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The Moscow Times – Russia

Kosachyov Sees START Ratification this Month

11 January 2011

The Associated Press

Russian lawmakers will likely ratify the New START arms treaty with the United States by the end of the month, State Duma Deputy Konstantin Kosachyov said.

The Duma gave preliminary approval to the treaty before the New Year's holidays but decided to delay a final vote to give the Russian side time to study the resolution passed by the U.S. Senate when it ratified the pact last month.

Kosachyov, who heads the Duma's International Affairs Committee, said Friday that Russia was now ready to ratify New START and has written its own amendments to the ratification document "to balance the work that has been done by the Senate."

He said the Duma's legislation would state how Russia's interpretation of the treaty differed from that of the Senate, but he stressed that the text of the treaty itself would remain unchanged.

"We don't accept certain interpretations from the American side, they will definitely not accept certain interpretations from the Russian side and then we will have to live with the existing treaty," Kosachyov said in an interview.

The U.S. legislation accompanying the treaty addressed Republican concerns that it would restrict U.S. plans to develop a missile defense system. Republicans also had sought increased funding for the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Kosachyov said the Duma would take two additional steps in ratifying the treaty: approve one statement addressed to "our American colleagues and partners" and another addressed to the leadership of Russia about the current state of the Russian nuclear arsenal and plans for its future development. He gave no specifics.

The Duma will likely consider the ratification bill in a second reading on Jan. 14, he said, while the third and final reading would likely wait until after the Federation Council returns Jan. 26. Both houses need to ratify the treaty. Both are under Kremlin control.

"We need to have more success stories in our bilateral relations and this is why I am very much in favor of ratifying the New START treaty as soon as possible," Kosachyov said.

New START would limit each country to 1,550 strategic warheads, down from the current ceiling of 2,200. It also would re-establish a system for monitoring and verification that ended in late 2009 with the expiration of the previous arms control agreement.

The treaty, which Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev signed in April, is a centerpiece of Obama's efforts to "reset" ties with Russia.

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/kosachyov-sees-start-ratification-this-month/428077.html>

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Voice of Russia – Russia

Duma Poised to Ratify New START in January

By Alexander Vatutin

January 11, 2011

Russian lawmakers have signaled their readiness to ratify the New START arms-reduction treaty with the United States by the end of the month.

The New START pact was signed by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama in Prague in April 2010. The Russian State Duma gave preliminary approval to the treaty on December 24 but decided to delay a final vote until January so as to give the Russian side time to study the resolution passed by the U.S. Senate when it ratified the pact last month. Among other things, the unilateral ratification resolution addresses Republican concerns that the New START Treaty would restrict U.S. plans to develop a missile defense system.

In Moscow, Vladimir Yevseyev, of the Center for Public and Political Studies, explains that Russia will withdraw from the New START if the United States starts stationing elements of its missile defense shield in Europe in what he says may damage Russia's national security interests.

"Russian lawmakers plan to adopt a ratification declaration, which will specifically caution against US missile defense installations in Europe, a sticking point that may well break nuclear parity between Russia and the United States," Yevseyev says.

Deputy head of the State Duma's Security Committee Gennady Gudkov said in an interview with the Voice of Russia on Tuesday that the ratification document will include at least six amendments related to those earlier approved by US Congress.

"A decision to map out the amendments was made before the New Year's holidays, Gudkov explains, stressing the necessity of weighing up all pros and cons pertaining to the US ratification resolution. With the text of the New START Treaty set to remain unchanged, we reserve the right to make necessary amendments to the document," Gudkov says.

Analysts say that the New START pact coming into force will add substantially to the ongoing "reset" of relations between Russia and the United States.

<http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/01/11/39348141.html>

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Press TV – Iran

'Iran Can Produce Nuclear Fuel'

Saturday, January 8, 2011

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali-Akbar Salehi says Iran is one of the few countries which can produce nuclear fuel rods and plates.

Salehi said Tehran is capable of making its own nuclear fuel plates and rods, reported Fars News Agency on Saturday.

The official went on to say that Iran has built a facility in the central city of Isfahan to develop the technology required to power nuclear reactors.

"We have built an advanced manufacturing unit in the Isfahan site for the fuel plates," said Salehi in an exclusive interview with Fars.

"A grand transformation has taken place in the production of (nuclear) plates and rods. With the completion of the unit in Isfahan, we are one of the few countries which can produce fuel rods and fuel plates."

He added that Western policies towards Iran had actually expedited the country's nuclear achievements, including the production of nuclear plates and rods.

"This is in fact because of [the] West's actions that we came to this point," he said.

"What we say is based on reality and truth. There is no exaggeration or deception in our work. It is them who do not want to believe that Iran has no intention, but to obtain nuclear technology for peaceful purposes."

Salehi said that Iran's inviting foreign envoys to visit the country's nuclear sites is a good-will gesture to further prove the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities.

Representatives from Russia, China, the European Union, and the Non-Aligned Movement have been invited to tour Iran's nuclear facilities in mid-January.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/159181.html>

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Xinhua News – China

Iran Has Produced 40 kg of 20% Enriched Uranium: Local Media

January 8, 2011

TEHRAN, Jan. 8 (Xinhua) -- Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and acting Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi announced Saturday that the country has so far produced almost 40 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium to supply fuel to the Tehran research reactor, local semi-official Fars news agency reported.

"We have produced about 40 kg of 20 percent (enriched) uranium and we hope to witness the injection of the first batch of Iran-made 20 percent fuel to the Tehran research reactor soon," Fars quoted Salehi as saying.

Salehi also said that Tehran is preparing to resume talks with the Vienna Group (the U.S., Russia, France and the International Atomic Energy Agency) on the swap of nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

The more they (the Vienna Group) delay in holding a new round of negotiations with Iran, "the more progress we make in fuel production and after a while the issue of fuel swap will become meaningless," Salehi said.

Stressing that Iran is one of the few countries capable of producing fuel rods and plates to be used for peaceful purposes, Salehi said Iran's progress in this field was a result of the West 's lack of cooperation and sanctions.

"Actually the West's attitude made us reach the point," he said.

Salehi announced in June that Iran is potentially capable of producing five kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium per month. In October, he said Iran had produced 30 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium.

In the face of West's denial to provide Iran with the 20 percent enriched uranium for Tehran's research reactor, the Iranian officials have said that they will press on with enriching uranium to 20 percent purity until its nuclear fuel needs are met.

In February, Iran stepped up its uranium enrichment level to 20 percent -- still much lower than the around 90 percent bomb grade but a significant development from its under-five-percent purification.

On May 17, Iranian, Brazilian and Turkish officials signed a nuclear fuel swap agreement that Iran would send some 1,200 kg of its 3.5 percent enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for a total 120 kg of 20 percent enriched fuel.

Western countries are pushing for multi-dimensional sanctions against Iran over its persistence on pursuing its sensitive nuclear program. Tehran insists that its nuclear program is " peaceful" and aims at energy production for civilian use.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-01/08/c_13682042.htm

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Tehran Times – Iran
Sunday, January 9, 2011

Iran, 5+1 to Start Talks on Jan. 21

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN – The first round of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany in 2011 will be held in Istanbul on January 21 and 22, announced Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Saturday.

Reportedly, the date was set after Davutoglu held separate telephone conversations with Saeed Jalili, Tehran's main negotiator, and Iranian Acting Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on Thursday.

According to Xinhua, Davutoglu had already spoken with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton earlier in the week.

Iran and the 5+1 group (the United States, China, France, Russia, Britain and Germany) resumed talks in early December in Geneva after more than a year hiatus.

Saeed Jalili, the Supreme National Security Council Secretary, who represented Iran during the Geneva talks, after the end of the talks said that both sides agreed that the next round of talks to be held in Istanbul in late January and focus on "common ground for cooperation."

The Iranian delegation also made it clear that Iran would never negotiate on its inalienable nuclear rights, including uranium enrichment, with any country.

"We will not talk about Iran's nuclear rights, and Iran will never accept pressure," Jalili said.

However, Ashton, who represented the major powers during the talks, reneged on the agreement and in the statement she read out after the end of talks said, "Iran's nuclear program is the central purpose of these talks."

In the latest development, Iran decided to invite some members of the UN Security Council, the European Union, the Group of 77, and Non-aligned Movement to visit Natanz nuclear enrichment plant and Arak heavy water reactor on January 15 and 16.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency, also announced last Tuesday that ten countries' ambassadors to the Vienna-based agency will tour Iranian nuclear facilities.

"The invitation is in line with the Islamic Republic's transparent nuclear policy," Soltanieh said.

Allowing a tour of Arak heavy water reactor is a significant move because even based on the IAEA safeguards, Iran is not required to allow the inspection of this site.

The tour of the nuclear sites will come about one week before the talks, and it will affect the talks.

Pundits have described Iran's initiative as a constructive step to build confidence.

They also say it proves the truthfulness of the Iranian officials' assertion that Tehran's nuclear program is meant for peaceful applications.

Ahmet Davutoglu also said on Saturday that Iran's invitation for visit of its nuclear sites "can bring the two sides (Iran and the major powers) closer to each other."

Diplomatic sources believe that the move shows Iran does not want to limit its negotiations only with the 5+1 group and seeks to involve other countries in the talks.

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=233778

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Sydney Morning Herald – Australia

Iran Defies West over Enriched Uranium

By Ali Akbar Dareini

January 10, 2011

TEHRAN: Iran says it has increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to higher levels, in defiance of United Nations demands that it halt the program.

The Vice-President, Ali Akbar Salehi, also says Iran has built a plant to make nuclear fuel plates and rods in Isfahan. That would allow Iran to produce its own reactor fuel.

But Western experts have disputed whether Iran has the technological capability to produce plates and rods when Tehran has made similar claims in the past.

And Israel's departing intelligence chief, Meir Dagan, said last week that he believes Iran will not be able to build a nuclear weapon before 2015 at the earliest.

The Israeli newspapers *Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv*, gave prominent coverage to Mr Dagan's retirement after eight years as the director of Mossad, the intelligence service, and his surprisingly upbeat assessment of Tehran's nuclear capabilities.

The assessment, which pushed back other Israeli estimates by a year or more, was based on the obstacles Iran has faced, including technical difficulties and covert action against its nuclear program by intelligence agencies.

But Mr Salehi, who is also Iran's acting foreign minister, said on Saturday that Tehran now has 40 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20 per cent, up from 30 kilograms reported in October.

Uranium enriched to 20 per cent is enough to produce fuel for a medical research reactor but far below the more than 90 per cent required to build fissile material for nuclear warheads.

A deal for the West to provide fuel for the reactor has fallen apart in the deadlock over Iran's broader nuclear program, which the West suspects is designed to develop atomic bombs. Iran denies the allegations, and says the program is peaceful.

Iran says fuel for the Tehran research reactor that produces the medical radioisotopes will run out in September, leaving it without the materials needed to diagnose and treat 850,000 cancer patients across the country.

"We've produced nearly 40 kilograms of 20 per cent-enriched uranium. We hope to inject the first Iranian-made fuel assembly into the Tehran reactor by September," the Fars news agency quoted Mr Salehi as saying.

Mr Salehi said Iran initially had no intention to enrich uranium to 20 per cent but was forced to do so after world powers refused to provide nuclear fuel.

The United Nations Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions against Iran last June over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment.

Iran started producing the 20 per cent-enriched material last February, saying the production rate was about three kilograms each month.

Iran is producing the 20 per cent level from its own stocks of low-enriched uranium, which has a 3.5 per cent purity.

Mr Salehi insisted on Saturday that Iran has the rare technology needed to produce the fuel rods, something it has been claiming for months . "We've set up an advanced plant to produce fuel plates in Isfahan," he said.

Production of fuel rods by Iran would give it an independent source of fuel for the Tehran research reactor and future nuclear power plants - and another bargaining chip in negotiations with the West.

"The more they delay the talks, we will move forward. After some time, the issue of fuel swap will be meaningless," Mr Salehi was quoted as saying.

Agencies

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/iran-defies-west-over-enriched-uranium-20110109-19jy9.html>

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Press TV – Iran

N-Scientists Hitmen Trained by Mossad

Monday, January 10, 2011

Senior Iranian lawmaker Esmail Kowsari says the assassins of an Iranian nuclear scientist have confessed to being supported by the Israeli intelligence service.

In July 2010, Iranian nuclear physics scientist Massoud Ali-Mohammadi was killed when a remote-controlled bomb detonated near his house in the north of the Iranian capital, Tehran.

Following security operations, Iran finally succeeded in arresting the main agents behind the terrorist incident and dismantled a network comprising of spies and terrorists commissioned by Israel, Intelligence Ministry announced on Monday.

Long before the assassination of Ali-Mohammadi, the intelligence officials of Israel, the UK and the US had publicly threatened to kill our nuclear scientists, Kowsari said on Monday.

“These [arrested] people have confessed that they had received assassination training from [Israeli intelligence agency] Mossad; and Mossad had provided all their equipment,” Fars News Agency quoted deputy head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission on Monday.

Kowsari added that the confessions of the detainees could be helpful in the arrest of the perpetrators of Dr. Majid Shahriari's assassination.

On November 29, unknown terrorists detonated bombs in the vehicles of Majid Shahriari and Fereydoun Abbasi -- both professors at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran.

Shahriari was killed immediately, but Abbasi and his wife sustained minor injuries and were transferred to a hospital and later released.

“Certainly these people are not the perpetrators of Dr. Shahriari assassination, but given the fact that all these terrorists take orders from Mossad, the confession of the detainees could be helpful in the arrest of agents behind the assassination of Dr. Shahriari and Dr. Abbasi,” Kowsari concluded.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry said in its statement that the Israeli intelligence service Mossad has used bases in certain European and non-European countries as well as Iran's neighboring states in an attempt to achieve its inhumane goals.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/159527.html>

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Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Monday, January 10, 2010

In Slaying Probe, Iran Claims it Penetrated Mossad

By ALI AKBAR DAREINI, Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's intelligence services said Monday they have arrested suspects in the assassination a year ago of a nuclear physicist in a months-long covert operation that also led them to penetrate Israel's Mossad spy agency.

Iran blames the Mossad for the slaying of Tehran University physics professor Masoud Ali Mohammadi, who was killed by a bomb-rigged motorcycle that exploded outside his house as he was leaving for work in January 2010.

Possible explanations for why he was targeted have never been clear, particularly as he had no known link to Iran's nuclear work, but Iranian state media have presented it as an attempt to slow the atomic program.

Monday's announcement said Iranian agents arrested a network of spies linked to the slaying, opening up revelations about further Israeli plots against the country, including a campaign to assassinate nuclear scientists.

"After months of silent struggle, offensive, multilayered and complicated operations and penetration into the depths of the Zionist regime's intelligence led to the uncovering of very important and sensitive information about Mossad spies and operations," said the Intelligence Ministry statement read out on state TV.

"Heavy blows were inflicted on the structure of the Zionist intelligence and security services."

The United States, Israel and other nations believe Iran is intent on developing nuclear weapons under the cover of a civil atomic energy program. Iran insists its work is solely for peaceful purposes.

In Israel, officials in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office had no immediate comment on Monday's announcement.

A pair of bomb attacks in November killed one nuclear scientist and wounded another in the capital. While those attacks targeted two people who had high-level involvement in Iran's nuclear work, a motive behind the slaying of Mohammadi is less clear.

The 50-year-old professor had no prominent political voice, no published work with military relevance and no declared links to the country's nuclear program, though his work included some aspects of nuclear theory.

Nonetheless, the Intelligence Ministry said in Monday's statement that the investigation into his death led authorities back to the Mossad and to the conclusion that Israeli spies operating from Europe and from countries neighboring Iran were directing a campaign to kill Iranian nuclear scientists. It offered no details.

"After extensive security measures and precise intelligence tracking ... the main agents behind this terrorist crime were identified and arrested, and a network comprising spies and terrorists affiliated to the Zionist regime was destroyed," it said.

Besides November's bomb attacks, the country's nuclear work faced a number of challenges over the past year, from malfunctioning centrifuges that spun out of control to a highly complex computer worm — known as Stuxnet — that Iran said was aimed at sabotaging its uranium enrichment program.

Iran is also under four sets of U.N. and other international sanctions over its refusal to stop enriching uranium, the cornerstone of the program.

A week ago, Israel's newly retired spy chief, Meir Dagan, said Iran would not be able to build a nuclear bomb before 2015 — further pushing back Israeli intelligence estimates of when Tehran might become a nuclear power.

The former Mossad chief said Thursday that Iran's nuclear program had been delayed by unspecified "measures" employed against it, according to the Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot.

In November's attacks, which took place on the same day, assailants on motorcycles attached magnetized bombs to the two men's cars as they drove to work.

They detonated seconds later, killing one of them, Majid Shahriar, and wounding the other, Fereidoun Abbasi. Each of their wives, who were in the cars, were also wounded.

Abbasi is on a list of figures suspected of links to secret nuclear activities in a 2007 U.N. sanctions resolution, which puts a travel ban and asset freeze on those listed. The resolution describes him as a Defense Ministry scientist who works closely with Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, believed to head secret nuclear projects. Iranian media said he was a member of the Revolutionary Guard, Iran's strongest military force.

Abbasi, according to pro-government news websites, is also a laser expert and one of the few top Iranian specialists in nuclear isotope separation.

Shahriari was involved in a major project with Iran's nuclear agency, the agency's chief said at the time of the killing, though he did not give specifics. He was a member of the nuclear engineering faculty at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran and his expertise — neutron transport — was particularly noteworthy because it lies at the heart of nuclear chain reactions in reactors and bombs.

Iran's intelligence agency has already announced a number of arrests in the November bombings.

In 2007, nuclear scientist Ardeshtir Hosseinpour died from gas poisoning. A one-week delay by state media in reporting his death prompted speculation about the cause, including that the Mossad was to blame.

<http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/in-slaying-probe-iran-800074.html>

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Businessweek

Pentagon Must Sharpen Iran Strategy to Counter Arms Buildup, Congress Says

By Tony Capaccio

January 10, 2011

Jan. 10 (Bloomberg) -- Congress is demanding that the Pentagon prepare a “national military strategic plan” for countering Iran’s nuclear and conventional arms build-up, and to brief lawmakers on it.

The Pentagon additionally must inform lawmakers of “any resources, capabilities, or changes to current law” that officials believe “are necessary to address the gaps identified in the strategy,” according to a congressional joint statement accompanying the fiscal 2011 defense authorization bill which President Barack Obama’s signed on Friday.

The provision is the second in as many years directing the military leaders to initiate a specific task pertaining to Iran. Congress last year, in its fiscal 2010 defense bill, required an unclassified report on Iran’s current military capabilities and strategy.

The new section goes further and “appears to reflect the views of those who believe a more well-developed military option” is needed to counter Iran’s potential nuclear weapons program, said Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East analyst with the non-partisan Congressional Research Service.

The new congressional provision also “appears to suggest there is a belief the U.S. military may need some new systems or equipment to counter that threat,” Katzman said.

The Obama administration has said it wants to stick to diplomacy and non-military pressure, such as economic sanctions, to persuade Iran to stop enriching uranium.

Iran’s Setbacks

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said today that international sanctions and technical difficulties have slowed Iran’s nuclear progress.

The sanctions “have made it much more difficult for Iran to pursue its nuclear ambitions,” Clinton said at a town hall meeting at Abu Dhabi’s Zayed University. “Technological problems” have also slowed Iran’s progress, she said. “Their program from our best estimate has been slowed down, so we have time, but not a lot of time.”

Israel’s outgoing head of intelligence, Meir Dagan, said last week that Iran wouldn’t be able to produce a nuclear weapon before 2015. Earlier Israeli estimates put Iran one to two years away from achieving such a capability. Iran’s leaders say the program is meant for peaceful purposes, including medical research.

U.S. military leaders, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, have said military action would only delay Iran’s nuclear program and inflame an unstable region.

All Options ‘on the Table’

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen repeated last month that with Iran “all options have been on the table and remain on the table.”

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Howard “Buck” McKeon said in a statement to Bloomberg News that the provision was prompted in part by reports Gates complained in January 2010 to officials that the U.S. lacked an effective Iranian strategy.

“Gates urged development of military alternatives to be considered should diplomacy and sanctions fail to force Iran to change course,” said McKeon, a California Republican.

“The military option must mean something, and Congress has a role in explaining and developing what the military option means,” he said.

McKeon’s panel will conduct hearings and require Pentagon officials and outside experts “to lay out the full range of possible military activities and operations to counter Iran’s capabilities,” he said.

Contingency Planning

“If these plans do not exist, our efforts will hopefully spur the Obama administration,” McKeon said. “I will not prejudge what this range of options should look like. However, I believe the phrase ‘Keep all options on the table’ should not be a throwaway line or a stale talking point.”

“It must be an integral part of our contingency planning in the unfortunate event international diplomacy and sanctions fail to deter Iranian proliferation,” McKeon said.

U.S. diplomatic cables released by the website WikiLeaks give context to U.S. and Israeli views on striking Iranian nuclear facilities.

Gates, in a February 8, 2010 meeting with French Foreign Minister Herve Morin, said a conventional weapons strike “by any nation,” including Israel and the U.S., “would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker.”

‘Collateral Damage’

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in a June 2, 2009 meeting with U.S. lawmakers, “estimated a window between six and 18 months from now in which stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons might still be viable.

“After that, any military solution would result in unacceptable collateral damage,” he was quoted as saying.

Israeli officials in a November 2009 meeting reiterated to U.S. officials that they viewed 2010 as a “critical year -- if the Iranians continue to protect and harden their nuclear sites, it will be more difficult to target and damage them,” said another cable.

“Both sides then discussed the upcoming delivery of GBU-28 bunker busting bombs to Israel, noting that the transfer should be handled quietly to avoid any allegations the U.S. government is helping Israel prepare for a strike against Iran,” the cable said.

The GBU-28 is a 5,000-pound bomb that’s the U.S.’s top air- dropped weapon for penetrating deeply buried facilities. The bomb was first sold to Israel in 2005.

With assistance from Nicole Gaouette and Vivian Salama in Abu Dhabi. Editors: Terry Atlas, Steven Komarow

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-01-10/pentagon-must-sharpen-its-iran-strategy-congress-says.html>

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The Star – Malaysia
Tuesday, January 11, 2011

Risk of Strike on Iran over Nuclear Plans Recedes

By Fredrik Dahl, Reuters

VIENNA (Reuters) - Sanctions and possible sabotage may be slowing Iran's nuclear drive, reducing the risk that Israel might resort to military strikes against the Islamic Republic's atomic sites any time soon.

Technical glitches and other hurdles for Iran's uranium enrichment programme are also creating more room for manoeuvre for diplomatic efforts by major powers to persuade Tehran to curb work the West fears is aimed at making bombs.

"There is a feeling that the sanctions and also some of the covert action are buying time, more time than many previously expected," a senior Western diplomat said.

Oliver Thraenert, senior fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, said: "I do believe people are a bit more relaxed now ... the technical problems the Iranians have are much more severe than expected."

This is likely to reduce the persistent speculation in recent years that Iran's foes, especially Israel but also the United States, could soon use military action to prevent the major oil producer from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Israel, which bombed an Iraqi reactor in 1981 and a suspected Syrian nuclear site in 2007, sees a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat to its existence and has indicated it could use force to prevent it developing such weapons.

But Israeli intelligence assessments published last week said the Jewish state now believed Iran would not be able to produce a nuclear weapon before 2015 and that a top Israeli official had counselled against pre-emptive military action.

It signalled new confidence in U.S.-led sanctions and other measures designed to discourage or delay Iran's nuclear work.

"Israel appears no less willing to contemplate military action against Iran to prevent it from obtaining nuclear weapons," Greg Thielmann, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Arms Control Association, said.

"However, there has been a dramatic change recently in statements from Israeli officials about the timeline they project for Iran to achieve a nuclear weapons capability."

WAR DRUM STOPPED BEATING?

U.S.-based journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, who wrote about the "coming confrontation" between Iran and Israel in an Atlantic magazine article last year, said one Israeli official now put the chances of an Israeli strike on Iran in the next year at below 20 percent.

"And he was one of the Israelis who felt, in the spring of last year, that it would be necessary for Israel to attack Iran's nuclear facilities by the end of 2011," Goldberg wrote in a blog this week.

Washington has not ruled out armed action against Iran, even though U.S. officials have warned that it would only delay its nuclear programme and that persuading Tehran to give up its activities was the only viable long-term solution.

But U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Monday that sanctions had set back Tehran's nuclear work, giving major powers more time to persuade it to change tack.

Shannon Kile at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said the "war drum was really beating" about a year ago, but this no longer seemed to be the case.

But any reduction in tension and lessening of talk of possible military conflict, with possible dire consequences for the world economy, could turn out to be temporary.

"There definitely has been sort of a de-escalation of the situation," Kile said. But, he added, "I don't see that as being necessarily something more permanent or lasting."

Iran is still amassing refined uranium -- material which can be used to make bombs if enriched much further -- and it is showing no sign of backing down in the long-running international dispute over its atomic ambitions.

"Technical difficulties and sanctions should not lead anyone to think we are near a solution," said Alireza Nader, an Iran specialist at the RAND Corporation.

"Iran may be motivated more than ever to develop the nuclear programme, especially since the ruling elite believe that backing down would send precisely the wrong signal to the United States and its allies."

IRANIAN NUCLEAR "BREAKTHROUGH"

Analysts say Iran's nuclear work has been experiencing technical difficulties for several years, partly because it is using enrichment centrifuges adapted from a smuggled 1970s European design which is prone to overheating and vibration.

Iran is testing an advanced, more durable model able to refine uranium two or three times faster, and says it intends to introduce it for production in the near future.

But the sanctions, which ban trade in nuclear-related technology and equipment, may make this more difficult.

Signs of foreign sabotage, such as the Stuxnet computer worm which some experts believe was aimed at Iran's enrichment activities, could also be a factor. In addition, Iran has blamed the West and Israel for the killing of two nuclear scientists last year, a charge Washington has rejected as "absurd".

The U.S.-based think-tank, the Institute for Science and International Security, said in an analysis that "overt and covert disruption activities have had significant effect in slowing Iran's centrifuge programme."

Iran rejects any suggestions that it is experiencing significant technical woes and last week announced a new "breakthrough" in its nuclear programme, saying it would make its own fuel for a research reactor later this year.

Western officials say tougher sanctions imposed on Iran since last year are hurting its economy and that this may force it to enter serious nuclear talks with six world powers -- the United States, Russia, Germany, France, Britain and China.

But no substantial progress was made when talks resumed in Geneva last month, for the first time in more than a year, and expectations of a breakthrough are low ahead of a second round in Istanbul next week.

"Sanctions will not force Iran to capitulate," Thielmann said. "It is also clear that negotiations will be a drawn-out and difficult process, requiring many months."

Additional reporting by Dan Williams in Jerusalem and Alistair Lyon in Beirut; editing by Tim Pearce

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2011/1/12/worldupdates/2011-01-11T234627Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-540855-1&sec=Worldupdates

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Ha'aretz Daily – Israel
11 January 2011

Netanyahu: Only 'Credible Military Option' Can Stop Nuclear Iran

Premier tells foreign correspondents that such a threat is necessary but need not be used once in place.

By News Agencies

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Tuesday that Iran would not stop its nuclear program unless economic sanctions were backed with a "credible military option."

The only time Iran has stopped its nuclear development is when it thought it was being threatened with a military strike, Netanyahu told foreign correspondents in Jerusalem.

The Iranian goal is to build nuclear weapons, said Netanyahu, and will stop only "if they thought they were facing a credible military option at the end of the tunnel."

"If there is credible military option you won't need to use it," Netanyahu added. He did not say that Israel was planning such a move.

Iran announced over the weekend that it had increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to higher levels, in defiance of United Nations demands to halt the program.

Vice President Ali Akbar Salehi, who serves as Iran's acting foreign minister and nuclear chief, said Tehran now has 40 kilograms of uranium enriched to 20 percent, up from 30 kilograms reported in October.

Uranium enrichment levels of 20 percent are enough to produce fuel for a medical research reactor but far below the more than 90 percent required to build fissile material for nuclear warheads.

A deal for the West to provide fuel for the reactor has fallen apart in the deadlock over Iran's broader nuclear program, which the West suspects is designed to develop atomic bombs. Iran denies the allegations, and says the program is peaceful.

Iran says fuel for the Tehran research reactor that produces the medical radioisotopes will run out in September, leaving it without the materials needed to diagnose and treat 850,000 cancer patients across the country.

Salehi said Iran initially had no intention to enrich uranium to 20 percent but was forced to do so after world powers refused to provide it nuclear fuel.

The UN Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions this summer against Iran over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment, which can be used to produce nuclear fuel or materials for bombs.

Iran started producing the 20 percent-enriched material in February 2010, saying the production rate was about three kilograms (6.6 pounds) each month.

Iran is producing the 20 percent level from its own stocks of low-enriched uranium, which has 3.5 percent purity and is needed to fuel an electricity-generating reactor.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-only-credible-military-option-can-stop-nuclear-iran-1.336447>

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Yonhap News – South Korea
January 10, 2011

S. Korea Presses N. Korea to Show More Conciliatory Behavior

By Sam Kim

SEOUL, Jan. 10 (Yonhap) -- South Korea pressed North Korea Monday to get more serious about the way it proposes talks between the sides, insisting that Pyongyang accept responsibility for its series of provocative acts.

North Korea proposed Saturday in a statement released through its official media that the two countries quickly hold talks to discuss ways to revive their stalled exchanges, a gesture apparently aimed at restoring the flow of economic support from the South.

Unification Ministry Chun Hae-sung said in a briefing that Pyongyang has yet to send a formal proposal to Seoul and that Saturday's statement falls short of being "a sincere overture, considering its form and content."

"Broadly speaking, it is important that the North shows a sincere attitude over peace on the Korean Peninsula and the advancement of inter-Korean relations," he said.

Since North Korea bombarded a South Korean island on Nov. 23, killing four people, the South has tightened even the most humanitarian aid to its impoverished neighbor. Relations had already been at the worst point in years after Seoul blamed Pyongyang in May for the sinking of a warship earlier that year.

North Korea has also alarmed the world by unveiling what it claims is a sophisticated uranium enrichment facility that could give the North another way of making nuclear bombs. The North, which routinely repeats its willingness to denuclearize, claims the uranium program is intended for peaceful energy use.

"On denuclearization, the North should show (steps) not in word but in deed. On inter-Korean relations, it should take responsible measures that our people can accept over the Cheonan sinking and the Yeonpyeong Island shelling," Chun said.

In its New Year's message, the North had professed its intention to seek dialogue with the South to defuse tension that arose over the November shelling of Yeonpyeong, while warning of a "nuclear holocaust" should enmity between the sides continue to rise.

South Korea says it will not fall for a charm offensive that may be followed by more provocation. It has also stepped up its defense posture in a move aimed at better deterring North Korean attacks and even retaliating harshly should another provocation arise.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/01/10/98/0401000000AEN20110110004600315F.HTML>

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Bangkok Post – Thailand

N. Korea could Soon Pose Direct Threat to US: Gates

11 January 2011

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned Tuesday that North Korea could have long-range ballistic missiles within five years that would pose a direct threat to the United States, reflecting growing concerns over Pyongyang's arsenal.

His comments represented a shift in the US view of North Korea's military power, describing the hardline regime in Pyongyang as making headway in its efforts to develop missiles that could potentially carry nuclear warheads.

"I think North Korea will have developed an intercontinental ballistic missile within that timeframe (five years)," Gates told reporters during a visit to Beijing, where he discussed tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Gates, who met Chinese President Hu Jintao on Tuesday, said he had conveyed to the Communist leaders in Beijing that their allies in Pyongyang would soon present a danger to the United States.

"With the North Koreans' continued development of nuclear weapons and their development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, North Korea is becoming a direct threat to the United States and we have to take that into account," he said.

North Korea has test-fired three ICBMs, most recently in April 2009 when one flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific.

Gates said the North could have a "limited" number of such missiles in five years, placing the US Pacific coast under potential threat.

The Pentagon chief said the United States appreciated the "helpful role" played by Beijing in recent months in containing the Korean crisis, after Pyongyang shelled a South Korean island in November, killing four people.

But he also said there had been a "sea change" in attitudes in South Korea, with the country's population outraged over Pyongyang's recent "provocations."

"Their tolerance for not responding has changed," he said.

Apart from the November 23 attack on Yeonpyeong island, the North stands accused by the South of torpedoing a warship last March with the loss of 46 lives. Pyongyang denies the charge.

The angry public reaction in South Korea had changed the "status quo" and it was vital that North Korea took actions to resolve the crisis, he said.

"Rhetoric is not enough at this point. There need to be some concrete actions by the North to demonstrate that they're truly serious about negotiation and engagement," he said.

Positive steps might include the North implementing a freeze on further missile or nuclear tests, he said.

US officials have sometimes expressed impatience with China's approach to North Korea, but Gates made a point of praising Beijing's diplomatic efforts during his visit.

However, his grave assessment of the situation on the divided peninsula and the North's weapons projects amount to renewed US pressure on China to rein in Pyongyang's leadership.

Gates said he expected the issue to come up in meetings later this week in Tokyo and Seoul, and when Hu visits Washington next week.

Pyongyang has expressed conditional willingness to return to six-nation nuclear disarmament talks that it abandoned in April 2009, a month before staging its second nuclear test.

But it fuelled regional fears in November by disclosing a uranium enrichment plant which could potentially give it a second route to a bomb.

The communist state this week officially proposed "unconditional" dialogue with Seoul, less than two months after the shelling assault.

The South rejected the offer, saying it was willing to hold government-level talks but only if the North admits responsibility for a series of provocations and confirms a commitment to scrapping its nuclear programme.

North Korea on Tuesday criticised South Korea's response, insisting it was sincere in trying to mend relations after months of tensions.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/215582/n-korea-could-soon-pose-direct-threat-to-us-gates>

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International Business Times – U.K.

China Mulls U.S. Offer on Nuclear Arms, Missile Defense, Space and Cyber Talks

By Gerald Helguero

January 11, 2011

China is studying a proposal from the U.S. to begin strategic security talks that would cover nuclear arms, missile defense, space and cyber issues, as the countries seek to improve their military-to-military relations.

"The Chinese side noticed the proposal of [U.S. Defense] Secretary [Robert] Gates on the conducting of the Strategic Security Dialogue and we are studying that," Gen. Liang Guanglie, the Chinese Minister for National Defense told reporters in Beijing on Tuesday.

Military-to-military talks have been strained as a result of large U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and increasing assertiveness by China over waters in the South China Sea, which includes major international shipping lanes.

Gates said it was important that the talks are "not subject to shifting political winds."

Gates was asked by a reporter if future talks would not be called off if the U.S. were to make another large sale to Taiwan and if there had been a "change of heart" among the Chinese military.

Liang, however, replied first, saying that China's position on sales had been "clear and consistent."

"We are against it," Liang said, saying the sales "seriously damaged China's core interests and we do not want to see that happen again, neither do we hope that the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan will happen again and further disrupt our bilateral and military-to-military relationship."

In early 2010, the Obama administration approved an arms sales package to Taiwan worth over \$6 billion for anti-missile missiles, military helicopters and communications equipment for fighter jets.

Liang said talks with Gates were productive, not only discussing "positive elements" but also "difficulties and obstacles" in the way of the militaries' relations in a "very candid manner."

Gates said he was confident that both sides "are on the road to fulfilling the mandate that our two Presidents have given to us: to strengthen the military-to-military relationships that they both consider an underdeveloped part of the overall U.S.-China relationship."

Strategic talks, if taken up by both sides, would be added to several other dialogues, including the Defense Consultative Talks (DCD), Defense Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT), as well as discussions under the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA).

"I was pleased that General Liang noted and said that the Chinese side would consider and study the beginning of a strategic security dialogue - as part of a broader Strategic and Economic Dialogue - that covers nuclear missile defense, space, and cyber issues," Gates said.

Liang said top Chinese military and U.S. officials will hold talks during the first half of 2011. The meeting also included "in depth" conversations about regional security interests, including the situation on the Korean peninsula, he said.

Gates said "a major concern of ours and clearly a major topic of discussion on my visit here to Beijing" was to inform China that recent large-scale military exercises with South Korea in the Yellow Sea were not directed "in any way at China."

Gates said he and Liang agreed to establish a "working group that will develop a new framework for improving ties" between the U.S. and Chinese militaries.

Gates said at a separate meeting with reporters that he asked Chinese President Hu Jintao if the Chinese military had performed a flight test of its J-20 jet fighter, which is expected to be a rival the U.S. F-22 Raptor. Images of the plane in flight had been posted to various Chinese web sites, prompting speculation of what message China was trying to send in light of the talks.

"[H]e said the test had absolutely nothing to do with my visit and had been a pre-planned test. And that's where we left it," he said.

<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/99702/20110111/china-mulls-u-s-offer-on-nuclear-arms-missile-defense-space-and-cyber-talks.htm>

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FoxNews.com

Pakistani Turmoil Renews Deep Concerns about Troubled U.S. Ally

By Jennifer Griffin

January 07, 2011

With Pakistan's civilian government clinging to power in the face of deepening internal divisions, a new book by a former CIA officer says Pakistan is the most dangerous place on earth and should be President Obama's top national-security priority.

"It is the fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world and it has more terrorists per square mile than any other country in the world," Bruce Riedel, author of "Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America and the Future of Global Jihad" tells FOX News in an exclusive interview. "Pakistan is our most important partner in the war against Al Qaeda and the most difficult partner in the war against Al Qaeda."

The U.S.-Pakistani relationship has been a fraught one from the day the South Asian nation broke free from British control to become an Islamic republic in 1947. Since President Dwight Eisenhower made the first presidential visit to Islamabad in 1951, America has valued the strategic importance of the nation but been frustrated by the divided loyalties of the government there.

There are many examples of the double game that Pakistan has played with its U.S. ally. One example was in 1993, it was Pakistan's Western-educated Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who helped North Korea make major advances in its nuclear program. Riedel's book describes how she shared the secrets that helped the North Koreans develop a uranium enrichment program and, ultimately, a nuclear weapon.

"She carried back and forth information about nuclear centrifuges from North Korea to Pakistan and other information. Whether she carried a nuclear weapons design, I don't think that has been substantiated one way or another," said Riedel, who led a White House strategy review on Pakistan for Obama in 2009.

"It's very ironic: Mrs. Bhutto was probably the most secular, pro-Western Pakistani politician of our lifetime and yet she was also involved in the nuclear trade with North Korea. And she was one of the early sponsors of the Afghan Taliban."

Bhutto reportedly received ballistic missile designs for her country's ongoing arms race with neighboring India in return for the nuclear secrets. The allegations first appeared in a book written by British journalist Shyam Bhatia, who was a friend of Bhutto's from Oxford.

In "Goodbye, Shahzadi" Bhatia writes: "The gist of what she told me was that before leaving Islamabad she shopped for an overcoat with the deepest possible pockets into which she transferred CDs containing scientific data about uranium enrichment which the North Koreans wanted."

He says she told him not to publish the information until after her death, highlighting her constant fear that she could be assassinated, which she was in December 2007.

In another example of the complicated relationship between the U.S. and its troublesome ally Pakistan the CIA has never yet been allowed to interview the father of Pakistan's nuclear program, A.Q Kahn, who in 2004 admitted to providing nuclear know how to, among others, Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Khan lives in Islamabad and has been free from house arrest since early 2009.

Critics of the administration's current policy suggest that the Obama team has not taken a tough enough line when it comes to the suspected ties between the nation's military and intelligence organizations and the Taliban and other radical groups.

KT McFarland, a nuclear proliferation and national security expert who worked in the Reagan Pentagon, said that the U.S. must be more demanding with its troublesome ally. "We've let the Pakistanis tell us what they want, and frankly they are playing both sides," said McFarland, a FOX News contributor.

"On one hand, they are helping us in Afghanistan and with Al Qaeda against the Taliban, but on the other hand they are helping the Taliban too, because they are hedging their bets." McFarland suggested that the U.S. should tell the Pakistani government to get serious about the search for Osama Bin Laden, who is believed to be hiding in the mountainous eastern region of the country. "I think we need to go to Pakistan and say, 'Look, you guys have had almost 10 years. We know that Osama Bin Laden is in Pakistan. If you want the relationship to continue, we want Osama Bin Laden.'"

Riedel, now a fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank, says the U.S. must pursue a two-track approach with Pakistan. On one hand, he supports a five-year, \$1.5-billion non-military aid package sponsored by Sen. John Kerry and Sen. Richard Lugar that is still stalled in Congress.

The money, Riedel says, will help convince the Pakistani people that the U.S. is seeking a long-term friendship. But Riedel also says the U.S. should get tough with Pakistan's top generals and members of its intelligence service, the I.S.I., if there is evidence they are supporting the Taliban or Al Qaeda.

He suggests placing offending officers on the U.S. terror watch list, which means their overseas assets would be frozen. "Imagine a state with the fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world, the sixth largest army, that's an active sponsor...of terrorist groups...that welcome Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda out of their hiding places into the Presidential palaces in Islamabad," Riedle said.

"That's the nightmare that we have to worry about. And that's the nightmare that we have to avoid at all costs."

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/07/pakistani-turmoil-renews-deep-concerns-troubled-ally/>

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Daily Telegraph – Australia

Afghanistan to Remain Our Biggest Worry

By Ian McPhedran, *The Daily Telegraph*

January 11, 2011

THE campaign in Afghanistan will dominate the military landscape this year as Australia and the other 44 nations involved in the international force struggle to develop a workable exit strategy from the eight-year conflict.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has flagged a further decade-long involvement for Australian troops, but such a commitment will become increasingly difficult to justify as casualties mount.

Pressure will build for a complete withdrawal once the training role is complete in Oruzgan province (about 2014), where most of the 1550 Australians are working.

More than 50 per cent of voters now oppose the deployment and that number will grow as the year progresses.

As the US-led coalition struggles to gain momentum in Afghanistan, neighbouring Pakistan will become more crucial in the broader campaign against terrorism.

The Taliban has shifted its focus to the restive northwest of the country and militant Islamist elements continue to exert strong influence inside the country's military and security services.

The big fear in Washington and Canberra will remain Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and the risk that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of the militants.

Any move in that direction would be met with maximum force from the US and its allies, including Australia.

Maximum force is also on the agenda for nearby Iran, which continues to stir the radical Islamist pot throughout the Middle East. The Iranian regime is hell-bent on achieving a nuclear capability and the US is equally committed to preventing such an outcome.

Further east, on the Korean Peninsula, nuclear war will remain a distinct possibility until the bizarre North Korean regime emerges from the shadows.

The big challenge in Korea will be avoiding mistakes that could tip the balance to all-out war. If that happened then the US would back the South and under the ANZUS treaty Australia would follow suit.

As the economic relationship between China and Taiwan deepens the likelihood of conflict will continue to wane.

Money talks and Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are acutely aware that peace and stability bring profits and prosperity.

Minor Islamic insurgencies across the region will play a role in Australia's 2011 security agenda. Jemaah Islamiah in Indonesia, Muslim separatists in southern Thailand, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines will remain a thorn in the side of security planners in Canberra and a threat to travellers.

Thanks to the efforts of Indonesian and Australian Federal Police the threat from JI has been reduced, but the fanatics will be planning new attacks against westerners.

China's influence will continue to rise across the Pacific islands as Beijing attempts to buy friends with soft loans and generous aid programs in tiny struggling nations beset with depleted fish stocks and dwindling rainforests that are most at risk from climate change.

Fiji could become Australia's biggest regional security headache in 2011.

The defence force will continue to plan for a military evacuation of the thousands of Australians who work and holiday in the troubled country struggling under the weight of a military dictatorship.

Back in Canberra, cost cutting will remain the focus for defence and national security mandarins this year.

There will be a new chief of defence in mid-year when Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston retires after two terms in the top job. The rumour mill is rife with the possibility of new chiefs for the navy and army as well.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/afghanistan-to-remain-our-biggest-worry/story-e6frezz0-1225985166506>

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Global Security Newswire

Pakistani Nuke Security in Question after Assassination

Tuesday, January 11, 2011

The United States' relationship with Pakistan and its insistence that the nuclear-armed state is a key ally in the fight against terrorism is being called into question following considerable public support for the man accused of assassinating a high-profile Pakistani politician last week, the *New York Times* reported (see *GSN*, Jan. 6).

Pakistani police officer and bodyguard Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri is charged with the gun slaying of Punjab state Governor Salman Taseer, evidently for the politician's outspoken stance against Islamabad's blasphemy law. Qadri has been showered with support in the wake of the killing, which demonstrated that the battle with militants is not restricted to the nation's fringes.

"Everything about what's happened in the past few days is a reminder of how we're still losing ground in Pakistan," said an unidentified Obama official with considerable experience dealing with the South Asian state. "It's trouble on many different levels."

Central to the Obama administration's stance on Pakistan is its stated belief that the South Asian nation's growing nuclear arsenal could never be compromised by a member of the military establishment with ties to extremist groups such as the Taliban or al-Qaeda.

Pakistani officials routinely insist that security surrounding their nuclear arsenal is foolproof and Washington has publicly accepted these assurances. However, Taseer's assassination has once again thrown doubt on Islamabad's assertions.

As a bodyguard for a senior public official, Qadri would reportedly have been evaluated by the government's Personnel Reliability Program, which also vets personnel with access to the nation's nuclear weapons program. That Qadri passed inspection has raised questions over whether other extremists might have obtained nuclear clearance.

In the past, Islamabad officials had said the screening process used for the security detail of government officials was akin to that used for scrutinizing the personnel charged with guarding the nation's nuclear sites. The background checks are intended to ensure the loyalty of guards in these key positions.

When Qadri allegedly opened fire on Taseer in a populated marketplace -- firing off more than 20 shots -- not one of the other security personnel in the vicinity moved to shoot him to stop the attack, according to the *Times*. It is not known how the elite police officer passed the screening process.

"It's one more reason to give pause" when contemplating what might occur should a Pakistani scientist or a guard with a similar mindset seek to appropriate nuclear assets, a U.S. official said.

Nearly two years ago, then-U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson expressed reservations about the security of nuclear materials in the country in a diplomatic dispatch leaked by the transparency group Wikileaks: "Our major concern is ... the chance someone working in GOP [government of Pakistan] facilities could gradually smuggle enough material out to eventually make a weapon."

Following the cable's publication, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry asserted that U.S. nuclear security fears were "misplaced and doubtless fall in the realm of condescension" (see *GSN*, Dec. 1, 2010).

Officials in Islamabad speculated the leak was part of a scheme by Washington to build a case for grabbing the nation's nuclear weapons in the event the Pakistani government collapses. The officials pointed to the strength of the nation's Personnel Reliability Program and its screening of nuclear workers and security personnel to underline their argument that the arsenal was safe from infiltration.

Since 2003, when chief Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan was exposed for running a black market proliferation ring, Islamabad's vetting system has appeared to function appropriately.

"This assassination raises further questions about the vetting process in the Pakistani security system," ex-CIA official Bruce Riedel said. "And it's worth remembering that on their list of potential threats to their nuclear assets, the United States is No. 1, and terrorists and religious fundamentalists are further down the line" (David Sanger, *New York Times*, Jan. 8).

http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20110111_5231.php

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Toronto Sun – Canada

OPINION

Koreas Inch Toward Conflict, Iran Chases the Bomb

By MERCEDES STEPHENSON, QMI AGENCY

January 9, 2011

Don't mistake this for a list of recommended tropical havens for your honeymoon, or how to stay looking hot when it's cold out.

This round of global hot spots and trends for 2011 leads me to potential sources of violent conflict and tension, and challenges to our security and safety over the coming year.

Today: One has La Bomba and the other wants it. The proliferation of nuclear weapons will escalate tension in regional conflicts in 2011, drawing the world's attention.

THE KOREAS

All eyes will remain on the sabre rattling between the two Koreas.

Interesting fact: The Korean war isn't over. Literally. There's an armistice, which means they're not supposed to shoot at each other (North Korea, I am looking at you), but technically it's still on.

No one really thinks the Koreans are about to break into trench warfare resembling 1951 again at any moment. The presence of nuclear weapons drastically changes the calculus for both sides because the stakes are literally survival and neither side has a death wish.

This has not diminished the international community's concern, however, that in the heat of the moment, a can't-take-it-back move could be made and things could rapidly devolve. Not surprising considering Seoul is well within range of a North Korean conventional artillery strike — let alone any need for long-range missiles or nuclear-tipped weapons.

Great Leader Kim Jong-il — the leader previously known as Intelligent Leader and Dear Leader and one can see why, what with the starving of people to build nukes — will transfer power to his son Kim Jong-un. Expect the aggressive moves and rhetoric to pick up as the family dynasty demonstrates its power and solidarity inside and outside the regime.

Last year saw the North build a new and surprisingly sophisticated uranium enrichment plant to fuel the nuclear weapons program. Kim Jong-il torpedoed and sunk a South Korean warship, killing sailors. Later in the year, he killed South Korean soldiers with a conventional artillery strike. Expect 2011 to bring increasing tension and global attention to the Korean peninsula.

IRAN

The Iranians want what the North Koreans already have — The Bomb, a nuclear weapon.

Actually, they'd like more than just the bomb, or a bomb — they'd like several. Redundancy is key in ensuring one's nuclear deterrence.

Otherwise, all it takes is one rather inconvenient airstrike on your nuclear bunker and the whole national security plan goes up in a mushroom-shaped puff of smoke.

How far are the Iranians from having nuclear capability? No one really knows, but experts no longer put the time frame in terms of years, but rather months. In other words, they've been working on it.

The Iranian government dreams of expanding its influence to regional power status. More and better meddling in Iraq and Afghanistan with minimal chance of push-back could be enabled through possession of a nuke. The Iranian regime's security would be ensured. The list of incentives is long.

The disincentive of course is that some countries are toying with the idea of preemptively bombing suspected Iranian nuclear facilities before they get to the weaponized stage.

Iran's apparent friends and allies appear to lack confidence in Iran's nuclear stewardship, jumping on the bandwagon and practically begging the U.S. to bomb Iran, or "cut the head off the snake."

Iran will continue to seek to expand its influence regionally and push toward nuclear capability.

Don't expect the U.S. to pussy-foot around forever. Obama is negotiating because he believes it's in U.S. interests right now and frankly, talking is generally better than shooting.

That doesn't mean a negotiation-based strategy will forever be in U.S., or ahem, regional (read Israeli) interests.

http://www.torontosun.com/comment/columnists/mercedes_stephenson/2011/01/07/16805271.html

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HA'ARTZ Daily – Israel

OPINION/Editorial

9 January 2011

Horizon of Nukes and Peace

Israel should advance peace if it wants to keep Iran's nukes on the horizon.

For two decades, Iranian leaders have sought to achieve a nuclear capability. First, they were motivated by lessons of the war against Iraq, which concluded with the Ayatollah Khomeini's humiliating surrender; leaders in Tehran were frightened by Saddam Hussein's ambitions. Another factor was the perception of Iran throughout history as a major power in the Persian Gulf. And Israel is not last on this list of motivations - the destruction of Israel is a declared policy of at least some Iranian leaders.

That's the simple account of Iran's moves, but the on-the-ground realities are more complex than this detached analysis. Iran is having trouble accomplishing its goals. In fact, Iran's nuclear capability, like the horizon, recedes as you think it's approaching. Leaders in Tehran operate under their own logic, which is based on their own priorities and is not identical to the West's logic. Iran's leaders are loath to risk losing control of their regime or to wage a direct confrontation that would give justification for a military attack.

For these reasons, Iran's leaders were alarmed by President George W. Bush's decision in 2003 to invade Iraq, which had been suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction; Iran thus suspended work on its military nuclear program. Then there was a series of mishaps which plagued Iranian equipment and key figures associated with its nuclear program. The result was another deferral of the target date for attaining nuclear weapons; the deferral was for a year, or two years, or three.

The continuing disagreement between Israeli and American intelligence on this issue, with the Israelis appearing to be more impatient and pessimistic than their counterparts, was hit by a bomb last week. Not a nuclear bomb, but one that had significance for the public debate. This was an estimate by outgoing Mossad chief Meir Dagan that Iran will achieve a military nuclear capability only in 2015. This estimate is predicated on continued pressure on Iran via economic sanctions and other means. The conclusion, however, is that there is no reason to hastily launch a preemptive strike that could embroil the attacker in a war on more than one front.

Even if Dagan is correct, the period until 2015 is not in Israel's favor. Israel should seize the window of opportunity to make progress on the peace track via an accord with Syria and an improvement in relations with Washington, the sobered-up Palestinian leadership and moderate Arab states. Peace must remain on the horizon - the right place for Iran's nuclear project.

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/horizon-of-nukes-and-peace-1.335984>

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Times of India – India

OPINION

When the Americans Go Home

By Gautam Adhikari

January 11, 2011

WASHINGTON: Change may be afoot in the US-Pakistan relationship. If carried out as recently reported, a new US approach may prove to be a turning point in the nine-year-old Afghan conflict. It may even bring a semblance of peace and stability to the region in the medium term. But New Delhi must watch the developments closely.

The Washington Post reported last week that the Obama administration would give Pakistan more military, intelligence and economic support after assessing that the US could not afford to alienate Pakistan, a precariously perched nuclear armed state and an indispensable ally in the Afghan conflict. In arriving at that assessment, the White House rejected proposals made by military commanders who, after losing patience with Pakistan's refusal to go after the Afghan Taliban, recommended that the US deploy ground forces to raid the insurgents' safe havens inside Pakistan.

The idea is to forge a regional peace with Pakistan's cooperation. Joe Biden, the US vice president, will be in Islamabad soon to explain the new approach, which aims for a political solution to the Afghan conflict. The US has realised that the war cannot be won without the Pakistani army wiping out the shelter and support the ISI provides the Taliban insurgents. Since that won't happen, why not buy peace?

The Obama administration faces mounting domestic pressure somehow to bring about a conclusion to its involvement in Afghanistan. Public opinion is now clearly against the war. A presidential election is due in 2012. President Barack Obama would like to show visible progress in Afghanistan by then.

If General Ashfaq Kayani agrees to cooperate with the new US approach after extracting all the goodies he can from the deal, the AfPak region might in fact witness some stability and apparent peace in the medium term. The Pashtun regions of Afghanistan will be effectively under Taliban control with the ISI promising to keep its wards on a leash; Kabul can have a token Afghan government while various warlords continue to manage the rest of the country.

The remaining al-Qaida biggies, who are all inside Pakistan and not in Afghanistan, can be quietly shipped off to Yemen or whichever sanctuary money can buy. The Pakistani army, in perennial search of 'strategic depth' against India, will have got what it wanted and the region's war-weary face might acquire a patina of peace.

In other words, Pakistan's army has the US over a barrel. General Kayani and his cohorts know well that the Americans want to leave the region without appearing to lose face. And he is aware that Washington is acutely nervous about an unstable Pakistan that has a nuclear capability within possible reach of terrorists.

Attempts at democratising and de-radicalising Pakistan have so far failed. The recent assassination of a liberal governor of Punjab merely underscores that reality. As India knows well and as the Americans have apparently accepted, the only source of stability in Pakistan is the military. Or, to put it another way, there can be no peace within Pakistan or in the region unless the Pakistani army agrees to ensure it.

But where does the new US approach, if implemented and successful over the next couple of years, leave the region as a whole? And where does it place India?

The AfPak region, for better or for worse, will somewhat resemble a status quo ante bellum. In other words, it won't be all that different from what prevailed in the decade preceding the outbreak of war in 2001. This time, the ISI-backed Taliban will effectively control a large part of Afghanistan while a weak Kabul will go along with the arrangement as long as it can persuade the Taliban not to take over the whole country. Pakistan will once again obtain space outside its borders to shelter radical Taliban as well as other potential insurgents. An international force will continue to guard Kabul while the Americans can see it all in the driving mirror as they depart.

Such a scenario, if it indeed comes about, will not be very different from what Robert Blackwill, a former US ambassador to India, has been suggesting for a while, his latest articulation coming in the current issue of Foreign Affairs. Which is that Afghanistan be partitioned de facto; the US gets out of a mess; al-Qaida goes away somewhere; Pakistan is left to its devices; and AfPak moves out of prime time TV.

As for India, there's little to do but wait and watch while weighing our options. We must keep looking over our shoulder at the looming presence of China, with which we can't see eye to eye in many matters, from unsettled borders to its unsettling camaraderie with our hostile neighbour. And we have to watch every move by a Pakistani military that we know needs an India bogey to justify its hold on power.

In a disturbed neighbourhood, we probably have to fend for ourselves. In case there is trouble, can we rely on support from newfound partners like the US when their national interest and domestic pressure call for a quick exit from the region? Who knows. Maybe it's time to put together a few wise heads to rethink policy options.

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<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/opinion/edit-page/When-the-Americans-go-home/articleshow/7254494.cms>

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