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The News Tribune – Tacoma, WA

Kremlin Hails Senate's Approval of Nuclear Treaty

President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday welcomed the U.S. Senate's decision to ratify a landmark U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control treaty, but Russian legislators said they need to study a resolution accompanying the document before following suit.

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press
December 22, 2010

MOSCOW (AP) – President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday welcomed the U.S. Senate's decision to ratify a landmark U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control treaty, but Russian legislators said they need to study a resolution accompanying the document before following suit.

Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalya Timakova said that when he signed the New START treaty with President Barack Obama, they agreed that the ratification process should be conducted simultaneously.

She said that Medvedev voiced hope that both houses of Russian parliament would ratify the pact, but added that they would need some time to analyze the Senate's conditions for its ratification before making their decision.

The New START treaty, signed by Obama and Medvedev in April, would limit each country's strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550, down from the current ceiling of 2,200. It also would re-establish a system for monitoring and verification which ended last year with the expiration of a previous arms control deal.

Legislators in the Kremlin-controlled parliament had said before the Senate landmark ruling on Wednesday that they would approve the treaty quickly after it is ratified in the U.S.

Lower house speaker Boris Gryzlov, however, told reporters Thursday that the Senate's ratification resolution contained some conditions and the legislators need to carefully study the text before making decision.

He added that the State Duma may ratify the pact Friday if the text of the treaty itself remained unchanged.

"If these conditions don't change the text of the treaty, we may pass a ratification bill even tomorrow," Gryzlov said.

He said that the house would need more time if it finds any changes in the body of the treaty.

Conservative Republicans said the pact would limit U.S. options on missile defense, lacked sufficient procedures to verify Russia's adherence and deserved more time for consideration.

Obama called the treaty a national security imperative and pressed strongly for its approval before Congress, with a Republican majority, assumes power in January. In recent days, he had telephoned a handful of wavering Republicans, eventually locking in their votes.

The Obama administration has argued that the United States must show credibility in its improved relations with its former Cold War foe, and the treaty was critical to any rapprochement. The White House is also counting on Russia to help pressure Iran over its nuclear ambitions.

Republicans had tried to kill the treaty by forcing changes in its language that would have sent it back for negotiations with Moscow. Democrats sought to appease some Republican senators by letting them raise these issues in legislation accompanying the treaty that would not directly affect the pact.

On Wednesday, two such amendments, one on missile defense and one on funding for the U.S. nuclear arsenal, passed with support from both parties.

Konstantin Kosachev, the head of the Duma's foreign affairs committee, said that decision is conditioned on the analysis of the amendments.

"We realize that the process shouldn't be delayed, but we intend to work in such a way that it doesn't affect the quality," he said.

Kosachev said that the Duma may quickly approve the pact Friday without any conditions, or could decide to include some conditions of its own, which could delay the vote.

The treaty must also be ratified by the upper house, whose speaker Sergei Mironov said that could happen on Friday as well, if the Duma approves the document, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Thursday that Moscow was still waiting for the official text of the resolution and refused to comment on issues raised by Republicans in the Senate resolution.

"The specific content of the Senate resolution will naturally determine the wording that our legislators will put in the Russian ratification bill," Lavrov said at a briefing.

Retired Gen. Vladimir Dvorkin, who helped negotiate previous arms deals with the United States, predicted that the Kremlin-controlled parliament will quickly ratify the New START.

"This treaty is important for the Russian leadership because it formally preserves the nuclear balance with the United States, the last attribute of a superpower," Dvorkin said, according to the Interfax news agency.

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/2010/12/22/1475956/kremlin-hails-senates-approval.html>

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People's Daily – China

Lavrov Rejects U.S. Senate Resolution on START

December 24, 2010

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Friday that the resolution adopted by the U.S. Senate on the new strategic arms reduction treaty (START) was not true.

"The Senate's resolution claims that the treaty does not apply to new kinds of non-nuclear strategic weapons that could be developed in the future. But this is not true," Lavrov said in the Federation Council as quoted by news agencies.

The statement by the U.S. Republican senators that denies link between offensive and defensive weapons was also not legally binding, he added.

"There are a few problems, one of the main ones being the assertion contained in this statement that the correlation between strategic offensive and defensive weapons, reflected in the treaty, is not legally binding for the U.S. and Russia because it is stipulated in the preamble. This thesis cannot be defended by lawyers," he said.

Lavrov also said the final draft resolution was more hard-lined than the initial version by including some Republicans' positions.

"Indeed, some of its points make this position more hard-lined as compared with the principles offered by the draft statement that was debated by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations," he said.

On the same day in an interview with three Russian TV channels, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev hailed the new START as a cornerstone of European and global security, as well as a very important event this year.

Medvedev praised his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama, saying the U.S. leader lived up to his promises.

"Good for him, he managed to 'push through' the ratification of the most important document on strategic offensive weapons in fairly difficult conditions, it will serve as the basis of our security in the coming years," said the Russian president.

The U.S. Senate ratified the START on Wednesday. Russia's State Duma would discuss the ratification of START in the first of its three required readings Friday, while the Federation Council, or the upper house of the parliament, would consider ratifying the treaty next year.

Moscow and Washington signed the new START on April 8 in Prague, which calls for a big cut in nuclear weapons from both sides. The treaty has to be ratified by the two countries' lawmakers before officially taking into effect.

According to the new treaty, both countries must reduce the number of their strategic missiles to 800 units, and reduce the number of warheads by one-third to 1550.

The START treaty has been widely seen as an effort for both Moscow and Washington to "reset" their relations.

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90853/7242107.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Russia Able to Up Nuclear Arms Potential after New START Treaty — Senator

24 December 2010

Russia will be able to increase its nuclear arms potential after a new arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia is ratified, a top Russian senator said on Friday.

"If one reads the text of the document carefully then it becomes clear that Americans will really have to reduce the number of [nuclear] warheads, while if we [Russia] want to reach the levels defined by the document, will actually have to increase the amount of warheads," Mikhail Margelov, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Federation Council, said in an interview with TVTc television channel.

The U.S. Senate passed the new START treaty by a 71-26 vote on Wednesday in what is seen as a major foreign policy victory for U.S. President Barack Obama, who is eager to "reset" relations with Russia.

The lower house of the Russian parliament, the State Duma, begins first reading debates on the ratification of the new treaty on Friday.

The new treaty, which has won the backing of the world's top figures, including NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, trims the Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals to a maximum of 1,550 nuclear warheads, down from the current ceiling of 2,200.

MOSCOW, December 24 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20101224/161911230.html

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Xinhua News – China

Russian Duma Approves START Agreement

December 25, 2010

BEIJING, Dec. 25 (Xinhuanet) -- Russia's State Duma has given preliminary approval to the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the United States, but the process is not yet finished. The parliament voted 350-to-58 to approve the new START agreement on Friday, in the first of three required readings.

The Duma has granted preliminary approval to the long-awaited US-Russia arms control treaty, but decided to delay the final vote until next month.

According to the new pact, both countries must reduce their number of strategic missiles twofold, to 800 units, and cut their warhead totals by a third, to 1,550.

But a resolution adopted by the US Senate has aroused Moscow's concerns. The text claims the treaty doesn't apply to new types of non-nuclear strategic weapons that could be developed in the future. It also denies a link between offensive and defensive weapons, but Russia's Foreign Minister says the ordinance is not legally binding.

He said, "There will be no doubts about our resolve to persistently pursue the legitimate interests of the Russian Federation, and promote agreements based on equality, taking into consideration each other's interests, parity and, of course, the respect for international commitments."

Russian lawmakers will not finish their ratification process until next year, as they're now embarking on a 10-day vacation.

Moscow and Washington signed the new START agreement in Prague on April 8th. The US Senate passed the treaty on Wednesday. The pact calls for big cuts in nuclear weapons from both sides, and has been widely viewed as an effort by both countries to "reset" their relationship.

Source: CNTV.cn

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/video/2010-12/25/c_13664274.htm

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Vancouver Sun – Canada

Nuclear Treaty Goes Easy on Russia: Analysts

By Dmitry Zaks, Agence France-Presse (AFP)

December 26, 2010

MOSCOW - The new Russia-U.S. nuclear arms pact may have been hailed as historic but analysts said that all Moscow really has to do is phase out Soviet-era missiles and warheads that are already out of date.

The new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was ratified by the U.S. Senate on Wednesday after a passionate months-long debate and given initial approval by Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, two days later.

It will face two more hearings in Russia and almost certainly enter into force within the next few months.

The first nuclear pact in two decades has been feted as vital to global security because it reduces old warhead ceilings by an impressive 30 per cent and sets a streamlined new inspection procedure designed to eliminate cheating.

The new START limits each side to 1,550 deployed warheads and 700 deployed long-range missiles — including those fired from submarines — and heavy bombers.

The two sides may also have up to 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers and bombers.

But analysts said that Russia's real problem was that even these lower missile and launcher ceilings were too high for the country to keep pace with the United States.

Soviet-era missiles such as the Saber SS-22 are rapidly approaching their expiry date and technical specifications mean the weapon has no purpose if its nuclear warheads are taken out of commission.

"START is not the problem here," said the respected military commentator Alexander Golts. "The problem is that Russia has to retire more delivery vehicles because of 'old age' than it has the funds to produce."

The United States had 2,019 more warheads deployed on its launchers and bombers than Russia under START data reported by the U.S. State Department in July 2009.

Independent estimates from the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists said that in late 2009 the United States in fact had 2,200 "operational" nuclear warheads and 2,500 more warheads in reserve that could be activated if necessary.

Russia on the other hand was believed to have had a total of 2,600 operational long-range warheads covered by START.

But the required phase-out of old missiles is not the only thing working in Russia's favour. New START counting rules will also allow it to attribute just one warhead per bomber even if it carries more — a point insisted on by Moscow during the treaty negotiations.

National Defence magazine editor Igor Korotchenko told the RIA Novosti news agency that Russia was now likely to keep just 390 missiles and bombers as it looks to save money ahead of a new round of strategic reductions in 2020.

And Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov saw nothing but the treaty's advantages while defending it in parliament Friday.

"We will not have to make any cuts to our strategic offensive weapons," Serdyukov told skeptical lawmakers from the Communist opposition. "But the Americans — they will indeed have to make some cuts," said Serdyukov.

"Serdyukov is right," said Moscow's Centre for Disarmament Director Anatoly Dyakov. "Russia has already met its launcher obligations. It only has 560 of those.

"We have more warheads. But if you take the old SS-20s out of commission — they each have 10 warheads and have been in service 10 years past their expiration — then you really do not need to take any additional measures," said Dyakov.

The feared SS-20 was eliminated under a landmark 1987 disarmament agreement but the Centre for Defence Information said that Russia now had 120 modified SS-N-20 missiles deployed on its submarines.

The maths also works in Russia's favour because START focuses exclusively on "strategic" nuclear weapons that are designed to destroy large populations or damage the enemy's ability to wage war.

These missiles are for the most part fired over great distances and have been the U.S. weapon of choice during the Cold War.

The United States thus has a strategic superiority over Russia — which in turn enjoys an advantage in "tactical" weapons used in smaller campaigns around its periphery.

Analysts said that tactical missiles and warheads will likely be the subject of the next round of reductions insisted upon by the United States.

"I am afraid that this is something Russia will not be able to avoid," the upper house of parliament's foreign affairs committee chairman Mikhail Margelov told Moscow Echo radio.

But he added: "We should definitely support START."

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/Nuclear+treaty+goes+easy+Russia+analysts/4026886/story.html>

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Financial Times – U.K.

US Fears Faster Iran Nuclear Arms Progress

By Daniel Dombey in Washington

December 29, 2010

US officials are worried Iran could use new technology in coming months that would shorten the time needed to reach nuclear weapon status and reduce the scope for diplomacy.

Washington is particularly concerned that Tehran might deploy a new generation of centrifuges to enrich uranium, a process that can yield nuclear fuel and weapons-grade material.

Since such devices are three times faster than the centrifuges Iran relies on now, officials say they would reduce the “dash time” needed to develop a nuclear weapon.

“If they were to deploy large numbers of these second-generation machines then it could dramatically reduce dash time,” said an administration official.

The US would look at the next quarterly report of the UN nuclear watchdog to see if Iran was making progress with the new centrifuges, he said.

The previous such report, in November, indicated Iran planned to deploy several hundred new centrifuges for “research and development” at its once-secret nuclear site near Qom.

David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security (Isis) in Washington said: “The next crisis will probably be over the question of deployment of these advanced centrifuges.”

Iran has been working for years to build a new generation of centrifuges. But they have yet to be deployed in significant numbers in spite of announcements by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president, that the effort had succeeded.

The Obama administration says it would take Iran one to two years between reaching a decision to make a bomb and producing enough highly enriched uranium for one weapon. That would leave plenty of time for detection by UN inspectors – unless the centrifuges are at a secret site.

Some outside commentators say far less time would be needed – about six months, according to Isis. Iran says its nuclear programme is purely peaceful.

Commentators agree the calculations would change greatly if Iran deployed more efficient centrifuges.

Iran relies on a form of the so-called P1 centrifuge, technology it acquired from Pakistan’s disbanded A.Q. Khan nuclear black market ring, which was modelled on 1970s Dutch equipment.

“The P1 is not going to get much better,” said the administration official. “It’s just a very temperamental machine. If anything goes off kilter, it tends to crash.”

Iran’s programme has also been beset by apparent sabotage by the US and its allies, assassinations of key scientists, and the Stuxnet computer virus, which Mr Ahmadinejad admitted had hit operations at Iran’s main enrichment plant in Natanz.

For unknown reasons, Iran keeps about half its approximately 8,500 centrifuges at Natanz idle. The US official said this was probably so that machines on standby could be used when centrifuges in operation broke down.

Mr Albright said it was a “perplexing question” why Iran had not developed and deployed better centrifuges to date, suggesting it was constrained by a lack of raw materials and components. Other experts suggest Tehran has problems mastering the technology because of its limited technical and industrial base.

Iran is experimenting on about 40 new-generation centrifuges at Natanz.

Mr Albright believed Iran was proceeding in a “slow, deliberate” fashion with its nuclear programme rather than embarking on a nuclear dash – including high levels of uranium enrichment – that could provoke a military strike.

The US official said Iran had sought consistently to develop its nuclear programme at secret sites. “That’s the most logical way for them to do it with the lowest risk, and also the advantage of a covert facility is that you don’t need to be hasty,” he added.

He added that it would take three to six months to reconfigure centrifuges from producing nuclear fuel to yielding weapons grade material, a process Iranian authorities would want to keep away from inspectors’ eyes.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4bd240c4-136a-11e0-a367-00144feabdc0.html#axzz19d5dgIUo>

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London Daily Telegraph – U.K.

Iran Nuclear Weapon is Further Off, Israel Says

Iran no longer has the capability to create a nuclear weapon on its own, Israel's deputy prime minister said on Wednesday, in a new assessment that would seem to make military action less likely in the near future.

By Richard Spencer, Middle East Correspondent

29 December 2010

The new view lengthens considerably previous time frames of about a year, and suggests the programme has been seriously damaged by sabotage, sanctions or both. It lends weight to the theory that a highly sophisticated computer worm called Stuxnet was inserted successfully last year into Iran's uranium enrichment programme.

A report by a former United Nations weapons inspector last week said the worm might have forced the replacement of 1,000 uranium enrichment centrifuges at Iran's main facility.

Moshe Yaalon, the deputy prime minister, said western pressure would force Iran to consider whether its nuclear programme was worth pursuing. "I believe that this effort will grow, and will include areas beyond sanctions, to convince the Iranian regime that, effectively, it must choose between continuing to seek nuclear capability and surviving," he told Israeli radio. "I don't know if it will happen in 2011 or in 2012, but we are talking in terms of the next three years."

He did not refer specifically to claims that Stuxnet damaged the Iranian programme, but he said it was clear it had encountered "difficulties".

"These difficulties postpone the timeline, of course," he said. "Thus we cannot talk about a 'point of no return'. Iran does not currently have the ability to make a nuclear bomb on its own. I hope it won't succeed at all and that the Western world's effort will ultimately deny Iran a nuclear capability."

Iran has accused Israel and its western allies of responsibility for the murders of two Iranian nuclear scientists in Tehran this year.

Earlier this year, Iran began enriching uranium from 3.5 per cent – suitable for nuclear power – to 20 per cent, saying it was for a medical facility.

From 20 per cent, it is a relatively simple step to increase concentration to 90 per cent, the level necessary for a nuclear weapon.

Iran claims it has no interest in developing a nuclear weapon, and some analysts say the country will stop short of doing so, hoping that the presence of a "breakout" capability would be enough to give Iran the extra regional clout it seeks.

However, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad admitted last month that the enrichment process had been hit by a virus, without naming it. Computer virus analysts say Stuxnet was so complex it was probably written by a "state actor" rather than an amateur hacker.

The new report, written for the Institute of Science and International Security by a team including David Albright, its director and a former UN weapons inspector, found a link between the worm and the frequency at which Iran's centrifuges spin.

The worm contained a code setting the speed at 1064 Hertz – the correct notional speed – and increasing it suddenly to 1410, at which point the centrifuges would "tear apart". It noted that the number of centrifuges operating at Iran's Natanz facility fell by about 1,000 not long after the start point of the worm.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/8229938/Iran-nuclear-weapon-is-further-off-Israel-says.html>

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Washington Examiner

Report: Iran Jails Nuke Scientist after US Return

By BRIAN MURPHY, Associated Press

January 3, 2011

An Iranian nuclear scientist who claimed he slipped away from his CIA captors has not been seen publicly since his heroic return to Tehran last year and could be facing an investigation as a possible turncoat, according to an opposition website.

The report on the website Iranbriefing.net says that Shahram Amiri is now being held in a Tehran prison, where he allegedly has faced beatings so severe that he had to be hospitalized for a week.

The website's account could not be verified, but it purports to offer the first details on Amiri's fate since he surfaced in the United States six months ago amid an array of contradictory stories between Tehran and Washington.

Amiri's return to Tehran in July was portrayed by Iranian authorities as a propaganda coup.

The nuclear scientist claimed he was kidnapped by American agents in May 2009 while on a pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Iran's state media said Amiri had snubbed a fortune in payoffs by his purported CIA captors and then escaped with inside information about America's covert operations against Tehran. Officials said a TV movie was in the works.

U.S. officials, however, say Amiri willingly cooperated and had been paid a total of \$5 million by the CIA for "significant" information about Iran's nuclear program.

Amiri turned up in Washington at the Iranian Interest Section at the Pakistan Embassy after a series of baffling videos that presented contradictory stories: one claiming he was on the run from the CIA and the other saying he was studying for a doctorate in the U.S.

Amiri then decided to leave the United States — but without the money — in July, American officials said. His return to Tehran, however, was the last time Amiri was seen in public.

Iranian authorities have not offered any information on his whereabouts and his family and colleagues have made no public statements as to his fate.

The Farsi-language account posted on the Iranbriefing.net website claims to pick up Amiri's trail after his highly publicized return. It cited anonymous family members as saying Amiri was first held in a safe house in Tehran and allowed weekend visits with relatives at the Talaie cultural center, which is operated by Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard.

The website quoted family members as being told that Amiri's movements were restricted for "his own safety."

The report says — without citing any source — that Amiri was later moved to a former military lockup, the Heshmatieh Prison, in Tehran, where he allegedly faced harsh interrogations and beatings that left him in a military-run hospital afterward for a week.

The website is operated by the IranBriefing Foundation, which describes itself as a "non-profit human rights organization" based in the United States that focuses on the role of the Revolutionary Guard and other Iranian security agencies. Officials at the group could not be reached immediately for comment.

The reports — if true — would fit into Iran's increasing attention to trying to plug security holes inside its nuclear program, which the West and others fear could lead to the development of atomic weapons. Iran claims it only seeks reactors for power and research.

In October, one of Iran's vice presidents, Ali Akbar Salehi — who is now acting foreign minister — acknowledged that some personnel at nuclear facilities had passed secrets to the West in exchange for payment. Salehi claimed that it "awakened" security forces to impose tighter controls.

Iran also acknowledged that a sophisticated computer worm, known as Stuxnet, had infiltrated systems at nuclear sites, including briefly halting activity at Iran's uranium enrichment lab. Iran's intelligence chief has accused the CIA and Israeli and British spy agencies of being behind the cyber attacks.

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/news/world/2011/01/report-iran-jails-nuke-scientist-after-us-return>

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Vancouver Sun – Canada

Iran Invites IAEA Envoys to Visit Nuclear Sites

By Mitra Amiri and Fredrik Dahl, Reuters

January 4, 2011

TEHRAN/VIENNA - Iran has invited envoys from China, the European Union and elsewhere to visit nuclear sites in a bid to show openness about its disputed atomic work ahead of new talks with major powers later this month.

Analysts saw Iran's invitation, to several ambassadors accredited to the UN nuclear watchdog in Vienna, as a "public relations" exercise which may do little to help resolve a long-running international row over Tehran's nuclear plans.

"However, it is a move away from all the confrontational rhetoric," Ali Ansari, an Iran expert at Scotland's St Andrews university, said.

But a senior Western diplomat dismissed it as Iran's latest "stunt" seeking to distract attention from its obligations under repeated UN Security Council resolutions calling on Tehran to suspend activity the West fears has military aims.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the ambassadors were invited to travel to the country before Tehran and six world powers involved in diplomatic efforts to defuse the nuclear dispute are due to meet in Istanbul at the end of January.

They included representatives from some of the six powers — China, Russia, France, Britain, Germany and the United States, ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told a news conference.

"They will possibly visit Iran and our nuclear facilities on Jan. 15 and 16," he said.

He did not give details, but a diplomat in Vienna said Russia, China, Egypt, Algeria, Cuba and current EU president Hungary were believed to be among those invited. Britain said it was not invited.

Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Vienna-based UN nuclear body, said the plan was for the group to travel to the Natanz uranium enrichment facility and the Arak heavy water reactor.

The two sites are at the heart of Iran's nuclear dispute with the West, which suspects the Islamic Republic is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Iran denies this.

"Ambassadors . . . are invited to visit our nuclear sites, particularly in Natanz and Arak," Ali Asghar Soltanieh told Reuters in Vienna. "This is in the line of our transparent nuclear policy," he said, adding that meetings with high-ranking Iranian officials would also be organized.

SANCTIONS PRESSURE

Tehran and the powers agreed in Geneva last month to meet again in Istanbul in late January. The Geneva talks were the first in more than a year and also the first since tougher UN, U.S., and EU sanctions were imposed on Iran in mid-2010.

But the Geneva meeting made no substantial progress towards finding a solution to the nuclear row. Iran says its nuclear program is purely for peaceful electricity production and has rejected international demands to curb it.

In Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the country had received Iran's invitation, without saying if it would go.

Hungary's foreign ministry said it had also received Iran's invitation and that it was consulting EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and member states about Tehran's proposal.

The senior Western diplomat, who declined to be named, said Iran was undercutting the authority of the IAEA as the international body tasked with making sure countries do not divert nuclear material for military purposes.

"Rather than answering the agency's questions and giving its inspectors the requested access to people, plans and plants, they are inviting select nations' envoys to the IAEA to come and do the verification job the IAEA is meant to do."

The IAEA regularly visits Iranian nuclear sites including Natanz but it has voiced growing frustration at what it sees as lack of Iranian full co-operation with its inspectors.

Mehmanparast said Tehran's invitation "has once again shown the goodwill of our country regarding co-operation" with the IAEA and Iran's "peaceful nuclear activities."

Proliferation expert Mark Fitzpatrick at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies think-tank called it a "propaganda ploy" aimed at deepening international divisions regarding Iran's nuclear program.

<http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Iran+invites+IAEA+envoys+visit+nuclear+sites/4056469/story.html>

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U.S. Welcomes N. Korea's Move to Reengage IAEA Inspectors: State Dept.

By Hwang Doo-hyong

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20 (Yonhap) -- The United States Monday welcomed North Korea's move to allow in international inspectors to monitor its nuclear facilities, but added Washington will heed actions, not words regarding the North's denuclearization.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, on a private mission to Pyongyang, earlier said that North Korea has agreed to allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to monitor its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, and negotiate the sale of 12,000 spent nuclear fuel rods.

At the State Department, spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters, "If North Korea wants to reengage with the IAEA, wants to reintroduce inspectors into its facilities, that certainly would be a positive step. But the key is following through and implementing that decision, and meeting its international obligations both under international agreements and also with the 2005 joint statement."

North Korea expelled IAEA monitors early last year in the wake of U.N. Security Council sanctions for a rocket launch seen as a long-range missile test. Months later, Pyongyang detonated its second nuclear device after one in 2006, saying the six-party talks are dead.

In a statement, Richardson's office also said North Korea agreed to set up a military commission consisting of representatives from the two Koreas and the U.S. and an inter-Korean military hotline to prevent conflicts in the disputed areas of the West Sea.

"We've seen a string of broken promises by North Korea going back many, many years," Crowley said. "We'll be guided by what North Korea does, not by what North Korea says it might do under certain circumstances. We're not against returning to six-party talks. But we don't want to have talks just for talks' sake. North Korea has a singular responsibility to take affirmative action that warrant a return to six-party talks."

The return of the U.N. monitors is one of preconditions Seoul and Washington had put forth for the resumption of the six-party talks on ending the North's nuclear weapons programs.

South Korea and the U.S. also want Pyongyang to apologize for the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island and the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan. China and Russia want the nuclear talks to reopen as soon as possible unconditionally.

China, a veto power on the Security Council, blocked efforts by the U.S. and its allies to denounce Pyongyang at a hastily convened meeting in New York Sunday.

South Korean officials have been cautious about the North's rapprochement efforts. Some experts say the proposals are just part of the North's traditional brinkmanship.

"North Korea has a better track record on implementation of threats than negotiated commitments, but it has also used bluffing tactics to heighten ambiguity and induce caution by its adversaries," said Scott Snyder, director of the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy at the Asia Foundation. "The problem lies in knowing the difference between threat and bluff."

Crowley, meanwhile, urged North Korea to refrain from responding to live-fire drills by South Korea on the disputed border in the Yellow Sea earlier in the day.

"There was no basis for any other response by North Korea," the spokesman said. "This was an internal matter for South Korea. Its military has a right to exercise within its own borders. This exercise was not a threat to North Korea."

Crowley's remarks came amid concerns that North Korea might break its promise not to retaliate for the artillery exercise in waters off Yeonpyeong Island. North Korea shelled the island last month, killing four people, the first attack on South Korean soil to target civilians since the 1950-53 Korean War.

Pyongyang had threatened to retaliate if South Korea proceeded with the planned live-fire exercise near the Northern Limit Line, the de facto borderline in the Yellow Sea. The North for years has been challenging the border line, drawn unilaterally by the United Nations Command at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Richardson said he was pleased North Korea did not retaliate.

"I am very encouraged by the news that North Korea will not react militarily to South Korea's drills," he said. "During my meetings in Pyongyang, I repeatedly pressed North Korea not to retaliate. The result is that South Korea

was able to flex its muscles, and North Korea reacted in a statesmanlike manner. I hope this will signal a new chapter and a round of dialogue to lessen tension on the Korean peninsula."

The North's restraint also comes amid media speculation that Pyongyang might be switching tactics, aiming for negotiation now after creating a series of crises. Earlier, North Korea revealed it has a uranium enrichment plant that could produce material for nuclear weapons.

"North Korea benefits from continued provocations to the extent that the incidents provide a pretext for even stronger domestic political control, reveal military and political weaknesses in South Korea, and divide the United States and China," Snyder said. "An effective policy response must address these vulnerabilities by strengthening South Korean defenses and closing the U.S. gap with China on how to deal with North Korea."

The scholar would not preclude chances of North Korea provoking further later.

"One possible target of a North Korean escalatory counter-response is a South Korean tower near the DMZ that has been authorized for the first time since 2004 to carry a Christmas display," he said. "Although both sides know that they cannot risk a war, the risk of miscalculation has been heightened as a result of recent North Korean provocations."

Crowley said the U.S. is ready to talk to North Koreans about restarting excavation for the remains of American soldiers in North Korea.

"We would hope that, as a humanitarian measure, we can continue cooperation with North Korea on return of remains," he said. "But again, that is separate from these other considerations, in our view."

North Koreans reportedly told Richardson it wants to resume the operation for the retrieval of the remains.

Richardson, once nominated by President Barack Obama as commerce secretary, successfully negotiated the release of two American citizens held in North Korea in the 1990s, and most recently toured North Korea in 2007 to resume operations to excavate the remains of U.S. soldiers killed in the Korean War.

Some 36,000 U.S. troops were killed during the war, and about 8,100 remain missing. A large number of those missing are believed to be buried in North Korea, but U.S. operations in the communist North have been suspended since 2005 because of escalating tension over the North's nuclear ambitions. At the end of the Korean War, North Korea returned the remains of about 3,000 Americans.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/12/21/26/0301000000AEN20101221000200315F.HTML>

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Korea Times – South Korea

North Korea Threatens Nuclear War

December 23, 2010

By Kang Seung-woo

North Korea said Thursday that it is ready to launch a "sacred" war against South Korea on the basis of its nuclear deterrent.

The North's warning came amid lingering tension on the Korean Peninsula after Seoul staged live-fire exercises on the border island of Yeonpyeong with the apparent aim of deterring North Korea, which shelled the island earlier, at a range south of the border and in the East Sea.

Kim Young-chun, minister of the People's Armed Forces, gave the warning while reading a report during a ceremony in Pyongyang marking the 19th anniversary of leader Kim Jong-il gaining supreme command of the Korean People's Army (KPA).

"The revolutionary armed forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are fully poised to launch a sacred war of justice of Korean style based on our nuclear deterrent at any time necessary to cope with the enemies' actions," Kim was quoted by the North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) as saying.

Kim criticized South Korean forces for having perpetrated military provocations such as shelling North Korea during the recent exercises aimed at a war of aggression in the West Sea.

After North Korea's deadly artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong Island along the border on Nov. 23, which killed four people including two civilians, the South staged its largest-scale air and ground exercise near the tense Northern Limit Line (NLL), Thursday. It also held a live-fire drill Monday.

“The enemy’s scenario for aggression aimed at the start of another Korean War has reached the phase of its implementation. The army and people of the DPRK never make empty talk. Should the enemies intrude into the sky, land and seas of the DPRK even an inch, the KPA will as ever continue dealing more devastating physical blows at them without hesitation,” Kim said.

Meanwhile, the United States backed South Korea’s recent military drills.

The White House said that the South’s military exercises were defensive in nature and well-publicized in advance.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/120_78547.html

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The Star – Malaysia

Thursday, December 23, 2010

ANALYSIS - N.Korea's Enrichment to Complicate any Nuclear Talks

By Sylvia Westall

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea's uranium enrichment work could complicate any future international talks on dismantling its nuclear programme, especially if ally China backs Pyongyang in saying that it is for peaceful purposes only.

North Korea revealed the previously undetected uranium facility in Yongbyon to a U.S. expert last month who said he was "stunned" at how modern it appeared.

The advance could give impoverished North Korea a second route to producing nuclear weapons and a bargaining chip for aid as it pushes to restart diplomatic talks.

The reclusive state, which carried out nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, has had a separate plutonium programme for decades.

North Korea could use its uranium enrichment to try to redefine "denuclearisation" and divide those involved in talks.

"The enrichment plant certainly presents a complication," said Mark Fitzpatrick at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

He said its implications for denuclearisation and how it fits into a 2005 nuclear-disarmament-for-aid deal with five regional powers would need to be negotiated "which is precisely Pyongyang's objective".

"Their obligation to denuclearize means no uranium enrichment, a Western diplomat versed in nuclear issues said, pointing out that Pyongyang had previously denied it was pursuing enrichment. "Enrichment definitely muddies the waters."

South Korean and U.S. officials suspect the North has similar facilities hidden at other locations where it could more easily raise the enrichment level from those used for nuclear power station fuel to the higher-grade suitable for atomic arms.

Seoul, Washington, Tokyo and Moscow, involved in the so-called six-party talks with North Korea and China, are likely to insist enrichment be included in any denuclearisation talks.

"Few want to accept a North Korean enrichment plant, regardless of North Korea's statement on its declared purpose," said David Albright, a former U.N. arms inspector and head of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

"North Korea's gamble is that some, such as China and various NGOs, will accept an enrichment plant under International Atomic Energy Agency (monitoring) and declared as dedicated to producing only low-enriched uranium."

This is similar to the problem the West has faced with Iran over technology that is difficult for U.N. inspectors to monitor to ensure there is no diversion for military purposes.

"You can't outright disallow (North Korea) the right to civilian nuclear activities, so they're creating a new issue to complicate things," said Shen Dingli, Director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

"Like Iran, they're using this right to uranium enrichment as leverage." Iran says it wants a civilian power programme, but the West suspects it is seeking atomic weapons capability.

DENUCLEARISATION REDEFINED?

China said on Tuesday that North Korea has the right to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes, but that it must allow IAEA inspectors back into the country to help ease tensions.

Pyongyang expelled the IAEA in April 2009 when it exited the six-party talks, but has recently suggested they could come back.

Albright said partial declarations and limited IAEA access would "doom" any verification effort and warned Pyongyang could offer its equipment and know-how to proliferation-prone states.

South Korea and its allies have refused to restart talks until Pyongyang gives a firm commitment on nuclear disarmament. Seoul is determined to push through with a "Grand Bargain" in which the North will give up the entirety of its atomic work.

"The next six-party talks will be the grand bargain. That means we would need to agree on the target year (for the North's dismantlement) and the whole picture, not partial elements such as Yongbyon," said a South Korean government official who is close to nuclear negotiations with the North.

Russia has expressed "deep concern" over North Korea's uranium enrichment work and has urged it to abide by the 2005 pledge to abandon its atomic programme.

Brian Myers at South Korea's Dongseo University said the North could not take enrichment off the table for talks as it would show it had no desire to return to them. It would use it to demand greater compensation for denuclearisation instead.

"Needless to say, I don't believe they are interested in negotiating disarmament in good faith. North Korea can no sooner give up its nuclear potential than the Vatican can give up Catholicism," he said, explaining that the atomic capacity protected the North and gave it a reason to exist.

Siegfried Hecker, the U.S. nuclear expert who was shown the uranium enrichment facility said earlier this month North Korea had already redefined what is meant by "denuclearisation".

"Shutting down the plutonium programme was within reach, but the same is not likely for the uranium programme, because the justification for its peaceful nature is more credible than for the plutonium programme, even though it is no less problematic."

Additional reporting by Jack Kim in Seoul, Chris Buckley in Beijing, Steve Gutterman in Moscow and Fredrik Dahl in Vienna; Editing by John Chalmers

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/12/23/worldupdates/2010-12-23T085806Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-537465-1&sec=Worldupdates

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Brisbane Times – Australia

N.Korea May Stage Atom Test 'to Boost Heir'

Park Chan-Kyong, Agence France-Presse (AFP)

December 24, 2010

North Korea may carry out another atomic test next year to bolster the status of leader-in-waiting Kim Jong-Un, a Seoul state think-tank said Friday, a day after the North threatened a nuclear attack.

Tensions remain high on the peninsula a month after the North bombarded a South Korean border island and killed four people including civilians.

The North may stage a third test "to demonstrate Kim Jong-Un's military prowess, to improve plutonium-based nuclear weapons and ratchet up military tensions", the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security said.

A new test is needed to improve its plutonium-based bombs using data from the second test in May 2009, the institute, which is affiliated to the foreign ministry, said in a report.

The North has been working for decades to build plutonium-based weapons and last month also disclosed a new uranium enrichment complex -- a potential new way to make bombs.

The report said the North is likely to build up its atomic arsenal next year and might test a uranium-based weapon "to maximise the shock to the outside world".

While six-party nuclear disarmament talks may well resume next year, chances of any progress are slim, it said.

The North is thought to have enough plutonium for maybe six to eight weapons but it is not known whether it can fit them to missile warheads. Nevertheless, it frequently raises the prospect of nuclear war.

On Thursday the North vowed readiness for a "sacred war" using its nuclear weapons.

"The revolutionary armed forces... are getting fully prepared to launch a sacred war of justice of Korean style based on the nuclear deterrent at any time necessary to cope with the enemies' actions deliberately pushing the situation to the brink of a war," said armed forces minister Kim Yong-Chun.

The North accuses the South of provoking its November 23 bombardment of Yeonpyeong island, near the disputed Yellow Sea border, by holding a firing drill there.

The South Monday staged another drill on Yeonpyeong but the North did not follow through with threats of a new and deadlier attack.

On Thursday Seoul deployed tanks, artillery and jet fighters in a show of force on the mainland.

And the South's defence ministry announced Friday that a giant Christmas tree near the North Korean border would stay lit until January 8.

The move is likely to anger Pyongyang since the date marks the birthday of Jong-Un, youngest son of leader Kim Jong-Il. The communist North sees the tree topped with a glowing cross as a provocative propaganda symbol.

The ministry said it hoped to send "a message of peace to the North" and the timing was just a coincidence.

An international think-tank urged the two Koreas to accept international arbitration to redraw the flashpoint sea border and lessen the possibility of all-out war.

The International Crisis Group, like many other analysts and the Seoul government, said the North's attacks are linked to moves to install Jong-Un as eventual successor.

They are an apparent attempt "to give the inexperienced heir some appearance of military and strategic prowess", the ICG said in a report.

"They also signal to potential rivals among North Korean elites that Kim Jong-Il is willing to take on the South to promote his son and he would therefore have no problem confronting domestic opponents."

There is "a real danger" the North will continue its attacks, it said.

The South's military, accused of a feeble response to last month's attack, has vowed to hit back harder next time by using air power.

The North offered apparent nuclear concessions to US politician Bill Richardson, who ended a visit to Pyongyang this week.

Richardson said it agreed to readmit UN atomic inspectors and negotiate the sale of nuclear fuel rods to a third party.

The New Mexico governor said Thursday a resumption of six-nation talks -- grouping the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan -- could help prevent a new escalation of tensions.

If "they don't react militarily again to this recent drill, then maybe the time has come for the six-party talks," he told CNN, referring to the South Korean exercise staged Thursday.

The North's news agency blamed the United States for the "alarming developments" on the peninsula this year.

It said Washington had orchestrated clashes to test a new military alliance it was forging with Japan and South Korea "to hold hegemony in the Asia-Pacific".

<http://news.brisbanetimes.com.au/breaking-news-world/nkorea-may-stage-atom-test-to-boost-heir-20101224-1976m.html>

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Korea Times – South Korea
December 24, 2010

'North Korea Capable of Hitting Seoul with Nukes'

By Lee Tae-hoon

Song Young-sun, a lawmaker of the National Assembly Defense Committee, said Friday that North Korea's military is capable of striking South Korea with its nuclear weapons via missile or by dropping them from a "stealth" aircraft.

“Pyongyang has yet to secure the technology to hit Hawaii, which is 3,600 kilometers away, or the U.S. mainland with a nuclear warhead,” Song of the minor opposition Future Alliance Hope told The Korea Times. “However, they have already developed numerous Scuds and other types of missiles highly capable of carrying small nuclear warheads and hitting any of South Korea’s major cities.”

The North’s missile, known as the BM-25 Musudan, is believed to be able to carry a payload weighing 1 to 1.2 tons and has a range of 3,000-4,000 kilometers, according to a report of the Defense Agency for Technology and Quality.

“The heavier the payload, the shorter the range of a missile,” Song said. “But South Koreans should be aware that they are living right next to North Korea.”

The second-term lawmaker pointed out that the North may simply drop nuclear bombs on the South using its airplanes, such as the AN-2 Colt and IL-28.

The AN-2 is a propeller-driven biplane made mostly of cloth and wood, and the IL-28 is a Cold War-era Soviet ground attack aircraft.

According to a 2010 Pentagon report, the AN-2 has “truly lethal potential,” as it gives off virtually no signature on radar, making it difficult to identify in the event of troop infiltration missions.

Song claims that the North possesses some 300 AN-2s, which can carry 10 to 15 heavily armed soldiers across the inter-Korean border.

It can even land on golf ranges, as it only needs a 250- meter runway.

The legislator, however, underlined that Pyongyang would not undertake a major nuclear attack against Seoul as “it would be suicidal for the reclusive regime to do so.”

“Ironically, the only reason the North maintains a belligerent attitude against the South is that it wants a security guarantee,” she said.

Nam Sung-wook, director of the Institute for National Security Strategy, also forecast Thursday that the Stalinist North would refrain from committing another military provocation until at least February.

Nam claims that the North will likely hold off until after the U.S. and China hold a summit in mid-January.

On Thursday, the North said it may wage a “sacred” war against the South on the basis of its nuclear deterrent.

“The revolutionary armed forces of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) are fully poised to launch a sacred war of justice of Korean style based on our nuclear deterrent at any time necessary to cope with the enemies’ actions,” Kim Young-chun, minister of the People’s Armed Forces, said.

Russian experts, however, have raised questions about the North’s capability to detonate a nuclear bomb, according to Russia’s news agency, Itar-Tass.

“In most probability, this is a type of blackmail on the part of the North Korean leadership,” a well-informed source in the nuclear power industry was quoted as saying by the agency.

“The real question, however, is if North Korea has the capability to set this fuse into action.”

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/12/113_78557.html

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Bangkok Post – Thailand

S.Korea Says N.Korea Nuclear Talks must be Revived

By Agence France-Presse (AFP)

29 December 2010

South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak called Wednesday for revived international talks to shut down North Korea's nuclear programme, apparently softening his stance towards negotiations.

"(We) have no choice but to resolve the problem of dismantling North Korea's nuclear programme diplomatically through the six-party talks," Lee said as he received a 2011 policy report from the foreign ministry.

Lee has publicly taken a tough line with the North since its deadly and destructive bombardment last month of a South Korean border island.

South Korea, the United States, and Japan have been cool to efforts by Russia and China to revive the talks with the North, to ease high tensions.

The president said the international community is pressed for time to denuclearise the North, which has set 2012 -- centenary of the birth of founder Kim Il-Sung -- as the year to become a "great, powerful and prosperous" nation.

Because of this goal, we "should certainly achieve the dismantlement of its nuclear programme next year", Lee said.

The South also accuses the North of sinking one of its warships in March near the disputed Yellow Sea border, a charge it denies.

Since the island shelling, Seoul has staged a series of military drills as a show of force and vowed to hit back hard using air power against any new attack.

Lee, however, also called for cross-border dialogue.

"We should make efforts to have peace settled through inter-Korean dialogue" while also strengthening defences, he said on receiving a separate policy report from the unification ministry which handles inter-Korean affairs.

The president also said reunification of the two Koreas is not "far off" and the ministry should work harder to persuade the public this can have benefits.

The foreign ministry report said policy in the new year would focus on winning international support for peaceful reunification.

But it said the North's ongoing power succession from leader Kim Jong-Il to his youngest son, coupled with threats of military brinkmanship, would continue to fan uncertainty on the peninsula.

Korea JoongAng Daily newspaper said the North had sharply increased its military drills this month, with a 150 percent increase over December 2009.

It said air force exercises had been unusually extensive, and a MiG fighter disappeared off radar screens last week during one drill.

The North shut down its elderly plutonium-producing reactor in 2007 under a six-nation disarmament deal. But it quit the forum in April 2009 and staged a second nuclear test a month later.

Last month it disclosed a uranium enrichment plant to visiting US experts. US officials and experts say it could easily be converted to produce weapons-grade uranium, giving the North a second way to build a bomb.

The US State Department has said the North has "at least one other" uranium enrichment site after the one it disclosed.

Pyongyang said Wednesday its new plant is designed solely to fuel a light-water reactor being built to produce energy.

"To ensure fuel supply to the reactor, a modern uranium enrichment plant equipped with thousands of centrifuges is in normal operation," ruling communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said, reiterating claims made early this month.

According to US troubleshooter Bill Richardson, who visited Pyongyang this month, the North has offered to permit the return of UN nuclear inspectors and dispose of fuel rods outside the country.

The apparent concessions have not been officially announced.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/213629/s-korea-says-n-korea-nuclear-talks-must-be-revived>

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People's Daily – China

DPRK Says Peaceful Use of Nuclear Power Legitimate Right

December 29, 2010

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had "the legitimate right" to develop its nuclear capability for peaceful purposes, the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper said Wednesday.

The paper said in a commentary the construction of light-water reactors was "a natural option in the light of the legitimate right to nuclear activities for peaceful purposes, the worldwide trend of developing nuclear energy and the country's daily increasing demand for electricity."

It blamed the United States for "contemplating stronger pressure and sanctions against the DPRK" and for failing to abide by the 1994 agreement on the construction of light-water reactors in the DPRK.

"Had the U.S. kept the above-said promise, the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula would not have remained so complicated as now," it said.

The commentary said the country was "making brisk headway" in the construction of light-water reactors by operating "thousands" of centrifuges at its uranium enrichment plant.

U.S. special envoy Steven Bosworth expressed disappointment at the DPRK's uranium enrichment activities last month, calling it "a kind of provocation."

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/7246153.html>

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Miami herald
December 31, 2010

NKorea Vows Better Ties with SKorea

By KIM KWANG-TAE, Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea, which has conducted two nuclear tests in the past, on Saturday welcomed the new year with calls for a Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons, better ties with rival South Korea and a promise to boost its military strength.

The North's annual New Year's message comes in the wake of its Nov. 23 artillery attack on a front-line South Korean island near the Koreas' disputed western sea border.

That barrage, which followed an alleged North Korean torpedoing of a South Korean warship in March, sent tensions between the Koreas soaring and fueled fears of war during the last weeks of 2010.

In the holiday message, carried in the official state press, the North said confrontation between the two Koreas should be defused as early as possible and called for a more determined campaign to improve inter-Korean relations and reunify the country.

But Pyongyang also said the military would continue to prepare itself for fighting and would focus on refining its spirit through "prompt, merciless and annihilatory action."

"The entire army should conduct intense combat training in an atmosphere of actual battle as required by the tense situation so as to reliably prepare all the officers and men," the North said in the editorial carried by its leading newspapers.

Four South Koreans, including two civilians, were killed in the shelling of Yeonpyeong island, which North Korea carried out after warning Seoul against conducting live-fire drills there. The attack was the first on a civilian area since the 1950-53 Korean War.

The South Korean government has strengthened security and deployed additional troops and weaponry to Yeonpyeong, which lies just seven miles (11 kilometers) from North Korean shores.

North Korea does not recognize the maritime border drawn by the U.N. in 1953, and it claims the waters around the island as its own. The Korean peninsula remains technically in a state of war because the conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

In the New Year's message, the North said its military "will not in the least pardon those who impair our absolute dignity and socialist system even a bit and violate our airspace, territory and waters even an inch, but discharge at any cost the historic mission it has assumed on behalf of the country and the nation with matchless arms."

The North said that leader Kim Jong Il "propelled" the country last year toward strength and success.

At the same time, the North said in an editorial that the North "is consistent in its stand and will to achieve peace in Northeast Asia and denuclearization of the whole of the Korean peninsula."

Nuclear disarmament-for-aid talks among the United States, the Koreas, Japan, China and Russia have been stalled, with Washington and Seoul demanding the North fulfill past nuclear commitments before they start again.

http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/12/31/1995499_nkorea-promises-denuclearization.html

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S Korea Says DPRK Holds Key to Reopening Six-Party Talks

January 3, 2011

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is "holding a key" to reopening six-party talks aimed at ending its nuclear program, a South Korean official said Monday.

"North Korea (DPRK) is holding a key. Let me reiterate it is important that the North shows its genuine will for peace and cooperation on the Korean peninsula and also its denuclearization," foreign ministry spokesman Kim Young-sun told a press briefing.

Countries involved in the six-party talks agree that the forum is the only way for dismantling the DPRK's nuclear program, Kim said in response to recent skepticism about the long-stalled talks as a viable means to achieve its goal.

"No party is questioning the viability of the six-party talks," Kim added.

His remarks came as Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. envoy on the DPRK, is scheduled to visit South Korea, China and Japan on January 3-7 to discuss reviving the six-party talks that the DPRK had boycotted.

Bosworth's upcoming trip will help fine-tune opinions of the countries concerned, the spokesman said. "I expect the outcome of his Asian tour to lay the foundations of discussions when Chinese President Hu Jintao visits the United States," he added.

The flurry of diplomatic activities come after Pyongyang, which once declared the six-party talks dead, expressed its will to return to the negotiating table while claiming it has developed a new, highly sophisticated uranium enrichment facility.

The last round of talks was hosted by China in December 2008.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said last week that "significant progress" must be made in dismantling its nuclear program in 2011 through the six-party talks.

"We can only resolve the issue of ending North Korea's nuclear program diplomatically through the six-party talks," Lee said.

Source: Xinhua

<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/7249053.html>

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SpaceDaily.com

Pakistan Test Fires Nuclear-Capable Missile

By Staff Writers

Islamabad (AFP)

December 21, 2010

Pakistan on Tuesday successfully test fired a medium-range ballistic missile capable of carrying nuclear and conventional warheads, the military said.

The military said in a statement that Ghauri Hatf 5, with a range of 1,300 kilometres (800 miles), could carry conventional and other warheads.

The launch was conducted by the Army Strategic Force command's strategic missile group at the end of a field-training exercise aimed at testing the force's operational readiness, the statement said.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee chairman General Khalid Shahmeem Wyne and other senior military officers and scientists witnessed the tests, it said.

"You have made the nation proud and we salute you for your outstanding work," Gilani told the scientists and engineers.

Gilani said Pakistan could be proud of its defence capability and the reliability of its nuclear deterrence. This capability, he added, formed the bedrock of Pakistan's security policy and will continue to be enhanced.

"The test amply demonstrates the credibility of our minimum deterrence strategy, which is the cornerstone of our security policy and ensures peace in the region," he said.

"It also sends the right signals internationally that Pakistan's defence capability is impregnable and should never be challenged."

Gilani said Pakistan was a responsible nation with an extremely reliable nuclear capability and did not harbor any aggressive designs against anyone.

South Asian rivals India and Pakistan -- which have fought three wars, two of them over the disputed territory of Kashmir -- have routinely carried out missile tests since both demonstrated nuclear weapons capability in 1998.

Pakistan's arsenal includes short-, medium- and long-range missiles named after Muslim conquerors.

"Let there be no doubt that Pakistan's armed forces are highly professional, motivated and fully capable of safeguarding Pakistan's security against all types of aggression," Gilani added.

http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Pakistan_test_fires_nuclear-capable_missile_999.html

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China Post – Taiwan

Thursday, December 23, 2010

India Tests Two Nuclear Capable Missiles: Official

The Indian military successfully tested two short-range nuclear-capable missiles from a facility in the east of the country Wednesday, a defense research official said.

The domestically-developed Prithvi-II surface-to-surface missiles were tested as part of a routine exercise at the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur-on-sea in the state of Orissa, S. P. Dash, the range director, said.

The Prithvi-II missile has a range of 350 kilometers (220 miles) and can carry a conventional or nuclear payload.

The weapon was last tested from same launch site on Sept. 24 this year, when it failed due to technical problems.

"Prithvi-II missile had proved its robustness and accuracy repeatedly during many trials earlier," a Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) official told the Press Trust of India news agency.

The drill followed a test on Tuesday by Pakistan, which successfully fired a medium-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile.

<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/asia/india/2010/12/23/284740/India-tests.htm>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Russia to Keep Satan Ballistic Missiles in Service until 2026

17 December 2010

Russia will continue to deploy SS-18 Satan heavy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) as part of the country's nuclear arsenal until at least 2026, the commander of Strategic Missile Forces (SMF) said Friday.

"The extension of the service life of the systems equipped with RS-20V [SS-18 Satan] missiles will allow us to keep these most powerful missiles in the world until 2026," Lt. Gen. Sergei Karakayev said.

Introduced almost 33 years ago, the missile is routinely tested and has proved to be a very reliable weapon.

"At this point, there are no serious technical restrictions to continue extending the missile's service life," the general said.

The missile is armed with a warhead containing 10 multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) with a yield of 550 to 750 kilotons each. It has a maximum range of 11,000 km (6,800 miles) with a launch mass of over 210 tons and a payload of 8.8 tons.

According to publicly available sources, Russia currently has 88 SS-18 missile silo launchers, most of them deployed at the Dombrovsky missile base in the Orenburg Region.

MOSCOW, December 17 (RIA Novosti)

http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20101217/161824781.html

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

Russia to Develop New Heavy ICBM by 2020

20 December 2010

Russia's state arms procurement program through 2020 provides for the development of a new heavy ballistic missile, a leading missile designer said on Monday.

The final decision should be made in 2012-13 by the expert community, not solely the Defense Ministry, said Yury Solomonov of the Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology (MITT), the developer of the troubled Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile.

"This matter is beyond the Defense Ministry's competence. It is a matter of state importance," he said.

"Heavy ICBM" refers to a class of missiles with a heavy throw weight between five and nine metric tons and a length of over 35 meters, capable of delivering a large number of warheads in a single MIRV missile.

Russia's Strategic Missile Forces are still armed with Soviet-era SS-18 Satan and SS-20 Saber ICBMs with an extended service life and are expected to remain in service until 2026.

The SS-18 Satan is deployed with up to 10 warheads with a yield of 550 to 750 kilotons each and an operational range of up to 11,000 km (6,800 miles).

MOSCOW, December 20 (RIA Novosti)

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101220/161856876.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency
OPINION & ANALYSIS

Russia's Strategic Nuclear Plans: Mission Uncertain

21 December 2010

RIA Novosti military commentator Ilya Kramnik

Russia, which is in the midst of far-reaching military and defense-sector reforms, will continue to focus on its strategic nuclear forces. They will be overhauled within ten years, with new systems making up 80% of the revamped Strategic Missile Force and Soviet-made systems with extended warranties comprising the remaining 20%.

Yars to replace Topol

The single-warhead Topol-M missiles first started to roll off the production line in 1998. Russia currently has about 70 Topols, most of them silo-based. Although mobile Topols were first deployed as recently as 2007, they will soon be replaced with the RS-24 Yars, a MIRVed version of the Topol-M missile, capable of carrying at least four warheads.

The Yars is currently the world's only MIRVed mobile missile and will replace the first-generation Topol systems that were made back in the 1980s and the early 1990s, as well as obsolete silo-based UR-100N missiles (NATO reporting name SS-19 Stiletto).

Moreover, Russia also intends to restructure its strategic nuclear forces, cutting the weighting toward the Strategic Missile Force from 70% to 30% or 35%. One reason for this is the planned scrapping of obsolete Soviet-made missiles and the construction of more missile submarines, which is gathering momentum. They will carry mainly MIRVed missiles.

Project 955 submarines armed with Bulava-30 missiles (NATO name SS-NX-32) will form the core of the naval element of Russia's nuclear systems.

The first such submarine, the Yury Dolgoruky, was to be brought into combat duty in 2011, but the situation is complicated by the fact that the next trial launch of the Bulava missile has been delayed until next spring. The deployment timeframe of the other boats in this project remains unclear despite recent successful launches of the Bulava. There is simply insufficient data on which to base any decision.

An extended series of trials should therefore be held to enable clear conclusions to be drawn before the missile goes into mass production. The submarine group armed with the Bulava-30 missiles is unlikely to take shape before 2014 or 2015, after the missile production system has been honed.

Moreover, post-trials Bulava production should be agreed with producers. The country has not faced such a challenging task since the 1970s and 1980s, when the Soviet Union mass-produced the systems that currently form the core of its armed forces.

The task is further complicated by the fact that technical and engineering education in Russia has deteriorated, and the country is suffering from an acute lack of highly skilled professionals. To make matters worse, wages in the defense sector are relatively small.

A new heavy missile: Bad choice

Recent weeks saw the announcement that Russia is to create a new heavy missile that will replace the RS-20 Voyevoda (SS-18 Satan), which is nearing the end of its service life. There are about 60 Voyevoda missiles in the Strategic Missile Force, each carrying 10 large-yield warheads.

However, the new START treaty, which has not yet been ratified, involves cutting back the number of strategic nuclear systems to 700 and the number of warheads to 1,550. According to Russia's development plans for its strategic nuclear forces, over 1,000 warheads are to be based on the Project 955 nuclear submarines and the modernized Project 667BDRM (Delta IV class, Dolphin) boats.

Long-range aircraft will carry approximately 80 warheads (under the new treaty, each aircraft may carry only one nuclear warhead).

This leaves some 400 warheads for the Strategic Missile Force. The Topol-M systems will account for 70 to 80 warheads, and 60 to 70 Yars missiles for 200 to 300 warheads. The remaining warheads (from several dozen to 100-120 warheads) are mounted on Soviet-made missiles that will be decommissioned last.

It is therefore unclear where this new heavy missile will fit in.

Russian designers and military leaders agree that the planned creation of a new heavy missile could be an ace for Russia to use if the United States refuses to ratify the new agreements. The deployment of 30 to 40 new heavy missiles with 300 to 400 large-yield precision warheads would greatly strengthen Russia's nuclear stance should the United States decide to go ahead with its ballistic missile shield for Europe.

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

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20101221/161874821.html>

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RIA Novosti – Russian Information Agency

OPINION & ANALYSIS

What Russian Papers Say

27 December 2010

Nezavisimaya Gazeta

Russian General Dips into U.S. Taxpayers' Pockets

Last Friday, on Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov's recommendation, President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree sacking over 10 officers and generals for corruption. No reason for their dismissal is specified in those parts of the document that have been made public.

A ministry source said some were fired over abuses they or their subordinates did. The list includes Col.-Gen. Vladimir Verkhovtsev, the chief of the Defense Ministry's 12th Main Directorate. His resignation is likely to attract international attention because he was responsible for the safekeeping, use and testing of nuclear ammunition in the Russian Army. Interestingly, the protection and security of Russian nuclear weapons facilities was part-funded via the Nunn-Lugar program.

In the early 1990s, U.S. Senator Richard Lugar and his former colleague Sam Nunn initiated a program to help former Soviet republics destroy and store weapons of mass destruction safely. Since then the United States has continued to render considerable financial aid to former Soviet republics to these ends. One of the main beneficiaries is the 12th Directorate and Verkhovtsev was one of the youngest generals ever to have headed it. Until recently, he was in his superiors' good books and nothing pointed to an early dismissal.

Ministry sources say his sacking is down to the culture of corruption and even theft endemic among his subordinates, including Maj.-Gen. Viktor Gaidukov, who heads a nuclear weapons storage facility. From 2006 to 2010, he and his wife employed a variety of schemes to embezzle 20 million rubles of state, or rather international, funds. The fact is that this money was allocated to his military unit under a special Russian-U.S. inter-government program to "improve the safekeeping and inventory of the nuclear arsenal."

Understandably, mass dismissals like this mar Russia's image. But, it seems, both Moscow and Washington have long pursued their own independent but aligned PR initiatives on this score.

“It is not generally known either in Russia or in the United States that for almost 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington has been giving Russia free aid to protect and maintain its nuclear facilities,” a 12th Directorate officer said on condition of anonymity.

According to official data made public by the U.S. administration, \$11 billion has been spent on this over the last two decades. On Sunday, Senator Richard Lugar said that the United States planned to set aside \$54.6 million in aid to Russia towards improving the safety and security of its nuclear weapons. The money has been assigned. But will Russia ensure its purposeful and effective use?

Viktor Litovkin, executive editor of Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye, asked Gen. Verkhovtsev to comment on the rumors surrounding his resignation.

“My resignation has nothing to do with this matter,” the general said. “It is wrong to link it with the Nunn-Lugar program. This is total nonsense. I made up my own mind to resign and submitted my report to the defense minister early in November.”

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<http://en.rian.ru/papers/20101227/161951388.html>

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FOXNews.com

OPINION

Is Iran About to Test a Nuclear Bomb In North Korea?

By Reza Kahlili

December 30, 2010

On December 24, a research report from the South Korean Foreign Ministry Institute indicated that North Korea would carry out another nuclear bomb test after the beginning of the year. -- South Korean media reported earlier this month that the North was digging a tunnel in preparation for such a nuclear test.

At the same time, reports from inside Iran indicate that a team of Iranian nuclear scientists have been sent to North Korea and that the two governments have agreed on a joint nuclear test in North Korea with a substantial financial reward for the Kim Jong-Il government.

It is no secret that Iran and North Korea are collaborating in a ballistic missile program. The North Koreans provided Iran with the technology and know-how to build the Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile, which is a copy of the Nodong-1 missile. The Shahb- 3 missile has a range of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) covering all of the U.S. military bases in the Middle East and the entire country of Israel.

Most alarming, recent WikiLeaks releases reveal that Iran obtained a cache of advanced missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads (based on a Russian design) from North Korea. Now, for the first time, Iran has the capability to target every capital in Western Europe.

Not only are these two governments continuing to collaborate on the missile projects, they are also conspiring on Iran's nuclear bomb development. This relationship has not only led to sharing data on previous nuclear tests by North Korea, but played a part in Iran's capability to build the more advanced P2 centrifuges that produce 2.5 times more enriched uranium than the first generation P1 model.

The recent revelations about North Korea's uranium enrichment plant also raise the possibility that North Korea is enriching uranium on Iran's behalf. Iran has always maintained that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes; that it is their right to produce nuclear fuel for their nuclear power plants.

In order to avoid a possible military reaction by the West, Iran is working covertly with North Korea until such a time they are capable of weaponizing their ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads.

Iran continues their nuclear bomb project on multiple fronts despite four sets of sanctions by the U.N. They continue to enrich uranium at the Natanz facility (which currently has enough enriched uranium stockpiled for three nuclear bombs) while they continue to openly enrich uranium to the 20% level. It is important to note that from this level, it is comparatively easy to reach the 93% needed to create an atomic bomb. Sources inside Iran reported several months ago that Iran has successfully mastered the enrichment of uranium to a weapon-grade level.

Iran is also increasing yellowcake production at the Gchine uranium mine. The mine currently has a design capacity of 21 tons of yellowcake per year; about half that amount is needed to produce the 55 pounds of 93% enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb.

They have a nuclear fuel facility in Isfahan capable of producing ten tons of nuclear fuel annually, and sufficient plutonium for two nuclear weapons a year.

The Arak heavy water plant — built in violation of the nonproliferation treaty — is near its completion, though the West had assumed this would not happen until 2015. This facility will be capable of producing significant amounts of bomb-grade plutonium. With the assistance of the Russians in going live, once the Bushehr nuclear power plant is fully operational, it will be able to produce more than 661 pounds of near-weapons-grade plutonium — enough to make 60 nuclear bombs within the first year or two.

The upcoming nuclear bomb test in North Korea is yet another indication that time is running out.

Soon we will wake up to the shocking realization that Iran has nuclear bombs and that both Iran and North Korea have nuclear warhead delivery systems.

It is a shame that we failed to stop North Korea from developing its nuclear capability, but it is not too late to stop Iran!

Maybe the North Korean leaders are not suicidal. Maybe they are only looking to intimidate South Korea, the U.S. and other allies in the region. Maybe they are trying to gain stature and stronger negotiating powers. However, the Iranian leaders have long talked about the destruction of Israel and its master -- America.

It is not only irresponsible and cowardly for our politicians to allow such a messianic regime, which supports worldwide terrorism, to acquire nuclear bombs; it holds dire consequences for the rest of the world.

Nuclear bombs in the hands of jihadists should be the final red line that the free world will not back away from!

Reza Kahlili is a pseudonym for an ex-CIA spy who requires anonymity for safety reason. "A Time to Betray," his book about his double life as a CIA agent in Iran's Revolutionary Guards, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2010.

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2010/12/30/iran-test-nuclear-bomb-north-korea/#>

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