgoing USS John C. Stennis.

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The departure of the Stennis prompted Iranian army chief Ataollah Salehi to threaten action if the carrier passed back into the Gulf.

"I recommend and emphasize to the American carrier not to return to the Persian Gulf. ... We are not in the habit of warning more than once," he said.

The threat led to a round of escalating rhetoric between the two sides that spooked oil markets and raised the specter of a military confrontation between Iran and the United States.

Iran threatened to close the strait, the world's most important oil shipping gateway, while the United States warned such a move would require a response by Washington, which routinely patrols international sea lanes to ensure they remain open.

Iran appeared to ease away from its earlier warnings on Saturday, with Revolutionary Guard Corps Deputy Commander Hossein Salami telling the official IRNA news agency that the return of U.S. warships to the Gulf was routine and not an increase in its permanent presence in the region.

"U.S. warships and military forces have been in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East region for many years and their decision in relation to the dispatch of a new warship is not a new issue and it should be interpreted as part of their permanent presence," Salami said.

Pentagon officials declined to comment directly on Salami's remarks, but reiterated that continued U.S. presence in the region reflected the seriousness with which Washington takes its security commitments to partner nations in the region and to ensuring free flow of international commerce.

The Lincoln's arrival in the Gulf was unrelated to Iran's statement on Saturday.

Tensions between Iran and the United States have been escalating in recent weeks as President Barack Obama prepares to implement new U.S. sanctions against Iran over its nuclear enrichment program, which Tehran says is for energy production but the West believes is aimed at producing atomic weapons.

The EU is preparing to intensify sanctions against Tehran with an embargo on Iran's oil exports and possibly freezing the assets of Iran's central bank. Obama is preparing new U.S. sanctions that target foreign financial institutions that do business with Iran's central bank.

Both sides tried to scale down the rhetoric last week. The White House emphasized the United States was still open to international talks on Iran's nuclear program, even as it denied Iranian assertions that discussions were under way about resuming a dialogue.

The White House would not confirm or deny Iranian reports that Obama had sent a letter to Iranian leaders, but spokesman Jay Carney said any communications with Tehran would have reinforced the statements Washington has made publicly.

The United States supports talks between Iran and the so-called P5 + 1, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council - Russia, China, France, England and the United States - plus Germany.

Carney urged Iran to respond to the letter sent in October on behalf of the P5 +1 by European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

"If the Iranians are serious about restarting talks, then they need to respond to that letter," Carney told a White House briefing. "That is the channel by which ... the restarting of those talks would take place."

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2012/1/23/worldupdates/2012-01-23T010857Z_3_TRE80LOYL_RTPOPT_0_UK-IRAN-USA-CARRIER&sec=Worldupdates

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Economic Times – India

US Miffed as Israel Hints at Strike on Iran Nuclear Sites

January 23, 2012

By Ashis RayAshis Ray, Tamil News Network (TNN)

LONDON: Israel could launch a unilateral strike on Iran's nuclear facilities without much prior notice to its closest ally for over 60 year, US, according to information reaching here from Tel Aviv.

While the Israeli leadership has signaled support for US president Barack Obama in his re-election bid by urging Jewish voters in America to vote for him, Israel's defence minister Ehud Barak is said to have told general Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, that Israel will give the US no more than 12 hours notice before it ventures to demolish Iran's nuclear installations.

Barak's message to Dempsey followed what Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu had told Obama: that an early warning of Israel's intentions would not be available to the US. The Israeli army's elite 35th Paratroopers Brigade is training for a long-range operation for some time, so as to be prepared for military action against Iran's nuclear plants.

Expressing its displeasure at the non-cooperation, US has cancelled a joint antimissile exercise with Israel, which had been planned for April. On Monday, foreign ministers of the EU are expected to ban Iranian oil imports as part of efforts to tighten sanctions on Tehran.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/us-miffed-as-israel-hints-at-strike-on-iran-nuclear-sites/articleshow/11599533.cms>

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Egypt Independent (Al-Masry Al-Youm) – Egypt

EU Bans Iranian Oil, Tehran Responds with Threats

Monday, January 23, 2012

By Reuters

BRUSSELS/TEHRAN - The European Union banned imports of oil from Iran on Monday and imposed a number of other economic sanctions, joining the United States in a new round of measures aimed at deflecting Tehran's nuclear development programme.

In Iran, one politician responded by renewing a threat to blockade the Strait of Hormuz, an oil export route vital to the global economy, and another said Tehran should cut off crude shipments to the EU immediately.

That might hurt Greece, Italy and other ailing economies which depend heavily on Iranian oil and, as a result, won as part of the EU agreement a grace period until July 1 before the embargo takes full effect. Angry words on either side helped nudge benchmark Brent oil futures above \$110 a barrel on Monday.

A day after a U.S. aircraft carrier, accompanied by a flotilla that included French and British warships, made a symbolically loaded voyage into the Gulf in defiance of Iranian hostility, the widely expected EU sanctions move is likely to set off yet more bellicose rhetoric in an already tense region.

Some analysts say Iran, which denies accusations that it is seeking nuclear weapons, could be in a position to make them next year. So, with Israel warning it could use force to prevent that happening, the row over Tehran's plans is an increasingly pressing challenge for world leaders, not least U.S. President Barack Obama as he campaigns for re-election in November.

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has voiced scepticism about the chances of Iran being persuaded by non-military tactics, called the EU sanctions a "step in the right direction" but said Iran was still developing atomic weapons.

Israel, assumed to have the only nuclear arsenal in the Middle East, views the Iranian nuclear programme as a threat to its survival.

Meeting in Brussels, foreign ministers from the 27-state EU, which as a bloc is Iran's second biggest customer for crude after China, agreed to an immediate ban on all new contracts to import, purchase or transport Iranian crude oil and petroleum products. However, EU countries with existing contracts to buy oil and petroleum products can honour them up to July 1.

EU officials said they also agreed to freeze the assets of Iran's central bank and ban trade in gold and other precious metals with the bank and state bodies.

Along with U.S. sanctions imposed by Obama on Dec. 31, the Western powers hope that choking exports and hence revenue can force Iran's leaders to agree to curbs on a nuclear programme the West says is intended to yield weapons.

EU SEEKS TALKS

The United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, confirmed plans for a visit next week by senior inspectors to try and clear up suspicions raised about the purpose of Iran's nuclear activities. Tehran is banned by international treaty from developing nuclear weaponry.

"The Agency team is going to Iran in a constructive spirit, and we trust that Iran will work with us in that same spirit," IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said in a statement announcing the Dec. 29-31 visit. "The overall objective of the IAEA is to resolve all outstanding substantive issues."

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said of the new sanctions: "I want the pressure of these sanctions to result in negotiations ... I want to see Iran come back to the table and either pick up all the ideas that we left on the table ... last year ... or to come forward with its own ideas."

Iran has said lately that it is willing to hold talks with Western powers, though there have been mixed signals on whether conditions imposed by either side make new negotiations likely.

The Islamic Republic insists it is enriching uranium only for electricity and other civilian uses.

It has powerful defenders against the Western action in the form of Russia and China, which argue that the new sanctions are unnecessary, and can also probably count on China and other Asian countries to go on buying much of its oil, despite U.S. and European efforts to dissuade them.

Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, classifying the EU embargo among "aggravating factors", said Moscow believed there was a good chance that talks between the six global powers and Iran could resume soon and that Russia would try to steer both Iran and the West away from further confrontation.

A member of Iran's influential Assembly of Experts, former intelligence minister Ali Fallahian, said Tehran should respond to the delayed-action EU sanctions by stopping sales to the bloc immediately, denying the Europeans time to arrange alternative supplies and damaging their economies with higher oil prices.

"The best way is to stop exporting oil ourselves before the end of this six months and before the implementation of the plan," the semi-official Fars news agency quoted him as saying.

He reiterated that Iran could close the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow channel between the Gulf and open sea through which a third of all oil tanker traffic passes to importers around the world.



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Washington has said it will not tolerate any closure, a position underlined by Sunday's passage through the strait of a U.S. flotilla around the carrier Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by two European frigates, Britain's Argyll and France's La Motte-Picquet.

HORMUZ THREAT

While Iran's Revolutionary Guards, possibly aware of the warships' impending arrival, had backed away on Saturday from a threat made by a vice president last month to prevent "even one drop of oil" passing through the strait if the West embargoed Iran's crude, a senior member of parliament said on Monday that the closure remained an option if exports were disrupted.

"If any disruption happens regarding the sale of Iranian oil, the Strait of Hormuz will definitely be closed," Mohammad Kossari, deputy head of parliament's foreign affairs and national security committee, told Fars.

Going further, he referred to previous U.S. warnings that it would use force to break any Iranian blockade of the channel and threatened wider violence against Washington's global interests.

"If America seeks adventures after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Iran will make the world unsafe for Americans in the shortest possible time," Kossari said.

"It is in America's interests to accept a powerful Iran and not seek military adventures."

While the Western powers were at pains to describe their naval movement through the strait as routine, a view echoed by the Revolutionary Guards, they also stressed its symbolism.

"On this occasion HMS Argyll and a French vessel joined a U.S. carrier group transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, to underline the unwavering international commitment to maintaining rights of passage under international law," Britain's defence ministry said in a statement.

In Paris, spokesman Thierry Burkhard said: "It's a sign to Iran if they want to consider it like that."

Iran, the world's No. 5 oil exporter and also rich in natural gas, says it is refining uranium and developing other nuclear technologies to meet rising energy needs. But the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency reported in November that it had evidence suggesting Iran had worked on designing an atomic bomb.

The unprecedented effort to take Iran's 2.6 million barrels of oil per day off international markets has kept global prices high, pushed down Iran's rial currency and caused a surge in the cost of basic goods for Iranians.

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/615701>

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Seattle Times
January 23, 2012

Iran Steps Up Threats to Shutter Strait of Hormuz

By NASSER KARIMI, Associated Press (AP)

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) – Two Iranian lawmakers on Monday stepped up threats their country would shutter the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude flows, in retaliation for oil sanctions on Tehran.

The warnings came as EU nations agreed in Brussels on an oil embargo against Iran as part of sanctions over the country's controversial nuclear program. The measure includes an immediate embargo on new contracts for Iranian crude and petroleum products while existing ones are allowed to run until July.

Iran has repeatedly warned it would choke off the strait if sanctions affect its oil sales, and two lawmakers ratcheted up the rhetoric on Monday.

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Lawmaker Mohammad Ismail Kowsari, deputy head of Iran's influential committee on national security, said the strait "would definitely be closed if the sale of Iranian oil is violated in any way."

Kowsari claimed that in case of the strait's closure, the U.S. and its allies would not be able to reopen the route, and warned America not to attempt any "military adventurism."

Another senior lawmaker, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, said Iran has the right to shutter Hormuz in retaliation for oil sanctions and that the closure was increasingly probable, according to the semiofficial Mehr news agency.

"In case of threat, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is one of Iran's rights," Falahatpisheh said. "So far, Iran has not used this privilege."

Monday's EU measure also includes a freeze on the assets of Iran's central bank as part of sanctions meant to pressure Tehran to resume talks on its uranium enrichment, a process that can lead to making nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes.

For its part, the United States has enacted, but not yet put into force, sanctions targeting Iran's central bank and, by extension, the country's ability to be paid for its oil.

About 80% of Iran's oil revenue comes from exports and any measures or sanctions taken that affect its ability to export oil could hit hard at its economy. With about 4 million barrels per day, Iran is the second largest producer in OPEC.

Tensions over the strait and the potential impact on global oil supplies and also the price of crude have weighed heavily on consumers and traders. Both the U.S. and Britain have warned Iran over any disruption to the world's oil supply through the strait.

Another Iranian lawmaker, Ali Adyani, sought to downplay the latest EU move, describing it as a "mere propaganda gesture," according to the semiofficial Fars news agency.

Former intelligence minister, Ali Falahaian, suggested Iran should stop all its crude exports "so that oil prices would go up and the Europeans' sanctions would collapse."

Threats to close the strait escalated during Iran's naval exercises in the Persian Gulf in January. Iran plans more naval war games in February.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2017310262_apmliran.html?syndication=rss

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Boston Globe

Bid for Iran Nuclear Talks Confronts Old Snags

By Brian Murphy, Associated Press

January 24, 2012

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—The last time Iran's nuclear envoys held talks with the U.S. and other world powers, the negotiations limped along until a parting shot by the Islamic Republic: Its labs boosted the enrichment levels of uranium in reply to demands for a full-scale freeze.

Since then, the standoff has only become tenser. The European Union on Monday joined the U.S. with new sanctions targeting Iran's critical oil exports. Authorities in Tehran fired back with another threat to block tankers in the Persian Gulf -- even while offering to restart international talks after a one-year gap.

Yet one thing hasn't changed since the last round of meetings in January 2011. The chances of Iran agreeing to stop enriching uranium -- the core dispute between Tehran and its foes -- still appear slim.

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Iran portrays its ability to make nuclear fuel as akin to a patriotic cause: showcasing the country's technological advances, elevating its international stature and proudly defying Western nuclear controls like other nations in the past -- including North Korea since the 1990s and China in the 1960s.

Iran strongly denies that it seeks nuclear weapons and says it only wants to enrich uranium to fuel reactors for energy and research. But Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has linked control of the entire nuclear cycle to part of Iran's "national identity."

"Iran's right for uranium enrichment is nonnegotiable," said conservative Iranian lawmaker Ali Aghazadeh. "There is no reason for Iran to compromise over its rights. But Iran is open to discussions over concerns about its nuclear program."

The bloc on the other side of the negotiating table -- the five permanent Security Council members plus Germany - has not publicly spelled out any clear strategies if talks resume in Turkey as a proposed venue. It's highly unlikely, however, that they would back off the insistence that Iran suspend uranium enrichment, which Washington and others fear could lead to weapons-grade nuclear material.

The potential dead ends are clearly marked even before any agreement to reopen dialogue.

Iranian officials hammer the point that halting uranium enrichment is off the agenda. Some in the West, meanwhile, question whether Iran's outreach is simply another tactic to buy time for its nuclear program under pressure from cyberattacks and targeted killings that Tehran has blamed on Israel and its allies.

In Paris last week, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said the European Union has made specific proposals for dialogue with Iran, but "unfortunately the country has not committed in a transparent and cooperative way in this process of talks."

On Monday in Brussels, the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton urged Tehran to offer "some concrete issues to talk about."

"It is very important that it is not just about words; a meeting is not an excuse, a meeting is an opportunity and I hope that they will seize it," she said as the EU adopted its toughest measures yet on Iran with an oil embargo and freeze of the country's central bank assets.

Iranian lawmaker Aghazadeh snapped back: "The West is not seeking a genuine dialogue."

"It's unlikely that any new round of talks will bring any understanding," he added. "There is lack of trust on both sides. Iran won't retreat from its position."

The situation carries strong echoes the last talks in January 2011. When the main talks foundered, Brazil and Turkey tried their hand by reviving proposals to provide Iran with reactor fuel rods from 20 percent enriched uranium in exchange for suspending the enrichment work.

It fell apart when Iran pushed ahead with a pilot program to make its own 20 percent enriched uranium. That's still far below the level needed for a warhead, but it boosts Iran's stockpile of higher-grade nuclear material and was seen as a powerful snub to Western demands.

In a news conference on Saturday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, used the word "justice" to describe what Tehran hopes to achieve from any possible talks.

It covers a lot of ground in explaining Iran's views.

Tehran considers its nuclear program as fully within U.N. rules -- which permit enrichment with oversight -- although U.N. watchdogs and other question how much of Iran's work is secret. Tehran also seeks to shift the nuclear spotlight onto Israel, which is believed to have an atomic arsenal despite its policy of neither confirming nor denying its military capabilities.



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But, above all, the Islamic Republic sees its nuclear advancement as an integral part of its self-declared goal of becoming the Muslim world's answer to Western military and technological dominance.

Iran has announced sweeping plans for upgrades to its armed forces, including new warships and surveillance drones similar to the unmanned CIA spy craft captured last month. Iran's state media has claimed aerospace engineers have launched objects into orbit and are working on sending an astronaut into space.

"The nuclear program is a huge part of what's shaping Iran's world view," said Mehrzad Boroujerdi, an Iranian affairs expert at Syracuse University. "Khamenei sees it as part of his legacy. In a way, it's like the nationalization of the Suez Canal for Egypt. It's a defining issue and one of major national importance."

It also is one of the few patches of common ground in a country deeply divided since the clashes and crackdowns after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election in 2009. Even opposition groups that rail against the ruling theocracy often support the nuclear program as a point of pride.

"The issue is protecting national interests," said Iranian political analyst Davoud Hermidas Bavand.

Yet he believes that talks -- even if they at first appear ill-fated -- are the only option to avoid deeper tensions that could lead to a military conflict in the Gulf.

"Talks offer a window to get out of the current impasse," he said.

The question still circles back to whether it could bring some concessions from Iran on uranium enrichment.

Meir Javedanfar, an Iranian-born analyst based in Israel, described Khamenei as stuck between "Obama and a hard place."

Khamenei cannot easily roll back the Iranian nuclear program, but is hit with increasing blows from sanctions that have isolated and eroded Iran's economy.

"Should he ignore it, the Iranian economy, the health of which is crucial to the survival of the regime, could collapse," he wrote in a Sunday commentary.

Keeping the ruling system in place, however, could also drive Iran's nuclear advances closer toward weapons, others contend.

"They perceive the whole nuclear issue as an insurance policy of sorts," said the analyst Boroujerdi. "There are those who say, 'If we are a nuclear power then the West wouldn't dare touch us.' And this, in their mind, helps ensure the survival of the system."

Associated Press writer Ali Akbar Dareini in Tehran, Iran, contributed to this report.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2012/01/24/bid_for_iran_nuclear_talks_confronts_old_sna_gs/?page=full

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Korea Herald – South Korea
January 23, 2012

Ex-US Envoy Sees Little Power for Young Kim

By Agence France-Presse (AFP)

The former US pointman on North Korea voiced doubt that the communist regime would give significant power to young new leader Kim Jong-Un, lowering chances for a resumption of diplomacy.

"Diplomatically, I think it's likely to be a fairly quiet year," Stephen Bosworth, who stepped down in October as the US coordinator on policy toward North Korea, said at the Asia Society in New York, on Monday.

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Bosworth said he believed that diplomacy was the only option on North Korea, which stormed out of six-nation talks on ending its nuclear program in 2009 when it carried out tests of a long-range missile and atomic bomb.

But Bosworth said North Korea's regime was more collective than many believe and doubted leaders would give decision-making power to the untested Kim Jong-Un, who is in his 20s and succeeded late father Kim Jong-Il last month.

"I do not believe that North Korea's engaged in a collective suicide mission. So I don't think that the senior generals and that the senior party people are going to give Kim Jong-Un anything approaching the level of authority that Kim Jong-Il had," Bosworth said.

"I think they need Kim Jong-Un as a figurehead. They need that face on what is... a dynasty," he said.

Despite his doubts of a suicide mission, Bosworth jokingly drew a parallel between North Korea and Heaven's Gate, a UFO cult in California whose members collectively killed themselves in 1997.

"The average North Korean grows up studying *juche* and venerating the leadership from the age of two on," Bosworth said, referring to the regime's "*juche*" philosophy of self-reliance.

"I've always tried to sort of think of North Korea as less a political entity and more of a cult. I sometimes refer to them as the Heaven's Gate of international politics," Bosworth said.

"On the other hand, I think there is good evidence that North Koreans now know more and understand better about the gap that exists between their lives and the lives of people in the neighborhood," he said.

Current US officials have also downplayed chances for diplomacy with North Korea during its transition.

President Barack Obama's administration was considering a new engagement drive that could have included US food aid to the impoverished North, but the plan was put on hold after Kim's death.

http://www.koreaherald.com/common/redirect.jsp?news_id=20120124000310&category_id=

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Pakistan Observer – Pakistan

Sunday, January 22, 2012

Experts for N-Regime Based on Equal Security

By Ashraf Ansari

Islamabad—The first session of Conference on Disarmament (CD) for 2012 is starting from and it will continue up to the end of March. The proposed Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) will be an important agenda point for CD deliberations. FMCT is very critical for Pakistan's nuclear programme, and its minimum deterrence.

It was in this background that the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Islamabad held a seminar titled "Challenges to Pakistan's Nuclear Programme & FMCT". The speakers included Ambassador (Retd) Tariq Osman Hyder, Lt. Gen (Retd) Asad Durrani, former DG ISI and Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Associate Professor at Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. With Senator Prof. Khurshid Ahmad was in the chair.

The speakers said: "Pakistan's nuclear programme is a vital element of Pakistan's national security. Pakistan is a responsible nuclear state with a command, control and security system second to none, along with strong strategic export controls, all subject to internal monitoring, review and improvement if required. The safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear programme and assets, from any internal or external threat, are beyond doubt".

Pakistan participates in many UN, IAEA activities and international initiatives concerned with nuclear safety and security as well as non-proliferation which further demonstrates its commitment and ability.



They said, some critical international perceptions are motivated, while others are due to misperceptions. Through engagement it should be attempted to correct these misperceptions. “The civil power generation nuclear programme, in which all the civil power reactors are under IAEA safeguards, is essential to Pakistan’s energy security as a fossil fuel deficit country dependent on energy imports for its socio-economic development. The power generation component of the programme must be advanced to meet Pakistan’s growing energy requirements. As this civil nuclear power generation programme is based on IAEA safeguarded reactors, it should not be subject to any external discriminatory technology denial policies. “In view of Pakistan’s experience and expertise in the safe operation of nuclear reactors and facilities, establishment of the requisite infrastructure and regulatory regimes, component manufacturing, nuclear safety as well as export controls, Pakistan is well placed for international partnerships in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. In this regard Pakistan should explore avenues of cooperation with other countries planning their safeguarded civil nuclear programmes”, they observed.

Under the PAEC Pakistan has long standing academic and training programmes as well as medical and agricultural nuclear research and treatment centers and facilities. Peaceful uses cooperation with other countries for their civil nuclear programmes and for agricultural and medical, research and treatment can also be explored under IAEA and OIC auspices.

The speakers pointed out that Pakistan’s strategic nuclear programme was based on credible minimum nuclear deterrence is essential to maintain peace and security in this region. It is not aimed at any country and is purely defensive and to deter any aggression or adventurism. Minimum deterrence is not static, and without entering into an arms race, has to evolve to meet and counter emerging threats to Pakistan’s security. They regretted “that rather than discussing and partnering Pakistan’s long standing offer of a Strategic Restraint Regime (SSR) in South Asia based on nuclear restraint, conventional balance and dispute resolution, India moved in the other direction in terms of its strategic capabilities, conventional build up and aggressive doctrines”. They said, it is also unfortunate that many members of the international community rather than supporting strategic restraint in South Asia have bolstered India’s strategic and conventional capabilities and assets. The US-India nuclear deal and the exemption by the NSG without placing all of India’s power reactors, ambitious breeder reactors programme and sizeable fissile material stocks from these power reactors under safeguards, is a clear violation by these countries of NPT obligations.

Recalling the provision by Russia to India of nuclear submarines in the past, without any safeguards the speakers said, now nuclear attack submarines capable of carrying nuclear armed ballistic missiles, constitute violations of Russia’s NPT obligations. Russian cooperation in the production of the Brahmos cruise missile is also a violation of Russia’s MTCR obligations. Under the Indo-US nuclear deal, 8 Indian heavy water, natural uranium reactors, which are ideal for weapons grade Pu production have been left outside safeguards. Their joint capacity of 2,000 MW, running at 60% capacity, is adequate to produce 1,200 kg of weapons grade Pu which can produce 240 nuclear weapons annually. There is no precedent of keeping power reactors outside IAEA safeguards. India’s ambitious breeder reactor programme significantly and exponentially adds to its weapons grade Pu capability. As the objective of breeder reactors is to extend the use of fissile material for power production there is no justification for keeping this programme outside of IAEA safeguards.

The Indian Prime Minister has stated in Parliament that no facet of India’s nuclear programme which has a strategic significance would be placed under safeguards. This statement makes it clear that important aspects of India’s nuclear programme kept out of safeguards have strategic objectives and therefore implications for the region and beyond.

The International Panel on Fissile Materials stated inter alia in its 2010 publication, “Reducing and Eliminating Nuclear Weapons: Country Perspectives on the Challenges to Nuclear Disarmament”, that, “India’s current stockpile of weapon grade plutonium is estimated as 700 kg by the IPFM, sufficient for about 140 fission weapons, and 6.8 tons of reactor-grade plutonium, sufficient for about 850 fission weapons”. While not widely known, reactor grade Pu.



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The speakers at IPS seminar said, Pakistan is therefore faced with: a grave asymmetry of fissile material stocks; an aggressive Indian “Pro-active” or “Cold Start” doctrine aimed at seizing Pakistani territory; development of an Indian nuclear Triad through the introduction of ballistic missile carrying submarines; the continued induction of other new lethal weapon systems; introduction of ABMs with cooperation from the USA, Russia and Israel; and a growing differential in terms of conventional armaments and capabilities facilitated by countries who call for better relations between Pakistan and India but whose actions on the ground are not in sync.

“These developments have significant implications for Pakistan’s security”, the speakers said.

The Seminar expressed full support for Pakistan’s position at multilateral disarmament fora, and for its principled position in the Conference on Disarmament which must be maintained.

The participants of the seminar said, Pakistan, a responsible nuclear State, supports the objectives of non-proliferation and should continue to contribute to the strengthening and further development of the international non-proliferation regime based on the principles of non-discrimination, equal and undiminished security for all states, and equal access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=136574>

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Times of India – India

India Becomes 6th Nation to Join Elite Nuclear Submarine Club

By Rajat Pandit, Tamil News Network (TNN)

January 24, 2012

NEW DELHI: India's long hunt for a nuclear submarine is finally over. But it will take the country another 10-12 months to get an operational nuclear weapon triad - the capability to fire nukes from land, air and sea.

India on Monday became the world's sixth country after the US, Russia, France, the UK and China to operate nuclear-powered submarines when the Russian Akula-II class submarine `K-152 Nerpa' was commissioned into Indian Navy as INS Chakra on a 10-year lease under a secretive almost \$1-billion contract inked in 2004.

The 8,140-tonne INS Chakra, however, is not armed with long-range nuclear missiles, like the Russian SS-N-21 cruise missiles with an over 2,500-km range due to international non-proliferation treaties like the Missile Technology Control Regime.

The Indian nuclear triad's elusive underwater leg will only come when the homegrown nuclear submarine, the over 6,000-tonne INS Arihant equipped to carry a dozen K-15 (750-km) or four K-4 (3,500-km) ballistic missiles, becomes fully operational by early-2013. India has the land and air legs in the shape of the Agni series of missiles and fighter jets capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

Defence ministry sources said INS Chakra, commissioned at the Primorye region in far south-eastern Russia in a ceremony attended by top Indian and Russian officials, would soon set sail for India. It will be based at Visakhapatnam, next to where INS Arihant is slated to begin extensive sea trials in February-March after the ongoing harbour-acceptance trials.

Though it may not add to India's nuclear deterrence posture, INS Chakra will give some much-needed muscle to India's depleting underwater combat arm, which has only 14 ageing conventional submarines to brandish. India is in talks for the lease of another Akula-II class submarine from Russia, say sources.

Nuclear-powered submarines are stealthy since they can operate underwater at long ranges for months unlike diesel-electric submarines that need to surface every few days to get oxygen to recharge their batteries and have limited endurance due to fuel requirements.

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INS Chakra will also be armed with the 300-km range Klub-S land-attack cruise missiles, which India deploys on its Kilo-class conventional submarines as well as other missiles and advanced torpedoes.

"It will be deadly 'hunter-killer' of enemy submarines and warships, as also provide effective protection to a fleet at sea. It can also provide cover to the nuclear-armed INS Arihant if required. With a dived speed of 30-35 knots, INS Chakra will be able to outrun any current Pakistani or Chinese submarine," said a source.

The Navy will also use INS Chakra to train its sailors in the complex art of operating nuclear submarines. The 'Charlie-I' class nuclear submarine India had leased from Russia from 1988 to 1991 was also named INS Chakra but the expertise gained on it was steadily lost since the Navy did not operate any other nuclear submarine thereafter.

The new 10-year lease flows from the January 2004 agreement, with India funding a major part of Nerpa's construction at Komsomolsk-on-Amur shipyard after Russia stopped it midway due to a fund crunch. It was slated for induction much earlier but technical glitches delayed the process, which included a toxic gas leak in November 2008 that killed 20 Russian sailors.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-becomes-6th-nation-to-join-elite-nuclear-submarine-club/articleshow/11608190.cms>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Defense Ministry Signs Bulava Missile Contract

24 January 2012

Russia's Defense Ministry has signed a contract for the manufacture of Bulava submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles through 2020, First Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Sukhorukov said on Tuesday.

"The tests of the Bulava missile system were successfully completed in December 2011 and a draft [presidential] decree is pending on its adoption for service with the Navy," he said.

He did not say exactly when the Bulava will enter service or whether Russia's newest nuclear-powered submarine, the Yury Dolgoruky, will enter service at the same time.

Russia successfully test launched two Bulava missiles on December 23.

They were the 18th and 19th test launches of the troubled Bulava. Only 11 launches have been officially declared successful.

But some analysts suggest that in reality the number of failures is considerably larger. Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer said that of the Bulava's first 12 test launches, only one was entirely successful.

Despite several previous failures, officially blamed on manufacturing faults, the Russian military has insisted that there is no alternative to the Bulava.

The Bulava (SS-NX-30) SLBM, developed by the Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology (since 1998), carries up to 10 MIRV warheads and has a range of over 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles). The three-stage ballistic missile is designed for deployment on Borey-class nuclear submarines.

The United Shipbuilding Corporation said on Friday the Yury Dolgoruky submarine will be put into operation in the second quarter of the year.

The Borey-class Project 955 sub's construction began in 1996 at the Sevmas shipyard and was completed in 2008. It has a crew of 130 and will be armed with 16 Bulava SLBMs and six SS-N-15 cruise missiles.

MOSCOW, January 24 (RIA Novosti)

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http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20120124/170925888.html

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Voice of Russia – Russia

New Submarines for Russia's Nuclear Force

By Oleg Nekhai

January 24, 2012

The Russian Strategic Nuclear Force is to get two new missile submarines this year. They are the “Yury Dolgoruky” and the “Alexander Nevsky”.

By 2018, the SNF will receive 8 submarines, four for the North Fleet and four for the Pacific Fleet. Thus, the Russian potential nuclear deterrent force, while already being very powerful, will be boosted even further. All the country’s potential enemies know full well that if an aggression is launched on Russia, the response will be quite devastating. The nuclear response may not be by sea, but by land, says Victor Litovkin, senior editor of the “Independent Military Review” journal.

“The Russian nuclear deterrent is fully operational and neither the U.S. nor NATO dares attack the country. The beefing up of the Russian naval fleets will further strengthen its nuclear deterrent potential, the more so, that for the first time the new “Borei” class submarines are to carry 16 “Bulava” nuclear missiles with 6-10 warheads each. The remaining subs, including the “Vladimir Monomakh” will be equipped with 20 such missiles each. It should be said though that all the above mentioned missiles and warheads should conform to the signed START-3 Treaty”, Victor Litovkin said.

“START-3 enjoins Russia and the U.S. to keep 700 means of delivery plus 100 in store, and 1,550 nuclear warheads each. By 2020, Russia will have in its northern regions, up to 11 cruisers, the biggest anti-submarine concentration in history. The American anti-missile defense will not be in a position to pose a threat to the Russian Armada, no matter where it is deployed.”

The Arctic Sea is Russia’s most advantageous area, because it is very difficult to detect the country’s missile cruisers under the thick ice. The Russian designers of the missile systems all say that there is no anti-missile device that could prevent Russia’s strategic missiles and warheads, which fly at hyper-sonic speed, to hit their intended targets.

The increase in the number of submarines equipped with inter-continental ballistic missiles is an alarming factor to potential enemies- the U.S., England, and France, says Victor Baranets, a commentator at the “Komsomolskaya Pravda”.

“The anti-missile system is meant to bring down land based rockets. Russia faces a problem here because of the proposed American system in Europe”, he said.

New missiles are replacing old ones. The new rockets fly at higher altitudes, are faster and can avoid flying objects. The Russian government has allocated 20 trillion rubles, about 700 billion dollars for that purpose up to 2020, a hefty chunk of which will be spent to develop the nuclear missile force.

<http://english.ruvr.ru/2012/01/24/64511847.html>

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National Journal

Scientists Halt Controversial Flu Research

By Maggie Fox

January 20, 2012

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Scientists working on a controversial project to create new forms of H5N1 bird flu agreed on Friday to stop their work for 60 days while the debate plays out.

"We recognize that we and the rest of the scientific community need to clearly explain the benefits of this important research and the measures taken to minimize its possible risks," they wrote in a letter published jointly by the journals *Science* and *Nature*.

"We propose to do so in an international forum in which the scientific community comes together to discuss and debate these issues," added the letter, signed by 39 scientists including Ron Fouchier of Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, Adolfo Garcia-Sastre of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York and Yoshihiro Kawaoka of the University of Wisconsin.

"It was a voluntary action to take a time out to give room to the debates that are going on, and to make sure that the opportunities and challenges that come from our research will be handled appropriately," Fouchier told *National Journal* in an e-mail.

Late last year the two teams, one led by Fouchier and one by Kawaoka, created lab-engineered forms of H5N1 bird flu. They said they were trying to see how the virus, which has been circulating since the 1990s, might mutate into a form that could cause a deadly human pandemic.

Other researchers expressed fears about the risk the new viruses could accidentally escape and cause the very pandemic that the scientific community has been worried about. In December, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity, an independent group that advises the federal government, asked the two teams to withhold details of their work.

Supporters of the research say it's key to predicting how H5N1 might mutate and change, as flu viruses often do. But opponents have said the work could be misused by terrorists or that the virus might somehow escape from the lab and spread.

The researchers tried to answer these fears in their letter.

"Despite the positive public-health benefits these studies sought to provide, a perceived fear that the ferret-transmissible H5 HA viruses may escape from the laboratories has generated intense public debate in the media on the benefits and potential harm of this type of research," they wrote.

"We would like to assure the public that these experiments have been conducted with appropriate regulatory oversight in secure containment facilities by highly trained and responsible personnel to minimize any risk of accidental release. Whether the ferret-adapted influenza viruses have the ability to transmit from human to human cannot be tested."

Right now, the H5N1 virus only rarely infects humans and cannot be transmitted very easily from one person to another. But it kills more than half its victims, according to the World Health Organization, which has tallied 343 deaths out of 582 known cases.

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/healthcare/scientists-halt-controversial-flu-research-20120120>

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News Release

U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency

Army Agency Completes Mission to Destroy Chemical Weapons

January 23, 2012

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. – The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency (CMA) completed the destruction of the chemical weapons stockpile at Deseret Chemical Depot (DCD) in Utah on Jan. 21, 2012.

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With the elimination of the Utah chemical weapons stockpile, CMA has safely destroyed nearly 90 percent of the Nation's stockpile of chemical agent and has successfully completed its mission to destroy all chemical agent munitions and items declared at entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and assigned to CMA for destruction. The CWC, an international treaty ratified by the United States in April 1997, required the complete destruction of the Nation's chemical weapons stockpile by April 2007. The United States was granted a five-year extension to April 2012 as allowed by the treaty.

"Completing destruction of this stockpile mission is a worthy and important accomplishment," said Secretary of the Army John McHugh. "This demonstrates our commitment to the elimination of chemical weapons, enhancing safety and security for our workforce, our communities and the nation."

<http://www.cma.army.mil/fndocumentviewer.aspx?DocID=003683880>

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Reuters.com

OPINION/Analysis

Analysis: Iran's Softer Gulf Words Don't Mean Nuclear Shift

By Robin Pomeroy

Sunday, January 22, 2012

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran has stepped back from a threat to close the Strait of Hormuz, but while its softened rhetoric appears to be aimed at de-escalating military tensions, it does not indicate any change of stance on its nuclear program.

"Iran's leadership has a strong sense of self-preservation," said Robert Smith, a consultant at Facts Global Energy. "The comments can likely be interpreted as a sign of cooler heads prevailing."

A senior commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps said on Saturday the likely return of U.S. naval vessels to the region was "not a new issue and ... should be interpreted as part of their permanent presence.

That was a significant shift from earlier this month when Tehran said the USS John C. Stennis aircraft carrier, which left at the end of December during Iranian naval maneuvers, should not return - an order interpreted by some observers in Iran and Washington as a blanket threat to any U.S. carriers.

Only a few weeks ago Tehran was threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, used by a third of the world's seaborne oil trade, if new sanctions cripple its oil exports - exactly the effect Washington and Europe are aiming for.

European Union foreign ministers are set to meet on Monday to agree a ban on importing oil from Iran and sanctions signed by U.S. President Barack Obama on New Year's Eve aim to make it impossible for countries around the world to buy Iranian crude.

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi, who had said Iran would not allow "even one drop of oil" through the strait if oil sanctions are imposed, was less fiery in remarks reported on Sunday.

"Today they (the West) have launched a new game against Iran but it is clear that we will resist against their excessive demands," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.

But while Iran may be reining in its most hawkish rhetoric, and calling for a resumption of talks with world powers that stalled a year ago [ID:nL6E8Cl1Q1], it is no closer to offering concessions on the nuclear issue that could lead to an easing of sanctions.

OIL IMPACT



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One Western diplomat in Tehran compared Iran's offer of talks to its position before the last round of sanctions were imposed in mid-2010.

"They were saying then: 'Let's have talks,' but it wasn't followed up by any kind of concrete commitment," he said, adding that, despite several public declarations of goodwill, Tehran has yet to deliver a reply to a letter Ashton sent to Tehran on October 21 letter offering to resume talks.

"Iran is not softening its stance," said Meir Javedanfar, Iran analyst and co-author of "The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran."

"It's changing its strategy after realizing that its ill-timed and exaggerated threat to close the Strait of Hormuz in case of sanctions caused more damage to its stance and position than anyone else."

The change in Iran's rhetoric could add to the bearish direction of oil prices which were down on Friday due to signs of reduced demand.

"The result of Iran softening its stance, amongst other factors, will contribute to an easing of oil markets," Smith said, adding that the impact will be limited.

"If recent events are any indication, the markets have listened to Iran's rhetoric so many times that its impact has become quite muted compared to the reactions of, say, five years ago."

While the likelihood of imminent naval clashes in the Gulf may have receded, Iran could yet see through its threat of closing Hormuz in the event of an Israeli air strike on its nuclear facilities, Javedanfar said.

"Iran could still block the strait of Hormuz in case of a preemptive strike against it.

"This is a scenario which nobody could or should ignore, despite the fact that the recent threat to close the strait in case of sanctions turned out to be a bluff."

Additional reporting by Hashem Kalantari; Editing by Myra MacDonald

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/22/us-iran-gulf-idUSTRE80L0RE20120122>

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Express Tribune – Pakistan

OPINION/Letter

The Bomb: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan

So what happens if Iran goes nuclear, and Saudi Arabia wants to follow?

By Pervez Hoodbhoy

January 23, 2012

Once upon a time Iran was Pakistan's close ally — probably its closest one. In 1947, Iran was the first to recognise the newly independent Pakistan. In the 1965 war with India, Pakistani fighter jets flew to Iranian bases in Zahedan and Mehrabad for protection and refuelling. Both countries were members of the US-led Seato and Cento defence pacts, Iran opened wide its universities to Pakistani students, and the Shah of Iran was considered Pakistan's great friend and benefactor. Sometime around 1960, thousands of flag-waving school children lined the streets of Karachi to greet him. I was one of them.

The friendship has soured, replaced by low-level hostility and suspicion. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, set major realignments in motion. As Iran exited the US orbit, Pakistan joined the Americans to fight the Soviets. With Saudi money, they together created and armed the hyper-religious Pashtun mujahideen. Iran too supported the mujahideen — but those of the Tajik Northern Alliance. But as religion assumed centrality in matters of state in both Pakistan and Iran, doctrinal rifts widened.

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These rifts are likely to widen as the US prepares for its withdrawal from Afghanistan. Iranians cannot forget that in 1996, following the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan, the Taliban took over Kabul and began a selective killing of Shias. This was followed by a massacre of more than 5,000 Shias in Bamiyan province. Iran soon amassed 300,000 troops at the Afghan border and threatened to attack the Pakistan-supported Taliban government. Today, Iran accuses Pakistan of harbouring terrorist anti-Iran groups like Jundullah on its soil and freely allowing Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and its associates to ravage Pakistan's Shia minority. Symptomatic of the grassroot-level change, Farsi is no longer taught in Pakistani schools.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's footprint in Pakistan has grown steadily since the early 1970s. Pakistani leaders, political and military, frequently travel to the Kingdom to pay homage or seek refuge. The dependency on Saudi money grew. After India had tested its Bomb in May 1998 and Pakistan was mulling over the appropriate response, the Kingdom's grant of 50,000 barrels of free oil a day helped Pakistan decide in favour of a tit-for-tat response and cushioned the impact of sanctions subsequently imposed by the US and Europe. The Saudi defence minister, Prince Sultan, was a VIP guest at Kahuta, where he toured its nuclear and missile facilities just before the tests. Years earlier Benazir Bhutto, the then serving prime minister, had been denied entry.

The quid pro quo for the Kingdom's oil largesse has been soldiers, airmen, and military expertise. Saudi officers are trained at Pakistan's national defence colleges. The Pakistan Air Force, with a high degree of professional training, helped create the Royal Saudi Air Force and Pakistani pilots flew combat missions against South Yemen in the 1970s. Saudi Arabia is said to have purchased ballistic missiles produced in Pakistan.

So what happens if Iran goes nuclear, and Saudi Arabia wants to follow?

For all its wealth, Saudi Arabia does not have the technical and scientific base to create a nuclear infrastructure. Too weak to defend itself and too rich to be left alone, the country has always been surrounded by those who eye its wealth. It has many universities staffed by highly paid expatriates and tens of thousands of Saudi students have been sent to universities overseas. But because of an ideological attitude unsuited to the acquisition of modern scientific skills, there has been little success in producing a significant number of accomplished Saudi engineers and scientists.

Perforce, Saudi Arabia will turn to Pakistan for nuclear help. This does not mean outright transfer of nuclear weapons by Pakistan to Saudi Arabia. One cannot put credence on rumours that the Saudis have purchased nuclear warheads stocked at Kamra air force base, to be flown out at the opportune time. Surely, this would certainly lead to extreme reaction from the US and Europe, with no support offered by China or Russia. Moreover, even if a few weapons were smuggled out, Saudi Arabia could not claim to have them. Thus they could not serve as a nuclear deterrent.

Instead, the Kingdom's route to nuclear weapons is likely to be circuitous, beginning with the acquisition of nuclear reactors for electricity generation. The spent fuel from reactors can be processed for plutonium. Like Iran, it will have to find creative ways by which to skirt around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – which forbids reprocessing spent fuel. But it doubtless takes heart from the fact that the US forgave India for its nuclear testing in 1998, and eventually ended rewarding it with a nuclear deal. Saudi Arabia had unwillingly signed on to the NPT in 1988. Its position then was that it would be happy to sign up but only if Israel did the same. That, of course, never happened. But Saudi Arabia had no option but to follow the US diktat.

The Kingdom's first steps towards making nuclear weapons are being contemplated. In June 2011, it said that 16 nuclear reactors were to be built over the next 20 years at a cost of more than \$300 billion, each reactor costing around \$7 billion. Arrangements are being made to offer the project for international bidding and the winning company should "satisfy the Kingdom's needs for modern technology". To create, run and maintain the resulting nuclear infrastructure will require importing large numbers of technical workers. Some will be brought over from western countries, as well as Russia and former Soviet Union countries.



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But Saudi Arabia will likely find engineering and scientific skills from Pakistan particularly desirable. Since many are Sunni Muslims, the Pakistanis would presumably be sympathetic with the Kingdom's larger goals. Having been in the business of producing nuclear weapons for nearly 30 years under difficult circumstances, they would also be familiar with supplier chains for hard-to-get items needed in a weapons programme. And because salaries in Saudi Arabia far exceed those in Pakistan, many qualified people could well ask for leave from their parent institutions at the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, Kahuta Research Laboratories, and National Development Complex.

Good sense dictates that Iran stops its pursuit of the Bomb. But whether it does or not, Pakistan should stay out of the Iran-Saudi nuclear rivalry. Over and above all this, Israel and the United States must stop threatening to bomb Iran.

The writer currently teaches physics and political science at LUMS. He taught at Quaid-i-Azam University for 36 years and was head of the physics department. He received a doctorate in nuclear physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/325571/the-bomb-iran-saudi-arabia-and-pakistan/>

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The Nation – Pakistan
OPINION/Commentary

Striving for a Global Fissile Material Regime

By Khalid Iqbal
January 23, 2012

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is a multilateral forum for disarmament diplomacy. It has evolved important treaties banning biological and chemical weapons, as well as underground nuclear tests. The CD has not yet produced anything worthwhile, since the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a pact now on hold because some key nations, including the US, have not yet ratified it. On the issue of fissile material, the conference could not evolve a consensus on a substantive work for the last over 12 years. Earlier, the US blocked the proceedings for about eight years, since the Bush administration had opposed negotiating a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), arguing that it could not be verifiable because the inspection regime would be too intrusive, too expensive and yet unreliable.

The first session of the conference for the current year will begin in Geneva on January 24. Over the last few years, an aura has been created that Pakistan is the only country blocking the negotiations of a very noble international treaty related to non-proliferation of WMD's and, more specifically, the nuclear weapons. A deeper examination of the matter reveals that the cut off based FMCT is neither a noble cause, nor would it contribute towards non-proliferation. It is driven by vested interests, and would perpetuate proliferation.

Due to structural limitations, the CD has often been mired in deadlocks. Currently, there are 65 member states, which have identities like the Western Group, the Non-Aligned Movement or G21, the Group of Eastern European States, the P5 etc. The CD takes its decisions by consensus. Every member has the right of veto, and to halt the negotiations if it perceives that its national interests could be in jeopardy. So when Pakistan exercises its option of negative vote, it is not doing anything out of the blue, but is following the set procedure.

An agreement on fissile material management is held hostage to intricately intertwined Indian policies of nuclear security and power generation. To understand the real significance of the FMCT for Pakistan, one needs to dig deeper into India's nuclear energy programme, rather than its nuclear security programme. India has piled up over 1,600 tons of reactor grade fissile material. The reactor grade plutonium was used in one of the Indian nuclear explosions of 1998.

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Pakistan's principal worry is India's accumulation of reactor grade plutonium for its fast breeder reactors (FBRs). The FBRs form the backbone of India's overall plans for nuclear energy. Their number would increase by five times by 2020 and more than 60 times by 2050. So far, India has refused to accept any safeguards on its FBR programme.

The Indo-US Agreement 123 of 2005 and the country-specific waiver by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) granted in 2008 has triggered the survival instinct among the strategic planners of Pakistan. These two instruments facilitate India to manage its nuclear weapon programme without any external accountability. The NSG waiver has enabled India to sign nuclear cooperation arrangements with a dozen or so countries, allowing it to import fissile material. Though imported fissile material would be used in civilian applications and duly accounted for, its practical implication would be that India will use its domestic stockpiles of fissile material for weapon production.

It is interesting to recall that the NSG was created in 1975 to standardise nuclear trade rules, as a reaction to India's testing of a nuclear explosive device in 1974. To carry out that explosion, India had clandestinely diverted plutonium from a power reactor provided to it by Canada.

The treaty that is being proposed in the form of cut off of production of fissile material from an arbitrary future date would only freeze the existing strategic asymmetries that exist between the States. Pakistan is taking a holistic position by proposing a regime that besides banning the future production, should also take into account the existing stocks.

Unfortunately, the cartel of countries that holds huge quantities of fissile material wants to continue holding it. Hence, retaining the option of increasing their respective stockpile of nuclear weapons at will! This would give them the capability of vertical as well as horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons. Banning the production of fissile material without first capping its weapon related applications would only encourage clandestine production, thus feeding the black market. This amounts to treating the symptoms while ignoring the root causes.

Pakistan has been an ardent supporter of all non-proliferation initiatives. It actively participated in the negotiations pertaining to NPT, but had to stay as a 'hold out' because of regional dynamics; later regional developments proved that Pakistan's decision was the best option in its national interest. Likewise, Pakistan participated in the activities leading to conclusion of CTBT and voted in its favour at the UNGA. Once again, Pakistan's non-signature and non-ratification of CTBT is because of regional security compulsions.

The principal security threat for Pakistan emanates from India, which is not a party to both these treaties. Pakistan's nuclear programme is security-driven, and it is a modest one. Pakistan does not plan to match a weapon-for-weapon with India; it only wants to maintain minimum credible deterrence, especially so in the context of dangerous doctrinal positions like the 'Cold Start Doctrine', which is indeed a mindset.

India with a historic record of blowing holes into global non-proliferation efforts stands rewarded; and Pakistan a proponent of non-proliferation is left high and dry. The fissile material management is a tricky issue; much more than managing the number of warheads and missiles. There are a number of loopholes, which could be exploited for circumventing a cut-off treaty. A viable course of action would be a drastic reduction in nuclear warheads and other military applications of fissile material. Once the demand is reduced, the production would fall.

India is developing a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD). America is also helping India in setting up such systems. An effective BMD would warrant that Pakistan should have around three times its existing warheads to maintain its posture of minimum credible deterrence.

Pakistan's position is neither the first, nor the only example of a country insisting on multilateral arms negotiations that its security interests be accommodated in a binding treaty. Arms control efforts over the previous decades always had to be flexible enough to address the security concerns of participating States. The effort towards CTBT started in 1954; end result has still not been achieved.

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The G21 members have also been reiterating that the CD's work should not become hostage to one issue - the FMCT - and should proceed on other disarmament matters as well, so that its work is on equal treatment of all issues. Moreover, the envisaged treaty must take into account the security concerns of all States.

Pakistan believes that the treaty, as currently envisaged, will upset the strategic equilibrium in the subcontinent by limiting Pakistan's deterrent capability, especially so when India has been provided the means to burst the ceiling of its nuclear arsenal; on as require basis.

Nuclear warheads and, as a corollary, stocking requirement of fissile material is prompted by the threat perception of a nation. Hence, as a prerequisite, there is a need to find fair and just solutions to potential hot spots, and then proceed for non-proliferation. There is a necessity to take into account regional imbalances in the domains of conventional weapons, and ballistic missile threat and militarisation of outerspace.

Accommodating Pakistan's strategic concerns and those of other developing nations in the CD provides the best and the only way forward if fissile material management regime is to be pursued on the basis of the principle of equal security for all. Where hard security compulsions are involved, nations must neither be isolated, nor coerced.

The writer is a retired Air Commodore and former assistant chief of air staff of the Pakistan Air Force. At present, he is a member of the visiting faculty at the PAF Air War College, Naval War College and Quaid-i-Azam University.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/columns/23-Jan-2012/striving-for-a-global-fissile-material-regime>

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The Hill

OPINION/Congress Blog

Making Our Defense Strategy Work for this Century

By Brig. Gen. Stephen A. Cheney USMC (Ret.) and Terri Lodge, American Security Project

January 23, 2012

Earlier this month the Obama Administration published its new defense strategy, which will be linked to a reduced budget submission to Congress. As we approach the election and the threat of sequestration there will be increasing demand for changes to both these.

As we prepare for the president's State of the Union speech, it is worth considering if further reductions in defense spending can be achieved while actually increasing our global national security.

As we fully comprehend the new 21st Century challenges and leave behind the outdated cold war threats, we at the American Security Project believe that the United States must reassess the need for a massive, complex and realistically unusable nuclear arsenal.

That is not to say we should just dismantle every weapon and platform, but rather examine what we need, and what we in fact can do without.

Our nuclear arsenal is our ultimate last resort against overwhelming force. It is not, and never can be, a deterrent against insurgent groups or rogue regimes seeking to obtain nuclear weapons. We should be realistic about these weapons and establish an effective and practical nuclear posture for the 21st Century.

Getting to this stage will not be easy. Not only do we face entrenched special interests and outdated thinking here in DC, but we also have to carefully manage our relationships with other nuclear powers.

There are four steps that the administration and the nuclear security establishment need to take.

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First, the politics of arms control have proven so insidious that progress in negotiations comes at a snail's pace. We should invest in the nuclear reduction process, so that success has a chance--not only with Russia but with China as well as nuclear weapons states. We need to have tough and verified agreements in place so that we know how many they have, so that we can plan our forces appropriately.

Second, we need to be realistic about the practicality of our nuclear triad. A proposed new strategic bomber fleet could cost \$18 billion over the next ten years; the new SSBN submarine program would cost \$ 347 billion over its lifetime. In this day and age, do we really think we will ever drop a nuclear bomb from a fundamentally vulnerable plane? If we face facts, we can actually save money and therefore increase our security.

Third, we have to take a hardnosed look at the reasons why countries choose to develop their own nuclear programs, and work with many other countries to lower proliferation risks. Nuclear programs are expensive and very risky for countries. Countries don't want these weapons as a show of bravado, though no doubt some part of the reason is pride, but rather as a deterrent to conventional attacks from others.

As such, the reducing and deterring nuclear programs is best achieved by using carrots as well as sticks. Carrots, such as the offer to create cooperative defense systems with economic independent zones is one alternative to sticks. Use of these new kinds of "carrots" will require a change in our thinking in Washington - using all the tools in our national security portfolio—not just the threat of military action.

Fourth, we must still be tough on our adversaries. If these defense and economic systems fail or countries cheat on their obligations, we and our international partners must be swift and tough in response.

In the end, the less we hold on to outdated nuclear forces and concepts the more we can face up to today's challenges, and the more America has to gain.

Brig. Gen. Cheney USMC (Ret.) is the CEO and Terri Lodge is Director for Nuclear Security at the American Security Project, a non-partisan think-tank based in DC.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/205789-making-our-defense-strategy-work-for-this-century>

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Huffington Post
OPINION/Commentary

Obama's Missed Opportunity on Defense

By William Hartung, Director, Arms and Security Project, Center for International Policy
January 23, 2012

The Obama administration's defense strategy review, unveiled at the Pentagon on January 6, is under attack. Republican front-runner Mitt Romney has argued that the plan is naive and dangerous, while numerous independent experts have rightly criticized the plan for being too timid in its pursuit of Pentagon spending reductions. Largely missing from the discussion is the fact that key components of the Obama strategy, if faithfully pursued, could support reductions in planned defense spending far greater than anything currently envisioned by the administration.

There is much to criticize in the Pentagon's new strategy -- most notably its unwillingness to sharply curtail the number of missions expected of our armed forces. But there are positive elements of the administration's proposed approach as well. These include its call for an end to long-term, large-scale nation building efforts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan; its acknowledgment that our economic strength is the essential foundation of our national security; its recognition that diplomacy and development can be as or more important than military approaches in dealing with the most urgent threats we face; its pledge to stop funding outmoded weapons programs that don't address current and future threats; and its suggestion that we may be able to sustain nuclear

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deterrence with a smaller nuclear arsenal than we currently possess. Taken together, these proposals imply significant reductions in Pentagon spending.

For example, in a world in which the United States no longer intends to wage large-scale counterinsurgency campaigns or engage in wars of occupation, U.S. military forces could easily be reduced by 200,000 to 250,000 troops, more than double the reductions being discussed by the Obama national security team. A less interventionist policy would also allow for a reduction in the hundreds of U.S. overseas bases and a scaling back of the number of aircraft carriers in the U.S. fleet.

Accepting the fact that we can protect the United States from nuclear attack with a nuclear arsenal considerably smaller than the one we now possess would allow the administration to discard plans for building costly new nuclear bombers, nuclear submarines, and nuclear weapons facilities.

Reshaping the U.S. defense apparatus to deal with the most relevant threats we face -- from nuclear proliferation to cyber-attacks -- would allow for cuts in old-style systems. First on the list should be the massive F-35 aircraft program, which is premised on a world of air-to-air combat by rival pilots. This sort of warfare is less and less likely to occur in an era of armed drones and increasingly accurate long-range missiles. If the need arises, air combat missions can be met with upgraded versions of current aircraft like the F-15, F-16 and F-18 at a fraction of the cost of building new F-35s.

In addition, putting priority on getting our fiscal and economic house in order should drive us to refrain from a military-led approach to the rise of China, allowing for corresponding reductions in the size of our Air Force and Navy. Even after reductions well in excess of what the Pentagon is currently proposing, U.S. military outlays would be three to four times what China is spending. If we militarize our Asia policy in service of a misguided assessment of the Chinese threat, we will fall behind Beijing in the race that matters the most -- the race to develop a sustainable strategy for economic growth.

The kinds of changes outlined above would allow the Obama administration to put forward proposals to trim at least twice as much from the Pentagon's bloated spending plans as they are currently contemplating -- in the range of \$1 trillion over 10 years. That would allow the administration to achieve savings similar to those that would be imposed if automatic across-the-board cuts required by last year's budget law -- a process known as sequestration -- were to take effect. If the Pentagon puts forward a cogent plan for phasing in the cuts rather than having to do so in the less orderly fashion required by sequestration, both our security and our economy would be better served.

If the Obama administration embraces the most forward-looking parts of its own defense strategy, we can have a defense posture that is far more effective and affordable than the one that is currently in place. It's time to stop nibbling at the edges of the problem and promote real reform -- a reform that could be implemented if the administration were to take its own best rhetoric to heart.

*William D. Hartung is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy and the author of *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex* (Nation Books).*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-hartung/obama-defense-spending_b_1223318.html

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Council on Foreign Relations
OPINION/Blog

Nuclear Weapons: U.S. Strategy from Pyongyang to Tehran

By Micah Zenko
January 23, 2012

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In March 2003, two weeks before a U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq to disarm Saddam Hussein's purported weapons of mass destruction program, President George W. Bush was asked to assess progress on U.S. policy toward North Korea, which was the "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement" of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. Bush replied: "It's in process. If they don't work diplomatically, they'll have to work militarily. And military option is our last choice."

Calling a North Korean nuclear weapon "unacceptable," in May 2003 President Bush declared: "We will not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea. We will not give in to blackmail. We will not settle for anything less than the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program."

Over the next six years, neither the diplomatic nor military approach worked to compel North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program. Between 2003 and when President Bush left office in January 2009, it is estimated that North Korea's plutonium stockpile increased from 1-2 bombs worth of fissile material to 7-11. Today, North Korea has between 6 and 10 bombs worth of plutonium, including the material used in the nuclear tests that took place in October 2006 and May 2009.

(Although sensors did not detect radionuclide evidence after the second test, it was believed to be a plutonium bomb. It is unknown if North Korea has produced highly-enriched uranium (HEU) at the gas centrifuge facility shown to an unofficial U.S. delegation in November 2010, estimated to be capable of producing one bomb's worth of HEU per year, or at other enrichment sites that the Obama administration said exists.)

As it turned out, the existence of several North Korean nuclear weapons were both tolerable and acceptable to the Bush administration. The collective weight of the Six Party Talks, economic sanctions, and positive incentives in the form of fuel oil or security guarantees failed to convince the North Korean regime to abandon their nuclear program and accept intrusive verification. As Arthur Brown, CIA East Asian division chief during the first term of the Bush administration, asked pointedly: "If you were Kim [Jong-il], would you give up the only thing that has protected your regime from collapse?"

Although former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld placed two dozen B-52 bombers and B-1 bombers on high alert to deter "opportunism," the Bush administration never seriously considered a preemptive attack on North Korean nuclear facilities for a number of reasons: the military was busy with regime change in Iraq; South Korean citizens would have borne the brunt of retaliatory artillery and rocket attacks; and there were no guarantees that airstrikes would effectively destroy the plutonium or any assembled nuclear warheads. As a Bush administration official readily acknowledged in December 2002: "I'm not saying we don't have military options. I'm just saying we don't have good ones."

Re-reading contemporary news accounts and the memoirs of senior Bush administration officials, it is striking that none believed the policies they developed, defended publicly, and implemented would achieve their strategic objective—the "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement" of North Korean nuclear weapons.

There is an important lesson to be learned from the twenty years invested in U.S. efforts to disarm North Korea, with particular application to the unfolding crisis over the Iranian nuclear program: there are some foreign policy objectives that simply cannot be achieved given the amount of attention and resources that policymakers are willing to commit. President Bush could have virtually assured that North Korea did not possess a bomb by authorizing a ground invasion that removed Kim Jong-il from power, subdued the military, and verified the absence of nuclear material north of the 38th parallel. However, the economic and human costs of such a military campaign would have been catastrophic. Thankfully, President Bush didn't live up to his word.

In the recent uproar over Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program, political leaders are once again vowing to achieve a maximalist strategic objective without demonstrating any willingness to commit the necessary resources to assure its success. After President Obama was elected, and again in the White House, he reaffirmed that Iranian nuclear "weaponization...is not acceptable." Other world leaders have echoed President Obama's commitment, including Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel, and David Cameron, who said it is "the clear view in



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Europe that Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon is fundamentally unacceptable." Even while opposing additional sanctions on Iran, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated, "China adamantly opposes Iran developing and possessing nuclear weapons."

It is important to note that there is no evidence from the U.S. intelligence community or the IAEA confirming that Iran has decided to pursue a nuclear weapon. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta clarified the U.S. position: "Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability."

However, if it were known with certainty that Tehran authorized the completion of a bomb, do world leaders truly believe that the previously implemented policies will prevent Iran from doing so? If so, it would only be possible with an array of covert actions in Iran, which have never been reported in the press. If not—as was the case of the Bush administration and North Korea—Iran could be another instance where policymakers promise a strategic policy objective that cannot be verifiably achieved.

Maximalist rhetoric should not constrain the pursuit of other policies that fall short of the ultimate goal. In the case of the Iranian nuclear program, this should include negotiations without preconditions; containment in cooperation with U.S. regional partners; deterrence through conventional and strategic military power; targeted economic sanctions that limit Iran's access to dual-use exports; and countering influence in the public sphere and international institutions. To prevent another political and military quagmire, it is essential that the Obama administration limit the rhetoric and focus on prudent, responsible, and achievable policy objectives.

Micah Zenko is a CFR Fellow for Conflict Prevention in the Center for Preventive Action. His areas of expertise include conflict prevention; U.S. national security policy; military planning and operations; and nuclear weapons policy.

<http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2012/01/23/nuclear-weapons-u-s-strategy-from-pyongyang-to-tehran/#>

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Bloomberg News

OPINION/Bloomberg View Columnist

How Iran Could Trigger Accidental Armageddon: Jeffrey Goldberg

By Jeffrey Goldberg

January 23, 2012

One of the arguments often made in favor of bombing Iran to cripple its nuclear program is this: The mullahs in Tehran are madmen who believe it is their consecrated duty to destroy the perfidious Zionist entity (which is to say, Israel) and so are building nuclear weapons to launch at Tel Aviv at the first favorable moment.

It's beyond a doubt that the Iranian regime would like to bring about the destruction of Israel. However, the mullahs are also cynics and men determined, more than anything, to maintain their hold on absolute power.

Which is why it's unlikely that they would immediately use their new weapons against Israel. An outright attack on Israel -- a country possessing as many as 200 nuclear weapons and sophisticated delivery systems -- would lead to the obliteration of Tehran, the deaths of millions, and the destruction of Iran's military and industrial capabilities.

The mullahs know this. But here's the problem: It may not matter. The threat of a deliberate nuclear attack pales in comparison with the chance that a nuclear-armed Iran could accidentally trigger a cataclysmic exchange with Israel.

Warp-Speed Escalation

The experts who study this depressing issue seem to agree that a Middle East in which Iran has four or five nuclear weapons would be dangerously unstable and prone to warp-speed escalation.

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Here's one possible scenario for the not-so-distant future: Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese proxy, launches a cross-border attack into Israel, or kills a sizable number of Israeli civilians with conventional rockets. Israel responds by invading southern Lebanon, and promises, as it has in the past, to destroy Hezbollah. Iran, coming to the defense of its proxy, warns Israel to cease hostilities, and leaves open the question of what it will do if Israel refuses to heed its demand.

Dennis Ross, who until recently served as President Barack Obama's Iran point man on the National Security Council, notes Hezbollah's political importance to Tehran. "The only place to which the Iranian government successfully exported the revolution is to Hezbollah in Lebanon," Ross told me. "If it looks as if the Israelis are going to destroy Hezbollah, you can see Iran threatening Israel, and they begin to change the readiness of their forces. This could set in motion a chain of events that would be like 'Guns of August' on steroids."

Imagine that Israel detects a mobilization of Iran's rocket force or the sudden movement of mobile missile launchers. Does Israel assume the Iranians are bluffing, or that they are not? And would Israel have time to figure this out? Or imagine the opposite: Might Iran, which will have no second-strike capability for many years -- that is, no reserve of nuclear weapons to respond with in an exchange -- feel compelled to attack Israel first, knowing that it has no second chance?

Bruce Blair, the co-founder of the nuclear disarmament group Global Zero and an expert on nuclear strategy, told me that in a sudden crisis Iran and Israel might each abandon traditional peacetime safeguards, making an accidental exchange more likely.

"A confrontation that brings the two nuclear-armed states to a boiling point would likely lead them to raise the launch-readiness of their forces -- mating warheads to delivery vehicles and preparing to fire on short notice," he said. "Missiles put on hair-trigger alert also obviously increase the danger of their launch and release on false warning of attack -- false indications that the other side has initiated an attack."

Then comes the problem of misinterpreted data, Blair said. "Intelligence failures in the midst of a nuclear crisis could readily lead to a false impression that the other side has decided to attack, and induce the other side to launch a preemptive strike."

'Cognitive Bias'

Blair notes that in a crisis it isn't irrational to expect an attack, and this expectation makes it more likely that a leader will read the worst into incomplete intelligence. "This predisposition is a cognitive bias that increases the danger that one side will jump the gun on the basis of incorrect information," he said.

Ross told me that Iran's relative proximity to Israel and the total absence of ties between the two countries -- the thought of Iran agreeing to maintain a hot line with a country whose existence it doesn't recognize is far-fetched -- make the situation even more hazardous. "This is not the Cold War," he said. "In this situation we don't have any communications channels. Iran and Israel have zero communications. And even in the Cold War we nearly had a nuclear war. We were much closer than we realized."

The answer to this predicament is to deny Iran nuclear weapons, but not through an attack on its nuclear facilities, at least not now. "The liabilities of preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear program vastly outweigh the benefits," Blair said. "But certainly Iran's program must be stopped before it reaches fruition with a nuclear weapons delivery capability."

Ross argues that the Obama administration's approach -- the imposition of steadily more debilitating sanctions -- may yet work. There's a chance, albeit slim, that he may be right: New sanctions are just beginning to bite and, combined with an intensified cyberwar and sabotage efforts, they might prove costly enough to deter Tehran.

But opponents of military action make a mistake in arguing that a nuclear Iran is a containable problem. It is not.



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