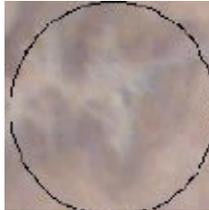


A Sourcebook on the Israeli Strike in Syria, 6 September 2007

Version of 2018-09-08



2002-09-05



2003-09-16



2007-08-10



2007-10-24

GeoEye/DigitalGlobe



Between 2007-10-10
and 2007-10-24



2007-11-23



2008-01-11

*Additional information would be welcome.
Please send it to thomsona@flash.net*

Where possible, the material in this sourcebook is presented in chronological order.

The main body contains information concerning the strike from sources with some apparent credibility.

Appendix A contains commentary and supplementary material.

*Readers are cautioned that the distinction
between information and commentary is often debatable.*

Appendix B contains material related to satellite imagery and its interpretation.

Appendix C briefly discusses a facility 5 km east of the site of the strike.

Appendix D contains frames from the April 24, 2008 intelligence briefing to Congress

Appendix E discusses reports of three additional sites and attempts to identify candidate facilities.

Appendix F lists Members of Congress belonging to committees briefed on the strike.

Appendix G deals with a second alleged nuclear facility constructed after the strike.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL0679478220070906>

Israel didn't attack Syria: Israel Radio

Thu Sep 6, 2007 6:46pm EDT

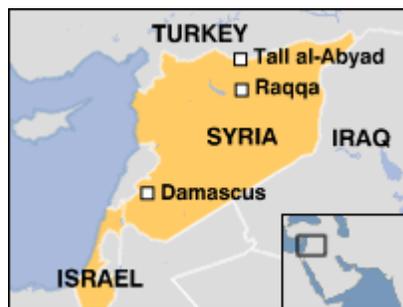
JERUSALEM (Reuters) - The Israeli military denied on Thursday a Syrian news agency report that Israeli warplanes attacked targets in Syria, Israel Radio reported.

"This event never happened," the radio said, quoting an unidentified Israeli military spokesman.

Syria 'fires on Israel warplanes'

Last Updated: Thursday, 6 September 2007, 16:25 GMT 17:25 UK

Syria has said its air defences opened fire on Israeli warplanes after they violated its airspace in the north of the country.



Syrian officials said the defences forced the jets to drop ammunition over deserted areas and turn back, according to the official news agency, Sana.

Israel's military said it would not comment on the reports.

Israel and Syria remain technically at war and tensions between them have been rising in recent months.

The Syrian government has insisted that peace talks can be resumed only on the basis of Israel returning the Golan Heights, which it seized in 1967.

Israeli authorities, for their part, have demanded that Syria abandon its support for Palestinian and Lebanese militant groups before talks can begin.

The last peace talks between the two countries broke down in 2000.

'Enemy aircraft'

A Syrian military spokesman said the Israeli warplanes had flown into Syrian airspace at around 0100 local time on Thursday morning, Sana reported.

"The Israeli enemy aircraft infiltrated into the Arab Syrian territory through the northern border, coming from the Mediterranean heading toward the eastern region, breaking the sound barrier," he said.

They were then engaged by Syrian air defence forces in the Tall al-Abyad, an area 160km (100 miles) north of Raqqa and near the border with Turkey, witnesses said.

"Air defence units confronted them and forced them to leave after they dropped some ammunition in deserted areas without causing any human or material damage," the spokesman said.

Pilots sometimes jettison ammunition or extra fuel to make their aircraft lighter and easier to manoeuvre.

Syria's Information Minister, Mohsen Bilal, told al-Jazeera TV that his government was "seriously studying the nature of the response".

"Israel in fact does not want peace," he said. "It cannot survive without aggression, treachery and military messages."

Tensions

Officials in Damascus said Syrian forces last fired at Israeli warplanes in June 2006, when they flew over the summer residence of the Syrian president in Lattakia, while he was inside.

Over the past few months, the leaders of both countries have both stressed that they do not want war.

But both sides have also been preparing for possible conflict.

In June, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert insisted his country did not want war with Syria, and that he had communicated this to Damascus through diplomatic channels.

He also repeated his warning that a "miscalculation" could spark hostilities between the two.

Mr Olmert's statement came after the Israeli military staged major exercises in the Golan Heights. Syria is also reported to have recently built up its armaments along the border.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6982331.stm

New twist to Syria-Israel tension

By Martin Patience

BBC News, Damascus

Published: 2007/09/06 18:05:38 GMT

[EXCERPTS]

The alleged violation of Syrian airspace by Israeli warplanes was announced by the official state news on Thursday afternoon.

It is not clear why it took the Syrian authorities almost 12 hours to make the reported incident public. The Israeli military, for its part, has made no public comment on the matter.

But in a summer where the two countries seem to have oscillated from possible war to possible peace talks, this incident will have left some officials in Damascus jittery.

Information Minister Mohsen Bilal told al-Jazeera TV that Syria's leadership was "giving serious consideration to its response... to this aggression".

Caught by surprise

It seems unlikely, however, that Syria will resort to anything more than public denouncements of the alleged incident.

But the alleged violation of Syria's airspace will serve only to heighten tensions between the two countries.

That it apparently happened in the country's north, close to the Turkish border - and not in the south, where Syria and Israel share a border - has taken many people here by surprise.

[deletia]

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2007/sep/91823.htm>



Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
Washington, DC
September 6, 2007

[EXCERPT]

12:46 p.m. EDT

MR. CASEY: Okay. Well, good afternoon, everybody. I don't have anything to open you up with, so let's go right to your questions.

Matt.

QUESTION: Have you -- obviously, I was not at the gaggle this morning, but have you been able to figure out what happened in -- over Syrian airspace?

MR. CASEY: Matt, I'm where we were on this, this morning, I've seen press reports. Those stories conflict with one another so really I just don't have anything for you on it.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/901650.html>

Israel mum on any IAF entry into Syria airspace

By Yoav Stern and Mazal Mualem, Haaretz Correspondents, and News Agencies

Last update - 12:02 **07/09/2007**

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert denied on Thursday all knowledge of a Syrian report that its military fired on an Israel Air Force warplane that infiltrated its airspace and "dropped munitions."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Olmert said in response to a question on the issue from Haaretz, hours after his office and the Israel Defense Forces both said they refused to respond to Damascus' claims.

The prime minister was speaking at an event for his Kadima party to mark the Jewish New Year holiday next week. He insisted that it was business as usual, asking reporters, "do I not look relaxed?"

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Vice Premier Haim Ramon issued similar responses. "I don't know what happened there," Ramon said.

The IDF said it would not comment on the Syrian reports. "It is not our custom to respond to these kinds of reports," the IDF Spokesman's Office said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for Olmert said there would be no comment beyond the military statement.

Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal said Thursday that Damascus is giving serious consideration to its response.

"Syria reserves the right to determine the quality, type, and nature of our response to the Israeli attack," he told Al-Jazeera television. "The Syrian leadership is seriously considering its response."

Bilal, however, refused to indicate whether the reaction would be on the military or diplomatic level. He would not give any more details about the incident, but said it proved Israel's policies are based on hostility.

"Israel in fact does not want peace," said Bilal. "It cannot survive without aggression, treachery and military messages."

He said recent U.S. aid of \$30 billion over 10 years to Israel encouraged its government to such arrogance that it delivered the morning message.

A Syrian Army spokesman, quoted by the official news agency, did not say how the military fired on the aircraft, but confirmed that the incident occurred at midnight Wednesday night.

"We warn the Israeli enemy government against this flagrant aggressive act, and retain the right to respond in an appropriate way," the spokesman said.

"The Israeli enemy aircraft infiltrated into the Arab Syrian territory through the northern border, coming from the Mediterranean heading toward the eastern region, breaking the sound barrier," the Syrian spokesman said.

"Air defense units confronted them and forced them to leave after they dropped some munitions in deserted areas without causing any human or material damage."

Syrian Cabinet Minister Buthaina Shaaban, speaking on Al-Jazeera television's English service, would not confirm that an IAF jet had attacked Syria, but did say the aircraft violated the country's airspace. "We are a sovereign country. They cannot do that," said Shaaban.

Al-Arabiya television reported that the incident occurred in north-eastern Syria, close to the border with Turkey.

A Syrian analyst told Hezbollah's Al-Manar television that the plane was likely dumping munitions in order to maneuver, and was not carrying out a bombing raid.

The reported incident comes after months of growing tensions along the frontier and concerns that the escalation could result in war. Over the summer, Israeli and Syrian officials have repeatedly made announcements that they had no interest in hostilities.

Security official said late last month, however, that the IDF had decided that war with Syria is unlikely and was reducing its troop presence in the Golan Heights after months of tension.

The Israeli officials said recently that Syria's military had also reduced its war readiness, but offered no details as the exact steps taken by the Syrians are classified. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to divulge the information to the press.

In an interview Sunday night with Haaretz, European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said he saw no reason for any forthcoming military conflict between Israel and Syria.

Israel Is Officially Silent on Syrian Report It Entered Airspace

By ISABEL KERSHNER

September 7, 2007

JERUSALEM, Sept. 6 — Israeli officials were tight-lipped on Thursday after Syria said that Israeli planes had violated its airspace early that morning and that Syrian air defenses had confronted the planes and repulsed them.

A Syrian military spokesman said that the Israeli planes had also dropped some munitions in unpopulated areas in the northern part of the country, according to the official Syrian news agency, SANA. The spokesman said there were no casualties or damage.

Israeli Army officials said only that they “are not accustomed to comment on reports of this nature.” A government spokesman said he had “nothing to add.” In a speech here Thursday evening, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made no mention of the accusations from Syria. When asked about them by an Israeli journalist, he said, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

The first official reports of Thursday’s episode emerged, by Syrian accounts, more than 12 hours after it took place. Syrian officials were quoted in various media as saying that the Israeli aircraft had infiltrated Syrian airspace around 1 a.m. They added that the Israeli planes were flying low, and broke the sound barrier.

Syria’s minister of information, Mohsen Bilal, told the satellite television network Al Jazeera, “Syria retains the right to determine the quality, type and nature of its response.”

Syrian officials could not be reached directly for comment.

While the Israeli military would not comment, it seemed plausible that the Syrians had detected an Israeli overflight to test Syrian radar and reactions, and that the Syrian response caused the Israeli pilots to drop their munitions to fly higher and faster.

By late in the day, though, analysts and media on both sides seemed to be trying to scale down tensions over the reports. Israel’s Channel 2 television reported that unnamed Syrian officials had said they had no intention of being drawn into a war on Israel’s timetable or terms.

Samir Taqqi, a political analyst at the Orient Center for Studies, a research institute in Damascus, said the Syrian response would probably be measured. “I don’t think you’ll see it lash out,” he said. “The response will be through a political mechanism, not military.”

Eyal Zisser, a Syria expert at Tel Aviv University’s Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, said that if the Syrians had an interest in an escalation, he would have expected much shriller statements out of Damascus.

The Syrian announcements came after months of increasing tension between Israel and Syria, with both in a heightened state of alert along their border.

Some Syrian analysts in Damascus interpreted the reported incident as an Israeli provocation, possibly aimed at increasing the stakes between the two countries. Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, has suggested that if Israel is not willing to resume negotiations for the return of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the alternative would be to try to regain the territory by force.

Thabet Salem, a Syrian political commentator, said of the day's reports, "Either this is in preparation for pushing Syria to peace talks by raising the stakes, or it's an attempt to abort any sort of calls for peace talks."

Formal peace talks between Israel and Syria broke down in 2000. Mr. Olmert has said he would be willing to resume talks if Syria showed its intentions were genuinely peaceful, for example by stopping its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and for Palestinian militant factions based in Damascus.

Separately on Thursday, 10 Palestinian militants were killed in clashes with Israel in Gaza. Four were killed in clashes with an Israeli force in southern Gaza, Palestinian medical officials and the Israeli Army said.

In addition, six members of Islamic Jihad were killed, the army said, when they approached the Gaza perimeter fence in two vehicles. Islamic Jihad said in a statement that it had intended to attack an Israeli military post.

Hugh Naylor contributed reporting from Damascus.

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article2938965.ece

Israeli jets 'drop ammunition' in sortie over Syria

By Anne Penketh, Diplomatic Editor

Published: 07 September 2007

Syria was considering its response last night after an Israeli warplane violated Syrian air space and was accused of dropping ammunition inside the country. The incident, near the Turkish border on Wednesday, came just after midnight at a time when tensions are running high between the two neighbours. It prompted Syrian air defence units to open fire on the Israeli jets, Syrian officials said.

The Israeli aircraft "infiltrated Syrian air space through the northern border, coming from the direction of the Mediterranean, and headed towards northeastern territory, breaking the sound barrier," said the official Syrian news agency, Sana. "The Syrian Arab Republic warns the government of the Israeli enemy and reserves the right to respond according to what it sees fit."

A Syrian official added: "They dropped bombs on an empty area while our air defences were firing heavily at them." Residents said they heard the sound of five planes or more above the Tal al-Abiad area on Syria's border with Turkey, about 100 miles north of the Syrian city of Rakka.

The Israeli army refused to comment on the incident but no casualties or damage were reported. "We cannot discuss military operations," a spokesman said.

Syria accuses Israel of violating its air space, dropping 'munitions'

Details regarding encounter unclear

By Albert Aji, Associated Press

September 7, 2007

DAMASCUS - The Syrian government charged yesterday that Israeli aircraft dropped "munitions" inside Syria overnight and said its air defenses opened fire in a new escalation of tensions between the decades-old foes.

It was unclear what happened. Syria stopped short of accusing Israel of purposely bombing its territory, and an Israeli spokesman said he could not comment on military operations.

Analysts speculated that such a foray could have been probing Syria's defenses or monitoring long-range missile bases. The reported path also would have taken the jets near Iran, whose growing power and anti-Israel government worries leaders of the Jewish state.

The incident came after a summer of building tensions that have fed worries of a military conflict erupting between Syria and Israel. Syria accused Israel last month of seeking a pretext for war, and the Israeli government is keeping a close watch on Syrian troop movements.

Both sides have insisted they want no conflict along the disputed frontier. But Syria fears it is being squeezed out of a US-brokered Mideast peace conference planned for November and will be left at a disadvantage in the standoff with Israel.

Syria has grown more vocal in pressing its demand that Israel give back the Golan Heights. Israel, in turn, seeks the return of three Israeli soldiers held for more than a year by two Syrian-allied militant groups, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territory.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency quoted a military official as saying Israeli jets broke the sound barrier flying over northern Syria before dawn yesterday, then "dropped munitions" onto deserted areas after being shot at by Syria's air defenses.

Syria did not say the aircraft bombed its territory, however. Asked whether Israel attacked Syria, Buthaina Shaaban, a Cabinet minister, said only that the aircraft violated Syrian air space.

Syrian officials did not describe the "munitions" dropped. Pilots sometimes jettison extra fuel tanks when warplanes come under fire to make the craft lighter and easier to maneuver.

In Washington, the State Department had no specific comment on the incident, citing the lack of details about what happened.

<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2007/200709/news09/12.htm#1>



Israel Condemned for Intrusion into Syria's Territorial Air

Pyongyang, September 11 [2007] (KCNA) -- A spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry gave the following answer to a question put by KCNA Tuesday in connection with the fact that Israeli warplanes invaded Syria's territorial air space:

Early in the morning of Sept. 6 Israel's warplanes illegally intruded into the territorial air above Syria and dropped bombs in the desert in its northeastern area before fleeing.

This is a very dangerous provocation little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security.

The DPRK strongly denounces the above-said intrusion and extends full support and solidarity to the Syrian people in their just cause to defend the national security and the regional peace.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
September 11, 2007

[EXCERPT]

12:07 p.m. EDT

MR. MCCORMACK: Good afternoon, everybody. I don't have anything to start off with, so we can get right into your questions. Who would like to begin? Sylvie?

QUESTION: Can you confirm that Israel carried an airstrike inside Syria last week, targeting a shipment of arms?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, I think you should talk to the Syrian Government or the Israeli Government about that.

QUESTION: Did -- the Israelis didn't inform you of any operation in --

MR. MCCORMACK: If -- any questions -- any questions about this story you can talk to the Israeli Government about.

Okay, good. We're done. (Laughter.) Ah, there you are.

<http://www.theinsider.org/news/article.asp?id=2605>

North Korea condemns Israel for sending fighter jets to violate Syria's airspace

N. Korea condemns Israeli 'provocation'

11 September 2007

North Korea yesterday lashed out at Israel for invading Syrian airspace last Thursday, its official news agency said.

"This is a very dangerous provocation little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security," a spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying by the Korean Central News Agency.

"The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly denounces the above-said intrusion and extends full support and solidarity to the Syrian people in their just cause to defend the national security and the regional peace," he added.

Syrian air defenses opened fire on Israeli aircraft after they flew over northern Syria and dropped ammunition on September 6, according to Syria's official media.

North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Il, also sent greetings yesterday to Syrian President Bashar Assad for his 42nd birthday. Kim wished Assad good health, happiness and greater success in his responsibility-heavy work.

The message stated: "Today the Syrian people under your leadership is striving to defend the country's sovereignty and honor and to build a modern society, while meeting all challenges and overcoming all difficulties, and making a positive contribution to a fair and comprehensive resolution of the Middle Eastern problem."

The message said with satisfaction that the friendship and cooperation between the two countries are growing steadily stronger.

SOURCE

Haaretz, "N. Korea condemns Israeli 'provocation'", 11 September 2007.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/903376.html>

Syrian FM: Israel dropped live ammo

By Yoav Stern and Assaf Uni Haaretz Correspondents and Agencies

Tue., September 11, 2007 Elul 28, 5767

The Israeli warplanes that violated Syria's airspace last week dropped live ammunition on Syrian soil, Damascus' foreign minister said yesterday, adding that Israel's decision not to comment was "appropriate."

"Israel used live ammunition in a deliberate and hostile attack," Minister Walid Moallem said at a news conference during an official visit to Turkey.

His Turkish counterpart, Ali Babacan, demanded a quick explanation from Israel over fuel tanks found near the Syrian border in the incident last Thursday, which he said involved violation of Turkish airspace by Israeli jets. Israel is still not commenting on the incident.

"All countries in the region must show respect to all countries' sovereignty and avoid acts that lead to tensions," Babacan said. "Otherwise, tensions would be fueled, and peace and stability in the region might be harmed."

European diplomats who met with Moallem on Sunday in Damascus quoted him as saying that Israel's decision not to comment on the incident was appropriate, given the circumstances. Moallem reportedly told the Europeans that he expected Israel to apologize "through the usual channels."

In Ankara, Moallem went on to reveal the details of the alleged strike, which according to him resulted in no casualties or damage to property. Moallem said that three Israeli planes fired four missiles at targets on the ground in the Dayr al-Zur district in eastern Syria, after entering Syrian airspace from the Mediterranean.

The Syrian foreign minister said the Syrian anti-aircraft radar system detected the planes when they were deep inside Syrian territory. He added the planes released their missiles very shortly after they were detected.

Despite the apparent outrage in Damascus over the incident, European diplomats who met with Moallem told Haaretz that they had received the impression that Syria would not retaliate militarily.

"Moallem did not demand the European Union to condemn the Israeli action, nor did he indicate that Syria would demand the United Nations Security Council hold a discussion on the matter," one European diplomat told Haaretz. "We got the impression that Syria is not interested in seeing this incident escalate."

The London-based daily Al-Hayyat reported yesterday that Israel had conveyed a calming message to Damascus via European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana. The paper quoted Moallem as saying that Solana informed him on Wednesday night during a meeting in Cairo that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Solana that Israel will decrease its military presence in the Golan Heights.

Moallem reportedly said that Solana had informed him of Israel's intention to withdraw most Israel Defense Forces troops stationed in the area to ease increasing tensions with Syria.

Moallem reportedly told the diplomats that the message was just a "preparation for the penetration of planes into Syrian skies, just hours later."

Haaretz has learned that Moallem told European diplomats that the calming message before the strike proved that Israel was interested in war rather than peace.

The next day Moallem called Solana, reports Al-Hayyat, to inform him of the incident, and told him that it came in direct contrast to Olmert's message and to Israel's declarations that it has peaceful intentions.

Meanwhile, former MK Azmi Bishara said he believes Israel carried out a military operation in Syria.

"Without getting carried away in speculation, this was an aerial operation, not an [airspace] violation that's meant to send a message," he wrote in an article published on the Syrian Web site Sham-Fares. Bishara wrote that the operation could have dire consequences, and that some officials in Lebanon or Syria could view it as a pretext to go to war.

The former Balad chairman added that Israel's refusal to comment on the issue was unusual. "Israel has wrapped itself in silence, imposing it on its most talkative politicians," he wrote. "Israel realizes the quiet after the storm could become the quiet before the storm."

Bishara said the strike might have been directed against a number of targets, such as people or units involved with arms smuggling, anti-aircraft systems or missile systems.

Alternatively, Bishara wrote, Israel may have been testing Syrian air defenses in order to map out a route for an air strike on Iran.

Barak Ravid adds: At a joint news conference in Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni asked her Portuguese counterpart to refrain from commenting on the incident. After Minister Luis Amado, whose country currently holds the presidency of the European Union, was asked for the EU's stance on the incident, Livni interrupted the discussion and signaled to Amado not to answer.

"I do not believe any statement by any party could help matters," Livni explained before moving on to the next question. "I find it ponderous that you should expect me to comment on this. You already know our position on the subject."

<http://web.israelinsider.com/Articles/Briefs/12035.htm>

Syrian FM said Israel's silence regarding alleged flyover is "appropriate"

By: Israel Insider staff

Published: September 11, 2007

According to European diplomats, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem does not want tensions to escalate over allegations that the IAF violated Syrian airspace and dropped ammunition, according to Haaretz. Moallem did note, however, that the IAF allegedly fired missiles at targets on the ground, the diplomats said.

The foreign minister also said that Israel's vow of silence regarding the incident was appropriate due to the circumstances, according to the European diplomats that met with Moallem on Sunday [2007-09-09] in Damascus.

Moallem reportedly told the diplomats that he expected Israel to apologize "through the usual channels."

"Moallem did not demand the European Union to condemn the Israeli action, nor did he indicate that Syria would demand the United Nations Security Council hold a discussion on the matter," one European diplomat told the paper. "We got the impression that Syria is not interested in seeing this incident escalate."

Syria lodges protest against Israeli overflights (Roundup)

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

Middle East News

Sep 11, 2007, 20:16 GMT

New York - Syria has protested to the UN Security Council that Israeli overflights of its territory may result in 'tragic uncontrollable consequences,' the UN said Tuesday [2007-09-11].

The protest note to the French Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, president of the council, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called the overflights 'aggressive Israeli violations' of Syrian territory.

The UN said the letter of protest, written in Arabic, was being translated into English and it declined to comment until the translation was completed and distributed to the council's 15 members. But a short English translation was provided to Deutsche Press-Agentur dpa.

'While warning Israel of the consequences following this blatant aggression, Syria insists that the continuous silence of the international community vis-a-vis these Israeli unlawful practices would expose the region and the international peace and security to tragic uncontrollable consequences,' Syrian Ambassador Bashar al-Jaafari said in the letter.

Syria has claimed that Israel flew jet overflights of its territory in past weeks and news reports said at one point that Israeli jetfighters were fired upon inside Syrian airspace. But the reports were not confirmed.

Ban this week urged countries in the Middle East to show restraint.

'I would urge the Israeli authorities and all other authorities in the region to exercise maximum restraint in managing this already very fragile, uncertain security situation in the region,' Ban said when asked about his reaction to the Syrian charges of Israeli overflights.

Ban said he was still waiting for 'full clarifications' about the situation from the parties involved before making any decision.

'IAF targeted Iranian weapons in Syria'

By YAAKOV KATZ, JPOST.COM STAFF, AND AP

The Jerusalem Post

Sep 11, 2007 18:31 | Updated Sep 12, 2007 23:38

Israeli warplanes targeted weapons destined for Hizbullah in a strike last week in northeastern Syria, a US government official said Wednesday, even as Israel remained silent over the incident.

The official said the target in the strike last Thursday was a site where Israel believed Syria was storing weapons from Iran heading for the Lebanese terrorist group.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the information involves intelligence gathering and because of the sensitivity of the situation.

Officials in Washington declined for several days to say whether they were aware of the strike, then on Tuesday confirmed they had intelligence indicating it had taken place.



Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al Moallem's version of the alleged IAF overflight:
At 1:30 a.m. on Wednesday Israeli planes entered Syria from the Mediterranean (1); 50 km. east of Dayr az Zawr the jets were discovered by Syrian anti-aircraft batteries (2) and as they were discovered, fired four missiles at ground targets (3); the jets then left Syria and passed near the Turkish border (4).

A graphic showing the Syrian foreign minister's version of events.

Photo: Rendering by Jonathan Beck

Meanwhile, Syria's UN Ambassador, Bashar Ja'afari, denied the reports on Wednesday, claiming the Israeli jets escaped without hitting their target.

"This is, as we say in French, blah blah," Ja'afari told reporters. "This is nonsense. This is unfounded statement. It is not true because they have already violated the airspace of a country, a member state of the United Nations."

"It's not up to the Israelis or anybody else to assess what we have in Syria and what we don't have," he said.

Ja'afari said it was also "totally wrong" because the Israelis could not find any target in Syria. That is because they were "running away" after coming under fire from Syrian air defenses and dropped their ammunition and extra fuel tanks to lighten the load, he said.

The Syrian ambassador sent identical letters to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the president of the Security Council accusing Israel of "flagrant defiance of international law," the UN Charter and council resolutions.

While Syria has repeatedly affirmed its desire for "a just and comprehensive peace in the region," Ja'afari accused Israel of "choosing aggression and escalation instead of espousing the option of peace" and committing "war crimes."

"In warning the Israeli government of the consequences of such blatant aggression, Syria emphasizes that if the international community persists in disregarding these Israeli actions in breach of international law, that is likely to subject the region and international peace and security to serious consequences that may be difficult to control," he said in the letter, circulated Wednesday.

Ja'afari told reporters Wednesday that Israel carried out the "provocative act ... in the middle of the huge momentum with regard to the peace process in the Middle East."

"We think the Israeli purpose behind doing such an aggressive act is to torpedo the peace process, to torpedo the idea of holding an international conference with the idea of having a comprehensive peace," he said. "So the issue in itself might not be a pure military one, but having a very important diplomatic and political background."

The letters did not ask the Security Council to take any action, but Ja'afari said Syria expects both the council and the secretary-general to react.

"What's happened is a violation of the Charter, a violation of the sovereignty of a member state of United Nations, and about the secretary-general and Security Council should assume their responsibilities by reaction to such an aggressive act," he said. "They should react because this is their duties, this is their job. It's not up to me to dictate to them what to say."

When Israeli aircraft attacked a Syrian village in October 2003, Ja'afari recalled that the secretary-general denounced the attack and the Security Council condemned it.

"We are waiting for serious outcomes, equal, at least, to the gravity of what happened," he said.

France's UN Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert said the letter was circulated to all 15 members but it was not discussed at a meeting on Wednesday. Diplomats said this was because the Syrians did not ask for any action.

On Tuesday, CNN reported that Israel Air Force jets that allegedly infiltrated Syrian airspace early last Thursday apparently bombed an Iranian arms shipment that was being transferred to Hizbullah, Tuesday.

A ground operation may also have been part of the foray, according to the network. Jerusalem refused to confirm or deny the report.

CNN said the operation involved ground forces and that the aerial strike left "a great hole in the desert." Although it did not name a specific source, the network cited "US government officials." The jets have been identified by the Turkish authorities as IAF F15Is, Israel's long-range bomber, after fuel tanks were found in Turkish territory.

The CNN report said the IAF's targets were likely weaponry delivered to Syria that was possibly intended for use by Hizbullah.

CNN's chief international correspondent, Christiane Amanpour, delivered the report and quoted sources saying that Israel was "very happy" with the results of the operation.

A US military official described the Israeli incursion as an air strike "deep into Syria" that succeeded in hitting a target. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because it was an intelligence issue, said he did not know what that target was.

Syria has called the incursion a "hostile act," but has been largely silent on the details of what happened. Israeli officials have refused to comment.

On Thursday, Syria said its air defense systems had fired on IAF aircraft that had infiltrated its airspace near the coastal city of Latakia.

The government, including the Prime Minister's Office and the IDF, maintained their policy of refusing to comment on the incident following the CNN report.

Syria has been known to be transferring weapons of its own, as well as arms from Iran, to Hizbullah.

During the Second Lebanon War, the IDF discovered a wide range of antitank missiles and short-range rockets being used by Hizbullah that had originated in Syria. Several Iranian-made missiles were also in Hizbullah hands before the war, but these were mostly destroyed by the IDF before being fired at Israel.

Over the upcoming holidays, the IDF will continue to maintain a high level of alert along the Syrian border amid fears that Damascus will respond to the alleged flyover. Defense officials said earlier this week that tensions between the countries had begun to subside, but that there was a need to maintain a high alert "just in case."

Syria lodges UN complaint against Israel

By AFP

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

[EXCERPT]

Syria lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations Tuesday [2007-09-11] over a "flagrant violation" of its airspace last week by Israeli warplanes, which dropped munitions on its territory.

Syria's UN envoy Bashar Jaafari said his government was "drawing attention to this flagrant violation by Israel of its airspace and to its aggression against the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic in clear and brazen defiance of international law".

In identical letters to UN chief Ban Ki-moon and to French Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, the current president of the Security Council, Jaafari said the Israeli planes last Thursday crossed Syria's northern frontier and dropped "some munitions without managing to cause any human casualties or material damage".

The Israeli incursion ratcheted up tension between the neighboring foes.

The Syrian letter, obtained by AFP, said the Jewish state had deliberately committed "other similar crimes including the bombing of Syrian civilian facilities in 2003".

"If the international community persists in disregarding these Israeli actions in breach of international law, that is likely to subject the region and international peace and security to serious consequences that may be difficult to control," Jaafari noted.

In an interview with an Italian newspaper published Saturday, Syrian Vice President Faruq al-Shara said his country was mulling a "series of responses" to the Israeli air violations.

A US defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity Tuesday, said Israel carried out the air strike well inside Syria last week, apparently to send Damascus a message not to rearm Lebanon's Hezbollah militia.

[deletia]

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gM4eQSY4r2aqoKqeK3M8io5yc9zw>

Israel keeps up blackout on mystery Syria air strike

Sep 12, 2007

JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel on Wednesday maintained an official blackout on an apparent strike by its warplanes on Syria, amid reports that the mysterious attack targeted weapons financed by arch-foe Iran.

No official Israeli comment was issued on allegations that its military carried out an attack deep inside Syria last Thursday, despite confirmation of a strike by a defence official of Israel's main ally the United States.

Citing anonymous Israeli sources, an Arab Israeli newspaper, the Assennara, said on Wednesday that the jets "bombed in northern Syria a Syrian-Iranian missile base financed by Iran.... It appears that the base was completely destroyed."

The previous day CNN reported that the strike, which could also have involved the use of ground forces, was believed to have targeted weapons either coming into Syria or moving through Syria from Iran to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shiite militia that Israel fought in a war last year.

The New York Times also reported on Wednesday that Israel thinks Syria and Iran are buying nuclear material from North Korea and had recently carried out reconnaissance flights over Syria, taking pictures of possible nuclear installations.

A US administration official said Israeli officials believe that North Korea might be unloading some of its nuclear material on Syria, the newspaper said.

"The Israelis think North Korea is selling to Iran and Syria what little they have left," the unidentified official was quoted as saying.

Syria on Tuesday lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations over the "flagrant violation" of its airspace in the early hours of September 6, when it said its air defences opened fire on Israeli warplanes flying over the northeast of the country.

Earlier a US defence official said that Israel had carried out an air strike as a warning to Damascus.

"It wasn't big. It was a quick strike. They were engaged by the Syrians, they dropped their ordnance and scooted out of there," said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

He said he did not know the target of the strike, but said the US military believed it was aimed at sending a message to the Syrians over their support for Hezbollah.

"The Israelis are trying to tell the Syrians: 'Don't support a resurgence of Hezbollah in Lebanon'."

Israeli officials have refused to comment on the report, as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "specifically instructed ministers not to talk about the incident related to Syria at all," a senior Israeli government official told AFP earlier this week.

This silence -- uncharacteristic in a nation notorious for media leaks -- continued on Wednesday, with even visiting French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner saying he was also being kept in the dark.

"I asked my hosts and they did not inform me," Kouchner told reporters in Jerusalem when asked about the reported strike, as he wrapped up his first visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

"If indeed... they have bombed a weapons convoy which was headed to Lebanon, we understand why they would do it," he said. "Everybody in Lebanon knows that large quantities of weapons arrive from the Syrian border."

Olmert bypassed his traditional interviews with Israeli newspapers ahead of the Jewish New Year that starts at sundown on Wednesday, leaving President Shimon Peres to mention Syria in only general terms.

"The central problem with Syria is Lebanon -- the question is to know whether Lebanon will be Lebanese or Iranian," Peres told public television. "The Syrians support Hezbollah and provide them with arms. As long as they continue on this route there will be tension in the air."

And Sylvan Shalom, a former foreign minister, told army radio: "Syria should draw the lessons from what happened and change its attitude to avoid being completely in the hands of Iran."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/12/world/middleeast/12syria.html>

U.S. Confirms Israeli Strikes Hit Syrian Target Last Week

By MARK MAZZETTI and HELENE COOPER

September 12, 2007

WASHINGTON, Sept. 11 — After days of silence from the Israeli government, American officials confirmed Tuesday [2007-09-11] that Israeli warplanes launched airstrikes inside Syria last week, the first such attack since 2003.

A Defense Department official said Israeli jets had struck at least one target in northeastern Syria last Thursday, but the official said it was still unclear exactly what the jets hit and the extent of the bombing damage.

Syria has lodged a protest at the United Nations in response to the airstrike, accusing Israel of “flagrant violation” of its airspace. But Israel’s government has repeatedly declined to comment on the matter.

Officials in Washington said that the most likely targets of the raid were weapons caches that Israel’s government believes Iran has been sending the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah through Syria. Iran and Syria are Hezbollah’s primary benefactors, and American intelligence officials say a steady flow of munitions from Iran runs through Syria and into Lebanon.

In the summer of 2006, during fighting between Israeli and Hezbollah forces, the militant group fired hundreds of missiles into Israel, surprising Israel with the extent and sophistication of its arsenal. Israel has tried repeatedly to get the United Nations to prevent the arms shipments across the Syria-Lebanon border.

One Bush administration official said Israel had recently carried out reconnaissance flights over Syria, taking pictures of possible nuclear installations that Israeli officials believed might have been supplied with material from North Korea. The administration official said Israeli officials believed that North Korea might be unloading some of its nuclear material on Syria.

“The Israelis think North Korea is selling to Iran and Syria what little they have left,” the official said. He said it was unclear whether the Israeli strike had produced any evidence that might validate that belief.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing a military action by another government.

In a letter circulated to members of the Security Council on Tuesday, Syria’s ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Jaafari, said Israel dropped munitions though they did not cause any “material damage.”

Syria made its protest via Qatar, the Arab representative on the Security Council, United Nations officials said. Security Council representatives discussed the issue on Tuesday, but did not come to any conclusions.

Neither Israel nor the United States has spoken publicly on the airstrikes. The State Department spokesman, Sean D. McCormack, referred all questions to Israel and Syria, and a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington declined to comment.

Tensions between Israel and Syria have escalated over the past year, since the end of the Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon, and both countries remain in a heightened state of alert along their common border.

Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, has said that if Israel is not willing to resume negotiations for the return of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the alternative would be to try to regain the territory by force.

Formal peace talks between Israel and Syria broke down in 2000.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/902928.html>

CNN: Israeli gov't 'very happy with success' of IAF strike on Syria

By Yoav Stern and Assaf Uni, Haaretz Correspondents, Haaretz Service and News Agencies

Last update - 03:50 **12/09/2007**

The CNN television network reported Tuesday [2007-09-11] that Israel is happy with the results of an alleged Israel Air Force strike last week in Syrian territory.

Quoting sources in the United States and the region, CNN said, "The Israeli government is very happy with the success of the operation."

European diplomats quoted Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem as saying Monday [10 September 2007] that the IAF warplanes that violated Syria's airspace fired missiles at targets on the ground, but did not cause any damage.

According to the CNN report, the sources said the IAF indeed carried out a strike on a target in Syria, adding that the operation "may have also involved Israeli ground forces who directed the air strike."

CNN quoted the sources as saying the strike, which possibly targeted an arms transfer from Iran to Hezbollah through Syria, "left a big hole in the desert."

The CNN report said U.S. government and military sources have confirmed the airstrike, and said that "they are happy to have Israel carry the message to both Syria and Iran that they can get in and out and strike when necessary."

Also Tuesday [11 September 2007], Syria lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations about an "aggression and violation of sovereignty" over the incident, the country's ambassador to the UN said Tuesday.

Syria's UN ambassador, Bashar al-Jaafari, said Damascus made its complaint in two letters to the UN secretary general and the president of the Security Council. The letters said the IAF action was in violation of the 1974 disengagement agreement that was reached after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Al-Jaafari also denied that Israel had landed troops on the ground inside Syria. "This is absolutely not true," he said, adding the reports were an attempt to show that Israel could land troops wherever it wants.

"Israel is seeking military escalation. We are exerting efforts so that we don't fall into this trap. We are dealing with the matter with utmost keenness, precision and responsibility," he added.

Meanwhile on Tuesday [11 September 2007], China's Xinhua news agency said North Korea had issued a harsh condemnation of the IAF incursion into Syrian airspace.

According to the report, the Korean Central News Agency quoted a spokesman for North Korea's Foreign Ministry as saying, "This is a very dangerous provocation little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security."

"The DPRK strongly denounces the above-said intrusion and extends full support and solidarity to the Syrian people in their just cause to defend the national security and the regional peace," the spokesman reportedly added.

European diplomats who met with Moallem on Sunday in Damascus quoted him as saying that Israel's decision not to comment on the incident was appropriate, given the circumstances. Moallem reportedly told the Europeans that he expected Israel to apologize "through the usual channels."

In Ankara for an official visit, Moallem went on to reveal the details of the alleged strike, which according to him resulted in no casualties or damage to property. Moallem said that three Israeli planes fired four missiles at targets on the ground in the Dayr al-Zur district in eastern Syria, after entering Syrian airspace from the Mediterranean.

The Syrian foreign minister said the Syrian anti-aircraft radar system detected the planes when they were deep inside Syrian territory. He added the planes released their missiles very shortly after they were detected.

Despite the apparent outrage in Damascus over the incident, European diplomats who met with Moallem told Haaretz that they had received the impression that Syria would not retaliate militarily.

"Moallem did not demand the European Union to condemn the Israeli action, nor did he indicate that Syria would demand the United Nations Security Council hold a discussion on the matter," one European diplomat told Haaretz. "We got the impression that Syria is not interested in seeing this incident escalate."

'Turkey gave Israel intel on Syria'

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Sep 13, 2007 19:39 | Updated Sep 15, 2007 16:36

Turkey provided Israel with intelligence on Syria prior to last week's alleged IAF flyover into the country, Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jarida claimed on Thursday.

According to the report, the country had a central role in delivering precise information regarding targets in Syria that were to be hit by Israeli planes. Further, the report claimed that the Israeli pilots were given authorization by the Turkish army to use its airspace in order to carry out the operation.

Sources told Al-Jarida that Turkish intelligence did not coordinate the move with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Coordination of the [release of information] occurred far away from the political echelon," it said.

The Israeli and Turkish armies share a strong relationship that has been felt through several joint exercises and weapons sales.

On Saturday, an unnamed Turkish official demanded explanations from Israel after fuel tanks allegedly dropped by Israel F-15I planes who were conducting a foray into Syrian airspace, were found on the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkish paper Hurriyet reported that Turkey was demanding whether the Israeli planes also passed over its own airspace.

Syria Might Be Seeking Nuclear Weapons Technology Through North Korea, Sources Say

Thursday, **September 13, 2007**

By James Rosen

WASHINGTON — U.S. intelligence officials have developed evidence showing that North Korea is helping Syria to develop a nuclear program for weapons purposes, FOX News has learned in recent interviews with sources who have knowledge of the situation.

Syrians emphatically denied the claim on Thursday.

The details of the claims are vague, but one source told FOX News in late August that the North Koreans had sold the Syrians a nuclear facility, most likely related to uranium enrichment. Enriched uranium is necessary both for nuclear power and nuclear weapons uses. The United States accuses Syria of assisting terrorist groups including Hezbollah.

A source said the case has been assigned the internal code name, "Orchard," and the evidence was developed through Israeli channels, possibly with the assistance of U.S. aerial photography.

Other sources, however, questioned Syria's ability to afford such a pricey venture. Those sources said that in recent discussions with U.S. intelligence officials, the officials had spoken of North Korea having sent nuclear scientists, engineers, and other personnel with relevant expertise to Damascus.

"I've noticed more and more people [in the intelligence community] talking about people being sent over [from North Korea to Syria]," one high-ranking former National Security Council official said.

The former NSC official also said North Korea is "definitely still procuring [equipment] for its HEU [highly enriched uranium] program. It's not as if they are viewing the talks as some kind of 'time out' on their HEU work." This would be in direct contrast with efforts in the Six-Party talks to denuclearize the Korean peninsula .

Most of two dozen sources spoken to over the past three weeks, including current and former Bush administration officials, foreign diplomats, and nonproliferation experts, also said they have heard discussions about nuclear cooperation in one form or another between Syria and North Korea.

A spokesman for the Syrian embassy on Thursday called the allegations "absurd."

"This is an incredibly absurd and ridiculously fabricated story. Those who create such lies are misleading the American public and end-up undermining US national interest in a way reminiscent of what happened in Iraq previously. In fact, it is a shame that serious news outlets would waste time and space on such a fictitious idea," said embassy spokesman Ahmed Salkini.

N. Korea, Syria May Be at Work on Nuclear Facility

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, September 13, 2007; Page A12

North Korea may be cooperating with Syria on some sort of nuclear facility in Syria, according to new intelligence the United States has gathered over the past six months, sources said. The evidence, said to come primarily from Israel, includes dramatic satellite imagery that led some U.S. officials to believe that the facility could be used to produce material for nuclear weapons.

The new information, particularly images received in the past 30 days, has been restricted to a few senior officials under the instructions of national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley, leaving many in the intelligence community unaware of it or uncertain of its significance, said the sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Some cautioned that initial reports of suspicious activity are frequently reevaluated over time and were skeptical that North Korea and Syria, which have cooperated on missile technology, would have a joint venture in the nuclear arena.

A White House spokesman and the Israeli Embassy declined to comment yesterday after several days of inquiries. A Syrian Embassy spokesman said he could not immediately provide a statement.

The new intelligence comes at an awkward moment for the Bush administration, which since the beginning of the year has pursued an agreement with North Korea on ending its nuclear weapons programs. U.S. and North Korean officials held talks last week in Geneva on the steps needed to normalize relations, and this week a delegation of U.S., Russian and Chinese experts visited North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear facility to consider ways to disable it. The New York Times first reported on the intelligence linking North Korea and Syria yesterday.

At the Geneva talks, North Korea indicated a willingness to satisfy U.S. questions about an alleged uranium-enrichment program that started the crisis over its nuclear ambitions, the sources said. U.S. officials have said that North Korean officials acknowledged the program in 2002, but Pyongyang subsequently denied doing so. In the meantime, it restarted a plutonium facility at Yongbyon and harvested enough weapons-grade material for as many as 10 nuclear weapons. In October, it tested a nuclear device.

In talks in Beijing in March 2003, a North Korean official pulled aside his American counterpart and threatened to "transfer" nuclear material to other countries. President Bush has said that passing North Korean nuclear technology to other parties would cross the line.

Israel conducted a mysterious raid last week against targets in Syria. The Israeli government has refused to divulge any details, but a former Israeli official said he had been told that it was an attack against a facility capable of making unconventional weapons.

Others have speculated that Israel was testing Syria's air defenses in preparation for a raid on Iran or that Israel was targeting weapons destined for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Bashar Jaafari, the Syrian ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters that the idea of a Hezbollah connection was ridiculous.

Syria has signed the nuclear nonproliferation treaty but has not agreed to an additional protocol that would allow for enhanced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. GlobalSecurity.org, which offers information on weapons of mass destruction, said that "although Syria has long been cited as posing a nuclear proliferation risk, the country seems to have been too strapped for cash to get far."

Syria has a Chinese-supplied "miniature" research reactor at Dayr al-Hajar, but has been unable to obtain larger reactors because of international pressure on potential sellers.

John R. Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a critic of the administration's dealings with North Korea, said that given North Korea's trade in missiles with Syria, it is "legitimate to ask questions about whether that cooperation extends on the nuclear side as well."

Israel 'Will Pay a Price'

Ambassador Imad Moustapha, Syria's envoy to Washington, gives his account of a mysterious Israeli air raid and discusses whether Syria will retaliate.

Jeffrey Bartholet

Newsweek Web Exclusive

Sep 14, 2007 | Updated: 2:00 p.m. ET Sep 17, 2007

Israel has imposed strict military censorship over news of a recent air strike deep inside Syrian territory. U.S. officials have confirmed that an air strike did take place on Sept. 6 but have not provided further details. Vaguely sourced reports, including accounts of a Syrian-North Korean nuclear program that have yet to be substantiated, are seeping into the media. What do the Syrians have to say about it? NEWSWEEK's Jeffrey Bartholet sat down with Syria's ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, to get his version of events.

NEWSWEEK: We're told the [Israeli] target was in a place called Dayr az Zawr.

Imad Moustapha: No, Dayr az Zawr is a major city; it was not targeted. The Israeli planes threw their ammunition close to Dayr az Zawr, but outside Dayr az Zawr, and then they made a U-turn and threw their reserve fuel tanks. And because they were flying above the Syria-Turkish border, they threw those on the Turkish side of the border. Nothing was damaged.

What were they bombing?

They didn't bomb anything. Once they were spotted by our defense systems and we started attacking them, they threw their ammunition because this makes them lighter. And they threw their additional fuel tanks, which were not empty by the way, and they made a U-turn and they left. You've got to understand, they were flying in the extreme northern part of Syria, on the Syrian-Turkish border.

How many bombs fell and what did they fall on?

They didn't hit anything. They just fell on wasteland.

So no casualties?

No, nothing.

No physical damage to structures?

No. Just on the ground. And Turkey protested about the two fuel tanks that fell on the Turkish side.

There have been reports, unsubstantiated at present, that what was targeted was some kind of nuclear North Korean-Syrian cooperation project.

Those reports are absolutely, totally, fundamentally ridiculous and untrue. There are no nuclear North Korean-Syrian facilities whatsoever in Syria ... We know the game. [After the fall of

Baghdad] some were claiming that Saddam's WMDs were being smuggled to Syria. This is not a new story. Every now and then we hear about nuclear materials being transferred to Syria.

What is the relationship between North Korea and Syria right now? It was noticed that North Korea immediately issued a strong and public denunciation of the Israeli attack, which seemed a bit unusual, given that North Korea is thousands of miles away.

People here can be very selective. The Lebanese government made such an announcement, Turkey made such an announcement, Indonesia made such an announcement. North Korea has very few friends around the world, and we have friendly relations with North Korea.

Do you have trade relations?

Very little actual relations ... [The relationship] is real. We're not denying it. There's nothing to hide.

Also a trade in missiles, in the past anyway. Scuds.

I'm not privy to military details. I leave that to military experts to discuss. What I am saying is the following: There is nothing sinister. To talk about a Syrian-North Korean nuclear plant is really, really sad, because it reminds me of the sort of stories that used to be fabricated here in the United States before the Iraq war, about Iraq's WMDs and such things. You would think America has learned its lesson, that it won't buy such stories anymore. And then you are astonished when you see mainstream [media] outlets publishing such stories. Such short-term memory for the American media.

There was an International Atomic Energy Commission inspection of Syria in 2003 that gave it a clean—

We cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Commission.

There was another unsubstantiated report that the target was a joint Iranian-Syrian missile plant.

And there was a third report that that was a convoy taking arms to Hizbullah. All are ridiculous. In northeastern Syria they'd spot a convoy taking arms to Hizbullah?

The reason some in the media have been speculating, I think, is because Israeli censors are enforcing a strict clampdown and people who know something have suggested that this raid was a big deal, that something was targeted and that what was targeted was hit.

Israel usually is very boastful, very arrogant. Usually when they do something they boast about how spectacular their operation was, how successful they were. This time it's only linkages here and there by people who claim this and that. Having said this, I'm not belittling the gravity of the Israeli provocation. It has changed dramatically the situation between us. They were sending us messages the last three months that they don't want to further escalate tensions between Syria and Israel, they do not have plans of hostile intent for Syria. They were saying this publicly, on the record. Then they send their jet fighters into Syrian sovereign airspace. I think this is a very serious provocation.

On that point, Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa told an Italian newspaper that Damascus will retaliate.

Let us be honest with each other. Every action in the world creates a reaction. So for anyone to imagine that Syria will look at what happened and say, 'Well, let's just let things pass by' is unrealistic. But this doesn't mean that Syria will immediately retaliate in kind, exactly the same way. We have our own national priorities ... Syria has been very, very clear about its desire to end the conflict in the Middle East through negotiations and the peaceful approach, based on the land-for-peace principle. We are committed to this. Having said this, until this happens we are in a state of war with Israel. And there are different ways to retaliate. It doesn't necessarily have to be the same [method].

Can you give me a couple of examples?

I'm not a military expert. But anyone who has studied the situation in the Middle East will understand. They want to occupy our territories, and they will pay a price for this.

Tell me about the diplomatic efforts that surrounded this. Did U.S. officials contact you; did you contact U.S. Officials?

No, not at all. The United States continues to provide blanket support for Israel, no matter what Israel does. In a way, they have expressed tacit approval. But we have launched an official complaint to the United Nations Security Council. We have informed the Arab League, the Europeans, Russia, China ... and we have publicly said that we reserve our right to retaliate in a way we choose.

Have you filed any complaint with Washington?

It would be a waste of time. I don't think Washington today has a mindset that would allow it to understand how such grave actions can lead to further deterioration in the Middle East.

What is the situation with U.S.-Syrian relations at this point? There was a lot of intelligence cooperation, then there was a long cold spell, and then there seemed to be a little bit of an opening in the winter and spring this year.

Time and again, we have told the United States that we believe in cooperation. We can address the issues, find common ground, brainstorm for creative solutions. But in a way, there is no dialogue today between Syria and the United States. We are not happy about this. We believe we need good relations with the United States. No resolution of the [Arab-Israeli conflict] can take place without the direct, strong involvement of the United States. Having said this, we have a problem in Iraq. It is in our own national interest to help stabilize the situation in Iraq. It's such a dangerous situation. And we are overrun with over 1.5 million Iraqi refugees. The stakes are very high. Time and again we have told the United States that it is better to stop this propaganda war with us and sit with us and see how we can help toward stabilizing the situation.

The other problem between Syria and the United States is Lebanon.

Are you sure it's a problem between us and the United States? I think it's a problem over what Israel wants in the Middle East.

One problem is that many opponents of Syrian policy in Lebanon have been assassinated. [Former prime minister] Rafik Hariri and—

Do you think Rafik Hariri was an opponent of Syria in Lebanon? He was the prime minister of Lebanon when we were in Lebanon. All the people who badmouth us today used to be close allies of the so-called "evil occupation of Syria in Lebanon." That is preposterous.

There have been a number of people who have been assassinated, including journalists.

Look, listen, these assassinations are terrible crimes. There is a United Nations commission that is investigating this crime ... These are serious, grave issues. Of course we say "No, we didn't do this." Try to understand. When an assassination takes place, within a minute we are accused of it. Tremendous political damage is inflicted on us. And yet in an extremely stupid way we are supposed to have assassinated one person after another? ... Why? Something is illogical about this. Let the U.N. investigation decide who killed these guys.

During the recent tensions, was there a moment when the Syrian government considered military retaliation [against Israel], firing missiles or—

We have not forfeited our right to retaliate. But as I have said, we don't necessarily have to retaliate in the same way that Israel has attacked. I don't know exactly the nature of this retaliation. It can happen in various ways, sometimes in asymmetrical ways. What I'm trying to say is the following: We live in a state of war with Israel. This is not the first act of hostility between Syria and Israel ... The problem is that sometimes a foolish action can provoke terrible consequences.

There was diplomacy [before the attack], when Israel was sending what were described as "calming" signals. There was tension, then a calming period, then this happened. Can you describe that period prior to the attack?

I can tell you that Israel was creating an atmosphere of brinkmanship in the region. There were unprecedentedly large maneuvers in the occupied Syrian Golan. And of course the Syrians took note of this and were in a high state of preparedness. And then the Israelis, and personally [Prime Minister] Ehud Olmert, sent personal public messages—both publicly and to European officials—in which he said Syria shouldn't be concerned, Israel doesn't intend to provoke Syria or attack Syria ... Having noted this, Syria is not a gullible country. As long as there is no peace agreement, we have to always be prepared.

Is it possible that Syria will decide that it's in its national interests not to respond?

That would not serve our national interests. That would be detrimental to our national interests, because it would encourage Israel to repeat the same intrusions and operations. As I have said, every reaction creates a reaction. If Israel calculates that they can do what they want, they're making a big mistake, just as they made a mistake last summer [in 2006, by waging war against Hezbollah in Lebanon].

So if the headline on this interview was "Syria Will Retaliate," that would not be inaccurate?

What I have said is that this is a long-term war. States have different approaches to things. What I'm trying to say is that Israel will not be permitted to do whatever it does without paying a price for it.

So Israel will pay a price.

It will. And there will always be a price for everything.

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8RLAJOG3&show_article=1&catnum=2

U.S.: Syria on Nuclear Watch List

Sep 14 [2007] 10:31 AM US/Eastern

By NICOLE WINFIELD

Associated Press Writer

ROME (AP) - A senior U.S. nuclear official said Friday that North Koreans were in Syria and that the government in Damascus may have had contacts with "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment.

Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation policy, did not name the suppliers, but said there were North Koreans in Syria and that he could not exclude that the network run by the disgraced Pakistan nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan may have been involved.

Semmel was responding to questions about an Israeli airstrike in northern Syria last week. Neither side has explained what exactly happened, but a U.S. government official confirmed that Israeli warplanes were targeting weapons from Iran and destined for Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

The Washington Post reported Thursday that Israel had gathered satellite imagery showing possible North Korean cooperation with Syria on a nuclear facility.

Semmel, who is in Italy for a meeting Saturday on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, said Syria was certainly on the U.S. "watch list."

"There are indicators that they do have something going on there," he said. "We do know that there are a number of foreign technicians that have been in Syria. We do know that there may have been contact between Syria and some secret suppliers for nuclear equipment. Whether anything transpired remains to be seen."

"So good foreign policy, good national security policy, would suggest that we pay very close attention to that," he said. "We're watching very closely. Obviously, the Israelis were watching very closely."

Asked if the suppliers could have been North Koreans, he said: "There are North Korean people there. There's no question about that. Just as there are a lot of North Koreans in Iraq and Iran."

Asked if the so-called Khan network, which supplied nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea, could have been involved, he said he "wouldn't exclude" it.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
September 14, 2007
12:06 p.m. EDT

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

QUESTION: Related to North Korea, are you aware of these comments that were made by the DAS -- Acting DAS for a nuclear nonproliferation policy, Mr. Semmel?

MR. MCCORMACK: You mentioned it to me. I don't know exactly what he said, but what I can tell you is that every single year the intelligence community puts out a report concerning weapons of mass destruction, the status of those programs of countries around the world. I don't have that report in front of me. It is a publicly available document. But I can tell you that that is the definitive U.S. view or assessment of the intelligence community.

QUESTION: But that report came out some time ago, correct? I mean, what he's talking about here when he says that there are North Koreans in Syria. There's no question about that.

MR. MCCORMACK: Like I said, Matt, I haven't had a chance to look at his remarks in any depth at all, so I'm not sure what --

QUESTION: Okay. Are you aware of there being a number of foreign technicians in Syria and Syrians being in contact with secret suppliers for nuclear equipment?

MR. MCCORMACK: This has been a topic that we've talked about for the past several days. And I can tell you, Matt, that certainly over the past couple of decades that we have held concerns about North Korea's nuclear program. It's well known; it's why we have the six-party talks. And we have also expressed over time our concerns about North Korea's activities in terms of dealing with A.Q. Khan and others around the globe. We've talked about that in quite some detail and some depth. Beyond that, I wouldn't have any comment about our view of North Korea, its nuclear program or any of its activities. But there's a pretty healthy public record, talking about that.

QUESTION: I understand that. But not really in relation to Syria and particularly, not in relation to Syria and nuclear --

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, there's a public record out there, Matt. I don't have it in front of me. I can't tell you what the report is. The next time we talk, I'm happy to take a meander through that report and we can talk about it in detail, but I don't have it here in front of me.

Yes.

QUESTION: Still on the same topic, if I may. I mean, you're aware of these reports that have been out this week, that are published drawing this very strong link between Syria and North Korea. Now, will this issue be on the table in any form next week, either bilaterally or amongst the six party talks?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, I've seen all the news stories that you're talking about. And you know, we've talked about what our response to those news stories is and heard a little bit of it there in response to Matt's question. But completely separately, I would say that as part of the six-party talks, the core of that is North Korea's nuclear program. That's the proximate issue that's before us right now.

What we want to get to is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. We want to be able to get North Korea to get rid of its nuclear program in all its aspects. And that also would involve any other activities outside of North Korea. So that is the core of the six-party talks. And we believe that this is the mechanism that will actually get us to that point. And that we've learned from past experience with dealing with the North Koreans and we think that having those six parties there, having that leverage, having the Chinese actively involved in these negotiations, really is the way to get to everybody's desired objective here or at least the publicly stated objective of having a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: Well, also (inaudible) the delisting issue. And wouldn't these kinds of reports, if they were true, or if there was any question raised about it -- it's a very serious allegation -- wouldn't this complicate the delisting wishes of the North Koreans?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, that's an issue that takes place and is being looked at on the basis of the facts. You're talking about delisting as a state sponsor of terrorism list?

QUESTION: Right.

MR. MCCORMACK: Chris Hill talked to the North Koreans a little bit about that, and again, we are taking a look at that in the context of any progress towards the goal that we are all talking about here: denuclearization. We have a next phase coming up and we certainly hope and we think that by the end of the year we can have the North Korean nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and the facilities disabled as well as a full listing of North Korea's nuclear program. That certainly would be progress. That would be something that has gone beyond any agreement that the international community has been able to arrive at with North Korea has gone before.

And in that context, certainly we are going to take a look at whether or not on the merits of the case we can do something about a couple issues that the North Koreans have raised: (1) the Trading with the Enemy Act and (2) the state sponsor of terrorism list. But again, we are going to take a look at that based on laws, regulations, the facts, as well as discussions with our other colleagues in the six-party talks and any progress that North Korea has made on that goal of denuclearization.

QUESTION: But you haven't really answered my question. I mean, if there's reports --

MR. MCCORMACK: What happened?

QUESTION: I don't really know. If there's any question --

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't know, take a poll. Have I answered the question? (Laughter.) I think I don't want to know the answer to that.

QUESTION: But as with any questions in the air about this possible link --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: Wouldn't that just throw a massive spanner in the works with this delisting?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, again, the whole point of the six-party talks is to get at the issue of denuclearization, so there isn't a North Korean nuclear program. That's the source of everybody's concern with respect to North Korea's behavior in the neighborhood as well as North Korea's links with others that have been involved in nuclear proliferation, A.Q. Khan for example. So that is the focus of what we are trying to get at. We are going to take each of these issues on their merits, we're going to take these issues based on our consultations with other members of the six-party talks and we're also going to take this step by step.

Everybody understands the history of agreements with North Korea and that is why we are taking the approach that we are. And that is that good-faith actions on the part of North Korea will be met in turn by good faith. So that you have -- and that when you have this taking place in the context of the six-party talks, you have North Korea making this commitment to all the other five parties not just the United States, and that any benefits that might flow to North Korea will flow from the other five parties not just the United States, and that if North Korea reneges on any of its commitments those benefits stop. And that the -- any consequences that might flow from that failure to live up to their commitments is going to come from all the other five parties not just the United States.

QUESTION: Can I ask one last question on this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yes.

QUESTION: In view of these reports, have you had any inquiries from any other foreign governments about it, about the reports?

MR. MCCORMACK: About?

QUESTION: About the link between Syria and North Korea.

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm not aware of any.

QUESTION: Sean --

QUESTION: Go ahead, Jonathan.

QUESTION: So we've got U.S. officials somewhere saying that there is a link with Syria -- between Syria and North Korea and you will not -- I mean, you haven't addressed the question yet, is --

MR. MCCORMACK: Well --

QUESTION: What are you officially saying?

MR. MCCORMACK: I think I just answered the question. Matt came at it from several different angles here and --

QUESTION: Well, I didn't get an answer, but basically what happened was that I gave up when realizing that I wasn't going to get an answer.

MR. MCCORMACK: Mr. Beale can take a lesson from this. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Well, maybe you could invite him. (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: I think I gave an answer. Look, I haven't looked at these comments in any depth, but what I can tell you is that we do have plenty of publicly available assessments and documents that are out there that describe our views of the state of development of the various programs -- weapons of mass destruction programs out there and North Korea's included. And you are free to take a look at those and that can give you a definitive U.S. Government view of those programs.

Yes, Arshad.

QUESTION: You said that you hoped and thought that by the end of the year you could achieve North Korea disabling its nuclear reactor and their facilities at Yongbyon, and that it was possible that you could offer them some of the incentives, Trading with the Enemy Act, et cetera.

MR. MCCORMACK: As well as -- part of that is also they would have to provide a full declaration of --

QUESTION: Right, correct.

MR. MCCORMACK: -- their nuclear programs.

QUESTION: But the February 13th agreement doesn't say disable all the facilities at Yongbyon. It says disable all its nuclear facilities. Does that mean that you believe that there are no other nuclear facilities other than those at Yongbyon?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, part of -- and you will see that in the declaration and we will see that in the declaration. We'll take a close look at it. In terms of -- and in terms of any other facilities that they may have, they haven't -- they have told us that they have an HEU program. They haven't told us that they have any other -- haven't acknowledged any other facilities. I guess that is something we will have to take a look at when we get the declaration.

But we would expect that as part of this process their nuclear program would be disabled. So we are, at this point, dealing with the only known that we have, and that is Yongbyon and all the facilities at

Yongbyon. If there are any others then, of course, that would be part of -- necessarily part of an agreement to disable those facilities or machinery in the context of the six-party talks.

QUESTION: So you're going to take a look at the declaration if you ever get one --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: And if you decide it's accurate and there are indeed additional facilities, they would have to be disabled, too --

MR. MCCORMACK: Then we'd have to --

QUESTION: -- before the benefits flowed?

MR. MCCORMACK: I think we -- since that is an unknown unknown at the moment, I think we would have to deal with it when that arose. If you have that fact in front of you, then you're going to have to deal with it. I think part of the idea in terms of the 950,000 tons of fuel oil or in-kind assistance, that is going to be phased in. I think you're going to see that -- because part of it is North Korea can't handle all -- a whole 950,000 tons all at once, so it is something you have to deal with.

QUESTION: Right. But it's also fuel oil, heavy fuel oil, or its equivalent --

MR. MCCORMACK: In-kind assistance.

QUESTION: -- (inaudible) a whole bunch of other stuff, too. It doesn't have to be fuel oil.

MR. MCCORMACK: That's right.

QUESTION: And it doesn't have to be strung out --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, but the thing that they're really looking for -- you're right -- but the thing that they're really looking for is fuel oil.

QUESTION: And you said that they've acknowledged having an HEU program.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah.

QUESTION: I thought that you -- and Secretary Hill did not -- Assistant Secretary Hill did not repeat that when he briefed us two weeks ago before the Geneva talks. And I thought that it was not now so clear that you guys believed that they did, in fact, acknowledge an HEU program back in October of '02.

MR. MCCORMACK: They did back in '02, yeah.

QUESTION: Can I just ask one more on the Syria (inaudible) of this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure.

QUESTION: Mr. Semmel in his comments said good foreign policy -- basically, he said what you said -- good foreign policy, national security policy, would suggest that we pay very close attention to that; i.e., Syria and (inaudible). And then he said we're watching very closely, obviously the Israelis were watching very closely. Can you explain what he means by that?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, I --

QUESTION: The Israelis were watching very closely?

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm sure the Israelis are watching very closely all of their neighbors. I can't -- I don't know what he has in mind when he says that.

[deletia]

(The briefing was concluded at 12:25 p.m.)

<http://home.kyodo.co.jp/modules/fstStory/index.php?storyid=337222>

Hill determined to push N. Korea nuke talks despite Syria reports

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14 [2007] KYODO

Top U.S. nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill reiterated Friday [2007-09-14] that there is a need to push for six-party talks on ending North Korea's atomic programs amid news reports Pyongyang may be providing Syria with nuclear aid.

Hill, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said the next plenary session of six-way discussions is likely to take place in Beijing from around next Wednesday and last for about three days.

Syria-N. Korea Reports Won't Stop Talks

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, September 15, 2007; A12

Reports that North Korea may be assisting Syria with a possible nuclear program will not derail efforts to implement a deal to end North Korea's nuclear programs, the chief U.S. negotiator said yesterday, arguing that the reports emphasized the need to complete the agreement.

U.S. sources reported this week that Israel had recently provided the United States with evidence -- known by the code name "Orchard" -- that North Korea has been cooperating with Syria on a nuclear facility. But many outside nuclear experts have expressed skepticism that Syria, which has mostly focused on chemical and biological weapons, would be conducting nuclear trade with North Korea.

"The reason we have the six-party process, and the reason we have put together a number of pretty serious countries in this process, is to make sure that the North Koreans get out of the nuclear business," Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill told reporters yesterday, in advance of a new round of talks next week in Beijing. "At the end of all this, we would expect to have a pretty clear idea of, you know, whether they have engaged in proliferation in other countries."

To the dismay of conservative critics, the Bush administration has pressed ahead with a deal that calls for North Korea to disclose all of its nuclear activities by the end of the year. Some have argued the administration is being snookered by Pyongyang to give up concessions without learning the full extent of its activities.

The White House and the State Department generally have declined to either confirm or deny reports of the Syria-North Korea link, but one top official yesterday seemed to fan the flames. Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation policy, told the Associated Press yesterday in Rome that North Koreans were in Syria and that Damascus may have had contacts with "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment. "There are indicators that they do have something going on there," he said.

State Department officials declined to comment on Semmel's remarks.

Meanwhile, a prominent U.S. expert on the Middle East, who has interviewed Israeli participants in a mysterious raid over Syria last week, reported that the attack appears to have been linked to the arrival three days earlier of a ship carrying material from North Korea labeled as cement.

The expert, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid compromising his sources, said the target of the attack appears to have been a northern Syrian facility that was labeled an agricultural research center on the Euphrates River, close to the Turkish border. Israel has kept a close eye on the facility, believing that Syria was using it to extract uranium from phosphates.

The expert said it is not clear what the ship was carrying, but the emerging consensus in Israel was that it delivered nuclear equipment. The ship arrived Sept. 3 in the Syrian port of Tartus; the attack occurred

Sept. 6 under such strict operational security that the pilots flying air cover for the attack aircraft did not know details of the mission. The pilots who conducted the attack were briefed only after they were in the air, he said.

Israel has imposed heavy censorship on reporters regarding the raid, so few details have leaked. The expert said that Israel appeared to have learned a lesson from its experience in destroying the Osiraq nuclear reactor in Iraq -- that bragging about an operation only makes it easier for the world to condemn it.

Adding to the mystery, Syria has made only muted protests about the raid, and North Korea, which rarely comments on international matters, swiftly condemned it.

Bruce Reidel, a former intelligence official at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center, said, "It was a substantial Israeli operation, but I can't get a good fix on whether the target was a nuclear thing." He said there was "a great deal of skepticism that there's any nuclear angle here" and instead the facility could have been related to chemical or biological weapons.

But other sources who have been monitoring the Middle East said the attack was likely to be against a transit point for Iranian weapons bound for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/15/world/middleeast/15intel.html?fta=y>

September 15, 2007

U.S. Official Says Syria May Have Nuclear Ties

By MARK MAZZETTI and HELENE COOPER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14 — A State Department official said Friday that the United States had concerns about Syria's involvement in illicit nuclear activities and suggested that North Korea might be aiding the Syrians in their efforts.

Andrew Semmel, a top official on countering the spread of nuclear weapons, said that Syria may have a number of "secret suppliers" for a covert nuclear program, and that North Korean technicians were currently operating inside Syria.

His comments, in an interview with The Associated Press in Rome, came in response to questions about an Israeli airstrike inside Syria last week. Neither Israel nor the United States has confirmed what targets the Israeli jets hit, and the government in Jerusalem has imposed a blanket restriction on the Israeli news media from reporting details about the raid.

American officials have been similarly tight-lipped, and officials who ordinarily see intelligence reports on such issues say their access has been restricted.

Mr. Semmel did not specify whether the technicians in Syria were specialists in nuclear technology; North Korea has long supplied Syria with missile technology. Some weapons experts said they were skeptical that Syria was in league with North Korea to build a secret program.

Damascus is not thought to have made serious efforts in the past to develop nuclear weapons, and those experts said it was unlikely that the Syrians could afford such a program or had the technical expertise to sustain it.

The speculation about possible North Korean activities inside Syria is heightening the Bush administration's concern about the future of its diplomatic efforts to dismantle North Korea's nuclear program. The Bush administration's top negotiator for North Korea, Christopher R. Hill, said that the United States still planned to go ahead with an agreement for food and fuel aid to North Korea in exchange for its decision to dismantle its nuclear program.

"We've always been concerned about the issue of proliferation," Mr. Hill told reporters during a news conference at the State Department. "To me, this simply is an important reminder of the need to accelerate the process which we've already engaged in, to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

He declined to say whether the United States had sought a specific explanation from North Korean officials, and added that the issue "does not change the goal of what we're aiming for."

A Bush administration official said earlier this week that over the past several weeks, Israel had conducted several aerial surveillance flights over Syria to take pictures of what Israeli officials were said to believe could be possible nuclear development installations.

North Korea's government took the unusual step of publicly condemning the Israeli strike. The Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua cited a North Korean Foreign Ministry official on Tuesday as calling the Israeli strike "a very dangerous provocation, little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security."

Some who advocate a hard-line stance toward North Korea, including former top Bush administration officials, said that possible intelligence about North Korea's efforts to aid Syria should halt diplomatic talks with Pyongyang.

"It would be a big mistake for the State Department to push ahead with the six-party process without this being resolved," said John R. Bolton, a former United States ambassador to the United Nations, referring to the diplomatic talks with North Korea. "They are rushing to finish this and declare victory, which could be a catastrophe for the president."

Israeli official muzzled on Syria attack

By Amy Teibel, Associated Press Writer

Posted 9/16/2007 8:52 PM

JERUSALEM — Israel's chief of military intelligence was ordered Sunday [2007-09-16] not to discuss an alleged air raid on Syria before a powerful parliamentary panel, tightening the veil of secrecy the government has thrown around the issue.

Tzachi Hanegbi, chairman of parliament's foreign affairs and defense committee, told reporters he instructed military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin to avoid any mention of Syria at a committee meeting Sunday. Panel members regularly report to journalists during and after committee meetings.

In a statement some participants saw as an oblique reference to the alleged Syria raid, Yadlin told the meeting, "Israel's deterrence has been rehabilitated since the Lebanon war, and it affects the entire regional system, including Iran and Syria," according to a lawmaker who was present.

The lawmaker spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to disclose the meeting's contents to the media.

Foreign news reports have suggested that Israel struck a Syrian site designed to make non-conventional weapons, possibly a nuclear installation built with North Korean help.

John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., told Israeli Channel 10 TV he thought Israel might have been attacking a nuclear installation, "a message not only to Syria, but to Iran."

"I think it would be unusual for Israel to conduct a military operation inside Syria other than for a very high value target, and certainly a Syrian effort in the nuclear weapons area would qualify," Bolton said in an interview broadcast Sunday.

Bolton, who has long called for a hard line against the Syrian and Iranian regimes, did not indicate he had firsthand information about the incident.

Among the other possible explanations are that Israel was on an intelligence-gathering mission, testing Syria's air defenses, scouting an air corridor for a future strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, or hitting a shipment of arms destined for Hezbollah, a close ally of Syria and Iran.

In the past, Israel often has been swift to announce such operations. This time, Syria cryptically announced the incident, saying its air space had been entered and that Israel had "dropped munitions." Syria has offered no evidence of any Israeli attack.

Syria and Israel fought each other in the 1967 and 1973 Mideast wars. Their last direct military confrontation was in neighboring Lebanon in 1982, when Israel's air force shot down dozens of Syrian warplanes and Israel destroyed Syrian tanks.

Israel has dismissed recent calls by Syria to restart peace talks, citing the Damascus regime's continued support for Palestinian militant groups and Hezbollah.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/903991.html>

Records on North Korean ship docked in Syria were altered

By Yossi Melman, Haaretz Correspondent

Last update - 09:30 16/09/2007

Online databases tracking a ship reportedly flying a North Korean flag that docked in Syria have changed their records following a report in The Washington Post linking the alleged Israeli air strike in Syria to a North Korean shipment.

Ronen Solomon, who searches information in the public domain for companies, told Haaretz he found references to a ship called Al Hamad on three different Web sites after the initial reports of the Israeli raid in Syria on September 6. These included the official sites of Syria's Tartous Port and the Egyptian Transportation Ministry.

Two of the three sites said the ship was flying a North Korean flag, and the third site reported it was flying a South Korean flag.

Haaretz confirmed Solomon's report.

Saturday, the Washington Post published an article citing an American Mideast expert, who said a shipment that arrived in Syria three days before the alleged Israel Air Forces strike was labeled as cement, but that Israel believed it carried nuclear equipment.

Following the Washington Post report, Solomon returned to the three sites, and discovered that all mentions of the North Korean flag on Al Hamad had been deleted, and that the ship's flag was now registered as 'unknown.'

The official site of Syria's Tartous Port, www.tartousport.com, had reported that Al Hamad, flying a North Korean flag and carrying cement, entered the port on September 3. Solomon stressed that several North Korean ships docked at Tartous during August.

Syria said IAF planes entered its airspace on September 5.

According to the site, the ship had passed through Tripoli port in Lebanon, Solomon said.

He then found a site, www.e-ships.net, that said Al Hamad was registered as a 1,700-ton ship intended for general cargo and flying a North Korean flag. The ship had been built in 1965 and had had several owners, according to the site.

In addition, Solomon found on the Web site of Egypt's Transportation Ministry, www.MTS.gov.eg, a record that Al Hamad had docked in Damietta Port Said in the Nile Delta about a month earlier, on July 28. However, this site registered the ship as flying a South Korean flag.

Haaretz was able to access the Tartous Port Internet site until Saturday afternoon, after which it went offline for several hours

<http://web.israelinsider.com/Articles/Briefs/12056.htm>

Search reveals Al Hamed bring shiploads of "cement" to Syria for months

By: Israel Insider staff

Published: September 16, 2007

The Vessel Al Hamed, suspected of bringing in nuclear material or equipment from North Korea -- reported to be the proximate cause for Israel's recent airstrike -- has been a frequent visitor in the Syria port of Tartous, arriving on a monthly basis with shipments of "cement" since June.

Dr. Aaron Lerner of IMRA followed up on a report in Sunday's Haaretz that identified the vessel Al Hamed as having visited the Syrian port of Tartous on 3 September, searching for the same vessel using the cache option of the Google search engine. The results indicate that the same vessel also visited that port at the end of June and July, both times listing cement as the commodity it was carrying and Tripoli Lebanon as its previous port of call.

<http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=36056>

Al Hamed vessel visited Tartous monthly with "cement"

Dr. Aaron Lerner - IMRA **16 September 2007**

Following up on a report in today's Haaretz that identified the vessel Al Hamed as having visited the Syrian port of Tartous on 3 September, a search for the vessel using the cache option of Google finds that the same vessel also visited that port at the end of June and July also listing cement as the commodity it was carrying.

#1 First report:

<http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:gweCY9dZ9bMJ:www.tartousport.com/english/news/index.html+cement+site:www.tartousport.com&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1>

Tartous port news

up date at /1:30/o'clock

8/7/2007

Ship-traffic at Tartous port on Sunday 8/7/2007

In the port there are /52/ vessels out of them

/22/ vessels are being operated and discharging and

/30/ ones arriving .

Second :

Arrived vessels (0) vessels ready for berthing:

...

6

vessel ALHAMED

Port Triboli/Lebanon

ready for berthing not ready

arrival 30/6/07

commodity cement

weight 1700

#2 Second Report

waiting ships by date: Wednesday 2007-08-08

http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:Q0TprLP9LJQJ:www.tartousport.com/main/english/traffic/%2520ship/waiting_ship.php+alhamed+site:www.tartousport.com&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2

vessel ALHAMED

port ---

arrival date 2007-07-30

commodity cement

weight 0

ready no

#3 Third report (using the translation option from Arabic to English)

www.google.com/translate?u=http%3A%2F%2F64.233.183.104%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dcache%3AD22mvUBo-tkJ%3Awww.tartousport.com%2Fmain%2Farabic%2Ftraffic%252520ship%2Fwaiting_ship.php%2BALHAMED%2Bsite%3Awww.tartousport.com%26hl%3Den%26ct%3Dclnk%26cd%3D3&langpair=ar%7Cen&hl=en&ie=UTF8

Vessels arriving on Tuesday 2007-09-04

Readiness No

Weight 2600

The type of goods Cement

Arrival date 2007-09-03

Agency Marine

Port Tripoli / Lebanon

The name of the ship ALHAMED

Transcript: Robert Gates on 'FOX News Sunday'

Sunday, September 16, 2007

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON — The following is a partial transcript of the Sept. 16, 2007, edition of "FOX News Sunday With Chris Wallace":

"FOX NEWS SUNDAY" HOST CHRIS WALLACE: Well, with us now to discuss the way forward in Iraq, Iran and other hot spots is the secretary of defense, Robert Gates.

[deletia]

WALLACE: Let's turn to another part of the world. Is Syria involved in a covert nuclear program with North Korean assistance?

GATES: Well, I'm not going to get into things that may involve intelligence matters, but all I will say is we are watching the North Koreans very carefully. We watch the Syrians very carefully.

WALLACE: How would we regard that kind of effort both by — in terms of the Syrians and the North Koreans?

GATES: I think it would be a real problem.

WALLACE: Because?

GATES: If such an activity were taking place, it would be a matter of great concern, you know, because the president has put down a very strong marker with the North Koreans about further proliferation efforts.

And obviously, any effort by the Syrians to pursue weapons of mass destruction would be a concern for us.

WALLACE: And you can give us no confirmation that, in fact, they are involved in that kind of program?

GATES: Will not address that.

WALLACE: Let me ask you one other question. Was there an Israeli air strike on Syria last week?

GATES: We don't talk about the military operations of other countries. You'll have to ask the Israelis.

WALLACE: Well, they're not going to answer us, but you can't blame me for trying.

[deletia]

From The Sunday Times

Israelis ‘blew apart Syrian nuclear cache’

Secret raid on Korean shipment

Uzi Mahnaimi in Tel Aviv, Sarah Baxter in Washington and Michael Sheridan

September 16, 2007

IT was just after midnight when the 69th Squadron of Israeli F15Is crossed the Syrian coast-line. On the ground, Syria’s formidable air defences went dead. An audacious raid on a Syrian target 50 miles from the Iraqi border was under way.

[Sourcebook note: The facility subsequently called “Al Kibar” is slightly over 80 statute miles from the Iraqi border.]

At a rendezvous point on the ground, a Shaldag air force commando team was waiting to direct their laser beams at the target for the approaching jets. The team had arrived a day earlier, taking up position near a large underground depot. Soon the bunkers were in flames.

Ten days after the jets reached home, their mission was the focus of intense speculation this weekend amid claims that Israel believed it had destroyed a cache of nuclear materials from North Korea.

The Israeli government was not saying. “The security sources and IDF [Israeli Defence Forces] soldiers are demonstrating unusual courage,” said Ehud Olmert, the prime minister. “We naturally cannot always show the public our cards.”

The Syrians were also keeping mum. “I cannot reveal the details,” said Farouk al-Sharaa, the vice-president. “All I can say is the military and political echelon is looking into a series of responses as we speak. Results are forthcoming.” The official story that the target comprised weapons destined for Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi’ite group, appeared to be crumbling in the face of widespread scepticism.

Andrew Semmel, a senior US State Department official, said Syria might have obtained nuclear equipment from “secret suppliers”, and added that there were a “number of foreign technicians” in the country.

Asked if they could be North Korean, he replied: “There are North Korean people there. There’s no question about that.” He said a network run by AQ Khan, the disgraced creator of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons, could be involved.

But why would nuclear material be in Syria? Known to have chemical weapons, was it seeking to bolster its arsenal with something even more deadly?

Alternatively, could it be hiding equipment for North Korea, enabling Kim Jong-il to pretend to be giving up his nuclear programme in exchange for economic aid? Or was the material bound for Iran, as some authorities in America suggest?

According to Israeli sources, preparations for the attack had been going on since late spring, when Meir Dagan, the head of Mossad, presented Olmert with evidence that Syria was seeking to buy a nuclear device from North Korea.

The Israeli spy chief apparently feared such a device could eventually be installed on North-Korean-made Scud-C missiles.

“This was supposed to be a devastating Syrian surprise for Israel,” said an Israeli source. “We’ve known for a long time that Syria has deadly chemical warheads on its Scuds, but Israel can’t live with a nuclear warhead.”

An expert on the Middle East, who has spoken to Israeli participants in the raid, told yesterday’s Washington Post that the timing of the raid on September 6 appeared to be linked to the arrival three days earlier of a ship carrying North Korean material labelled as cement but suspected of concealing nuclear equipment.

The target was identified as a northern Syrian facility that purported to be an agricultural research centre on the Euphrates river. Israel had been monitoring it for some time, concerned that it was being used to extract uranium from phosphates.

According to an Israeli air force source, the Israeli satellite Ofek 7, launched in June, was diverted from Iran to Syria. It sent out high-quality images of a northeastern area every 90 minutes, making it easy for air force specialists to spot the facility.

Early in the summer Ehud Barak, the defence minister, had given the order to double Israeli forces on its Golan Heights border with Syria in anticipation of possible retaliation by Damascus in the event of air strikes.

Sergei Kirpichenko, the Russian ambassador to Syria, warned President Bashar al-Assad last month that Israel was planning an attack, but suggested the target was the Golan Heights.

Israeli military intelligence sources claim Syrian special forces moved towards the Israeli outpost of Mount Hermon on the Golan Heights. Tension rose, but nobody knew why.

At this point, Barak feared events could spiral out of control. The decision was taken to reduce the number of Israeli troops on the Golan Heights and tell Damascus the tension was over. Syria relaxed its guard shortly before the Israeli Defence Forces struck.

Only three Israeli cabinet ministers are said to have been in the know – Olmert, Barak and Tzipi Livni, the foreign minister. America was also consulted. According to Israeli sources, American air force codes were given to the Israeli air force attaché in Washington to ensure Israel’s F15Is would not mistakenly attack their US counterparts.

Once the mission was under way, Israel imposed draconian military censorship and no news of the operation emerged until Syria complained that Israeli aircraft had violated its airspace. Syria claimed its air defences had engaged the planes, forcing them to drop fuel tanks to lighten their loads as they fled.

But intelligence sources suggested it was a highly successful Israeli raid on nuclear material supplied by North Korea.

Washington was rife with speculation last week about the precise nature of the operation. One source said the air strikes were a diversion for a daring Israeli commando raid, in which nuclear materials were intercepted en route to Iran and hauled to Israel. Others claimed they were destroyed in the attack.

There is no doubt, however, that North Korea is accused of nuclear cooperation with Syria, helped by AQ Khan's network. John Bolton, who was undersecretary for arms control at the State Department, told the United Nations in 2004 the Pakistani nuclear scientist had "several other" customers besides Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Some of his evidence came from the CIA, which had reported to Congress that it viewed "Syrian nuclear intentions with growing concern".

"I've been worried for some time about North Korea and Iran outsourcing their nuclear programmes," Bolton said last week. Syria, he added, was a member of a "junior axis of evil", with a well-established ambition to develop weapons of mass destruction.

The links between Syria and North Korea date back to the rule of Kim Il-sung and President Hafez al-Assad in the last century. In recent months, their sons have quietly ordered an increase in military and technical cooperation.

Foreign diplomats who follow North Korean affairs are taking note. There were reports of Syrian passengers on flights from Beijing to Pyongyang and sightings of Middle Eastern businessmen from sources who watch the trains from North Korea to China.

On August 14, Rim Kyong Man, the North Korean foreign trade minister, was in Syria to sign a protocol on "cooperation in trade and science and technology". No details were released, but it caught Israel's attention.

Syria possesses between 60 and 120 Scud-C missiles, which it has bought from North Korea over the past 15 years. Diplomats believe North Korean engineers have been working on extending their 300-mile range. It means they can be used in the deserts of northeastern Syria – the area of the Israeli strike.

The triangular relationship between North Korea, Syria and Iran continues to perplex intelligence analysts. Syria served as a conduit for the transport to Iran of an estimated £50m of missile components and technology sent by sea from North Korea. The same route may be in use for nuclear equipment.

But North Korea is at a sensitive stage of negotiations to end its nuclear programme in exchange for security guarantees and aid, leading some diplomats to cast doubt on the likelihood that Kim would cross America's "red line" forbidding the proliferation of nuclear materials.

Christopher Hill, the State Department official representing America in the talks, said on Friday he could not confirm "intelligence-type things", but the reports underscored the need "to make sure the North Koreans get out of the nuclear business".

By its actions, Israel showed it is not interested in waiting for diplomacy to work where nuclear weapons are at stake.

As a bonus, the Israelis proved they could penetrate the Syrian air defence system, which is stronger than the one protecting Iranian nuclear sites.

This weekend President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran sent Ali Akbar Mehrabian, his nephew, to Syria to assess the damage. The new “axis of evil” may have lost one of its spokes.

Olmert says he respects Assad, won't rule out talks

By Barak Ravid, Haaretz Correspondent

Last update - 21:30 17/09/2007

After eleven days of speculations regarding an alleged Israel Air Force strike on Syria, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said on Monday that he respects Syrian President Bashar Assad and is ready, under the right conditions, to launch peace talks with Damascus.

"I have a lot of respect for the Syrian leader and for Syrian policy. They have internal problems, but we have no reason to rule out dialogue with Syria," Olmert said in a briefing for Russian-language media outlets in Israel.

"As I've said in the past, we want to make peace with everyone," Olmert went on. "If the conditions ripen, we are ready to make peace with Syria, with no preconditions and no ultimate demands."

Olmert did not respond to a question on the alleged September 6 attack, which has resulted in a slew of speculations by foreign publications. Israeli officials have remained tight-lipped about the whole affair.

According to a report in this week's London-based Sunday Times, an Israeli source said the strike came in the wake of intelligence reports suggesting Syria was been planning a "devastating surprise" for Israel. The report also claimed that Israeli ground forces were involved in the attack on a Syrian installation, which foreign sources described as a nuclear facility.

The British weekly reported the Israeli source said that planning for the strike, which the United States allegedly backed, began shortly after Mossad chief Meir Dagan presented Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, in late spring, with evidence that Syria was seeking to acquire a nuclear device from North Korea.

Meretz MK Zahava Gal-On told Attorney General Menachem Mazuz on Monday that he should demand Olmert provide the Knesset with details of the incident.

In a letter to Mazuz, Gal-On, who heads the Meretz Knesset faction, wrote, "In light of reports by foreign sources and the total blackout imposed by Israel on what happened or didn't happen, I am asking you to present the prime minister with his duty to report on all unusual IDF activity to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee or to one of its subcommittees."

Gal-On wrote in her letter to Mazuz on Monday that the Knesset must oversee all IDF action beyond Israel's borders, "if not in advance, then at least in retrospect." She said that if Olmert does not update the committee, then it will become a "members' club that hears briefings without the capability for real supervision."

Gal-On also referenced the Rubinstein Committee, headed by Professor Amnon Rubinstein, which scrutinized oversight of the defense establishment, and recommended the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee be aware of IDF activities in order to ensure parliamentary oversight.

At the end of the letter, Gal-On wrote that "the existence of and respect for these constitutional principles are crucial, and unrelated to the wisdom, benefit or success the government attributes to one IDF action or another."

Meretz Chairman Yossi Beilin told Israel Radio that he did not support Gal-On's letter. He said he does not see cause for criticism of the matter, believing instead confidential matters should remain so.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7000171.stm>

N Korea denies Syria nuclear ties

Published: 2007/09/18 08:48:20 GMT

[EXCERPT]

North Korea has denied allegations that it may be helping Syria develop a nuclear weapons facility.

The foreign ministry in Pyongyang called the claims an "unskilful conspiracy" and "groundless".

There were allegations last week that Syria was holding technology or materials relating to North Korea's nuclear programme.

This follows reports that Israeli jets entered Syrian air space earlier this month and hit an unknown target.

"Recently some US media including the New York Times have been spreading allegations that we are secretly helping Syria with its nuclear programme. Such reports are groundless and misleading," a ministry spokesman said.

He also dismissed reports that North Korea could be helping Syria build a nuclear weapons facility.

"We, as a responsible nuclear power, already declared in October 2006 that we will never allow the transfer of nuclear materials, and we have been sticking to this declaration," the spokesman said in a statement published by the official Korean Central News Agency.

The suspicions were "nothing but an unskilful conspiracy" fabricated again by "impure forces" who do not want to see "progress in six-party talks and in relations between Washington and Pyongyang", the spokesman added.

No comment

Syria has formally complained to the United Nations about the alleged raid by Israeli aircraft over its territory.

This is G o o g l e's cache of <http://www0.un.org/radio/news/html/12872.html> as retrieved on Mar 16, 2008 21:02:31 GMT.

No Israeli Bombs Hit Syrian Targets - Syria's UN Ambassador

September 18 [2007]

Published reports have indicated that Israel jets attacked an alleged nuclear related facility in Syria back on September 6th. Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar Jaafari says the Israeli jets that violated Syrian airspace retreated when targeted by Syrian air defenses and did not attack any target in Syria. Meanwhile, the Secretary-General has expressed concern about the incident and says he's awaiting clarification as to what exactly happened. The Syrian Ambassador [*sic*] says Israel has no intention of providing the S.G. with that information. The press office at the Israeli mission to the United Nations says it has no comment on the incident. Two reports by Jerry Piasecki Report 1 - Syrian Ambassador says Israeli planes did not bomb any target in Syria Report 2 - SG says he is awaiting clarification on the incident.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/09/20/uttm/main3280257.shtml>

Syria Disputes Airstrike Claims

Israel Claims Damascus Getting Nuclear Technology From North Korea

September 19, 2007

Syria is disputing Israel's claims that Damascus is getting nuclear technology from North Korea. "Up to the Minute" Contributor Frank Ucciardo weighs in.

(CBS) U.S. Officials told CBS News that the Israeli airstrike into Syria on September 6th was to destroy a building that was believed to have contained nuclear equipment. Syria's Ambassador, Bashar Ja'afari, says no building was attacked, and there were no nuclear weapons. "It wasn't an air strike, it was a violation of our airspace," he says.

The Israeli air action came three days after a North Korean ship docked at a Syrian port. Ja'afari says Syria is not engaged in nuclear proliferation with North Korea, or any other country. "Actually, Israel has the nuclear capabilities we don't have," he says.

Ambassador Ja'afari sent two letters to U.N. Secretary General Ban-ki Moon and the security council demanding they investigate Israel's violation of their airspace. But the question remains - if the Israeli jets were not after nuclear equipment, why did they violate Syrian airspace?

"I think the Israelis and some adamant neo-cons in the administration are trying very hard to undermine and torpedo this idea of holding a so-called international conference in the fall of this year," says Ja'afari.

President Bush has proposed an international middle east conference in the United States. On Monday, Israel's president, Shimon Peres, said Israel is ready for direct peace negotiations with Syria.

"They felt what they did was wrong by penetrating and intruding our airspace, so I think they were trying to ease the tension in the area to de-escalate the situation by providing such statements. But, I'm sure they are not honest with these kinds of statements, because the background and the motivations would be political," says Ja'afari.

When the Israeli U.N. Mission was asked to comment, they said, "We are not going to comment on the alleged incident in Syria, and the Israelis will continue not to comment on this issue until further notice."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/09/17/wsyria117.xml>

N Korean ship 'linked to Israel's strike on Syria'

By Tim Butcher in Jerusalem

Last Updated: 2:31am BST 18/09/2007

A suspicious North Korean freighter that re-flagged itself as South Korean before off-loading an unknown cargo at the Syrian port of Tartous is at the centre of efforts today to investigate Israel's recent airstrike on Syria.

An Israeli on-line data analyst, Ronen Solomon, found an internet trace for the 1,700-tonne cargo ship, Al Hamed, which showed the vessel started to off-load what Syrian officials categorised as "cement" on Sept 3.

This was three days before Israeli jets attacked a site in the north eastern desert of Syria, not far from its border with Iraq.

Since leaving Tartous, one of Syria's main ports on the Mediterranean, the ship's trace has disappeared and it is not known whether western intelligence agencies are tracking the vessel.

"I became suspicious after the first reports from Syria about the attack so I traced all traffic into Syrian ports in the days prior to the incident," Mr Solomon said.

"There were five ships but the interesting one was the one with a connection to North Korea - the Al Hamed."

He said he cross-referred to other maritime databases to establish the ship was not a regular visitor to the Mediterranean but had come through the Suez Canal in late June.

It had registered itself for the Suez transit as a South Korean vessel but Mr Solomon said this was standard procedure for North Korean ships seeking to avoid international constraints on North Korea.

Records showed the vessel docked at Tartous on July 28 before going back to sea and then returning to the port on Sept 3. "Since then there is no trace so I have no idea if she has gone up into the Black Sea or is still in the Mediterranean or whatever," Mr Solomon said.

Israel has not given any details on the operation.

Last week, US officials suggested that North Korea had sought to export some of its nuclear technology and equipment to Syria but the Israelis had been tipped off, so they arranged a pre-emptive strike on a sensitive shipment.

Mr Solomon said the Al Hamed was owned by a North Korean business until a few months ago when ownership changed hands to an as yet unidentified new owner.



Rumor about "Secret Nuclear Cooperation" between DPRK and Syria Dismissed

Pyongyang, **September 18 [2007]** (KCNA) -- A spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry gave the following answer to a question put by KCNA today as regards the rumor about "secret nuclear cooperation" between the DPRK and Syria spread by some media of the United States:

Recently, the New York Times and some other media of the United States spread the rumor about the DPRK's secret nuclear cooperation with Syria. This is sheer misinformation.

The DPRK solemnly declared in October 2006 that, being a responsible nuclear weapons state, it would never allow nuclear transfer, and has stood by its words.

The DPRK never makes an empty talk but always tells truth.

The above-said story is nothing but a clumsy plot hatched by the dishonest forces who do not like to see any progress at the six-party talks and in the DPRK-U.S. relations.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7004209.stm

Netanyahu 'admits Israeli strike'

Last Updated: Thursday, 20 September 2007, 09:55 GMT 10:55 UK

The Israeli opposition leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, has made the first apparent admission of Israel's involvement in an alleged air strike against Syria.

In a live interview on Israeli TV, Mr Netanyahu said he had congratulated Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on the raid.

"I was a partner in the issue from the start, and I gave my backing," he said.

Mr Netanyahu was criticised for his remarks, after Israel had maintained an official policy of silence on the reported incident two weeks ago.

Speaking on Channel 1 news, Mr Netanyahu said: "When a prime minister does something that is important in my view and necessary to Israel's security... I give my backing."

When asked if he had personally congratulated Mr Olmert on the operation, Mr Netanyahu said: "Yes". But the Likud party leader refused to give details of the attack.

Labour party secretary general Eitan Cabel told state radio: "I have no idea if this was stupidity, folly or a desire to steal credit.

"This is simply very dangerous conduct and the man is not worthy of leading."

Likud MP Yuval Steinitz said the remarks "were not wise".

Rising tensions

Damascus says Israeli warplanes violated Syrian airspace in the north of the country on 6 September, and describe the incident as a "hostile act".

The Syrian authorities say that the aircraft were forced away and that they fired their weaponry into a deserted area. Witnesses said the Israeli jets had been engaged by Syrian air defences in Tall al-Abyad, north of Raqqa and near the border with Turkey.

The Syrian government has briefed Western diplomats and complained to the United Nations.

US officials have indicated that at least one target in northern Syria was hit.

Israel and Syria technically remain at war and tensions between them have been rising in recent months.

The Syrian government has insisted that peace talks can be resumed only on the basis of Israel returning the Golan Heights, which it seized in 1967.

Israeli authorities, for their part, have demanded that Syria abandon its support for Palestinian and Lebanese militant groups before talks can begin.

The last peace talks between the two countries broke down in 2000.

Story from BBC NEWS: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/7004209.stm

Published: 2007/09/20 09:55:45 GMT

US feared N Korea-Syria link before Israeli strike

By Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington

Published: **September 20 2007** 22:04 | Last updated: September 20 2007 22:04

The US had concerns about potential nuclear-related co-operation between North Korea and Syria before recently receiving Israeli intelligence on the issue that Israel reportedly used to justify an air strike inside Syria.

Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli opposition leader, on Thursday appeared to confirm reports that Israeli fighter jets had earlier this month launched strikes inside Syria, which US and Israeli media reported were due to concerns that North Korea was helping Syria develop a clandestine nuclear programme.

One senior US official said Washington had for some time possessed intelligence about potential nuclear co-operation between the two countries.

While declining to outline the specific intelligence, the US official said North Korea would have to address the concerns as part of the declaration of nuclear activities that Pyongyang is required to make to complete the current stage of the six-party talks aimed at denuclearising the Korean peninsula.

The US hopes to complete the stage this year and talks may resume in Beijing next week after North Korea refused to return to the table this week.

President George W. Bush on Thursday declined to make any comment on the Israeli attack.

But when asked whether North Korea was helping Syria with a nuclear programme, he said the US would continue to make clear to North Korea that "we expect them to honour their commitment to give up weapons and weapons programs and, to the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop their proliferation if they want the six-party talks to be successful".

The US official said the administration had made a strategic decision not to raise the issue more forcefully early on in the six-party talks – which include China, Japan, South Korea and Russia – to avoid scuppering the possibility of a successful outcome because of a "Kelly" situation.

Negotiations between North Korea and the US broke down in late 2002 after James Kelly, the then top State Department official for east Asian affairs, confronted Pyongyang over its alleged uranium nuclear programme. Three months later, Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The scant information provided by administration officials about the alleged nuclear co-operation has prompted scepticism by experts on the claims that Syria is developing a clandestine nuclear programme, with or without the help of North Korea.

"It is highly unlikely that the Israeli attack had anything to do with significant Syrian-North Korean nuclear co-operation," said Joseph Cirincione, director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress. "The basic, well-documented fact is that the 40-year-old Syrian nuclear research programme is too basic to support any weapons capability.

Universities have larger nuclear programmes than Syria.”Most experts have suggested that Israel was much more likely to have targeted some a facility related tofor conventional weapons or missiles, over which North Korea and Syria have co-operated in the past.

”I would be very, very surprised if the North Koreans were dumb enough to transfer fissile material to Syria or were trying to do work outside of North Korea in a place like Syria,” said Michael Green, a former senior Asia adviser to Mr Bush who is now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. ”The transfer of fissile material in the wake of President Bush’s public statement after the nuclear test would be extremely dangerous for North Korea and not worth the risk.”

Press Conference by the President

The White House,
September 20, 2007

[EXCERPT]

Martha.

Q You won't comment on what the Israelis may or may not have done --

THE PRESIDENT: That's an accurate statement. I hope you got that from my answer -- now, you're afraid -- now, Gregory is worried I'm actually going to comment, see.

Q That's what I'm hoping.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to, so you might want to go to another subject.

Q I know you won't comment on that. But let's talk about whether or not you believe that North Korea is aiding Syria with a nuclear program.

THE PRESIDENT: We have made it clear, and will continue to make it clear to the North Koreans through the six-party talks that we expect them to honor their commitment to give up weapons and weapons programs, and to the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop that proliferation, if they want the six-party talks to be successful.

In other words, whether it be the exportation of information and/or materials is an important part -- it doesn't matter to us whether they do -- in terms of the six-party talks, because they're both equally important, I guess is the best way to say it. In other words, we want -- it does matter -- let me rephrase that -- it matters whether they are, but the concept of proliferation is equally important as getting rid of programs and weapons.

Q So you believe they are aiding Syria?

THE PRESIDENT: It's a general statement that we expect them not to be proliferating.



Talks Held between WPK and Syrian Political Party

Pyongyang, September 21 [2007] (KCNA) -- Talks were held between Choe Thae Bok, secretary of the C.C., the Workers' Party of Korea, and Saaed Eleia Dawood, director of the Organizational Department of Syria's Baath Arab Socialist Party, on September 21.

Present at the talks were officials concerned from the DPRK side and the director's party and the Syrian charge d'affaires ad interim here from the Syrian side.

At the talks both sides informed each other of activities of their parties and exchanged views on the issue of boosting the friendly and cooperative ties between the two parties and a series of issues of bilateral interest.

The talks proceeded in a friendly atmosphere.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/20/AR2007092002701.html>

Israel, U.S. Shared Data On Suspected Nuclear Site

Bush Was Told of North Korean Presence in Syria, Sources Say

By Glenn Kessler and Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writers

Friday, September 21, 2007; A01

Israel's decision to attack Syria on Sept. 6, bombing a suspected nuclear site set up in apparent collaboration with North Korea, came after Israel shared intelligence with President Bush this summer indicating that North Korean nuclear personnel were in Syria, U.S. government sources said.

The Bush administration has not commented on the Israeli raid or the underlying intelligence. Although the administration was deeply troubled by Israel's assertion that North Korea was assisting the nuclear ambitions of a country closely linked with Iran, sources said, the White House opted against an immediate response because of concerns it would undermine long-running negotiations aimed at persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear program.

Ultimately, however, the United States is believed to have provided Israel with some corroboration of the original intelligence before Israel proceeded with the raid, which hit the Syrian facility in the dead of night to minimize possible casualties, the sources said.

The target of Israel's attack was said to be in northern Syria, near the Turkish border. A Middle East expert who interviewed one of the pilots involved said they operated under such strict operational security that the airmen flying air cover for the attack aircraft did not know the details of the mission. The pilots who conducted the attack were briefed only after they were in the air, he said. Syrian authorities said there were no casualties.

U.S. sources would discuss the Israeli intelligence, which included satellite imagery, only on condition of anonymity, and many details about the North Korean-Syrian connection remain unknown. The quality of the Israeli intelligence, the extent of North Korean assistance and the seriousness of the Syrian effort are uncertain, raising the possibility that North Korea was merely unloading items it no longer needed. Syria has actively pursued chemical weapons in the past but not nuclear arms -- leaving some proliferation experts skeptical of the intelligence that prompted Israel's attack.

Syria and North Korea both denied this week that they were cooperating on a nuclear program. Bush refused to comment yesterday on the attack, but he issued a blunt warning to North Korea that "the exportation of information and/or materials" would affect negotiations under which North Korea would give up its nuclear programs in exchanges for energy aid and diplomatic recognition.

"To the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop that proliferation, if they want the six-party talks to be successful," he said at a news conference, referring to negotiations that also include China, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

Unlike its destruction of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, Israel made no announcement of the recent raid and imposed strict censorship on reporting by the Israeli media. Syria made only muted protests, and Arab leaders have remained silent. As a result, a daring and apparently successful attack to eliminate a potential nuclear threat has been shrouded in mystery.

"There is no question it was a major raid. It was an extremely important target," said Bruce Riedel, a former intelligence officer at Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy. "It came at a time the Israelis were very concerned about war with Syria and wanted to dampen down the prospects of war. The decision was taken despite their concerns it could produce a war. That decision reflects how important this target was to Israeli military planners."

Israel has long known about Syria's interest in chemical and even biological weapons, but "if Syria decided to go beyond that, Israel would think that was a real red line," Riedel said.

Edward Djerejian, a former U.S. ambassador to Syria and founding director of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, said that when he was in Israel this summer he noticed "a great deal of concern in official Israeli circles about the situation in the north," in particular whether Syria's young ruler, Bashar al-Assad, "had the same sensitivity to red lines that his father had." Bashar succeeded his Hafez al-Assad as president of Syria in 2000.

The Israeli attack came just three days after a North Korean ship docked at the Syrian port of Tartus, carrying a cargo that was officially listed as cement.

The ship's role remains obscure. Israeli sources have suggested it carried nuclear equipment. Others have maintained that it contained only missile parts, and some have said the ship's arrival and the attack are merely coincidental. One source suggested that Israel's attack was prompted by a fear of media leaks on the intelligence.

The Bush administration's wariness when presented with the Israeli intelligence contrasts with its reaction in 2002, when U.S. officials believed they had caught North Korea building a clandestine nuclear program in violation of a nuclear-freeze deal arranged by the Clinton administration.

After the Bush administration's accusation, the Clinton deal collapsed and North Korea restarted a nuclear reactor, stockpiled plutonium and eventually conducted a nuclear test. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice convinced Bush this year to accept a deal with North Korea to shut down the reactor, infuriating conservatives inside and outside the administration.

But for years, Bush has also warned North Korea against engaging in nuclear proliferation, specifically making that a red line that could not be crossed after North Korea tested a nuclear device last year. The Israeli intelligence therefore suggested North Korea was both undermining the agreement and crossing that line.

Conservative critics of the administration's recent diplomacy with North Korea have seized on reports of the Israeli intelligence as evidence that the White House is misguided if it thinks it can ever strike a lasting deal with Pyongyang. "However bad it might be for the six-party talks, U.S. security requires taking this sort of thing seriously," said John R. Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations who was a top arms control official in Bush's first term.

But advocates of engagement have accused critics of trying to sabotage the talks. China on Monday abruptly postponed a round of six-party talks scheduled to begin this week, but U.S. officials now say the talks should start again Thursday.

Some North Korean experts said they are puzzled why, if the reports are true, Pyongyang would jeopardize the hard-won deal with the United States and the other four countries. "It does not make any sense at all in the context of the last nine months," said Charles "Jack" Pritchard, a former U.S. negotiator with North Korea and now president of the Korea Economic Institute.

http://wexler.house.gov/apps/list/press/fl19_wexler/092107_israelsyria.shtml

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2007

Contact: Josh Rogin
Phone: (202) 225-3001

Congressman Wexler Introduces Resolution Supporting Israeli Air Strike on Syria

(Washington, DC) Today, Congressman Robert Wexler (D-FL), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe and a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, announced that he will introduce a resolution on September 24 supporting Israel's right to security and self defense and its recent covert military operation on September 6 that appears to have successfully eliminated an alleged nuclear weapons facility in Syria. The resolution also condemns the Syrian government for its cooperation with North Korea in the development of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Finally, the resolution condemns Syria for continuing to provide military, logistical and political assistance to the terrorist organization Hezbollah in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. The full text of the resolution is attached below.

Over the past several decades, Syria has acquired an advanced deadly arsenal of chemical weapons and surface-to-surface missiles, and has reportedly conducted research and development in biological weapons. According to a September 20 Washington Institute Policy Watch Report, Syria has binary-type and cluster-bomblet chemical warheads for all its major missile systems, as well as thousands of bombs filled with the nerve agents sarin and possibly VX. Additionally, it is reported that Syria currently possesses about 200 Scud-Bs, 60-120 Scud-Cs, and a smaller number of Scud-Ds as well as the Soviet SS-21 missile with a 70-kilometer range, and large numbers of domestically produced 220-millimeter and 302-millimeter artillery rockets with ranges of 70 and 100 kilometers, respectively.

"A Syria with nuclear weapons is an unacceptable threat to the United States, Israel and international community and would further destabilize the Middle East," Congressman Wexler said. "Israel's recent military action was effective and absolutely appropriate given the growing threat from Syria. Congress should go on record supporting this justified operation. It is critical that the international community immediately address Syria's massive buildup of deadly weapons of mass destruction and urge Damascus to end its support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas"

Congressman Wexler is Chairman of the Europe Subcommittee, a senior member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the House Judiciary Committee, and he also sits on the Financial Services Committee.

Expressing the unequivocal support of the House of Representatives for Israel's right to self defense in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria.

Whereas on September 6, 2007, the Government of Israel justifiably conducted covert military operations in Syria, bombing a suspected nuclear facility;

Whereas in 1981, Israeli Defense Forces attacked and destroyed the nuclear reactor at Osirak, Iraq, preventing Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons;

Whereas on September 6, 2007, it is reported that as many as 8 Israeli Air Force fighter jets struck a Syrian nuclear weapons facility; Whereas it has been reported that Syria is pursuing nuclear capabilities in addition to its already dangerous biological and chemical weapons programs;

Whereas according to a 2004 unclassified Central Intelligence Agency report on Syria, “Pakistani investigators said that they had confirmation of an IAEA allegation that A.Q. Khan offered nuclear technology and hardware to Syria.”;

Whereas reports suggest that the Syrian Government is working closely with the North Korean Government to develop a nuclear weapons program;

Whereas Andrew Semmel, acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy, said Syria may have had contacts with “secret suppliers” to obtain nuclear equipment for a covert program and that North Korean technicians are currently operating in Syria;

Whereas the United States military and intelligence community have tracked several shipments of material they believe have left North Korea and are destined for Syria that may contain high-grade metals that could be used in weapons such as missiles or solid-fuel rocket technology;

Whereas it is reported that Syrian leaders have threatened Israel claiming that Syria has a big surprise in store for Israel in 2007;

Whereas over the past three decades, Syria has acquired a deadly arsenal of chemical weapons and surface-to-surface missiles and has reportedly conducted research and development in biological weapons;

Whereas according to the Department of State, Syria has missiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel and may be seeking to place a nuclear warhead on Scud-C missiles it possesses;

Whereas the Government of Syria has disclosed that an explosion occurred at a secret military facility in Aleppo in July 2007, while attempting to weaponize a Scud-C missile with mustard gas, reportedly killing 15 people and injuring 50;

Whereas Syria continues to provide logistical and political assistance to the terrorist organization Hezbollah and is the main conduit for the transfer of sophisticated rockets and other arms to Hezbollah units in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701;

Whereas Syria has been designated by the Department of State as a sponsor of international terrorism; and

Whereas the Government of Syria’s continued support for international terrorist organizations and its possession of weapons of mass destruction represent an imminent threat to the United States, Israel, and United States allies in the Middle East:

Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

- (1) expresses its unequivocal support for Israel's right to self defense in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria;
- (2) reaffirms America's unbreakable bond with Israel and pledges to continue to work with Prime Minister Olmert and his government to ensure that Israel continues to receive critical military and economic assistance needed to address the growing security threat of Syria and Iran;
- (3) condemns the Government of Syria for its continued support of terrorism and its illicit chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons activities, including close cooperation with the Government of North Korea;
- (4) condemns the Government of North Korea for providing Syria with technology, expertise, and materials to develop nuclear weapons;
- (5) condemns Syria and Iran for continuing to provide military, logistical, and political support to Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups;
- (6) urges President George W. Bush to condemn the Government of North Korea for providing Syria with nuclear technology and expertise and to reexamine diplomatic discussions with North Korean officials in light of nuclear cooperation between Damascus and Pyongyang; and
- (7) urges President Bush and his Administration to support strengthening United States sanctions against Syria.

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[Congressman Wexler is Chairman of the Europe Subcommittee and a senior member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the House Judiciary Committee; and he also sits on the Financial Services Committee.](#)

Report: IDF raid seized nuclear material before Syria air strike

By Haaretz Service

Last update - 16:40 23/09/2007

Israel Defense Forces commandos seized nuclear material of North Korean origin during a raid on a secret military site in Syria before the Israel Air Force allegedly bombed it this month, British newspaper The Sunday Times reported Sunday.

The report, based on what the newspaper called "informed sources in Washington and Jerusalem," said the air strike was carried out with United States approval after Washington was shown evidence the material was nuclear related.

The paper quoted Israeli sources as saying Israeli special forces had been gathering intelligence for several months in Syria, and had located the nuclear material at a compound in the country's north.

In another report, Newsweek quoted Uzi Arad, a former senior Mossad official and ex-policy advisor to then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as saying of the reported operation: I do know what happened, and when it comes out, it will stun everyone."

Netanyahu stirred anger among aides to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert last week when he appeared to confirm reports of the operation - about which Israeli officials have maintained a rare silence - during an interview with Israel Channel One Television.

The Sunday Times reported that diplomats in North Korea and China believe a number of North Koreans were killed in the strike, based on reports reaching Asian governments about conversations between Chinese and North Korean officials. The officials noted that ballistic missile technicians and military scientists had been working for some time with the Syrians.

According to the report, the Bush Administration was given Israeli intelligence suggesting North Korean personnel and nuclear-related material were at the Syrian site over the summer, but the administration demanded "clear evidence of nuclear-related activities before giving the operation its blessing."

As a result, the newspaper said, IDF commandos "almost certainly dressed in Syrian uniforms" seized samples of the nuclear material and took them back to Israel for testing. The sources confirmed that the samples were identified as being from North Korea.

According to the Sunday Times, the site - near Dayr az-Zawr - now lies in ruins following the IAF strike.

The report said the operation was personally directed by Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who according to The Sunday Times is said to have been largely preoccupied with it since taking up his post on June 18. The newspaper quoted military experts as saying that the operation probably could not have taken place under former defense minister Amir Peretz.

Syria has said IAF planes violated its airspace and fired missiles at targets on the ground, but both Damascus and Pyongyang have vehemently denied the reports of nuclear cooperation.

The Sunday Times also quoted an Israeli intelligence expert as saying, "Syria has retaliated in the past for much smaller humiliations, but they will choose the place, the time and the target."

The IAF dispatched several fighter jets toward Syria Saturday, after a Syrian airplane disappeared from the Israeli radar screens, army sources said.

The jets returned to base after they ascertained that the Syrian plane had crashed.

110th CONGRESS
1st Session
H. RES. 674

Expressing the unequivocal support of the House of Representatives for Israel's right to self defense in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 24, 2007

Mr. Wexler (for himself, Mr. Engel, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Burton of Indiana, Mr. Linder, Mr. Brady of Pennsylvania, and Mr. Renzi) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the unequivocal support of the House of Representatives for Israel's right to self defense in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria.

Whereas on September 6, 2007, the Government of Israel justifiably conducted covert military operations in Syria, bombing a suspected nuclear facility;

Whereas in 1981, Israeli Defense Forces attacked and destroyed the nuclear reactor at Osirak, Iraq, preventing Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons;

Whereas on September 6, 2007, it is reported that as many as 8 Israeli Air Force fighter jets struck a Syrian nuclear weapons facility;

Whereas it has been reported that Syria is pursuing nuclear capabilities in addition to its already dangerous biological and chemical weapons programs;

Whereas according to a 2004 unclassified Central Intelligence Agency report on Syria, "Pakistani investigators said that they had confirmation of an IAEA allegation that A.Q. Khan offered nuclear technology and hardware to Syria.";

Whereas reports suggest that the Syrian Government is working closely with the North Korean Government to develop a nuclear weapons program;

Whereas Andrew Semmel, acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy, said Syria may have had contacts with "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment for a covert program and that North Korean technicians are currently operating in Syria;

Whereas the United States military and intelligence community have tracked several shipments of material they believe have left North Korea and are destined for Syria that may contain high-grade metals that could be used in weapons such as missiles or solid-fuel rocket technology;

Whereas it is reported that Syrian leaders have threatened Israel claiming that Syria has a big surprise in store for Israel in 2007;

Whereas over the past three decades, Syria has acquired a deadly arsenal of chemical weapons and surface-to-surface missiles and has reportedly conducted research and development in biological weapons;

Whereas according to the Department of State, Syria has missiles capable of striking anywhere in Israel and may be seeking to place a nuclear warhead on Scud-C missiles it possesses;

Whereas the Government of Syria has disclosed that an explosion occurred at a secret military facility in Aleppo in July 2007, while attempting to weaponize a Scud-C missile with mustard gas, reportedly killing 15 people and injuring 50;

Whereas Syria continues to provide logistical and political assistance to the terrorist organization Hezbollah and is the main conduit for the transfer of sophisticated rockets and other arms to Hezbollah units in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701;

Whereas Syria has been designated by the Department of State as a sponsor of international terrorism; and

Whereas the Government of Syria's continued support for international terrorist organizations and its possession of weapons of mass destruction represent an imminent threat to the United States, Israel, and United States allies in the Middle East: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) expresses its unequivocal support for Israel's right to self defense in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria;

(2) reaffirms America's unbreakable bond with Israel and pledges to continue to work with Prime Minister Olmert and his government to ensure that Israel continues to receive critical military and economic assistance needed to address the growing security threat of Syria and Iran;

(3) condemns the Government of Syria for its continued support of terrorism and its illicit chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons activities, including close cooperation with the Government of North Korea;

(4) condemns the Government of North Korea for providing Syria with technology, expertise, and materials to develop nuclear weapons;

(5) condemns Syria and Iran for continuing to provide military, logistical, and political support to Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist groups;

(6) urges President George W. Bush to condemn the Government of North Korea for providing Syria with nuclear technology and expertise and to reexamine diplomatic discussions with North Korean officials in light of nuclear cooperation between Damascus and Pyongyang; and

(7) urges President Bush and his Administration to support strengthening United States sanctions against Syria, including additional sanctions under the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (Public Law 108–175).



Yonhap: DPRK Envoy Reiterates Denial of Syria Nuclear Ties, Comments on 6-Party Talks

Yonhap headline: "Top N. Korean Envoy Reiterates Denial of Pyongyang-Damascus Nuclear Ties"

Yonhap

Tuesday, September 25, 2007 T06:43:29Z

Journal Code: 2489 Language: ENGLISH Record Type: FULLTEXT

Document Type: OSC Transcribed Text

Word Count: 412

BEIJING, Sept. 25 (Yonhap) -- North Korea's chief nuclear negotiator reiterated Tuesday his country's denial of allegations that the North is helping Syria with a secret atomic weapons program, warning six-nation talks aimed at denuclearizing the North could grind to a halt if no substantial agreement is reached this week.

Dismissing recent media reports that the North may have provided nuclear technology to Syria, Pyongyang said last week "dishonest forces" were spreading such suspicions to overturn progress in ties between Washington and Pyongyang.

"Lunatics have created these rumors about a nuclear deal between us and Syria," Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-kwan (Kim Kye Gwan) told reporters upon arriving at Beijing's international airport Tuesday morning. Kim is to attend a new round of six-nation talks aimed at ending the North's nuclear program.

Andrew Semmel, acting U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation, told a conference earlier this month that Syria has "secret suppliers" of nuclear equipment and that there were North Koreans in the country, raising alarm over a possible nuclear link between the two states.

Underling the significance of the negotiations that involve the two Koreas, the U.S., Russia, Japan and host China, Kim warned North Korea's denuclearization could stop if the six-party talks fail to produce an agreement during the four-day round that begins Thursday.

"Denuclearization will continue if we reach a agreement on the steps we have achieved so far," Kim said. "And this is a very important meeting where things will return to the starting point if no agreement is produced."

North Korea in July shut down its key nuclear facility under a landmark deal reached earlier this year. A multinational team of experts recently completed surveying the North's nuclear facilities that are to be disabled, a main topic in this week's talks in Beijing.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Sunday Pyongyang has yet to come clean on all of its nuclear programs.

"There are frankly a lot of questions that remain to be answered and we want to be able to answer questions about all aspects of the North Korean nuclear program," she told reporters in Beijing, raising the possibility that the North's alleged proliferation could be brought up during the six-party talks.

Kim is expected to meet with top U.S. nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill for talks on Wednesday ahead of the plenary session.

(Description of Source: Seoul Yonhap in English -- Semiofficial news agency of the ROK. URL: <http://www.yonhapnews.net/Engservices/3000000000.html>)

North Korea denies Syria nuclear link

Mark Tran and agencies

Tuesday **September 25, 2007**

North Korea today dismissed reports that it was providing nuclear material for Syria as allegations "fabricated by lunatics".

Pyongyang's forceful denial followed an attack by Israeli warplanes in northern Syria earlier this month.

The strike was allegedly on either a joint Syrian-North Korean nuclear project or a shipment of arms for Hizbullah guerrillas in Lebanon.

"That matter is fabricated by lunatics, so you can ask those lunatics to explain it," North Korea's top nuclear envoy, Kim Kye Gwan, told reporters as he arrived in Beijing for the latest round of talks on Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

Envoys from the two Koreas, China, the US, Japan and Russia are scheduled to meet from Thursday to set out a timetable for dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programme.

Under an agreement reached in February, the five countries agreed to provide North Korea with 1m tons of heavy fuel oil, or the monetary equivalent in other aid.

In return, Pyongyang agreed to shut down its main nuclear reactor at Yongbyon - which it did in July - and to then reveal details of its nuclear programmes, with full disarmament as the ultimate goal.

"The closure of Yongbyon wasn't the key to this dispute. It was the prelude to resolving the key issues," Zhang Liangui of the Central Party School in Beijing, the main training site for Communist party officials, told Reuters.

"The key will be whether North Korea will agree to revealing its nuclear weapons in the declaration and how it will explain its uranium enrichment activities."

Speculation about possible nuclear links between North Korea and Syria has clouded the latest talks in Beijing.

The North today sought to turn the tables by accusing the US of helping Israel with its nuclear programme.

Its Communist party newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, accused the US of "shutting its eyes" to the nuclear programmes of its allies while "taking issue with the rights to nuclear activities of other countries for peaceful purposes".

The paper cited US help for Israel's nuclear weapons programme as an example. "The US has long actively promoted and cooperated with the Israeli nuclear armament plan," it said.

"They decided to provide assistance to Israel's nuclear development programme. Then the US dispatched nuclear experts to Israel and transferred highly enriched uranium, the key ingredient for nuclear weapons, to them."

Israel is widely believed to be a nuclear power, but its government has never formally confirmed or denied that it has nuclear weapons.

Exclusive: Ynet reporter visits site of 'Syria operation'

Ynet reporter and commentator Ron Ben-Yishai visits Syria, speaks to residents about Israel's alleged overflight

Ron Ben-Yishai

Published: 09.26.07, 07:16 / Israel News

Deir Ezzor is a city located in the Syria's northeast region close to the Turkish border, and home to what Syria claims to be an agricultural research station.

It was there that residents heard the sound of jets overhead on the night between the fifth and sixth of September. It was there that Israel allegedly carried out an air raid two weeks ago.



Ron Ben Yishai in Deir Ezzor (Photo: Ron Ben-Yishai)

At a checkpoint in the city, a Syrian soldier refused us access to the agricultural research station. "Mam'nua!" he said firmly, and signaled a warning sign with his hand upon noticing the camera.

The farm was four or five kilometers away from us. From a distance, we could see some pits that looked like part of a mine or a quarry. But it was hard to identify exactly what was being done there.

Deir Ezzor locals did not seem to take the issue seriously, but nevertheless described Israelis as being conniving and evil, and believed they were capable of anything.

"There were a few Israeli planes here that made supersonic booms over the city and maybe even dropped something. We didn't hear any explosions on the ground," said Ali (alias), a resident of the city.

"All this talk about supposed tensions following an overflight of fighter planes is only meant to intimidate Israel. But the threat is not real," a Syrian journalist told me.

“It’s all to deter Israel from doing something similar,” the journalist continued. According to him, Israel caused the supersonic booms in order to bait Syria into shooting down the planes, and thus give Israel reason to declare war.

In recent weeks, since Syria first reported an Israeli air raid on its territory, the international press has published more and more testimonies and claims regarding cooperation between Damascus and Pyongyang on nuclear issues.

Among other things, it has been claimed that Israel’s alleged attack came three days after the arrival of a shipment from North Korea in Syria. The North Korean government refuted the reports, and said they were “fabricated by lunatics”.

Nevertheless, a security meeting between representatives of both countries regarding “common interests” was reported as taking place at around the same time.

The full story will be published Wednesday by Yedioth Ahronoth. A complete documentation of Ron Ben-Yishai’s visit to Damascus, the Syrian Golan, and other sites, will be published in Ynet and Yedioth Ahronoth at the end of next week.

Congress Throws Covert Israeli Attack on Syria Out Into the Open

Florida Rep. Robert Wexler: 'This Is the World's Worst-Kept Secret'

Nathan Guttman

Wed. Sep 26, 2007

Washington - As Israel and the United States struggle to maintain a veil of ambiguity over Israel's alleged air strike against Syria earlier this month, Congress is bringing the issue out into the open and giving American sanction to an event that now seems all but confirmed.

Democrat Robert Wexler from Florida introduced a resolution this week supporting Israel's covert operation and backing the country's right to defend itself "in the face of an imminent nuclear or military threat from Syria."

"This is the world's worst-kept secret," Wexler told the Forward this week, stressing that his proposed resolution did not reveal anything that wasn't already reported in the world press.

With the lack of any official American or Israeli comment on the alleged air strike, Congress has become the leading voice in debating and promoting public discussion on the issue. A congressional source told the Forward that both the administration and Israel had expressed no opposition to having Congress play this role and that they did not ask lawmakers to abide by the rule of secrecy that both governments imposed on themselves.

The congressional source said that officials in the administration have confirmed in private conversations that the attack indeed took place. The source also said that "in general terms, the reports are right," referring to media reports describing Israel's target in Syria.

Ranking minority member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee Ileana Ros-Lehtinen also took on the issue of the Israeli attack on Syria, which according to reports was aimed at nuclear devices that Syria received from North Korea. According to Ros-Lehtinen's proposal, Pyongyang will not be removed from America's list of countries sponsoring terror until it stops supplying Damascus with nuclear technology. Both resolutions are now in the process of collecting co-sponsors and are expected to be referred to the foreign affairs committee.

According to Wexler, who is a strong backer of Israel and a member of the foreign affairs committee, congressional support for the Israeli attack is needed, since it will pose "an obvious contrast" to the lack of action on behalf of Congress when Israel attacked an Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad in 1981, effectively putting an end to the Iraqi nuclear program.

Wexler added that he is pushing forward the resolution, also, in order to make clear to Syria that it will have no support if it attempts to complain about Israel at the United Nations or any other international forum.

According to Wexler, the Israeli operation "has an important positive impact on America" since Israel has "proactively negated what is seen as a Syrian nuclear effort."

Israel and the United States are in accord on issues relating to the covert action in Syria and on the need to refrain from any public affirmation of the attack, diplomatic sources said. The Washington Post reported last week that Israel had shared intelligence with the United States after first learning about the nuclear ties between Syria and North Korea.

Former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who is now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, wrote this week in a New Republic op-ed that the attack not only took care of a potential nuclear threat but also restored Israel's deterrence in the region.

"In effect," Ross wrote, "[the Israeli raid] tells President Assad that Syria has few secrets it can keep from Israel. For a conspiratorial and paranoid regime, this is bound to keep its leaders preoccupied internally trying to figure out what Israel knows and doesn't know."

While showing silent support for Israel's action, the administration is also extending an olive branch to Damascus by inviting its representatives to participate in the upcoming Middle East peace conference, scheduled for mid-November in Washington. The invitation was not conveyed directly to Syria, but rather to all countries that belong to an Arab League committee on advancing the Arab peace initiative.

The notion of Syria attending the peace conference was shot down the next day, when Syrian officials said that their country will not take part in the event. Israeli sources said that Jerusalem has no say on who attends the conference, as long as the basic ground rules of recognizing Israel and renouncing terror are kept.

Scott Lasensky, a Middle East scholar at the United States Institute of Peace, said that the seemingly contradictory signals Washington is sending Damascus are yet another sign of the lack of coherent policy toward Syria.

"There is no overall strategy regarding Syria," said Lasensky, who co-authored a study calling for a reassessment of the American approach to Syria. The study calls for a more robust policy that will include not only coercion but also engagement, and that will, among other measures, reconsider the Syrian peace offer to Israel based on its merits.

This peace offer, forwarded by President Bashar al-Assad several times in the past year, appears now to be off the table. Reuters news agency quoted an unnamed Syrian official this week as saying that the Israeli Air Force attack on September 6 had "ruined chances for peace."

Sept. 26 [2007] Democratic debate transcript

[EXCERPTS]

[Sourcebook note: At the time of this debate, Senator Clinton was a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.]

Russert: OK, all right -- all right, we've had that discussion.

Senator Clinton, in 1981, the Israelis took out a nuclear reactor in Iraq. On September 6th, to the best of our information, Israel attacked Syria because there was suspicion that perhaps North Korea had put some nuclear materials in Syria. If Israel concluded that Iran's nuclear capability threatened Israel's security, would Israel be justified in launching an attack on Iran?

Clinton: Tim, I think that's one of those hypotheticals, that is...

Russert: It's not a hypothetical, Senator.

Clinton: ... better not addressed at this time.

Russert: It's real life. It's real...

Clinton: What is real life is what apparently happened in Syria, so let's take that one step at a time.

Russert: But my question -- no, let me finish.

Clinton: I know what the question is.

Russert: My question is...

Clinton: But I think it's important to lay out what we know about Syria...

Russert: What Israel -- my question is...

Clinton: ... because we don't have as much information as I wish we did. But what we think we know is that with North Korean help, both financial and technical and material, the Syrians apparently were putting together, and perhaps over some period of years, a nuclear facility, and the Israelis took it out. I strongly support that.

We don't have any more information than what I have just described. It is highly classified. It is not being shared. But I don't want to go a step further and talk about what might or might not happen down the road with Iran.

Russert: My question was...

Clinton: But I think it is fair to say what happened in Syria, so far as we know, I support.

Russert: My question is: Would the Israelis be justified if they felt their security was being threatened by the presence of a nuclear presence in Iran, and they decided to take military action? Would they be justified?

Clinton: Well, Tim, I'm not going to answer that, because what I understand is...

Kucinich: I'll answer it.

Gravel: I'll...

Clinton: ... that there was evidence...

(Laughter)

Clinton: Well, let me just finish and then Mike and Dennis can answer.

But there was evidence of a North Korea freighter coming in with supplies. There was intelligence and other kinds of verification.

So I don't think it's a question of if they feel it. That is a much higher standard of proof. Apparently it was met with respect to Syria.

[deletia]

Russert: Senator Obama, would Israel be justified in launching an attack on Iran if they felt their security was jeopardized?

Obama: I think it's important to back up for a second, Tim, and just understand. Number one, Iran is in a stronger position now than it was before the Iraq war because the Congress authorized the president to go in.

And so, it indicates the degree to which we've got to make sure before we launch attacks or make judgments of this sort, that we actually understand the intelligence and we have done a good job in sorting it through.

Now, we don't know exactly what happened with respect to Syria. We've gotten general reports, but we don't know all the specifics.

We got general reports in the run-up to the Iraq war that proved erroneous, and a lot of people voted for that war as a consequence.

[deletia]

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=907662&contrassID=1&subContrassID=5>

Hillary Clinton says she supports 'apparent' IAF action in Syria

By Haaretz Service

Last update - 07:18 **28/09/2007**

New York Senator Hillary Clinton said on Wednesday evening [26 September 2007] that she supports what she said was the Israel Air Force's "apparent" action against a nuclear facility in Syria.

Clinton spoke during a televised debate for the leading candidates vying for the Democratic nomination for U.S. president.

The candidates largely evaded questions on the incident, on which foreign media has speculated but Israel remains quiet. The moderator of the debate, Tim Russert of NBC, raised the issue of Syria when asking whether the candidates would support an Israeli strike on Iran, should it acquire nuclear capabilities.

Clinton called the question "hypothetical," and told Russert, "That's better not addressed at this time," despite Russert's repeated attempts to extract an answer on whether a nuclear Iran would warrant an Israeli attack.

However, she went on to say, "We don't have as much information as we wish we did. But what we think we know is that with North Korean help, both financial and technical and material, the Syrians apparently were putting together, and perhaps over some period of years, a nuclear facility, and the Israelis took it out. I strongly support that."

The senator from New York also backed up reports, first exposed by The Washington Post two weeks ago, that that the IAF targeted a North Korean shipment of nuclear material that arrived in Syria three days before the strike.

"There was evidence of a North Korea freighter coming in with supplies. There was intelligence and other kinds of verification," Clinton said.

She went on to emphasize that she had no other information on the incident because of its "highly classified" nature.

Obama and Edwards were less forthcoming in their responses. On Syria, Obama said only, "We don't know exactly what happened." He said that the United States is a "stalwart ally of Israel," but added only that diplomatic means must be pursued to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capability. Edwards did not mention Israel, but spoke vehemently against authorizing U.S. President Bush to pursue nuclear action in Iran.

<http://conflictblotter.com/2007/09/28/more-juice-on-the-syrian-air-strike/>

More juice on the Syrian air strike

September 28th, 2007

The Kuwaiti press claims a pair of scoops on the September 6 Israeli air strike in Syria.

The Al Jarida newspaper reported Friday [2007-09-28] [<http://www.aljarida.com/aljarida/Article.aspx?id=26165>] that retired Iranian general Ali Reza Asgari [*also transliterated as Askari and Asghari*], who defected in February, gave Israel the intelligence on Syria's missile program used in the Syrian airstrike. After the former deputy defense minister and Revolutionary Guard commander disappeared during a visit to Istanbul in February of this year it was widely reported in both the English and Arabic press that he was providing a gold mine of info to Western intelligence agencies.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Al Watan newspaper, citing senior European diplomats, reported Friday [<http://www.alwatan.com.kw/default.aspx?pageid=37&mgdid=549500>] that US jets provided air cover to the Israeli fighter jets during the Syrian air strike. Writes Al Watan:

The sources said Washington had intensified its efforts to corner Assad, in order to make him confront the two opposing factions within the ruling regime. One of those factions is calling for direct retaliation against Israel, while the other prefers avoiding entanglement in a conflict whose results are uncertain, fearing the possibility that the Israeli air raid is an attempt to provoke a knee jerk reaction from Syria and draw it into a war that will extend to Iran.

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/Flash.aspx/133907>

'Iranian Defector Enabled IAF Syria Strike'

Reported: 14:39 PM - **Sep/28/07**

(IsraelNN.com) Kuwaiti newspaper Al Jerida reported Friday that the intelligence for Israel's alleged attack on a Syrian target in early September was provided by Gen. Ali Reza Asgari, who defected from Iran a few months ago. Asgari was allegedly involved in the development of Syria's missile program.

Another Kuwaiti paper, Al Watan, quoted diplomatic sources in Europe as saying that US jets circled above the Israeli fighters and gave them aerial cover during the operation.

It also said that Russian experts are trying to understand how the IAF jets managed to enter deep into Syrian territory without setting off two Russian-built radar systems that were in place in Syria.

Seven Questions: The World According to John Bolton

Posted September 2007

[EXCERPT]

Negotiations with North Korea are on a knife's edge. Rumors of secret Israeli raids on alleged Syrian nuclear facilities and possible U.S. airstrikes on Iran are roiling political salons from Washington to Riyadh. In this Seven Questions, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton offers some advice for those confronted with a dangerous world.

FOREIGN POLICY: It's been a tense week on the nuclear front, with Syria accusing Israel of invading its airspace, and then North Korea blasting Israel for doing so. You've been one of the only people who have spoken openly about the likelihood that Israel bombed nuclear facilities in Syria. If that were the case, why do you think Israel wouldn't announce it had done so?

John Bolton: Well, I don't think we really know what the target of the Israeli raid was. There seems to be a lot of indication that there was a North Korean-Syrian project in the nuclear field, although obviously the details of that are not known. And what that suggests is that we need very clear answers from the North Koreans in the context of the six-party talks [as to] whether indeed they are proliferating nuclear technology, whether they're outsourcing their program—or just exactly what it is they're doing.

Now, what the Israeli raid actually hit, I don't think people know. I was certainly reacting against the notion that it was an attack on a shipment of missiles bound from Iran to Hezbollah, because I don't think the Israelis would take the risks inherent in an attack on Syrian territory against a target like that. To me, it suggests that it was a higher-value target, and a nuclear facility of some kind would definitely qualify. But what exactly the target is, I don't know myself, and I'm not sure that there's anything but speculation out there at this point. There has been at least some public acknowledgment through official U.S. sources that there are concerns about not just North Korean ballistic-missile cooperation with Syria, which we've known about for some time, but the possibility that there's cooperation on the nuclear front as well.

<http://www.un.org/radio/story.asp?NewsID=7859>

Foreign Minister of Syria Says Tensions Are Escalating in Middle East

01/10/2007

Another country in the region, Syria, says that the Middle East continues to be an arena of daunting challenges and heightened tensions as a result of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories. Addressing the General Assembly today, Syria's Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moualem, said this is not a new development, but the challenges and tensions are escalating, threatening security and stability throughout the region.

Foreign Minister Al-Moualem said the latest act of Israeli aggression against Syria on September 6th was proof of Israel's desire to escalate tension:

"We reiterate that the failure of the international community, including the Security Council, to condemn this act of aggression would encourage Israel to persist in this hostile pursuit, and lead to an exacerbation of tensions in the region."

The Foreign Minister of Syria said his country has repeatedly stressed that peace was its strategic choice.



DPRK Weekly: US 'Hardline' Forces 'Fabricating' DPRK-Syria Nuclear Cooperation

Article by Pae Yo'ng-il: "Vicious Smear Commotion Aimed at Crushing the Republic"

T'ongil Sinbo (via Uriminjokkiri Internet)

Monday, October 1, 2007 T01:50:41Z

Journal Code: 9296 Language: ENGLISH Record Type: FULLTEXT

Document Type: OSC Translated Text

Word Count: 687

Strange talk about some "nuclear materials transfer" by the Republic is going around in the United States lately.

The gist of it is that the Republic is secretly supplying Syria with nuclear materials and equipment.

However, the countries involved, and a majority of the world's countries as well, lend no credence to this so-called "nuclear materials transfer." Even US allies are showing a reaction of disbelief, noting inconsistencies in reports by the US media.

This tells us that the so-called "nuclear cooperation" between the Republic and Syria is an anti-Republic smear story that someone created through an intentional, planned fabrication.

The problem, however, is that this rumor, which is without any factual data or scientific evidence whatever, is being circulated extensively among senior bureaucrats in the US administration.

The US newspaper "New York Times," which first reported the matter, revealed that "The information was received from a certain high-level figure in the US Government," and this is confirmed by US Defense Secretary Gates clamoring on 16 September, "If the nuclear cooperation story is true, then it is of great concern." Moreover, a US State Department spokesperson even made the deeply provocative remark, "We will bring up the issue of the Republic's nuclear proliferation" at the next six-party talks.

So, why is this vicious, anti-Republic smear story suddenly fabricated and circulated in the United States?

The world press claims that hard-line conservative forces in the present US administration, which does not desire peace and security on the Korean peninsula and wants to somehow realize its policy of crushing the Republic through isolation blockades and military aggression, came up with this "nuclear cooperation story."

This is not mistaken.

In times past, too, every time DPRK-US relations were going smoothly and the issue of guaranteeing peace on the Korean peninsula came to the agenda, hard-line conservative forces of the United States

would intentionally come up with "suspicious incidents" to turn dialogue and negotiation into confrontation and mistrust.

Some straightforward examples of this are how former US Undersecretary of State Bolton, who is considered to be representative of US hard-line conservatives, cited some "enriched uranium nuclear program" in 2002 and wantonly overturned a DPRK-US agreement from the Clinton administration's time, and how, in 2005, (they) came up with "the story of North Korea's manufacture of counterfeit currency" and wrecked implementation of the 19 September Joint Statement for nearly two years.

The facts plainly show that the "DPRK-Syria nuclear cooperation story" is something that comes from the vicious malice of US hard-line conservative forces who want to block the improvement of relations between the Republic and the United States, drive the Korean peninsula political situation into aggravated tension, and ultimately achieve the crushing of the Republic through confrontation and war.

One researcher with the Center for American Progress, a public research organization in the United States, also disclosed that hard-line factions in the US administration "started these suspicions for the purpose of creating an obstacle in North Korea-US nuclear negotiations," which they have criticized as being too appeasing.

The US hard-line conservative forces, however, are making a miscalculation.

As history shows us, no matter how many "suspicious incidents" US hard-line conservative forces have come up with in their vicious schemes to apply pressure on the Republic and realize their aggressive ambitions, justice and victory have always been with the Republic, and their vile attempts at crushing (it) could not escape wretched defeat.

Though the United States clamors about some "nuclear cooperation" by the Republic, that will not work in today's enlightened world. The US hard-line conservative forces must clearly consider the present reality and immediately cease their unjust propaganda to smear and crush the Republic.

(Description of Source: Pyongyang T'ongil Sinbo (via Uriminjokkkiri Internet) in Korean -- Weekly newspaper claiming to be an independent mouthpiece for overseas Koreans on North-South and reunification issues; posted on Uriminjokkkiri, external website targeting overseas Koreans; technically administered out of Shenyang, China but reportedly run by the Workers Party of Korea United Front Department. URL: <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com>)



**Full text of the interview given by HE
Dr. Bashar al-Assad
President of the Syrian Arab Republic
to
Lyce Ducet of the BBC
OCTOBER 1, 2007
Damascus**

Ms Ducet: President Bashar Al-Assad welcome to this BBC interview.

President Assad: You are most welcome in Syria.

Ms Ducet: Syria and Israel are now in a state of high alert, how do you see the possibility of the war?

President Assad: Whenever you talk about non-peace and non-war situations, this means that it will end by either peace or war; you do not have a third option. We have been working on peace since the peace conference in Madrid, 1991. Of course, the situation and the atmosphere are not good as it was used to be.

Ms Ducet: It is significantly more tense now, especially in the last few weeks.

President Assad: Exactly, you are right. But that does not mean that we do not have an open window or light at the end of the tunnel; we still can work for peace in order to turn the tide in the right direction towards the peace.

Ms Ducet: Tension increased after the 6th of September when Israeli jets entered Syrian space in the north and they carried out a bombing raid that remains mysterious to this day, what did they bomb?

President Assad: They bombed buildings and constructions related to the military, but it's not used, it's under construction, so there are no people in it, there is no army, there is nothing in it and we do not know the reason, it was not clear. But for us it reflects the fundamental antipathy of Israel towards peace. That is how we see it. It does not matter what the target is.

Ms Ducet: But why would they carry out such a high risk raid if they were not going after what you call a highly valued target?

President Assad: That's what you have to ask the Israelis. We are working to achieve peace in the region. We in Syria work for peace. It was surprising for us and for the entire world, why they did they

do it? Nobody knows why. What is the target? But the target is not an important target; and I think if they knew what it was they would not have done it.

Ms Ducet: But they were obviously sending a message to you. What was the message?

President Assad: I told you, because they work against peace; this is against peace. You cannot talk about peace and carry out attacks against a neighboring country. This is the only message that we got.

Ms Ducet: But at the same time the Israeli Prime Minister reassured you that he was interested in peace and even complemented you and said that he respects you and respects Syrian conduct. So, the air raid reflects something different?

President Assad: The strife that has been going on for six decades now in the region is not about personal matters to admire or respect me. It is about rights; we have our land – the Golan Heights – which is occupied and it has to go back. This is the only way to achieve peace and it is not by label or mantra or by just saying that they want peace. They have to work for peace and this attack is in the other direction.

Ms Ducet: But you know that there are so many speculations swirling about this: whether it was a suspected nuclear site set up with the help of North Korea, whether it was the North Koreans trying to dispose of some nuclear materials, whether it was an arms cache for Hizbollah in Lebanon, whether Israel was trying to test your air-defenses, all the details are swirling about. Why is it so mysterious in a region where there are so few secrets?

President Assad: It was not mysterious. We said everything in the media.

Ms Ducet: But it is mysterious because from Washington all the way to Tel-Aviv there is a news blackout, unprecedented for this region. So everyone says there must be something that happened and only you - there are only a few people, maybe you can count on one hand - who know exactly what happened, and you are one of them?

President Assad: This propaganda reminds us about what happened before the war in Iraq when they showed all the concrete evidence that Iraq has nuclear programmes or WMD programmes which turned out not to exist at all. So, about the propaganda, we do not have to waste our time about propaganda, because it is the same story. As to the reason, only the Israelis know what it is.

Ms Ducet: Are you going to retaliate?

President Assad: Retaliate does not mean missile for missile and bomb for bomb. We have our means to retaliate, maybe politically, maybe in other ways. So we have the right to retaliate in using different means, but if we wanted to retaliate militarily this means that we are going to work according to the Israeli agenda, which is something we do not look for. That does not mean we squander any opportunity for peace in the near future, something we do not want to see happening.

Ms Ducet: Israel used the option of an air raid, what about Syria? Do you keep military options on the table? Everywhere I go in the region, when I speak to Arab or Israeli leaders, they tell me that Syria has been re-arming since the war ended last year in Lebanon, getting better missiles, better air-defenses,

strengthening its defenses along the Golan Heights, leading to suspicion that you are planning a military strike?

President Assad: It is always an option. That is why you have the army to defend your territory. We do not build the army to make any aggression but to defend our country, and this is normal, especially after the war on Lebanon last year when we saw the Israelis wreck havoc in the Lebanese cities, in Beirut and in southern Lebanon where they killed civilians. It is very normal and self-evident that we are going to prepare ourselves for that, so it is an option.

Ms Ducet: So to those who say they are worried that Syria could carry out a military strike you say it is possible?

President Assad: It is possible, but we do not say that this is our option. We did not say that this is the option we are going to adopt now. We said we have many different means. That depends on which is more effective, which option achieves our interests. It is not only about the military option. This is one of the options, but we keep it. This is the last option. It should not be the first anyway if you want to talk about peace, it should not be the first option.

Ms Ducet: But in the present context where, although you do not seem to accept that, Israel has said it sent you a message, Washington says it sent you a message, they say you got the message; so what do you say back to them, what is your message back to them?

President Assad: I do not know if they see into my mind if I got the message or not.

Ms Ducet: Only you know that.

President Assad: No, they know what the message they want to send, they have to announce it.

Mr. Ducet: They did quite dramatically.

President Assad: They did not tell me directly what their message is. Again, I would say the only message that we got is that the Israelis do not want peace. This is the only message. If we say that this is an aggressive state, this is something we know for a long time; so this is nothing new.

Ms Ducet: So you deny that you are working with North Korea on any kind of nuclear cooperation?

President Assad: We have a relation with North Korea and this is not something in secret. We have a relation with them but to have a construction, if you have, like they say you mean the nuclear, we are not interested in any nuclear activity. So far even peaceful reactor we do not even mention peaceful reactor for electricity or for any peaceful use in Syria. Talking about a strategic project like this, you do not have any protection, any air-defence, any people and then the aircraft attack that reactor and there is no radiations, no emergency plans. This is impossible. This is only a building, a construction, and they attacked this construction, nothing happened. So, it is not nuclear at all; these are only false claims.

Ms Ducet: So has this put off the agenda for now any hopes of a resumption of official peace talks with Israel?

President Assad: For the meantime yes, unless they change their behavior.

Ms Ducet: How would you describe the state of tension now, how high is it?

President Assad: It is definitely high. It is high, how high we do not have a measure to say how high. It is dangerous, the situation is dangerous but we have to work to reverse it. We do not have to keep it high anyway if we want to talk about peace, although we do not see peace on the horizon, but we have to keep working for it, otherwise nobody knows where the region is going to.

Ms Ducet: You repeatedly have said that you would like to have direct talks with Israel on a peace deal, including giving back the Golan Heights occupied in 1967 war, and Israel has repeatedly said that it is always ready for unconditional talks, so what is stopping you?

President Assad: Talking about the negotiations needs more than one party; it needs a third party, which should be an impartial arbiter, but it does not exist. The United States, especially this administration, is not interested in peace. It is impossible to move towards peace and to achieve something without the United States; that is what stopped it. This is first. Second, you have a weak government in Israel, and weak governments can launch war; they cannot make peace. While in Syria we still have the public support to go towards peace, and we do not have any problem. So, we have to see what can be done with the other party to talk about direct negotiations.

Ms Ducet: George Bush said on June 7 to the Israeli Prime Minister: You do not need me to negotiate with Syria; go ahead on your own. For you that meant that talks are off?

President Assad: Yes exactly, because without a third party you cannot achieve peace, because of different circumstances and many accumulations through the last few decades; it is not that easy to say just go and talk directly.

Ms Ducet: But the Israelis and the Americans say why should they talk peace to Syria while you are giving exile to Khaled Mashaal, the leader of Hamas, standing with Iran and arming Hezbollah, and unless you end those ties they say there cannot be any peace-talks with Syria for peace?

President Assad: We did not invite Hamas to Syria; they were expelled from their country and we did not invite them. It is normal for them to be here. Hezbollah represents a large section of the Lebanese and we have normal relations with the Lebanese people, and it is normal to have relations with them and to support their cause. This is not related to being against peace. This is not logical; it is devoid of logic.

Ms Ducet: But you know that this is the key demand for Washington and you have to shift direction in your alliances if you would like genuinely to make peace in this region?

President Assad: This argument is devoid of logic, and there is no relation between this and that. Otherwise, I will say that the Israelis are killing Palestinians everyday; why to go to peace with them? How do they talk about peace and they kill Palestinians and they killed Lebanese last year. We do not kill anyone; we politically support any party, organization or country which has a just cause; this has been our position forever.

Ms Ducet: Is Syria going to go along to the Middle East conference planned it is seems for November to bring together Israelis, Palestinians, other Arab nations and important players in the region?

President Assad: I think we do not have a lot of opportunities to squander, because the more opportunities you lose, the more peace is going to be difficult. I mean this conference or any conference is going to be an opportunity, but it should be purposeful and substantive. I do not see where the purpose and what the substance of this conference is, what are they going to talk about, what are the criteria, what are the methods and means? Everything is not clear. If you want to prepare for a conference like this, you have to see what happened before in the Madrid Conference in 1991 when there was shuttling by the American officials between the different countries for nearly ten months. They did not go to any party this time. So what kind of conference is this one? It needs more clarification for Syria to take a decision.

Ms Ducet: If the Palestinians said that substantive issues; the final status issues of a peace deal are on the table, would Syria go?

President Assad: But it is not about the Palestinians and Palestinian territory; it is about the Syrian occupied territory, the Golan Heights. So, if they do not talk about the Syrian occupied territory, there will be no way for Syria to go there.

Ms Ducet: But it is not about Syria in this conference. It is first and foremost about an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal?

President Assad: It should be about comprehensive peace and Syria is part of this comprehensive peace. Without that we would not go.

Ms Ducet: So, most probably you are not going?

President Assad: If the criteria of this conference do not meet our needs and achieve our interests, we will not go.

Ms Ducet: What is your message to George Bush now?

President Assad: About what?

Ms Ducet: About how he should be dealing with Syria?

President Assad: I would only say to anyone who dealt ...

Ms Ducet: Well that's George Bush yes, if you want him to help you make peace with Israel, and since you are worried about the Middle East conference he is organizing?

President Assad: I will only tell them that their approach towards Syria, the previous approach towards Syria was futile, and you have to seek another approach which is dialogue and taking our interests into consideration. That is the only message we want, it is about our interests.

Ms Ducet: Well, Condoleezza Rice says I think we have not seen anything in Syrian behavior to this point that suggests Syria is doing anything but acting in a destabilizing way in the Middle East, and that is why they say they do not want to talk to you right now?

President Assad: I do not think that we created the war in Iraq to talk about destabilizing the Middle East; we did not create the problem in Lebanon recently, we did not meddle in the affairs of different countries to create the instability or to sow instability. This is first. Second, we do not have any interest in sowing instability in the region because we are going to pay the price. We have strong interests in having a stable region and that is what we are working for. So, we do not take these statements into consideration.

Ms Ducet: Some people say that you are just waiting and biding your time until president Bush finishes his second term. You do not expect anything from him?

President Assad: No, because we do not bet on any President or administration. We are betting on policy. But again, as I have said many times that we have lost hope with this administration. We do not think that they will work for peace. We do not think that they have learned anything from their experience and failure in Iraq. That is why, so if you call it buying time or whatever it is something subjective, but this is the reality.

Ms Ducet: For Washington, the number one issue, as you know, is Iraq. They maintain that you were more cooperative but still not cooperative enough. Let me just quote what ambassador Ryan Croker said to Congress in September, which you might have heard, that Syria's role has been problematic, you did host a meeting of the border security working groups, interdicted some foreign terrorists in transit to Iraq, but on the other hand, suicide bombers continue to cross the borders from Syria to murder Iraqi civilians?

President Assad: Again this is against our interests, because if you have chaos in Iraq we will have chaos in Syria. We are already paying the price of the chaos in Iraq. You know about the refugees in Syria; we have about 1.5 million. So we are paying the price. What is the goal of Syria in ignoring those people or those terrorists who cross the borders as they claim? Actually, the problem is political. Whenever you do not have a real political process in Iraq, you will have this chaos, and you will have the fertile ground for the terrorists. These are the issues.

Ms Ducet: Do you accept the report that there are foreign fighters crossing your borders going to Iraq?

President Assad: Any country cannot seal its borders as the Americans say. And they said they cannot control their borders with Mexico. This is the major or the greatest power in the world; it cannot control its borders. So any country cannot control its borders. But if you have smuggling, you do not know about it. It is illegal and you do not know about it. This is to be expected anywhere in the world. But if they have any information, they should send out this information, if they have any concrete information. But they only have allegations.

Ms Ducet: They say, and I quote the pentagon in September, this network it is funneling about 50-80 suicide bombers passing from Syria into Iraq.

President Assad: If they knew they crossed the Syrian borders, this means they know who they are. This is just theoretical.

Ms Ducet: But what do you say to them? Do you say I want to do more, but I cannot do more, because I do not have the resources. It is not a question of political will? Because they say you want to keep some of these foreign fighters here along with other groups to maintain your political options if you like, your ability to exercise influence in your neighboring countries?

President Assad: It is self-evident that you want to control your borders. Any country wants that. So if I want to do more, it is for my interests. We are not working for their interests. They have to know that. We have an interest in controlling our borders and we told them and many Europeans about the whole borders with Lebanon and Iraq and we said that we want to control it and any help will be welcomed. But, talking about sealing the borders, this is something not logical and not realistic.

Ms Ducet: Are you also working to try to prevent that kind of chaos in Lebanon? People say that Syria can do a lot more to bring about a stable solution for Lebanon which has been deadlocked many years as you know between the pro-Syrian and the Anti-Syrian coalitions?

President Assad: Definitely we have to work for the stability in Lebanon because again we paid a high price in Lebanon in the past because of the civil war in the 1970s and the 1980s, and we have to support the consensus in Lebanon. This is our position today; we support any consensus in Lebanon about any issue and we have interest in having a stable Lebanon.

Ms Ducet: Since Rafiq Hariri was assassinated in February 2005, seven prominent Lebanese including 4 members of parliament were murdered. All of them were described as anti-Syrian. You have denied being involved. If you are not involved, who would it be?

President Assad: But before that many pro-Syrians were killed and they did not mention that, so who killed them?

Ms Ducet: But who is killing the anti-Syrians?

President Assad: We do not know. We are not in Lebanon any way.

Ms Ducet: But you have influence there, a great deal of influence. Your ally Hezbollah there is playing a prominent role?

President Assad: Of course we have influence and we have good relations; we are a neighboring country to Lebanon and of course we have influence and this is normal, but having an influence is different from committing crimes in Lebanon. We never said that we do not have influence in Lebanon, but we have positive influence and you can have negative and bad influence; this is not in our interest. What did we get from killing those people? That is the question which should be asked. Even if we want to accuse Syria, the question should be: did Syria get any benefit from that? Actually no. the opposite is happening; we are accused and the people who are described as anti-Syrian get the benefit from that not Syria.

Ms Ducet: Your father, President Hafiz al-Assad, passed away without getting back the Golan Heights that you lost in 1967 war; do you think you will get it back in your lifetime as part of a peace deal with Israel?

President Assad: Definitely we will have it back. There is no other choice. We are not going to give it up. Some day we are going to get it back.

Ms Ducet: But it is not going to happen in the coming few years?

President Assad: Not with this American Administration.

Ms Ducet: Or with this Israeli one?

President Assad: It depends more on the American administration and American policy more than the Israeli one.

Ms Ducet: But you have to deal with Israel, they say that you use the Americans as an excuse?

President Assad: But from our experience through the last 16 or 17 years, since the peace process started, the main factor is the American Administration and they can apply pressure on all parties and they can play an active role in that regard.

Ms Ducet: Some people wonder why President Bashar al-Assad does not do more to try to repair his relations with Washington, when it matters so much to most important issue for you, which is to get the Golan Heights back, and yet your closest ally is Iran which pushes you into a corner and creates more isolation for you?

President Assad: Actually, we tried hard for many years, but they always turned a deaf ear not only to Syria but even to their allies who were disappointed because of the reaction towards the peace issue, Iraq, Palestine and even towards the issue of terrorism. They turned a deaf ear. It is not true that we did not try; we tried hard and it is very normal that you have to try to keep good relations with the major power in the world; it is not wise not to look for bad relations with it.

Ms Ducet: Was this a source of regret for you? I mean you want to be at the top table, you want to be involved in the major decisions in the region, but you are isolated from your Sunni Arab neighbors, and you are isolated from the major powers? This is not in Syria's interest?

President Assad: No, they cannot isolate Syria. Isolating Syria does not mean that you do not have visitors or that they do not talk to you; isolating Syria means that Syria is not active in any issue. Can they solve any problem without Syria? That is the question that they have to answer. If the answer is yes, they would not say that we have to play a better role or to show different behavior. If we are not important and isolated, they would not care about Syria. So, they cannot isolate Syria. It is a matter of time and substance because in substance they cannot isolate Syria.

Ms Ducet: But could you make major political concessions to change your foreign policy approach?

President Assad: We are not going to haggle over our right and interests and this should be clear; we are not going to work for the others' interests; we work first for our interests, and if there are common interests, we will welcome making cooperation with any country in the world. That is what they have to know. To make concessions, what do they mean by concessions?

Ms Ducet: Cutting your ties with these militant groups that seem to be part of the problem and not part of the solution like Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas, who are all in Syria?

President Assad: All these issues are related to the peace process. If you have peace, you would not have any problem. It is all related to peace, and if you have comprehensive peace, you will not have problems with Hezbollah, Hamas, Jihad, Syria, Iran or any other party in the region.

Ms Ducet: It is a tough job for someone who has been trained as an ophthalmologist?

President Assad: Definitely, not because of being an ophthalmologist but because the reality is tough.

Ms Ducet: Tougher than you expected?

President Assad: No, I have been here since I was born. It is not related to the profession. Actually, if you want to take it as a profession, then being a politician is the profession of every Middle Eastern person today.

Ms Ducet: You finished one term and started the second; it is very disappointing that you have not achieved as much as you may have wished in this neighborhood and in the region?

President Assad: Of course it is disappointing; you always have rosy dreams when you come to your job, to achieve lot of things in your mind, but reality is different.

Ms Ducet: Mr. President Bashar Al-Assad, thank you very much.

President Assad: Thank you.

A.N.Idelbi

<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/search2007.shtml>



Syrian Foreign Minister says Security Council should condemn Israeli acts

1 October 2007 – The Security Council should condemn a recent Israeli "act of aggression" against Syria, the country's Foreign Minister told the General Assembly in a speech that also urged greater assistance to help Iraqi refugees and non-intervention in Lebanon's upcoming presidential elections.

http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2007/10/israel_finally.php

Israel finally admits to Syrian air strike

Published: Tuesday, 2 October, 2007 @ 6:47 PM in Beirut

[EXCERPT]

Damascus & Jerusalem - After nearly a month of official silence, Israel confirmed on Tuesday that its air force carried out a strike inside Syrian territory on Sept 6.

Israel eased a strict news blackout on Tuesday, regarding an airstrike in Syria last month, allowing the first publication of reports it struck an unspecified "military target" deep inside Syrian territory.

Journalists in Israel are required to submit articles related to security and military issues to the censor, which can make changes to stories or bar publication altogether. In a rare move, the censor's office issued a special directive about the Syrian air raid, specifically prohibiting publication of any details.

Violation of the censorship orders can result in the loss of press credentials or other sanctions.

Israel's military censor had imposed a total blackout on coverage of the Sept. 6 airstrike. But Tuesday, the office allowed preliminary details to be published after Syria's president, Bashar Assad, confirmed the airstrike in a televised interview.

"Israeli air force planes attacked a military target deep inside Syria on Sept. 6, the military censor allowed for publication today," Israel's Army Radio reported. The headline on the web site of the Maariv newspaper was, "Now it can be revealed: Israel attacked in Syria," while the Haaretz newspaper led with the military's permission to publish "the fact" of Israel's attack.

However, the censor continued to bar publication of other key details, including the target of the raid, which forces participated in the mission and whether the operation was successful.

Foreign reports, quoting unidentified U.S. officials, have speculated that Israel attacked a weapons shipment destined for Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon, or attacked a nuclear facility built with North Korean technology.

In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp. Monday, Assad said Israeli warplanes attacked an "unused military building," the first time Syria officially acknowledged an air raid had taken place.

Previously, Syrian officials had said only that the Israeli warplanes entered the country's airspace, came under fire from anti-aircraft defenses, and dropped munitions and fuel tanks over northeastern Syria to lighten their loads while they fled.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7026003.stm

Analysis: Syria-Israel tensions

By Lyse Doucet

BBC News, Damascus

Last Updated: Wednesday, 3 October 2007, 13:18 GMT 14:18 UK

The secret is out. But the speculation has not ended. And the tension lingers dangerously.

Israel has suddenly broken its exceptional news blackout on a covert air raid against Syria, admitting officially its warplanes hit a "military installation" on 6 September.

This unexpected disclosure, after weeks of mysterious silence, came hours after the first public comments from Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

He ended his silence in a BBC interview, saying Israeli jets hit "a building under construction related to the military but it's not used, it's under construction so there's no people in it, there's no army, there's nothing in it".

Regional views on conference

So now it is official, on both sides. But speculation over exactly what was hit continues to create ripples in capitals around the world.

Was it a suspected nuclear site established with North Korean help? Had Pyongyang tried to dispose of some nuclear material to evade the inspectors? Maybe it was a Hezbollah arms cache? Or perhaps a test of Syria's new air defences?

'Propaganda'

Why, I asked the president, would Israel carry out such a high-risk raid if it was not such a high-value target?

President Assad just batted the incongruity away. And, as always in the Middle East, history provided the answers.

"The propaganda reminds us," he said, "of what happened before the war in Iraq when they showed all the concrete evidence that Iraq had nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction which turned out not to have existed at all."

But Israel clearly sent a message to Damascus. Did Damascus get it?

The fact President Assad decided to give a rare interview suggested he had a message or two he also wanted to pass on.

What did Israel's raid tell him? That Israel had "a fundamental, visceral antipathy towards peace".

But Israel has also been sending messages to try to bring down the temperature.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert even went so far recently as to offer a rare compliment to Mr Assad, saying "we have respect for the Syrian leader and the Syrian conduct".

President Assad seemed embarrassed by the personal praise.

Neither peace nor war

In his interview, he spoke of a time of "non-peace and non-war" in a region where it had to be "either peace or war... there is no third option".

And yet, despite his firm assertion that Syria reserved the right to retaliate, Mr Assad's responses underlined a recognition of the dangers of military escalation.

"Retaliate doesn't mean missile for missile and bomb for bomb... this is the last option," he said.

One source in Damascus said Israel had made it absolutely clear its riposte to any Syrian strike would be "devastating".

But that has not stopped intense debate, in coffee shops and the corridors of power on both sides, about a possible strike by Syria or Israel - or an accidental war, a miscalculation when mistrust and misunderstanding run so deep.

Continuing strains

Ever since last year's punishing war in Lebanon both sides have spoken of their readiness for peace but they've also reinforced their defences along the occupied Golan Heights. Damascus wants this territory back as part of any peace deal.

Syria is known to have acquired better long-range missiles and upgraded its air defences with Russian and Iranian help.

So that leaves them in that sensitive "non-war, non-peace" situation.

Months ago, all talk was of a summer war or a return to the peace talks broken off in 2000.

But in June, US President George W Bush made it clear to Ehud Olmert that Israel did not need Washington's approval to talk to Damascus.

That, said Mr Assad, confirmed there was no point in talking.

"From our experience of 16 years of a peace process, the main factor is the US administration," he said.

Continuing strains between the US and Syria mean the Bush team has no interest in going down this track.

Incomplete picture

On an earlier trip to Damascus, as the blistering seasonal heat began to ease, I commented to a Syrian friend that the "summer war" had also not materialised.

"Oh," she answered, "but there could be an autumn war."

And then came the Israeli air strike.

So Mr Assad, like his father Hafez al-Assad, seems resigned to the "long game" because of what he calls "the realities".

He clearly feels he has his own cards to play, not least Syria's relationship with a range of militant Palestinian and other Arab groups including Hezbollah in Lebanon.

There are some signs Damascus has been trying to use its influence more positively to reduce tensions but not enough to please most of its critics.

"They can't isolate Syria," he insisted.

So this week, a few more pieces of this latest Middle East puzzle were put in place.

But as long as there are big black holes in this jigsaw, people will continue to fill them with their own pieces, whether or not they really fit. This means everyone will continue to see a different picture - and that is dangerous.

<http://www.allbusiness.com/government/government-bodies-offices-government/5507902-1.html>

Israel Confirms September Air Strike on Syria.

Publication: Israel Faxx

By Robert Berger (VOA-Jerusalem), YnetNews.com & IsraelNationalNews.com

Date: Wednesday, **October 3 2007**

Israel's military censor decided to cancel the ban on publication of information regarding the Israeli air strike that took place in Syria early in September after Syrian President Bashar Assad and Knesset

Member Binyamin Netanyahu (Likud) acknowledged that the event took place.

A YnetNews source said that after the two men gave television interviews in which they discussed the air strike "it was pathetic and ridiculous to continue to deny that the event took place and to cite foreign and anonymous sources".

In an interview with the BBC, the Syrian head of state said that Israel had attacked an abandoned army base in the northeast of the country. He also said that "Syria reserves the right to retaliate to the attack."

Former Prime Minister Netanyahu was the only source in Israel to acknowledge the Israeli Air Force's operation when he admitted in a television interview that he had given his blessing to the mission.

Before the military censor lifted the gag order, the Israeli media was obligated to cite reports made by foreign sources when discussing details of the attack. According to these foreign reports, the Israeli Air Force attacked a Syrian military installation that contained nuclear material provided to the Arab state by North Korea.

A source from within the Prime Minister's office clarified that there has been no change in policy regarding the events that took place in Syria last month. The only difference is that reporters will no longer need to cite foreign reports when writing about the incident the source said.

Israeli analyst Eyal Zisser said Israel sent a warning to Syria via the air strike. "Actually, what happened was that Israel called Bashar's bluff," he said.

Zisser said the fact that Syria did not respond militarily to the Israeli air strike shows that Assad does not want to take on the Jewish State. "Syria does understand clearly the balance of power between Israel and Syria, and I do believe that from now on Syria will be much more careful, including in what Bashar has to say to its own people," he added.

Despite the initial secrecy, Netanyahu acknowledged on September 19 that an unspecified military operation had been carried out in Syria. Netanyahu told Channel One TV that he had been briefed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on the impending operation "from the start" and had praised Olmert's decision to go ahead with the attack. He also said he had personally congratulated Olmert, chairman of the rival Kadima party, on the success of the operation. Netanyahu was subsequently slammed by defense officials, who called his public leak to the media "the highest level of irresponsibility."

On Saturday, September 29, Syrian Vice President Farouk Al-Shara'a reiterated Syrian claims that Israel's reported raid was not a bombing at all. "Everything reported about this raid is wrong and is part of a psychological warfare that will not fool Syria," he said, adding, "They (Israel) are making up things to justify an aggression in the future. They are playing on public opinion to mislead it." Reports of the operation were, he claimed, an attempt by Israel to "restore the image of the Israeli army following its defeat by the Lebanese resistance last year."

While saying that the September 6th Israeli operation was nothing more than a flyover, Syria's ambassador to the US, Imad Moustapha, told Newsweek last month that Israel would nonetheless "pay a price" for it.

According to a Washington Post report published September 15, the IAF raid targeted facilities that were used to process nuclear materials shipped in from North Korea several days earlier. The attack targeted an "agricultural research center" that Israel believed was actually a facility used by the Syrians to extract uranium from phosphates, according to unnamed "Israeli defense sources."

Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Jerida reported that the intelligence for Israel's attack on a Syrian target was provided by Gen. Ali Reza Asgari, who defected from Iran a few months ago. Asgari was allegedly involved in the development of Syria's missile program.

Another Kuwaiti paper, Al-Watan, quoted diplomatic sources in Europe as saying that US jets circled above the Israeli fighters and gave them aerial cover during the operation. The newspaper also said that Russian experts are trying to understand how the IAF jets managed to enter deep into Syrian territory without setting off two Russian-built radar systems in place in Syria.

The London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat reported last month that, according to NATO sources, the Israeli jets made their way to their target by way of the Turkish border with Syria. The sources told the newspaper that Israeli jets fired four missiles at a target the Israelis believed was being used for weapons development with Iranian and North Korean assistance; only one of the missiles struck the targeted building. The NATO sources were quoted as saying that Israel's main objective was to warn the Syrians that Israel knows about its secret weapons programs, as well as to test the abilities of the new advanced Russian air defense system recently purchased by Syria.

<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/story?id=3695754>

High Level Debate Stalled Syria Air Strike

U.S. Was Concerned Over Intelligence, Stability to Region, Officials Tell ABC News

Oct. 5, 2007

The September Israeli airstrike on a suspected nuclear site in Syria had been in the works for months, ABC News has learned, and was delayed only at the strong urging of the United States.

In early July the Israelis presented the United States with satellite imagery that they said showed a nuclear facility in Syria. They had additional evidence that they said showed that some of the technology was supplied by North Korea.

One U.S. official told ABC's Martha Raddatz the material was "jaw dropping" because it raised questions as to why U.S. intelligence had not previously picked up on the facility.

Officials said that the facility had likely been there for months if not years.

"Israel tends to be very thorough about its intelligence coverage, particularly when it takes a major military step, so they would not have acted without data from several sources," said ABC military consultant Tony Cordesman.

U.S. Cautious After Flawed Iraq Intelligence

A senior U.S. official said the Israelis planned to strike during the week of July 14 and in secret high-level meetings American officials argued over how to respond to the intelligence.

Some in the administration supported the Israeli action, but others, notably Sect. of State Condoleeza Rice did not. One senior official said the U.S. convinced the Israelis to "confront Syria before attacking."

Officials said they were concerned about the impact an attack on Syria would have on the region. And given the profound consequences of the flawed intelligence in Iraq, the U.S. wanted to be absolutely certain the intelligence was accurate.

Initially, administration officials convinced the Israelis to call off the July strike. But in September the Israelis feared that news of the site was about to leak and went ahead with the strike despite U.S. concerns.

The airstrike was so highly classified, President Bush refused to acknowledge it publicly even after the bombs fell.

ABC's Martha Raddatz filed this report for "World News With Charles Gibson."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/05/AR2007100501765.html>

North Korean Mystery

By Jim Hoagland

Sunday, October 7, 2007; B07

Two big questions hang over the new agreement to contain North Korea's nuclear weapons program at its current level -- whatever that level is.

Why has a secretive government addicted to power politics and flexing its military muscles abruptly turned to negotiations and peaceful compromise?

And why is North Korea doing the same?

The Bush administration, of course, cannot match Kim Jong Il's regime in paranoia, bellicosity and information control, although this White House seems at times to have been tempted to try. Other countries know next to nothing about Pyongyang's motivations, intentions or even its ability to carry out any agreement it makes.

This deepens the Washington end of this great strategic mystery: Why is President Bush accepting the promises of a regime he has regularly excoriated -- at a time when officials in his administration make a credible case that North Korea has just been caught helping Syria with nuclear technology?

North Korea's desperation as its economy implodes and its people starve is clearly part of the answer. Pyongyang's plight has helped U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill get an agreement that he believes can be verified and enforced. Timing is also everything for Bush, who is reaching for diplomatic successes before his presidency ends.

There are months of quibbling ahead over the differences between "disabling" and "dismantling" North Korea's plutonium production facilities and other points in the agreement. But Hill appears to have pulled the hermit nation of North Korea into an international process that carefully calibrates risks and rewards on both sides.

A crucial provision of the six-nation accord announced in Beijing on Wednesday requires Pyongyang to declare the extent of its weapons-grade plutonium stockpile, including the amount it used in a nuclear test last year.

U.S. officials have estimated that North Korea could make 10 to 12 bombs from its existing stockpile. But the actual number is smaller -- perhaps half as many -- according to the intelligence service of one major Asian nation. A significant revision downward in U.S. intelligence estimates of North Korea's nuclear threat could explain the Bush administration's more relaxed view of Pyongyang in recent months.

But the more significant change in attitude has come from Pyongyang toward Washington, according to diplomats involved in the talks, which also included China, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

A key moment came when North Korea agreed to an international inspection last month to determine

how its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon should be disabled -- and asked Hill to have the United States rather than the United Nations carry out that intrusive inspection.

A U.S.-led inspection would have much more credibility in Washington, the North Koreans indicated. They also want to move quickly -- that is, while Bush is still in office and can presumably beat back Republican opposition to the agreement.

At Hill's suggestion, the inspection team was broadened to include experts from China and Russia, the other nuclear powers represented in the talks, to spread the mission's responsibilities and risks. The inspectors' report cleared the way for the comprehensive package of requirements and incentives unveiled in Beijing.

In another bout of tacit cooperation that indicates this deal may be serious enough to last, the United States and North Korea have kept the agreement from being derailed by the mysterious airstrike that Israel launched against Syria on Sept. 6. Israel and Syria have both thrown unusual secrecy around the raid, refusing to disclose what was hit.

But highly classified U.S. intelligence reports say that the Israelis destroyed a nuclear-related facility and caused North Korean casualties at the site, which may have been intended to produce plutonium, according to a senior official with access to those reports. The Israelis have provided the United States with photographs, physical material and soil samples from the site -- taken both before and after the raid -- according to two independent sources.

A last gasp of North Korean international banditry before going straight on nuclear nonproliferation? A continuing confidence by Pyongyang that it can say one thing in public and do another covertly? Or simply the serendipity of one branch of a secretive government going about its skulduggery while others go a different way?

With North Korea, it is of course unclear. Winston Churchill's famous description of Russia -- a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma -- would be mere understatement if applied to Kim Jong Il's regime. That is why it is both good and important that Christopher Hill has put such emphasis on transparency in this agreement. Who knows? It may even catch on in Washington.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/05/AR2007100501896.html>

'A Way Out' for Iran

By David Ignatius

The Washington Post

Sunday, October 7, 2007; Page B07

[EXCERPT]

A powerful, albeit silent, demonstration of military power was Israel's Sept. 6 strike against a target in Syria, Iran's key ally. An informed official told me it was an attack on nuclear materials supplied to Syria by North Korea, and that the United States and Israel had shared information before the raid. The silence from all parties has been deafening, but the message to Iran is clear: America and Israel can identify nuclear targets and penetrate air defenses to destroy them.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=3702807&page=1>
<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=3702807&page=2>

Israel used electronic attack in air strike against Syrian mystery target

Oct. 8, 2007

By David A. Fulghum and Douglas Barrie



Mysteries still surround Israel's air strike against Syria. Where was the attack, what was struck and how did Israel's non-stealthy warplanes fly undetected through the Russian-made air defense radars in Syria?

There also are clues that while the U.S. and Israel are struggling in the broader information war with Islamic fundamentalists, Tel Aviv's air attack against a "construction site" in northern Syria may mean the two countries are beginning to win some cyberwar battles.

U.S. officials say that close examination of the few details of the mission offers a glimpse of what's new in the world of sophisticated electronic sleight-of-hand. That said, they fault the Pentagon for not moving more quickly to make cyberwarfare operational and for not integrating the capability into the U.S. military forces faster.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said last week that the Israelis struck a building site at Tall al-Abyad just south of the Turkish border on Sept. 6. Press reports from the region say witnesses saw the Israeli aircraft approach from the Mediterranean Sea while others said they found unmarked drop tanks in Turkey near the border with Syria. Israeli defense officials finally admitted Oct. 2 that the Israeli Air Force made the raid.

U.S. aerospace industry and retired military officials indicated the Israelis utilized a technology like the U.S.-developed "Suter" airborne network attack system developed by BAE Systems and integrated into U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle operations by L-3 Communications. Israel has long been adept at using unmanned systems to provoke and spoof Syrian surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, as far back as the Bekka Valley engagements in 1982.

Air Force officials will often talk about jamming, but the term now involves increasingly sophisticated techniques such as network attack and information warfare. How many of their new electronic attack options were mixed and matched to pull off this raid is not known.

The U.S. version of the system has been at the very least tested operationally in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last year, most likely against insurgent communication networks. The technology allows users to invade communications networks, see what enemy sensors see and even take over as systems administrator so sensors can be manipulated into positions where approaching aircraft can't be seen, they say. The process involves locating enemy emitters with great precision and then directing data streams into them that can include false targets and misleading messages that allow a number of activities including control.

Clues, both good and unlikely, are found in Middle East press reports. At least one places some responsibility for the attack's success on the U.S.

After the strike, the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Watan reported that U.S. jets provided aerial cover for Israeli strike aircraft during the attack on Syria. Similar statements of American involvement were made by Egyptian officials after the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel.

More interesting is the newspaper's claim that "Russian experts are studying why the two state-of-the-art Russian-built radar systems in Syria did not detect the Israeli jets entering Syrian territory," it said. "Iran reportedly has asked the same question, since it is buying the same systems and might have paid for the Syrian acquisitions."

Syria's most recent confirmed procurement was of the Tor-M1 (SA-15 Gauntlet) short-range mobile SAM system. It uses vehicle-mounted target-acquisition and target-tracking radars. It is not known whether any of the Tor systems were deployed in the point-defense role at the target site struck by Israeli aircraft. If, however, the target was as "high-value" as the Israeli raid would suggest, then Tor systems could well have been deployed.

Iran bought 29 of the Tor launchers from Russia for \$750 million to guard its nuclear sites, and they were delivered in January, according to Agence France-Presse and ITAR-TASS. According to the Syrian press, they were tested in February. Syria has also upgraded some of its aging S-125s (SA-3 Goa) to the Pechora-2A standard. This upgrade swaps out obsolete analog components for digital.

Syrian air defense infrastructure is based on for the most part aging Soviet SAMs and associated radar. Damascus has been trying to acquire more capable "strategic" air defense systems, with the country repeatedly associated with efforts to purchase the Russian S-300 (SA-10 Grumble/SA-20) long-range SAM. It also still operates the obsolescent S-200 (SA-5 Gammon) long-range system and its associated 5N62 Square Pair target engagement radar. There are also unconfirmed reports of Syrian interest in the 36D6 Tin Shield search radar.

There remains the second mystery of the actual site of the target and its use. Israeli news reports contend it was a compound near Dayr az-Zwar in north central Syria, and not Tall al-Abyad farther north. The site of the attack has been described as a transshipment point for weapons intended for the Hezbollah in Lebanon to restock missile stores that were used in last summer's fighting with Israel. Others contend it is a site with nuclear materials that may be associated with Iran's nuclear bomb program. Mentions are also made of a North Korean ship arriving in Syria only days before the attack and the presence of North Korean workers in Syria for several months.

"There are always indications the North Koreans are doing something they shouldn't, Vice Adm. Robert Murrett, director of the National Geospatial-intelligence Agency (NGA), told Aviation Week & Space Technology in response to a question about the shipment of nuclear materials from North Korea to Syria, which were subsequently bombed. "They are a high priority. We work as a key element . . . on the trafficking of WMD [weapons of mass destruction] and high-interest arms shipments anyplace."

It's part of a growing NGA role in spotting the proliferation of weapons technology "which may be coming from East Asia to the Middle East . . . that we don't want to cross borders." Other crucial boundaries for surveillance include the borders in all directions in Afghanistan and Iraq—which includes Syria and Iran—as well as semi-governed areas such as the Horn of Africa. The use of automation to aid rapid analysis is improving, but that's being balanced by the fact that "the sheer volumes of data we are ingesting now . . . continue to increase by a couple of orders of magnitude on an annual basis," he says.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/11/world/middleeast/11syria.html?ref=world>

Syria Tells Journalists Israeli Raid Did Not Occur

By HUGH NAYLOR

October 11, 2007

DEIR EZ ZOR, Syria, Oct. 9 — Foreign journalists perused the rows of corn and the groves of date palms pregnant with low-hanging fruit here this week, while agents of Syria's ever present security services stood in the background, watching closely, almost nervously.

"You see — around us are farmers, corn, produce, nothing else," said Ahmed Mehdi, the Deir ez Zor director of the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, a government agricultural research center, as he led two of the journalists around the facilities.

It was here at this research center in this sleepy Bedouin city in eastern Syria that an Israeli journalist reported that Israel had conducted an air raid in early September.

Ron Ben-Yishai, a writer for the Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot, grabbed headlines when he suggested that the government facility here was attacked during the raid, snapping photos of himself for his article in front of a sign for the agricultural center.

He said he was denied access to the research center, which sits on the outskirts of the city, and he did not show any photos of the aftermath of the raid, though he said he saw some pits that looked like part of a mine or quarry, implying that they could also be sites where bombs fell.

His claims have compelled the Syrian government, already anxious over the rising tensions with Israel and the United States, to try to vindicate itself after a recent flurry of news reports that it may have ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons.

President Bashar al-Assad, in a BBC interview, played down the Israeli raid, saying that Israeli jets took aim at empty military buildings, but he did not give a specific location. His statement differed from the initial Syrian claim that it had repulsed the air raid before an attack occurred.

Israel has been unusually quiet about the attack on Sept. 6 and has effectively imposed a news blackout about it. **Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli opposition leader, on Sept. 19 became the first public figure in Israel to acknowledge that an attack had even taken place. Some Israeli officials have said, though not publicly, that the raid hit a nuclear-related facility that North Korea was helping to equip, but they have not specified where.**

On Monday, journalists toured the agricultural center at the government's invitation to prove, Mr. Mehdi said, that no nuclear weapons program or Israeli attacks occurred there. "The allegations are completely groundless, and I don't really understand where all this W.M.D. talk came from," Mr. Mehdi said, referring to weapons of mass destruction.

"There was no raid here — we heard nothing," he added.

An entourage of the center's employees lined up with him to greet the journalists. In a seemingly choreographed display, they nodded in agreement and offered their guests recently picked dates as tokens of hospitality.

They showed off a drab-colored laboratory that they said was used to conduct experiments on drought-resistant crops and recently plowed fields where vegetables and fruits are grown.

Mr. Ben-Yishai's news report rattled Syrians for another reason: he apparently was able to slip into Syria, which bars Israelis from entering, and travel throughout the country.

"I think he came in on a European passport," said Ghazi Bילו, who said he was a graphic designer for the agricultural center.

Burhan Okko, who also said he was a graphic designer for the center, interrupted, saying, "It was definitely on a German passport." The international news media have speculated that the Israeli attack was aimed at a Syrian effort to acquire nuclear weapons materials, possibly with the aid of North Korea. Syria rejects these claims.

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/10/washington/10diplo.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

An Israeli Strike on Syria Kindles Debate in the U.S.

By MARK MAZZETTI and HELENE COOPER

October 10, 2007

WASHINGTON, Oct. 9 — A sharp debate is under way in the Bush administration about the significance of the Israeli intelligence that led to last month's Israeli strike inside Syria, according to current and former American government officials.

At issue is whether intelligence that Israel presented months ago to the White House — to support claims that Syria had begun early work on what could become a nuclear weapons program with help from North Korea — was conclusive enough to justify military action by Israel and a possible rethinking of American policy toward the two nations.

The debate has fractured along now-familiar fault lines, with Vice President Dick Cheney and conservative hawks in the administration portraying the Israeli intelligence as credible and arguing that it should cause the United States to reconsider its diplomatic overtures to Syria and North Korea.

By contrast, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her allies within the administration have said they do not believe that the intelligence presented so far merits any change in the American diplomatic approach.

“Some people think that it means that the sky is falling,” a senior administration official said. “Others say that they're not convinced that the real intelligence poses a threat.”

Several current and former officials, as well as outside experts, spoke on the condition of anonymity because the intelligence surrounding the Israeli strike remains highly classified.

Besides Ms. Rice, officials said that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates was cautious about fully endorsing Israeli warnings that Syria was on a path that could lead to a nuclear weapon. Others in the Bush administration remain unconvinced that a nascent Syrian nuclear program could pose an immediate threat.

It has long been known that North Korean scientists have aided Damascus in developing sophisticated ballistic missile technology, and there appears to be little debate that North Koreans frequently visited a site in the Syrian desert that Israeli jets attacked Sept. 6. Where officials disagree is whether the accumulated evidence points to a Syrian nuclear program that poses a significant threat to the Middle East.

Mr. Cheney and his allies have expressed unease at the decision last week by President Bush and Ms. Rice to proceed with an agreement to supply North Korea with economic aid in return for the North's disabling its nuclear reactor. Those officials argued that the Israeli intelligence demonstrates that North Korea cannot be trusted. They also argue that the United States should be prepared to scuttle the agreement unless North Korea admits to its dealing with the Syrians.

During a breakfast meeting on Oct. 2 at the White House, Ms. Rice and her chief North Korea negotiator, Christopher R. Hill, made the case to President Bush that the United States faced a choice: to continue with the nuclear pact with North Korea as a way to bring the secretive country back into the diplomatic fold and give it the incentive to stop proliferating nuclear material; or to return to the administration's previous strategy of isolation, which detractors say left North Korea to its own devices and led it to test a nuclear device last October.

Mr. Cheney and Stephen J. Hadley, the national security adviser, also attended the meeting, administration officials said.

The Israeli strike occurred at a particularly delicate time for American diplomatic efforts. In addition to the North Korean nuclear negotiations, the White House is also trying to engineer a regional Middle East peace conference that would work toward a comprehensive peace accord between Arabs and Israelis.

The current and former American officials said Israel presented the United States with intelligence over the summer about what it described as nuclear activity in Syria. Officials have said Israel told the White House shortly in advance of the September raid that it was prepared to carry it out, but it is not clear whether the White House took a position then about whether the attack was justified.

One former top Bush administration official said Israeli officials were so concerned about the threat posed by a potential Syrian nuclear program that they told the White House they could not wait past the end of the summer to strike the facility.

Last week, Turkish officials traveled to Damascus to present the Syrian government with the Israeli dossier on what was believed to be a Syrian nuclear program, according to a Middle East security analyst in Washington. The analyst said that Syrian officials vigorously denied the intelligence and said that what the Israelis hit was a storage depot for strategic missiles.

That denial followed a similar denial from North Korea. Mr. Hill, the State Department's assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific affairs, raised the Syria issue with his North Korean counterparts in talks in Beijing in late September. The North Koreans denied providing any nuclear material to Syria.

Publicly, Syrian officials have said Israeli jets hit an empty warehouse.

Bruce Riedel, a veteran of the C.I.A. and the National Security Council and now a Middle East expert at the Brookings Institution, said that American intelligence agencies remained cautious in drawing hard conclusions about the significance of the suspicious activity at the Syrian site.

Still, Mr. Riedel said Israel would not have launched the strike in Syria if it believed Damascus was merely developing more sophisticated ballistic missiles or chemical weapons.

"Those red lines were crossed 20 years ago," he said. "You don't risk general war in the Middle East over an extra 100 kilometers' range on a missile system."

Another former intelligence official said Syria was attempting to develop so-called airburst capability for its ballistic missiles. Such technology would allow Syria to detonate warheads in the air to disperse the warhead's material more widely.

Since North Korea detonated its nuclear device, Ms. Rice has prodded Mr. Bush toward a more diplomatic approach with North Korea, through talks that also include Japan, Russia, South Korea and China. Those talks led to the initial agreement last February for North Korea to shut down its nuclear reactor in exchange for fuel and food aid.

That deal angered conservatives who believed that the Bush administration had made diplomacy toward North Korea too high a priority, at the expense of efforts to combat the spread of illicit weapons in the Middle East.

“Opposing the Israeli strike to protect the six-party talks would be a breathtaking repudiation of the administration’s own national security strategy,” said John R. Bolton, former United States ambassador to the United Nations.

But other current and former officials argue that the diplomatic approach is America’s best option for dealing with the question of North Korean proliferation.

“You can’t just make these decisions using the top of your spinal cord, you have to use the whole brain,” said Philip D. Zelikow, the former counselor at the State Department. “What other policy are we going to pursue that we think would be better?”

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3459379,00.html>

Report: Top N. Korean official leaves for visit to Syria

Associated Press

Published: 10.13.07, 15:56 / Israel News

A high-level North Korean official left on Saturday [2007-10-13] for an overseas trip including a visit to Syria, the North's state media reported, amid suspicions the two countries might be cooperating on a secret nuclear program.

Choe Thae Bok, speaker of the North's rubber-stamp parliament, will also visit Italy during the trip, the North's Korean Central News Agency said in a brief one-sentence dispatch that gave no further details.

The trip comes amid lingering suspicions that North Korea may be providing nuclear assistance to Syria.

North Korea provides missile technology to Syria, but has strongly denied accusations that it spreads its nuclear expertise beyond its borders. Syria also has denied receiving any North Korean nuclear help.

The two countries accused US officials of spreading the allegations for political reasons.

Andrew Semmel, acting US deputy assistant secretary for nuclear nonproliferation policy, said in September that North Korean personnel were in Syria, and that Damascus may have had contacts with "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment.

Last month, a high-level Syrian delegation visited Pyongyang.

North Korea, which conducted its first-ever nuclear test last October, has been compliant in international talks aimed at dismantling its nuclear program. In July, Pyongyang shut down its sole operating nuclear reactor and pledged earlier this month to disable it by year's end.

Israel Struck Syrian Nuclear Project, Analysts Say

By DAVID E. SANGER and MARK MAZZETTI

The New York Times

October 14, 2007

WASHINGTON, Oct. 13 — Israel's air attack on Syria last month was directed against a site that Israeli and American intelligence analysts judged was a partly constructed nuclear reactor, apparently modeled on one North Korea has used to create its stockpile of nuclear weapons fuel, according to American and foreign officials with access to the intelligence reports.

The description of the target addresses one of the central mysteries surrounding the Sept. 6 attack, and suggests that Israel carried out the raid to demonstrate its determination to snuff out even a nascent nuclear project in a neighboring state. The Bush administration was divided at the time about the wisdom of Israel's strike, American officials said, and some senior policy makers still regard the attack as premature.

The attack on the reactor project has echoes of an Israeli raid more than a quarter century ago, in 1981, when Israel destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq shortly before it was to have begun operating. That attack was officially condemned by the Reagan administration, though Israelis consider it among their military's finest moments. In the weeks before the Iraq war, Bush administration officials said they believed that the attack set back Iraq's nuclear ambitions by many years.

By contrast, the facility that the Israelis struck in Syria appears to have been much further from completion, the American and foreign officials said. They said it would have been years before the Syrians could have used the reactor to produce the spent nuclear fuel that could, through a series of additional steps, be reprocessed into bomb-grade plutonium.

Many details remain unclear, most notably how much progress the Syrians had made in construction before the Israelis struck, the role of any assistance provided by North Korea, and whether the Syrians could make a plausible case that the reactor was intended to produce electricity. In Washington and Israel, information about the raid has been wrapped in extraordinary secrecy and restricted to just a handful of officials, while the Israeli press has been prohibited from publishing information about the attack.

The New York Times reported this week that a debate had begun within the Bush administration about whether the information secretly cited by Israel to justify its attack should be interpreted by the United States as reason to toughen its approach to Syria and North Korea. In later interviews, officials made clear that the disagreements within the administration began this summer, as a debate about whether an Israeli attack on the incomplete reactor was warranted then.

The officials did not say that the administration had ultimately opposed the Israeli strike, but that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates were particularly concerned about the ramifications of a pre-emptive strike in the absence of an urgent threat.

“There wasn’t a lot of debate about the evidence,” said one American official familiar with the intense discussions over the summer between Washington and the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. “There was a lot of debate about how to respond to it.”

Even though it has signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Syria would not have been obligated to declare the existence of a reactor during the early phases of construction. It would have also had the legal right to complete construction of the reactor, as long as its purpose was to generate electricity. In his only public comment on the raid, Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad, acknowledged this month that Israeli jets dropped bombs on a building that he said was “related to the military” but which he insisted was “not used.”

A senior Israeli official, while declining to speak about the specific nature of the target, said the strike was intended to “re-establish the credibility of our deterrent power,” signaling that Israel meant to send a message to the Syrians that even the potential for a nuclear weapons program would not be permitted. But several American officials said the strike may also have been intended by Israel as a signal to Iran and its nuclear aspirations. Neither Iran nor any Arab government except for Syria has criticized the Israeli raid, suggesting that Israel is not the only country that would be disturbed by a nuclear Syria. North Korea did issue a protest.

The target of the Israeli raid and the American debate about the Syrian project were described by government officials and nongovernment experts interviewed in recent weeks in the United States and the Middle East. All insisted on anonymity because of rules that prohibit discussing classified information. The officials who described the target of the attack included some on each side of the debate about whether a partly constructed Syrian nuclear reactor should be seen as an urgent concern, as well as some who described themselves as neutral on the question.

The White House press secretary, Dana Perino, said Saturday that the administration would have no comment on the intelligence issues surrounding the Israeli strike. Israel has also refused to comment. Nuclear reactors can be used for both peaceful and non-peaceful purposes. A reactor’s spent fuel can be reprocessed to extract plutonium, one of two paths to building a nuclear weapon. The other path — enriching uranium in centrifuges — is the method that Iran is accused of pursuing with an intent to build a weapon of its own.

Syria is known to have only one nuclear reactor, a small one built for research purposes. But in the past decade, Syria has several times sought unsuccessfully to buy one, first from Argentina, then from Russia. On those occasions, Israel reacted strongly but did not threaten military action. Earlier this year, Mr. Assad spoke publicly in general terms about Syria’s desire to develop nuclear power, but his government did not announce a plan to build a new reactor.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, a group of Persian Gulf states, has also called for an expansion of nuclear power in the Middle East for energy purposes, but many experts have interpreted that statement as a response to Iran’s nuclear program. They have warned that the region may be poised for a wave of proliferation. Israel is believed to be the only nuclear-armed nation in the region.

The partly constructed Syrian reactor was detected earlier this year [2007] by satellite photographs, according to American officials. They suggested that the facility had been brought to American attention by the Israelis, but would not discuss why American spy agencies seemed to have missed the early phases of construction.

North Korea has long provided assistance to Syria on a ballistic missile program, but any assistance toward the construction of the reactor would have been the first clear evidence of ties between the two countries on a nuclear program. North Korea has successfully used its five-megawatt reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex to reprocess nuclear fuel into bomb-grade material, a model that some American and Israeli officials believe Syria may have been trying to replicate.

The North conducted a partly successful test of a nuclear device a year ago, prompting renewed fears that the desperately poor country might seek to sell its nuclear technology. President Bush issued a specific warning to the North on Oct. 9, 2006, just hours after the test, noting that it was “leading proliferator of missile technology, including transfers to Iran and Syria.” He went on to warn that “the transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable.”

While Bush administration officials have made clear in recent weeks that the target of the Israeli raid was linked to North Korea in some way, Mr. Bush has not repeated his warning since the attack. In fact, the administration has said very little about the country’s suspected role in the Syria case, apparently for fear of upending negotiations now under way in which North Korea has pledged to begin disabling its nuclear facilities.

While the partly constructed Syrian reactor appears to be based on North Korea’s design, the American and foreign officials would not say whether they believed the North Koreans sold or gave the plans to the Syrians, or whether the North’s own experts were there at the time of the attack. It is possible, some officials said, that the transfer of the technology occurred several years ago.

According to two senior administration officials, the subject was raised when the United States, North Korea and four other nations met in Beijing earlier this month.

Behind closed doors, however, Vice President Dick Cheney and other hawkish members of the administration have made the case that the same intelligence that prompted Israel to attack should lead the United States to reconsider delicate negotiations with North Korea over ending its nuclear program, as well as America’s diplomatic strategy toward Syria, which has been invited to join Middle East peace talks in Annapolis, Md., next month.

Mr. Cheney in particular, officials say, has also cited the indications that North Korea aided Syria to question the Bush administration’s agreement to supply the North with large amounts of fuel oil. During Mr. Bush’s first term, Mr. Cheney was among the advocates of a strategy to squeeze the North Korean government in hopes that it would collapse, and the administration cut off oil shipments set up under an agreement between North Korea and the Clinton administration, saying the North had cheated on that accord.

The new shipments, agreed to last February, are linked to North Korea’s carrying through on its pledge to disable its nuclear facilities by the end of the year. Nonetheless, Mr. Bush has approved going ahead with that agreement, even after he was aware of the Syrian program.

Nuclear experts say that North Korea’s main reactor, while small by international standards, is big enough to produce roughly one bomb’s worth of plutonium a year.

In an interview, Dr. Siegfried S. Hecker of Stanford University, a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, said building a reactor based on North Korea's design might take from three to six years.



IAEA Press Releases

Press Release 2007/18
Recent Media Reports Concerning Syria

15 October 2007

Statement attributable to IAEA Spokesperson Melissa Fleming on recent media reports concerning Syria:

1. The IAEA has no information about any undeclared nuclear facility in Syria and no information about recent reports.
2. We would obviously investigate any relevant information coming our way.
3. The IAEA Secretariat expects any country having information about nuclear-related activities in another country to provide that information to the IAEA.
4. The IAEA is in contact with the Syrian authorities to verify the authenticity of these reports.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL1545795520071015?>

U.N. watchdog asks Syria about "undeclared" atom plant

Mon Oct 15, 2007 11:53am EDT

By Mark Heinrich

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog did not know about any undeclared atomic plant in Syria and has asked Damascus about information that such a site was targeted by an Israeli air strike, a spokeswoman said on Monday.

Citing unidentified U.S. and foreign officials with access to intelligence reports, the New York Times said on Sunday the nuclear reactor was partially built and apparently modeled on one in North Korea used for stockpiling atomic bomb fuel.

Israel confirmed earlier this month that it had carried out a September 6 air strike on Syria, a major foe, but has not described the target. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said the target was an unused military building.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency has no information about any undeclared nuclear facility in Syria and no information about recent reports," spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said in a statement issued from the IAEA's Vienna headquarters.

"The IAEA is in contact with the Syrian authorities to verify the authenticity of these reports," she said.

"We would obviously investigate any relevant information coming our way. The IAEA Secretariat expects any country having information about nuclear-related activities in another country to provide that information to the IAEA."

A Vienna diplomat close to the IAEA said it had initiated contacts with Damascus shortly after the air raid but the Syrians had provided no clarification yet.

U.S. officials have linked the raid to apparent Israeli suspicions of covert nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria. They said the site in question was identified earlier this year in satellite photographs.

SYRIAN DENIES ILLICIT PROGRAMME

Syria has belonged to the 144-nation IAEA since 1963 and has one declared, small research reactor subject to U.N. inspections, which aim to prevent illicit diversions of civilian nuclear energy technology into atomic bombmaking.

Syria has denied hiding any nuclear activity from the IAEA or having anything other than energy goals with nuclear work.

The Vienna diplomat said that if Syria was indeed building a new reactor, it would have been required to inform the agency, and provide design data, as soon as it decided to construct one.

No country had provided satellite or other intelligence about the alleged plant to the IAEA although such help would be crucial to detecting such a site, added the diplomat, who asked not to be named due to the topic's political sensitivity.

"With the (low) level of IAEA funding, inspectors can't go around a country checking every building. The IAEA is not a go-it-alone investigative agency," said the diplomat.

The IAEA has been investigating past nuclear secrecy in Iran, a member state and ally of Syria, since 2003.

Iran has pledged to clarify the scope of its program by the end of 2007 in an effort to avoid being hit with harsh U.N. sanctions over its refusal to stop enriching uranium, a process Western powers suspect Iran is channeling into bombmaking. Iran says it only wants an alternative source of electricity.

The New York Times said the targeted Syrian facility appeared to have been much further from completion than an Iraqi reactor the Israeli air force flattened in 1981.

"A very real question is whether Syria is technically and financially able to build such a reactor. It would be hard to justify an air strike on a facility so early on in construction and, if supplied by North Korea, unlikely ever to be finished," U.S. analyst David Albright, alluding to North Korea's nuclear disarmament agreement earlier this year, told Reuters.

"Israel may have wanted to send a signal to Iran. The U.S. wants to scare Iran (off nuclear work) and this air strike might have been a way to do it, and explain some of Israel's secrecy."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/15/world/middleeast/15mideast.html>

October 15, 2007

Israel Silent on Reports of Bombing Within Syria

By STEVEN ERLANGER

Correction Appended

JERUSALEM, Oct. 14 — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Israeli officials declined Sunday to confirm or deny a report that an Israeli Air Force strike against Syria last month had bombed a partly constructed nuclear reactor apparently of North Korean design.

The report, published in The New York Times on Saturday, was featured prominently in the Israeli news media on Sunday. But Israeli officials continued their silence about the Sept. 6 airstrike, though they have signaled they are proud of the operation; a senior military official said it had restored “military deterrence” in the region.

Former Israeli officials and intelligence experts would not discuss whether Israel hit a nuclear reactor that was under construction. But they said the report was plausible given their understanding of Syria’s ambitions in the realm of nonconventional weaponry and its longstanding quest for strategic parity with Israel.

Maj. Gen. Aharon Zeevi Farkash, Israel’s former chief of military intelligence, called the notion that Israel had targeted a nuclear reactor in Syria “logical.”

Ms. Rice, flying here from Moscow for four days of talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders before a regional peace conference in the United States this fall, declined to discuss what she called “news reports” of the Israeli raid, though she did express concern about proliferation.

“We’re very concerned about any evidence of, any indication of, proliferation,” she said. “And we’re handling those in appropriate diplomatic channels.”

She also tried to draw a line between nuclear proliferation and the peace process. “The issues of proliferation do not affect the Palestinian-Israeli peace efforts we are making,” she said, warning sides against actions that could derail the peace effort. “This is the time to be extremely careful,” she said.

Ms. Rice met with various Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, hours before Mr. Barak flew to Washington to discuss security cooperation and rocket defense systems. She also met with members of the Olmert government who have been warning the prime minister not to make too many concessions to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, on territory, the status of Jerusalem or the fate of refugees.

Ms. Rice played down the idea of a breakthrough on this trip, calling the Israeli-Palestinian talks “a work in progress.” She said she did not expect “that there will be any particular outcome in the sense of breakthroughs on the document” the two sides are trying to negotiate.

Asked about Israeli-Palestinian progress, a senior American official who briefed reporters on Sunday night said, “We’re not even into the second half of the ballgame.” Speaking on the condition of

anonymity according to standard diplomatic practice, he added, “I do think this is going to require a lot of hands-on American diplomacy.”

Regarding the Syria strike, General Zeevi Farkash said Hafez al-Assad, Syria’s former president and the father of President Bashar al-Assad, had “long spoken of Syria’s weakness opposite Israel in the realm of air power, technology and ground forces,” and the need for a nonconventional ability, which in the past meant chemical weapons.

But he added that a “constellation of interests” between North Korea and Syria could have led Syria to go “a stage further” in its quest for strategic parity and deterrence, by moving beyond its chemical ability into the nuclear realm, “as Iran is doing.”

Noting the pressure on North Korea to end its nuclear weapons program, the general suggested that smuggling some elements of its program to Syria would have allowed the North “to preserve the knowledge it has accumulated and not just throw it away.”

The Syrian president has acknowledged the Israeli airstrike but has said it was against an unused military building. North Korea has denied any involvement in a nuclear program in Syria.

Uzi Arad, who once worked for Mossad, Israel’s intelligence agency, and was the national security adviser under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said that he did not know what Israel bombed in Syria but that a nuclear reactor was plausible.

North Korea’s route to a nuclear weapon was based on plutonium, he said, adding that “North Korea has the technology, and its approach to life showed that technology was something to be traded.”

Israeli analysts, meanwhile, expressed surprise at reports that some American officials considered the Israeli airstrike to have been premature. Several American and foreign officials have said it would have been years before the Syrians could have used the reactor to produce the spent nuclear fuel that could, through a series of additional steps, be reprocessed into bomb-grade plutonium.

But Emily B. Landau, director of the arms control and regional security program at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, said, “The one lesson that Israel has learned from the Iranian experience is that if you don’t take care of something like this at the very initial stages, you’re going to have a bigger problem later on.”

Correction: October 18, 2007

An article on Monday about the refusal of Israeli officials to confirm or deny a report in The Times that the Israeli Air Force had bombed a Syrian facility on Sept. 6 overstated the conclusion Israeli and American intelligence analysts had drawn about the target. While they judged the facility to be a partly constructed nuclear reactor, they said it was of apparent North Korean design; they did not say so definitively. The article also misstated the background of Uzi Arad, the national security adviser under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said it was plausible that a nuclear reactor had been bombed. Mr. Arad once worked for Mossad, Israel’s intelligence agency; he is not “a former head of Mossad.”

Ambassador denies nuclear program in Syria

Envoy: Reports that Israeli attack targeted reactor are 'fabrication'

08:50 AM CDT on Thursday, **October 18, 2007**

By TIM CONNOLLY / The Dallas Morning News

tconnolly@dallasnews.com

[EXCERPT]

Reports that an Israeli air strike in Syria was directed against a partly built nuclear reactor are "sheer fabrication," Syria's U.S. ambassador said Tuesday *[October 16, 2007]* in Dallas.

"This is an absolutely surrealistic story," Ambassador Imad Moustapha said. "There is no Syrian nuclear program whatsoever, absolutely not. Syria has never tried to acquire nuclear technology."

Mr. Moustapha, addressing the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth, noted that the Israeli government did not claim to have bombed a nuclear facility and that reports that it may have done so all emanated from Washington.

He compared those reports to pre-Iraq war assertions by the Bush administration about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the alleged ties between the Iraqi government and al-Qaeda. Both claims were later discredited.

The New York Times, citing unidentified U.S. and foreign officials, reported Saturday that the targeted site was apparently modeled after a North Korean facility used to produce fuel for nuclear weapons. U.S. and Israeli officials have declined to confirm or deny the report.

Mr. Moustapha described the target of the Sept. 6 Israeli strike as a military facility of "minor tactical importance."

US diplomat discusses N Korea policy

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Broadcast: 16/10/2007

Reporter: Tony Jones

US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill discusses the United States's relationship with North Korea.

Transcript

[EXCERPT]

[deletia]

TONY JONES: Little bit more difficult to talk about domestic politics while you're here during an election campaign, I mean that's true. While you were negotiating with the regime to end its nuclear weapons program, do you believe that Pyongyang was secretly supplying nuclear technology to Syria?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Well again, you've seen a lot of press reports on this and suffice to say that we have been very concerned about proliferation from North Korea for a long time. We've been concerned especially about their missile proliferation, we've been concerned about all of their proliferation. So, the real question is: what are we going to do about this? And there are some people that argue when we see reports of proliferation, we should somehow withdraw from the talks. And then there are others - and I would include myself in the others - that, you know, when you see reports of proliferation you need to follow them up, you need to get in the face of these people, and you need to continue this process of, you know, face-to-face talks. So, I think that's where we are. And what I can assure you of is any issues of proliferation, believe me, we address these in these talks.

TONY JONES: Do you know if there's any basis of these report of proliferation, specifically whether North Korea has supplied nuclear technology or nuclear materials to Syria?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Again, a lot of these reports, as you know, are based on intelligence reports. We don't comment on intelligence reports, but I can assure you we follow up any reports of proliferation.

TONY JONES: It's not a stretch to imagine though, is it, because North Korea has, and it's known that it has supplied ballistic missile technology to Syria in the past.

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Well, we know that they've been involved with ballistic missile technology in Syria, we know that for a fact and we've been very concerned about their relations, generally in the Middle East. And what I've told the North Koreans is we need to hear from them what else they're doing in these countries, because [if] we don't hear from them, we're going to hear it from somewhere else. So you know, the North Koreans are often fond of telling us that we have a hostile attitude to them or we don't trust them, et cetera. I think it's time for them to show a little movement on these issues.

TONY JONES: Well, what are the North Koreans telling you about the allegations they've supplied nuclear technology to build a nuclear reactor in Syria?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Well, I think you know that publicly they've simply dismissed all these allegations. Our concern is to follow up allegations of proliferation and make very clear to the North Koreans that as we go forward, and we are going forward in this process, in the six parties, and what we expect to get by the end of the year is for them to list all of their nuclear programs and in a verifiable way. So we've got to look at any - how to put it - export programs they might have.

TONY JONES: If these allegations were proven, if this intelligence were proven, what would the implications be?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Well again, you know, I don't want to speculate except to say I think the best way to deal with allegations, I think the best way to deal with proliferation issues is through a process of talks. And that's where we can make very clear what needs to happen, what needs to be done, and so I - the idea that we should somehow break off from talks, not deal with them, I think begs the question and then what? Then what are we doing? How are we dealing with the problem?

TONY JONES: This will be part of the talks though, I imagine, the proliferation issue and the Syria connection?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Any matter of proliferation needs to be addressed yes, and by the way it has been, we are working on these issues.

TONY JONES: And across the table they're denying this to you as well as publicly, are they?

CHRISTOPHER HILL: Well, you know, we are in a dialogue with them on a lot of issues including proliferation, and let's see where we come out.

[deletia]

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/913902.html>

Syria denies it confirmed target of IAF strike was nuclear facility

By Barak Ravid, Haaretz Correspondent, and Haaretz Service

Last update - 15:24 18/10/2007

Syria denied Wednesday its representatives to the United Nations had confirmed that an Israel Air Force strike last month targeted nuclear facility, and added that such facilities do not exist in Syria, state-run news agency said.

The Syrian Arab News Agency, SANA, quoting a foreign ministry source, said that Syria had made it clear in the past that there are no such facilities in Syria.

On Tuesday, a UN press release sent after a meeting of the First Committee, Disarmament and International Security, in New York paraphrased Syria's UN ambassador, Bashar al-Jaafari, as saying that a nuclear facility was hit.

"Israel was the fourth largest exporter of weapons of mass destruction and a violator of other nations' airspace, and it had taken action against nuclear facilities, including the 6 July attack in Syria," the release paraphrased al-Jaafari as saying, in an apparent error as to the date of the September 6 air strike.

Syria has confirmed that the target of an IAF raid deep within its borders last month was a nuclear facility, Israeli Foreign Ministry officials said Wednesday.

The comments were first reported to Israel by Foreign Ministry Deputy Director General for Strategic Affairs Miriam Ziv, who took part in the UN meeting.

In an official response, the Foreign Ministry confirmed the content of Ziv's report, but declined further comment.

The comments follow a Saturday New York Times account, which said that the attack targeted a partially built nuclear reactor that was years away from completion.

Israeli officials have been largely silent about the affair. The military only recently relaxed censorship to allow Israel-based journalists to report that Israeli aircraft attacked a military target deep inside Syria.

Syrian President Bashar Assad has maintained that Israel bombed an "unused military building" in the raid.

The Times said the nuclear reactor was modeled on one North Korea had used to create its stockpile of nuclear weapons fuel. North Korea has denied involvement in any such activities in Syria.

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,302656,00.html>

Syrian Official Says Israeli Airstrike Hit Nuke Facility

By James Rosen

Wednesday, **October 17, 2007**

DAMASCUS, Syria — A high-ranking Syrian official confirmed that Israel's airstrike last month in northern Syria hit a nuclear facility, according to a document obtained Wednesday by FOX News.

"Israel was the fourth-largest exporter of weapons of mass destruction and a violator of other nations' airspace, and it had taken action against nuclear facilities, including the 6 July attack in Syria," Syrian representative Bassam Darwish is quoted in the document as saying.

Diplomats familiar with the document cannot explain why July 6 was invoked, instead of Sept. 6, the date both countries say an incident occurred. A State Department source tells FOX News the best explanation is that Darwish misspoke.

The document, released by the General Assembly's Department of Public Information, recounted Tuesday's proceedings at the annual gathering of the U.N.'s Disarmament and International Security Committee.

What is clear is that this is the first time Syria has acknowledged its nuclear efforts.

Click here to view the document posted on the U.N. Web Site.

[<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/gadis3345.doc.htm>]

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/gadis3345.doc.htm>

[Accessed 2009-03-28]



16 October 2007

General Assembly
GA/DIS/3345

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Sixty-second General Assembly
First Committee
7th & 8th Meetings (AM & PM)

DELAY IN REAPING ‘DISARMAMENT DIVIDEND’ DIVERTS RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT, FUELS CONFLICT, FIRST COMMITTEE TOLD TODAY AS IT CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE

World Safer Four Decades Ago; Now, ‘Faceless, Nameless Non-State Actors’ Have Weapons of Mass Destruction, Many Countries on Verge of Joining ‘Nuclear Club’

[deletia]

Statements in the general debate were also made by the representatives of Sudan, India, San Marino, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Singapore, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Jordan and Uganda.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply were the representatives of Iran, the Russian Federation, Syria, Egypt and Georgia.

[deletia]

Right of Reply

[deletia]

Also speaking in the right of reply, the representative of Syria said that the delegation of Israel had spoken out of context yesterday. Israel had used lies and accusations, which was not useful since the entire world was aware of the objectives and practices of that “colonial” entity, which encouraged State terrorism and had never respected the resolutions adopted against it by the United Nations. There had been politically motivated acts by Israel against Syria, and, at the same time, Israel had tried to distract attention from its actions, in particular, its interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon.

Concerning the Lebanese border, he said that the Lebanese Minister of Defence had denied that anything had crossed the border, and those controlling the border had confirmed that. Syria had informed the Secretary-General of that in writing. Contacts between Lebanese and Syrian authorities had been ongoing to protect the border, and the countries had regularly reported to the Security Council on their meetings. Syria had also recently increased the number of guards on its border, preventing any transfer of weapons from Iraq or any other countries. In a letter dated 4 May, Syria had reported on that. It had also asked Europe for help in securing its border, but had not received any such assistance.

The accusations by Israel, therefore, were totally unjustified. Israel was an “enemy entity” occupying Syrian territory. Israel regularly filmed trucks carrying fruits and vegetables into the country, and had recently bombed one of them. Israel was building eight reactors in a small territory and preparing itself “in nuclear terms” for a possible war, with 20 nuclear warheads, using thousands of cluster bombs, and not providing maps to show where they were dropped or where the nuclear waste was being disposed of. It was an entity that claimed that Gaza was trying to occupy areas, when it was itself occupying territory.

Moreover, the entity that was the fourth largest exporter of lethal weapons in the world, that which violated the airspace of sovereign States and carried out military aggression against them, as had happened on 6 September against Syria, such an entity, with all those characteristics and more, had no right to go on lying without shame.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/10/18/news/UN-GEN-UN-Syria-Israel.php>

UN: Action to be taken against interpreter for false report that Syria has a nuclear facility

The Associated Press

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations said Thursday action would be taken against the interpreter responsible for an erroneous report that Syria has a nuclear facility.

Syria denied that one of its representatives told the U.N. General Assembly's committee that deals with disarmament on Tuesday that Israel had attacked a Syrian nuclear facility. It said the representative was misquoted, demanded a correction, and insisted that "such facilities do not exist in Syria."

After more than seven hours of investigation Wednesday, U.N. officials agreed the Syrian delegate was misquoted. "There was an interpretation error," U.N. associate spokesman Farhan Haq said. "There was no use of the word nuclear."

The U.N. expressed regret for the incident.

The mistake made headlines in the Middle East and heightened concerns over Damascus' nuclear ambitions. Those ambitions were under scrutiny following a Sept. 6 Israeli airstrike on an unknown target in northeastern Syria near the border with Turkey. Widespread reports say it may have been a nascent nuclear facility, a claim Syria has denied.

The incident started Tuesday night with a U.N. press summary in English of the disarmament committee's proceedings that paraphrased the Syrian representative as saying, "Israel was the fourth largest exporter of weapons of mass destruction and a violator of other nations' airspace, and it had taken action against nuclear facilities, including the 6 July attack in Syria."

The Syrian representative spoke in Arabic, but Haq said Thursday the problem was not the translation from Arabic. An interpreter who worked from Arabic into French was fairly accurate, he said.

The problem occurred when interpreter translated the statement into English from French, Haq said.

"Action will be taken against that freelance interpreter to the fullest extent of the U.N. rules and regulations," Haq said, refusing to comment further on what that action might be.

Other U.N. staffers familiar with the rules said the freelance interpreter likely works on some kind of contract with the U.N. translation service that will not be renewed. The staffers spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

Earlier Thursday, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas told reporters: "We regret the error and the department that deals with General Assembly affairs is looking further into the incident."

She confirmed that the Syrian Mission had discussed the matter with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management. She added that any reporter who spoke Arabic and listened to the original tape recording of the Syrian delegate would realize the mistake.

According to the corrected text, the Syrian representative said: "...the (entity) that is ranking number four among the exporters of lethal weapons in the world; that which violates the airspace of sovereign states and carries out military aggression against them, like what happened on Sept. 6 against my country, such entity with all those characteristics and even more, has no right for its representative to go on lying without shame..."

The Syrian representative was replying to a speech to the committee on Monday by Israeli Ambassador Miriam Ziv, deputy director general for strategic affairs in the Foreign Ministry, who accused Syria of continuing to transfer weapons to Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/10/20071017.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
October 17, 2007

Press Conference by the President

James S. Brady Briefing Room

10:45 A.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

Q There's a report today from Israel Army Radio indicating that the Syrians have confirmed that the Israelis struck a nuclear site in their country. You wouldn't comment on that before, and I'm wondering if now, on the general question, you think it's appropriate for Israel to take such action if it feels that there is mortal danger being posed to the state?

THE PRESIDENT: David, my position hadn't changed. You can ask me another question.

Q Can I ask you whether -- did you support Israel's strike in 1981 on the Iraqi reactor outside Baghdad?

THE PRESIDENT: You know, Dave, I don't remember what I was doing in 1980 -- let's see, I was living in Midland, Texas; I don't remember my reaction that far back.

Q Well, but as you look at it as President now --

THE PRESIDENT: -- private citizen back there in 1981 in Midland, Texas, trying to make a living for my family and --

Q But you're a careful -- someone who studies history --

THE PRESIDENT: Student of history? I do, yes. No, I don't remember my reaction, to be frank with you.

Q But I'm asking you now, as you look back at it, do you think it was the right action for Israel to take?

THE PRESIDENT: David, I'm not going to comment on the subject that you're trying to get me to comment on.

Q Why won't you? But isn't it a fair question to say, is it -- given all the talk about Iran and the potential threat, whether it would be appropriate for Israel to act --

THE PRESIDENT: Hey, Dave -- Dave --

Q -- in self-defense --

THE PRESIDENT: I understand --

Q -- if Iran were to --

THE PRESIDENT: -- I understand where you're trying to take --

Q -- develop nuclear weapons?

THE PRESIDENT: I understand where you're trying to take. It's a clever ruse to get me to comment on it, but I'm not going to. Thank you.

Q Well, I'm just wondering why you think it's not appropriate to make that judgment, when it's a -- it is a real-world scenario, as we know, since they apparently took this action against Syria --

THE PRESIDENT: Dave. Welcome back. (Laughter.)

[deletia]

Q Let's stay with the nuclear -- here. When North Korea tested a nuclear device, you said that any proliferation would be a grave threat to the U.S., and North Korea would be responsible for the consequences. Are you denying that North Korea has any role in the suspected nuclear --

THE PRESIDENT: See, you're trying to pull a Gregory.

Q Yes, I am.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, well, I'm not going to fall for it. But I'd like to talk about --

Q Don't Americans have a right to know about who is proliferating, especially when you're negotiating with North Korea?

THE PRESIDENT: No, you have a right to know this, that when it comes to the six-party talks, proliferation -- the issue of proliferation has equal importance with the issue of weaponry, and that North Korea has said that they will stop proliferating, just like they have said they will fully disclose and disable any weapons programs.

Step one of that has been dealing with shuttering Pyongyang. Step two will be full declaration of any plutonium that has been manufactured, and/or the construction of bombs, along with a full declaration of any proliferation activities. And in my judgment, the best way to solve this issue with North Korea peacefully is to put it in -- keep it in the context of six-party talks. And the reason why is that

diplomacy only works if there are consequences when diplomacy breaks down, and it makes sense for there to be other people at the table so that if North Korea were to have said to all of us, we're doing to do x, y, or z, and they don't, that we have other -- people other than the United States being consequential.

There's a lot of aid that goes on with -- between North Korea and China, or North Korea and South Korea, and therefore, if they renege on their promises -- and they have said -- they have declared that they will show us weapons and get rid of the weapons programs, as well as stop proliferation -- if they don't fulfill that which they've said, we are now in a position to make sure that they understand that there will be consequences.

And I'm pleased with the progress we're making. Is there still work to be done? You bet there's work to be done. Do I go into this thing saying, well, you know, gosh, the process is more important than results? I don't. What matters most to me are whether or not we can achieve the results that I've said we're hoping to achieve. And if not, there will be consequences to the North Koreans.

Q Was Syria part of those talks? Is Syria part of the talks?

THE PRESIDENT: Proliferation is a part of the talks.

Q Including Syria?

THE PRESIDENT: Elaine.

Look, in all due respect to you and Gregory, this is not my first rodeo. And I know where you're trying to get me to comment. I'm not going to comment on it, one way or the other.

Elaine.

Q But, Mr. President, your administration has talked about --

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Martha. Martha, thank you. Elaine.



Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
Washington, DC
October 17, 2007

[EXCERPT]

MR. CASEY: ...

Nicholas.

QUESTION: On North Korea, Tom, I know that you have not been willing to talk about any Syria links or any programs and such, though you are aware, I am sure, of reports, in addition to the Israeli strike, of a shipment that recently went to Syria that is reported to be from North Korea. But you probably also know there have been suggestions from people whom some might describe as hardliners that the reason you're not talking much about any North Korean help that Syria might have received is because you do not want this to derail the deal with North Korea. Is there any truth to that?

MR. CASEY: I think that's where I started the briefing about the answers the President gave. I think the President made very clear, and you can go back and check the transcript, that nonproliferation issues have always been a part of the six-party talks; that the North Koreans have committed to us to both ceasing any support for proliferation activities as well as providing a declaration that covers the full range of their nuclear programs, including what proliferation activities they might have engaged in. And that is where we believe we will be able to find the best answers to what exactly is the full scope of their program, and that's essential to being able to have confidence that as we move forward with the disablement and ultimately dismantling of the full range of their nuclear program that we have a complete understanding of what's there.

Beyond that, in terms of the various press reports that have been out there, it's the same answer as always. I just don't have anything for you on it.

QUESTION: So the declaration is not -- the deadline for the declaration is the end of the year, right?

MR. CASEY: Yeah.

QUESTION: So between now and then, they're free to export anything they like?

MR. CASEY: Nicholas, again, they've committed to ceasing those activities. I'm not going to try and parse it for you. They've made commitments; we expect them to live up to them.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

MR. CASEY: Yeah, Param.

QUESTION: I mean, despite Israel's admission that they've had a strike on Syria, why is the Administration refusing to admit or deny that North Korean material has been -- nuclear material had been found in Syria?

MR. CASEY: Look, I think the President refused to comment on this about five times less than an hour ago. I could probably go back and count the number of times I have simply said I don't have anything for you on it, and you could ask again, Param, but it's the same answer as before. Seriously, I just don't have anything for you.

QUESTION: Tom, can you just --

MR. CASEY: Yeah.

QUESTION: You said you expect them to abide by the commitments they've made. They actually haven't -- in these things they signed, they never said we're not going to export material --

MR. CASEY: Nicholas --

QUESTION: -- to anybody else. They haven't.

MR. CASEY: Nicholas, look, I think it's abundantly clear that we expect a full declaration from the North Koreans about the extent of their nuclear program. It's also abundantly clear -- and you've heard it from the President, you've heard it from Chris, you've heard it from the Secretary, you've heard it from every official involved in this policy -- that proliferation issues have been part of our discussion with the North Koreans since the beginning.

The United States is not going to pretend that North Korea has given us a declaration or pretend that they have ceased their activities. This is a serious process. It's designed to get us to the point where the United States can be assured, the other members of the six-party can be assured and the world can be assured that North Korea is out of the nuclear business.

Are we there yet? Nope, we sure aren't. There's still a facility at Yongbyon. It's been shut down, but it hasn't been disabled. And ultimately, after it's disabled, it'll need to be dismantled.

They've promised to give us a declaration. Do we have it yet? No, but we've got a commitment to get one. Can I tell you right now what's in that declaration or, you know, how it will look to us at the time? No, we'll have to see. That's why this whole process is based on good faith actions for good faith actions.

But I would note that we have now entered what is a really new phase in the ending of North Korea's nuclear program. We have in the past gotten to the point of suspension of activities. That's where the

February 13th agreement brought us. This latest agreement takes us to actual dismantlement, to moving their facilities, the ones that are producing plutonium for nuclear bombs, out of business not just in terms of temporary shuttering, which they could restart and have back to full operations in a few weeks, but something where it's going to take a year or more for them to do so. And I think that's an important step and it's one that hasn't been achieved before. The declaration of their full length of their programs is also extremely significant because it's something that we haven't had. And once we have that, then we will be able to know and work specifically on eliminating any and all other nuclear programs or activities that may be out there.

But anyone asserting to you that the United States is turning a blind eye to proliferation activities, whether by North Korea or anyone else, simply isn't speaking in a way that marries up with the facts on this issue.

QUESTION: Is it abundantly clear that North Korea is not (inaudible) proliferation activities?

MR. CASEY: Nice try, Param. Look, as I said, we have had proliferation as part of our discussion with them since the beginning of the six-party talks. I think when we get a declaration we'll be able to talk in more specific detail about what might or might not be there.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/10/18/2062472.htm?section=justin>

Syria denies existence of nuclear site

Posted Thu **Oct 18, 2007** 12:00am AEST

Syria has denied media reports suggesting that its UN envoy had said a nuclear site was hit in an Israeli air strike last month, saying there was no such thing on its soil.

"The ministry denies media reports that Syria's ambassador in New York had said the September 6 raid targeted a nuclear plant because no such facility exists in Syria," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Syria has already made this clear in the past," it added.

Israeli media reports had said that a Syrian representative had made the comments at a meeting of a UN committee in New York.

According to a New York Times report on Sunday, Israeli warplanes bombed a site that Israeli and US intelligence believe was a partly built nuclear reactor possibly modelled after one in North Korea.

Citing unnamed US and foreign officials with access to the intelligence reports, the report said it appeared Israel carried out the raid to demonstrate its determination to snuff out even a nascent nuclear project.

But the UN nuclear watchdog said on Monday [2007-10-15] it had no information about any "undeclared nuclear facility in Syria" and that it was investigating the media reports.

White House mum on Syrian nukes

October 18, 2007

By Nicholas Kralev -

Bush administration officials said yesterday that they are determined to prevent current and former hard-liners from using reports of North Korean nuclear-related transfers to Syria to derail negotiations with Pyongyang.

President Bush repeatedly refused at a press conference to disclose any information about the suspected exports to Syria or an Israeli air strike on a site thought to house those materials, saying any proliferation concerns that the United States has will be addressed in six-nation talks with the North.

Asked whether the American people have a right to know whether North Korea is secretly aiding the nuclear ambitions of a country hostile to the United States while negotiating the end of its own programs, Mr. Bush offered a terse answer.

“No,” he said. “You have a right to know this — that when it comes to the six-party talks, the issue of proliferation has equal importance with the issue of weaponry, and that North Korea has said that they will stop proliferating, just like they have said they will fully disclose and disable any weapons programs.”

Current and former hard-line members of Mr. Bush's administration, who drove North Korea policy during his first term but have since lost his ear, have expressed dismay that the White House is not making more of the Syria reports.

Those policy-makers to whom Mr. Bush listens now — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Christopher R. Hill, the chief negotiator with the North — will not allow the hard-liners, who criticized the recent nuclear agreement even before the Syria mystery, to stall the negotiations, administration officials said.

“The president has decided that it's worth pursuing a deal with North Korea, and that's what matters,” one official said.

In February, Pyongyang agreed in principle to dismantle its nuclear programs, and to shut down its main reactor at Yongbyon as a first step, which it did in July. Earlier this month, it promised to disable Yongbyon's three main facilities and to produce a full declaration of its nuclear efforts and capabilities by year's end.

But critics of the deal — whose other parties are China, Japan, South Korea and Russia — said the text was too vague and left much room for interpretation.

Some of that vagueness became apparent yesterday, when Mr. Bush said the North Koreans had agreed to something that analysts said is not technically part of the deal.

“Step two will be full declaration of any plutonium that has been manufactured and/or the construction of bombs, along with a full declaration of any proliferation activities,” the president said.

The Oct. 3 document does say that the North “committed not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how,” but when it comes to the declaration, it says it “will include all nuclear facilities, materials and programs.” There is no mention of documenting proliferation activities.

Nevertheless, such a disclosure “is implied in their commitment, and we intend to hold them to it,” said Gordon Johndroe, spokesman for the National Security Council at the White House.

The agreement is also vague on whether North Korea is required to list any nuclear weapons it has built. Kim Kye-gwan, the chief North Korean negotiator, was reported as saying two weeks ago: “We can't declare nuclear weapons this year, because if we do it at this stage, our nuclear-weapons technology level will be revealed.”

Bruce Klingner, senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said the “very vague document” demonstrates the need for “specific treaty language prohibiting further proliferation and requiring a full declaration” of past activities.

Congress is likely to ask questions about the Syria reports during Mr. Hill's next testimony on the deal, Mr. Klingner said.

“The administration needs to come clean on this story to the degree possible to garner more support for the negotiations,” he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/18/AR2007101802549.html>

Syrians Disassembling Ruins at Site Bombed by Israel, Officials Say

By Robin Wright and Joby Warrick

Washington Post Staff Writers

Friday, October 19, 2007; A18

Syria has begun dismantling the remains of a site Israel bombed Sept. 6 in what may be an attempt to prevent the location from coming under international scrutiny, said U.S. and foreign officials familiar with the aftermath of the attack.

Based on overhead photography, the officials say the site in Syria's eastern desert near the Euphrates River had a "signature" or characteristics of a small but substantial nuclear reactor, one similar in structure to North Korea's facilities.

The dismantling of the damaged site, which appears to be still underway, could make it difficult for weapons inspectors to determine the precise nature of the facility and how Syria planned to use it. Syria, which possesses a small reactor used for scientific research, has denied seeking to expand its nuclear program. But U.S. officials knowledgeable about the Israeli raid have described the target as a nuclear facility being constructed with North Korean assistance.

The bombed facility is different from the one Syria displayed to journalists last week to back its allegations that Israel had bombed an essentially an empty building, said the officials, who insisted on anonymity because details of the Israeli attack are classified.

While U.S. officials express increasing confidence that the Syrian facility was nuclear-related, divisions persist within the government and among weapons experts over the significance of the threat. If the facility was a nuclear reactor, U.S. weapons experts said it would almost certainly have taken Syria several years to complete the structure, and much longer to produce significant quantities of plutonium for potential use in nuclear weapons. Nuclear reactors also are used to generate electricity.

"This isn't like a Road Runner cartoon where you call up Acme Reactors and they deliver a functioning reactor to your back yard. It takes years to build," said Joseph Cirincione, director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress. "This is an extremely demanding technology, and I don't think Syria has the technical, engineering or financial base to really support such a reactor."

While expressing concern over the prospect that Syria may have decided to launch a nuclear program in secret, some weapons experts question why neither Israel nor the United States made any effort before the secret attack -- or in the six weeks since -- to offer evidence to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a move that would trigger an inspection of Syria by the nuclear watchdog.

"The reason we have an IAEA and a safeguard system is that, if there is evidence of wrongdoing, it can be presented by a neutral body to the international community so that a collective response can be pursued," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association. "It seems to me highly risky and premature for another country to bomb such a facility."

But John R. Bolton, the Bush administration's former ambassador to the United Nations, said Syria's secrecy -- including its apparent move to clean up the site after the bombing -- suggests that Damascus

is pursuing a strategy similar to that of Iran, which the Bush administration believes is pursuing a nuclear weapons capability. Bolton said Iran once attempted to conceal nuclear activity from IAEA inspectors by bulldozing nuclear-related buildings and even digging up nearby topsoil to remove all traces of nuclear material.

"The common practice for people with legitimate civilian nuclear power programs is to be transparent, because they have nothing to hide," Bolton said.

The IAEA has not been provided any evidence about the Syrian facility and has been unable to obtain any reliable details about the Sept. 6 strike, said a European diplomat familiar with the agency's internal discussions.

Syria is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has cooperated with IAEA inspections of the small, 27-kilowatt research facility it has run for decades, IAEA sources said.

Some experts speculate that Israeli and U.S. officials may have calculated that reporting their intelligence to the IAEA would have produced only limited repercussions, the equivalent of a diplomatic slap on the wrist to Syria, which might have decided to build the facility anyway.

Foreign sources familiar with the attack say Israel wanted to send a strong message to Iran about the price of developing a secret nuclear program. Israel is increasingly alarmed about Iran's intentions and frustrated that the international community has not persuaded Tehran to suspend its uranium enrichment program.

If North Korea is shown to have helped with the construction of a Syrian reactor, it would suggest that the Pyongyang government has been secretly hawking its nuclear know-how to the Syrians for years, several experts said. But even if North Korea's involvement is proved, it is unlikely that the Bush administration would halt negotiations with Pyongyang over dismantling its nuclear program, the experts said.

"The Bush administration has clearly decided not to let this incident deter them from trying to limit North Korea's nuclear activity," said Gary Samore, a National Security Council member under President Bill Clinton who is now with the Council on Foreign Relations.

<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/story?id=3752687&page=1>

EXCLUSIVE: The Case for Israel's Strike on Syria

Official: Air Attack Targeted Nascent Nuclear Facility Built With North Korean 'Expertise'

By MARTHA RADDATZ

Oct. 19, 2007

Israeli officials believed that a target their forces bombed inside Syria last month was a nuclear facility, because they had detailed photographs taken by a possible spy inside the complex, ABC News has learned.

The Bush administration has steadfastly refused to say anything about the Israeli raid on Syria, or to confirm what was hit. But ABC News has learned of the apparent mole and other dramatic and secret details about the events leading up to the airstrike, plus the evidence that supported it.

A senior U.S. official told ABC News the Israelis first discovered a suspected Syrian nuclear facility early in the summer, and the Mossad (Israel's intelligence agency) managed to either co-opt one of the facility's workers or to insert a spy posing as an employee.

As a result, the Israelis obtained many detailed pictures of the facility from the ground.

The official said the suspected nuclear facility was approximately 100 miles from the Iraqi border, deep in the desert along the Euphrates River. It was a place, the official said, "where no one would ever go unless you had a reason to go there."

But the hardest evidence of all was the photographs.

The official described the pictures as showing a big cylindrical structure, with very thick walls all well reinforced.

The photos show rebar hanging out of the cement used to reinforce the structure, which was still under construction.

There was also a secondary structure and a pump station, with trucks around it. But there was no fissionable material found because the facility was not yet operating.

The official said there was a larger structure just north of a small pump station; a nuclear reactor would need a constant source of water to keep it cool.

The official said the facility was a North Korean design in its construction, the technology present and the ability to put it all together.

It was North Korean "expertise," said the official, meaning the Syrians must have had "human" help from North Korea.

A light water reactor designed by North Koreans could be constructed to specifically produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

When the Israelis came to the CIA with the pictures, the U.S. then got the site's coordinates and backed it up with very detailed satellite imagery of its own, and pinpointed "drop points" to determine what would be needed to target it.

The Israelis urged the U.S. government to destroy the complex, and the U.S. started looking at options about how to destroy the facility: Targeters were assembled, and officials contemplated a special forces raid using helicopters, which would mean inserting forces to collect data and then blow the site up.

That option would have been very daring, the official says, because of the distance from the border and the amount of explosives it would take to take down the facility.

The options were considered, but according to the official, word came back from the White House that the United States was not interested in carrying out the raid.

But as ABC News reported in July, the Israelis made the decision to take the facility out themselves, though the U.S. urged them not to. The Bush administration, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates leading the way, said the Israelis and the U.S. should "confront not attack."

The official said the facility had been there at least eight months before the strike, but because of the lack of fissionable material, the United States hesitated on the attack because it couldn't be absolutely proved that it was a nuclear site.

But the official told ABC News, "It was unmistakable what it was going to be. There is no doubt in my mind."

Imad Moustapha: Give Syria a place at the table

U.S. and Israel are trying to marginalize Syria's role in the peace process
08:42 AM CDT on Saturday, **October 20, 2007**

Excerpts of an editorial board interview with Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha, who addressed the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth on Tuesday.

[deletia]

We don't know why Israel launched an air strike on Syria on Sept. 6, but we assume they had some justification. If you were in Israel's shoes, could you understand why they wouldn't want you at the negotiating table?

We believe in Syria that the only way forward is to reach a peace agreement with the Israelis. We are realists. We do understand that the Israelis enjoy military superiority compared to the Syrian capabilities. ... We also understand that the Israelis know very well that, despite their sheer military superiority, they cannot impose on us forever their policies of occupation. ...

The Israelis know very well, and the United States knows absolutely well, that there is no Syrian nuclear program whatsoever. It's an absolutely blatant lie. And it's not like they think we have but they're not sure. They know. Let me be clear about it: Syria has never, ever contemplated acquiring nuclear technology. We are not contemplating it today. We are not contemplating doing this in the future – neither for military nor for civilian purposes.

Then what did Israel attack?

Israel attacked a military installation in Syria. This is not unprecedented in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. ... It's easy for Syria right now to launch a missile against an Israeli target. But where this will lead to – another destructive war in our region similar to what happened last summer in Lebanon? ... What did this [Lebanon] attack lead to? Nowhere. Israel attacked Syria a month ago. What did this lead to? They did not destroy our military capability. It served domestic reasons in Israel, and it served some special, narrow-minded agendas here in the United States.

How does it serve Israel's agenda to keep this quiet? Israel hasn't said a word about this attack.

Israel didn't say anything, but this suited Israel very well, because suddenly ... everybody in the United States is discussing this "Syrian nuclear program." Everybody – particularly The New York Times – every two or three days they have a new article about the Syrian nuclear program. And we are flabbergasted in Syria. I have written three letters to The New York Times telling them: Have you forgotten what you have done prior to the Iraq war, when you published all the fallout stories about the Iraqi WMDs? Don't you realize that you're being "Judith Millered" for the second time within five years?

I'm trying to tell The New York Times: Look, be careful. Can't you see that you are being led into extremely dangerous territory? You are accusing a country of doing something it has not even contemplated doing – based on nothing. Based on leaks from Israeli agents who are very happy playing this game.

What was attacked, and what was the damage? Were there any deaths?

Minor damage. The military significance of it was minor. ... Nobody died. None. It was a military warehouse. ... All I'm saying is that every story that has to do with a Syrian nuclear program is an absolutely false story, full stop. Nothing whatsoever that Syria is doing has to do with nuclear technology for reasons that are simple for anyone to analyze: We are realists. We understand that if Syria even contemplated nuclear technology, then the gates of hell would open on us.

COMMENTARY

What Happened in Syria?

By PETER HOEKSTRA and ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

October 20, 2007; Page A10

Over the last few weeks, State Department officials have reported major diplomatic breakthroughs that will roll back North Korea's nuclear weapons program, allow Pyongyang to be removed from the U.S. state sponsors of terror list, and normalize relations between our two countries.

North Korea reportedly has agreed to disable its nuclear facilities and has, as it has done many times before, promised to give a full accounting of its nuclear program. The latest deadline is Dec. 31, 2007. Congress has been asked to support this agreement, which State Department officials claim will benefit our nation and promote regional stability.

Then, early last month, Israel conducted an airstrike against a facility in northern Syria that press reports have linked to nuclear programs by North Korea, Iran or other rogue states. If this event proves that Syria acquired nuclear expertise or material from North Korea, Iran or other rogue states, it would constitute a grave threat to international security for which Syria and any other involved parties must be held accountable.

The Bush administration, however, has thrown an unprecedented veil of secrecy around the Israeli airstrike. It has briefed only a handful of very senior members of Congress, leaving the vast majority of foreign relations and intelligence committee members in the dark. We are among the very few who were briefed, but we have been sworn to secrecy on this matter. However, we are prepared to state, based on what we have learned, that it is critical for every member of Congress to be briefed on this incident, and as soon as possible.

We are concerned that, although the Bush administration refuses to discuss the Israeli airstrike with the American people or with the majority of Congress, it has not hesitated to give information on background to the press to shape this story to its liking. New York Times writer David Sanger authored and coauthored articles on Oct. 14 and 15 that appeared to reflect extensive input from senior policy makers. Washington Post writer Glenn Kessler coauthored an article on Sept. 21 that also cited inside information from the administration. We believe this is unacceptable.

We want to remind President Bush that the Constitution invests Congress with various powers and authority over foreign policy. Not only does Congress have an obligation to conduct oversight over these matters, but it is accountable to the people of this country to ensure that their security and interests are safeguarded.

The proposed deals with North Korea will involve substantial expenditures of U.S. funds to pay for heavy fuel oil deliveries. Congress will be asked to approve the authorization of funds for this expenditure. We cannot carry out our duties when we are being denied information about these critical national security matters.

We all want to secure agreements that address the proliferation of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and unconventional weapons. However, for these agreements to have long-term viability, they must be transparent, and based on close consultations and collaboration with the Congress.

If the Israeli airstrike last month is related to covert nuclear collaboration involving Syria and either North Korea, Iran or other rogue states, this may or may not be an issue that can be easily addressed by negotiations alone. It is certain, however, that such a serious international security issue will not stay secret forever.

Congress, therefore, needs to be fully briefed, not just on the details of the airstrike, but on how to address this matter and how, if press reports are true, rogue states will be held accountable for what could amount to a very serious case of WMD proliferation.

We regret that the administration has ignored numerous letters from Congress asking that all members be briefed on the Israeli airstrike. Failing to disclose the details of this incident to the legislative branch, preventing due diligence and oversight -- but talking to the press about it -- is not the way to win support for complex and difficult diplomatic efforts to combat proliferation by rogue nations.

Until Congress is fully briefed, it would be imprudent for the administration to move forward with agreements with state proliferators. Congress must be a full partner in this process and, from this point forward, must be kept dutifully and currently informed about this matter.

Mr. Hoekstra is the senior Republican member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Ms. Ros-Lehtinen is the senior Republican member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

http://www.newsmax.com/insidecover/Israel_attack_syria/2007/10/22/42934.html

Hoekstra, Ros-Lehtinen: Reveal Syria Attack Info

Monday, October 22, 2007 3:15 PM

By: Newsmax Staff

[EXCERPTS]

Two influential Republican members of the U.S. House have castigated the Bush administration for failing to brief Congress on Israeli bombing of a suspected nuclear facility in Syria last month.

In an op-ed piece in Saturday's Wall Street Journal, Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, senior GOP member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, the senior Republican member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote:

[deletia; full text of op-ed above]

The day after the op-ed piece was published, Hoekstra and Rep. Jane Harman of California – who chairs the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Intelligence – appeared on CNN's "Late Edition" with Wolf Blitzer.

[See http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=ci_gFFXg8dY]

Hoekstra reiterated his call for the Bush administration to divulge to Congress details about the Israeli strike and the alleged Syrian-North Korean program.

But when asked if she had been briefed, Harman said: "I know what I know from the public media."

Blitzer said: "But you're the chair of this important intelligence subcommittee of the House Homeland Security Committee. Have they briefed you?"

Harman answered: "No, they have not briefed me on what went on in northern Syria ... I've had some conversations with Peter, but he's not free to reveal classified information even to me, although I have the clearances. That's just how the thing works."

Asked by Blitzer if the reported North Korean link to the Syrian facility "raises alarm bells" for him, Hoekstra replied:

"Absolutely. I mean what we've found through the '90s and what we have found through the Bush administration is that the North Koreans, they'll always make deal, but the other thing that we'll see consistently is that they will break those agreements."

Archive for Friday, October 26, 2007

GOP asks about N. Korean role in Syria

By Peter Spiegel

October 26, 2007 in print edition A-7

House Republicans pressed the Bush administration's top North Korea negotiator Thursday [2007-10-25] to explain a reported Israeli airstrike last month on a Syrian nuclear facility under construction, indicating growing congressional concern over the incident.

At a Capitol Hill hearing, Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee accused the administration of improperly withholding details of the Sept. 6. bombing raid, saying they needed to know of any evidence that North Korea was involved in spreading nuclear technology to Syria.

Evidence of North Korean involvement in a Syrian program would be grounds to void a pending nuclear deal with North Korea, some said.

Christopher Hill, the State Department's assistant secretary for Asia and the official responsible for U.S. negotiations with North Korea, acknowledged under intense questioning that he had raised the issue of Syria in recent talks with the North Korean government.

The statement was the closest any senior administration official has come to acknowledging possible North Korean involvement in a Syrian nuclear program. But Hill, like other senior officials, including President Bush, declined to confirm the Israeli strike had occurred, saying he was not authorized to discuss sensitive intelligence matters.

On Thursday, the private Institute for Science and International Security, based in Washington, said it had obtained commercial satellite photos showing that a large building at the Syrian site had been razed. Its website, www.isis-online.org, includes before-and-after images and says tractors or bulldozers can be seen where the suspected reactor building that was being constructed no longer stands.

At the hearing, Hill testified: "Clearly we cannot be reaching a nuclear agreement with North Korea if, at the same time, they're proliferating. It is not acceptable."

In February, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program and allow in international inspectors in return for energy assistance and the unfreezing of North Korean assets. The agreement, the details of which are still being finalized, has been criticized by GOP conservatives for rewarding the government in Pyongyang before its nuclear program is fully dismantled.

Thursday's hearing was the latest in a series of Republican demands to be briefed on the Israeli strike and any evidence of nuclear assistance from North Korea or Iran.

Earlier this week, leading Republicans on the House Intelligence and Foreign Affairs committees, both among a select group of senior congressional leaders who have been briefed on the incident, demanded that all members of Congress be filled in.

Rep. Ed Royce (R-Fullerton) said at the hearing that if there were evidence that North Korea was providing Syria with nuclear assistance, it would be “a pretty damning indictment of Pyongyang’s intentions” that should call into question the six-party talks on the new agreement.

Hill said that the administration would not tolerate nuclear proliferation by North Korea, but declined to say whether intelligence gathered as a result of the Israeli strike showed evidence of North Korean involvement.

peter.spiegel@latimes.com

A New Intelligence Failure?

By Mark Hosenball | NEWSWEEK

Nov 5, 2007 Issue

The Syrian desert facility that Israel apparently attacked in a shadowy Sept. 6 raid—and that some administration officials believe was a secret nuclear reactor—might be several years old. Israel bombed the complex near the Euphrates River months after alerting the United States to the existence of a suspect Syrian facility, according to intelligence sources. But photographic evidence obtained by NEWSWEEK shows the boxy main building already existed in 2003, and a European intelligence source said the program might have begun years earlier. The source, who asked for anonymity when discussing sensitive information, said fresh intelligence suggests the Syrians actually started a hush-hush program under the regime of late president Hafez Assad, who died in 2000, and that initially, clandestine factions of the government may have kept it secret from Bashar al-Assad, Hafez's son and successor. If true, it could be a significant intelligence failure by American and other Western spy agencies. (The CIA declined to comment.)

The facility in the 2003 satellite photo, taken by the commercial remote-sensing company GeoEye, appears identical to the one pictured in satellite images snapped weeks before the Israeli strike, with one notable distinction: the recent photos include what analysts have described as a pumping station along the Euphrates. Nuclear experts say Syria probably put in the pumping station to cool a reactor, which many believe was based on a North Korean design and was years from completion. A post-raid commercial satellite image taken last week showed the site had been flattened by bulldozers—evidence that most experts agree demonstrated Syria's desire to hide all traces of the facility. Israel has kept quiet about its attack, while Syria denied having a secret nuclear program.

Immediately after the bombing, many nuclear-proliferation experts in the United States and Europe expressed doubt that Syria had the money or the scientific capability for a secret atomic program. They also questioned whether North Korea would be desperate and greedy enough to sell nuclear wares to Syria. The new photos now have skeptics admitting they may have been mistaken.

The Bush administration has maintained a strict gag order on discussion of the Israeli attack. But two weeks after the incident, U.S. "intelligence czar" Mike McConnell began giving highly classified one-on-one briefings about the incident to a handful of congressional leaders. Republicans and Democrats came away with opposing conclusions. According to a former administration official, Republican legislators began agitating for a halt, or at least an interruption, in ongoing U.S. disarmament talks with North Korea. But House Foreign Affairs chairman Tom Lantos told NEWSWEEK that even after the briefing, he remains "fully in favor of pursuing ongoing diplomatic discussions with North Korea." Lantos said he also favors closer relations with both Pyongyang and Damascus, and that if North Korea disarmament talks succeed, the country should be dropped from a U.S. list of states that sponsor terrorism.

<http://pogoblog.typepad.com/pogo/2007/11/congress-still-.html>

Congress Still Largely Uninformed on Israeli Strike on Syria

Nick Schwellenbach

November 8, 2007

[EXCERPT]

Despite several congressional requests to the executive branch for briefings on Israel's air strike on Syria in September, Congress still remains largely in the dark, POGO learned yesterday. On October 20, Reps. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), respectively the ranking members of the House intelligence and foreign relations committees, published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal charging that:

We regret that the administration has ignored numerous letters from Congress asking that all members be briefed on the Israeli airstrike. Failing to disclose the details of this incident to the legislative branch, preventing due diligence and oversight -- but talking to the press about it -- is not the way to win support for complex and difficult diplomatic efforts to combat proliferation by rogue nations. [emphasis added]

The Senate intelligence committee officially told me "no comment" yesterday *[November 7, 2007]*. However, a congressional staffer told me that "the issue has been closely held. The leadership of the defense committees and Intel committees have been briefed, but not the general membership of the Congress as you correctly noted in Ros-Lethinen's OpEd." Other sources told me that they were not aware of their full committees being briefed yet either.

Perhaps of greater practical concern for congressional oversight is, though a few select members have been briefed, none of their staff, which members depend upon for their expertise and knowledge, have not been allowed to accompany them, POGO has been told.

<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3218,36-969665@51-677013,0.html>

Mohamed ElBaradei pense que "l'Iran ne sera pas une menace dès demain"

LE MONDE | 22.10.07 | 14h56 • Mis à jour le 22.10.07 | 15h01

VIENNE ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

[EXCERPT]

Quel commentaire faites-vous à propos des raids aériens menés le 6 septembre par Israël en Syrie? Selon la presse américaine, ces frappes visaient des sites où se construisait un réacteur nucléaire basé sur des éléments en provenance de la Corée du Nord. Ces informations sont-elles fondées ?

A l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), nous avons reçu zéro, et je souligne "zéro", information allant dans ce sens. Nous avons contacté les Syriens, ainsi que les agences de renseignement étrangères. Nous avons dit : si l'un d'entre vous a la moindre information montrant qu'il y avait des éléments liés au nucléaire, évidemment, nous serions contents d'enquêter là-dessus. J'ose espérer, franchement, qu'avant que les gens en viennent à bombarder et à utiliser la force, ils viennent nous voir pour signaler leurs préoccupations. Nous serions alors allés sur place pour vérifier. Nous n'avons pas d'indication montrant que c'est nucléaire. Tant que nous ne recevons pas d'information allant dans ce sens, nous ne pourrons pas faire grand-chose.

Dans le suivi que vous avez fait jusqu'à présent des activités nucléaires de la Corée du Nord, avez-vous trouvé la moindre indication d'un lien, ou de transferts, vers la Syrie ?

Nous ne disposons pas d'informations de cet ordre. Concernant la Corée du Nord, nous avons été les premiers à aller en 1992 au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU pour dire que quelque chose était problématique dans ce pays. Nous ne cachons pas les faits. Mais pour pouvoir agir avec autorité, nous devons disposer d'informations.

Comment cette action militaire israélienne en Syrie pèse-t-elle, selon vous, sur le dossier nucléaire iranien ?

Je dois vraiment savoir - bientôt j'espère - ce qui s'est passé exactement en Syrie. Certains ont tendance à parler un peu vite de l'usage de la force, en brandissant cette idée de "guerre juste" ou de "guerre préventive". La Charte de l'ONU édicte clairement les cas spécifiques dans lesquels la force peut être autorisée : dans un cas d'autodéfense face à une attaque imminente, ou alors lorsqu'une décision collective est prise par le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU s'il juge que la paix et la sécurité internationales sont menacées.

C'est pourquoi, lorsqu'il est question d'employer la force sans explication, je deviens très préoccupé. J'espère obtenir une explication (sur le raid en Syrie), indiquant notamment en quoi il s'agirait d'un cas d'autodéfense. Je ne le sais pas. Y a-t-il un rapport avec le nucléaire ? Y a-t-il un rapport avec l'Iran ? Ce sont des questions importantes. J'ajoute une chose. Lorsque les Israéliens ont détruit le réacteur nucléaire de recherche de Saddam Hussein en 1981 (Osirak), la conséquence a été que Saddam Hussein a fait basculer son programme dans la clandestinité. Il a commencé à mettre en place un programme nucléaire militaire massif, "underground". L'usage de la force peut repousser les échéances, mais il ne traite pas les racines du problème.

[Translated from Le Monde (Paris)]

MOHAMED ELBARADEI THINKS "IRAN IS NOT AN IMMEDIATE THREAT"

By Natalie Nougayrède

Le Monde

October 23, 2007 (posted Oct. 22)

<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0,36-969665,0.html>

[EXCERPT]

*** What comment do you have about the air raids Israel carried out in Syria on September 6? According to the American press, these strikes were aimed at sites where a nuclear reactor was being constructed with equipment that came from North Korea. Are these reports well-founded?**

At the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), we have received zero, and I emphasize "zero," information that goes in that direction. We have contacted the Syrians, as well as foreign intelligence agencies. We've said: if one of you has the slightest information showing that there were elements tied to nuclear matters, obviously, we would be happy to investigate it. I dare hope, frankly, that before people start bombing and using force, they will come to see us to say what they're worried about. We would then have made an on-site verification inspection. We have no indication showing that this is nuclear. So long as we receive no information going in this direction, we can't do much.

*** In following North Korea's nuclear activities so far, have you found the slightest indication of a link or of transfers in the direction of Syria?**

We have no information of that kind. Concerning North Korea, we were the first to go in 1992 to the U.N. Security Council to say that there was something problematic about that country. We don't hide facts. But in order to act with authority, we have to have information.

*** How has this Israeli military action in Syria affected, in your opinion, the Iranian nuclear matter?**

I should really know -- soon, I hope -- what exactly happened in Syria. Some have a tendency to talk a little quickly about the use of force, waving around this idea of "just war" or "preventive war." The U.N. Charter pronounces clearly the specific cases in which force can be authorized: in a case of self-defense when faced with an imminent attack, or when a collective decision is taken by the U.N. Security Council if it thinks that international peace and security are threatened.

That's why, when it's a question of using force without any explanation, I get very worried. I hope to obtain an explanation [about the raid in Syria], indicating in particular in what way it was a case of self-defense. I don't know. Is there a relation to nuclear matters? Is there a connection with Iran? These are important questions. I'll add one more thing. When the Israelis destroyed Saddam Hussein's nuclear research reactor in 1981 (Osirak), the consequence was that Saddam Hussein moved to a secret program. He began to implement a massive military nuclear program, "underground." The use of force can set back the clock, but it doesn't deal with the roots of the problem.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/23/AR2007102302577.html>

Photographs Said to Show Israeli Target Inside Syria

By Robin Wright and Joby Warrick

Washington Post Staff Writers

Wednesday, October 24, 2007; A01

Independent experts have pinpointed what they believe to be the Euphrates River site in Syria that was bombed by Israel last month, and satellite imagery of the area shows buildings under construction roughly similar in design to a North Korean reactor capable of producing nuclear material for one bomb a year, the experts say.

Photographs of the site taken before the secret Sept. 6 airstrike depict an isolated compound that includes a tall, boxy structure similar to the type of building used to house a gas-graphite reactor. They also show what could have been a pumping station used to supply cooling water for a reactor, say experts David Albright and Paul Brannan of the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS).

U.S. and international experts and officials familiar with the site, who were shown the photographs yesterday, said there was a strong and credible possibility that they depict the remote compound that was attacked. Israeli officials and the White House declined to comment.

If the facility is confirmed as the site of the attack, the photos provide a potential explanation for Israel's middle-of-the-night bombing raid.

The facility is located seven miles north of the desert village of At Tibnah, in the Dayr az Zawr region, and about 90 miles from the Iraqi border, according to the ISIS report to be released today. Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector, said the size of the structures suggested that Syria might have been building a gas-graphite reactor of about 20 to 25 megawatts of heat, similar to the reactor North Korea built at Yongbyon.

"I'm pretty convinced that Syria was trying to build a nuclear reactor," Albright said in an interview. He said the project would represent a significant departure from past policies. ISIS, a nonprofit research group, tracks nuclear weapons and stockpiles around the world.

Israel, which has nuclear weapons of its own, has not said publicly what its warplanes hit or provided justification for the raid. Syria has denied having a nuclear program. But beginning construction of a nuclear reactor in secret would violate Syria's obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which requires all signatories to declare their intent when such a decision is made, according to sources at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog.

The new report leaves many questions unanswered, such as what Syria intended to use the unfinished structures for and the exact role, if any, of North Korea in their construction. Also unclear is why Israel chose to use military force rather than diplomatic pressure against a facility that could not have produced significant nuclear material for years. The new details could fuel debate over whether Israel's attack was warranted.

Albright acknowledged the difficulties of proving what the site is, in part because the roof was put on at an early stage, blocking views of the foundation and obscuring any potential reactor components. In

construction of other types of nuclear reactors, the roof is left off until the end so cranes can move heavy equipment inside.

Some nuclear experts urged caution in interpreting the photos, noting that the type of reactor favored by North Korea has few distinguishing characteristics visible from the air. Unlike commercial nuclear power reactors, for example, a North Korea-style reactor lacks the distinctive, dome-shaped containment vessel that prevents the release of radiation in the event of a nuclear accident.

"You can look at North Korea's [reactor] buildings, and they look like nothing," said John E. Pike, a nuclear expert and director of GlobalSecurity.org. "They're just metal-skinned industrial buildings." The proximity of the building to a water source also is not significant by itself, Pike said.

But Brannan, of ISIS, combed through a huge amount of satellite imagery to find a site along the Euphrates that matches a reactor's specifications as well as descriptions of the attack site. The compound's distance from populated areas was a key detail, since reactors are usually isolated from major urban populations.

The site is also close to an irrigated area, which would explain statements by some officials privy to details of the attack that the facility was located near orchards. A small airstrip about two miles away could have been used to transport personnel to the site.

U.S. and foreign officials tracking the incident said that Syria is presently trying to remove remaining structures at the site.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has acquired its own aerial photographs but has not finished analyzing them, according to an IAEA source.

In an interview published yesterday, IAEA director and Nobel Peace laureate Mohamed ElBaradei expressed anger at the Syrians, Israelis and foreign intelligence agencies for not providing information about a suspected nuclear program.

"We have said, 'If any of you has the slightest information showing that there was anything linked to nuclear, we would of course be happy to investigate it,' " he told the French newspaper Le Monde.

"Frankly, I venture to hope that before people decide to bombard and use force, they will come and see us to convey their concerns."

ElBaradei also said an airstrike could endanger efforts to contain nuclear proliferation.

"When the Israelis destroyed Saddam Hussein's research nuclear reactor in 1981, the consequence was that Saddam Hussein pursued his program secretly. He began to establish a huge military nuclear program underground," he said. "The use of force can set things back, but it does not deal with the roots of the problem."

http://www.isis-online.org/publications/SuspectSite_24October2007.pdf

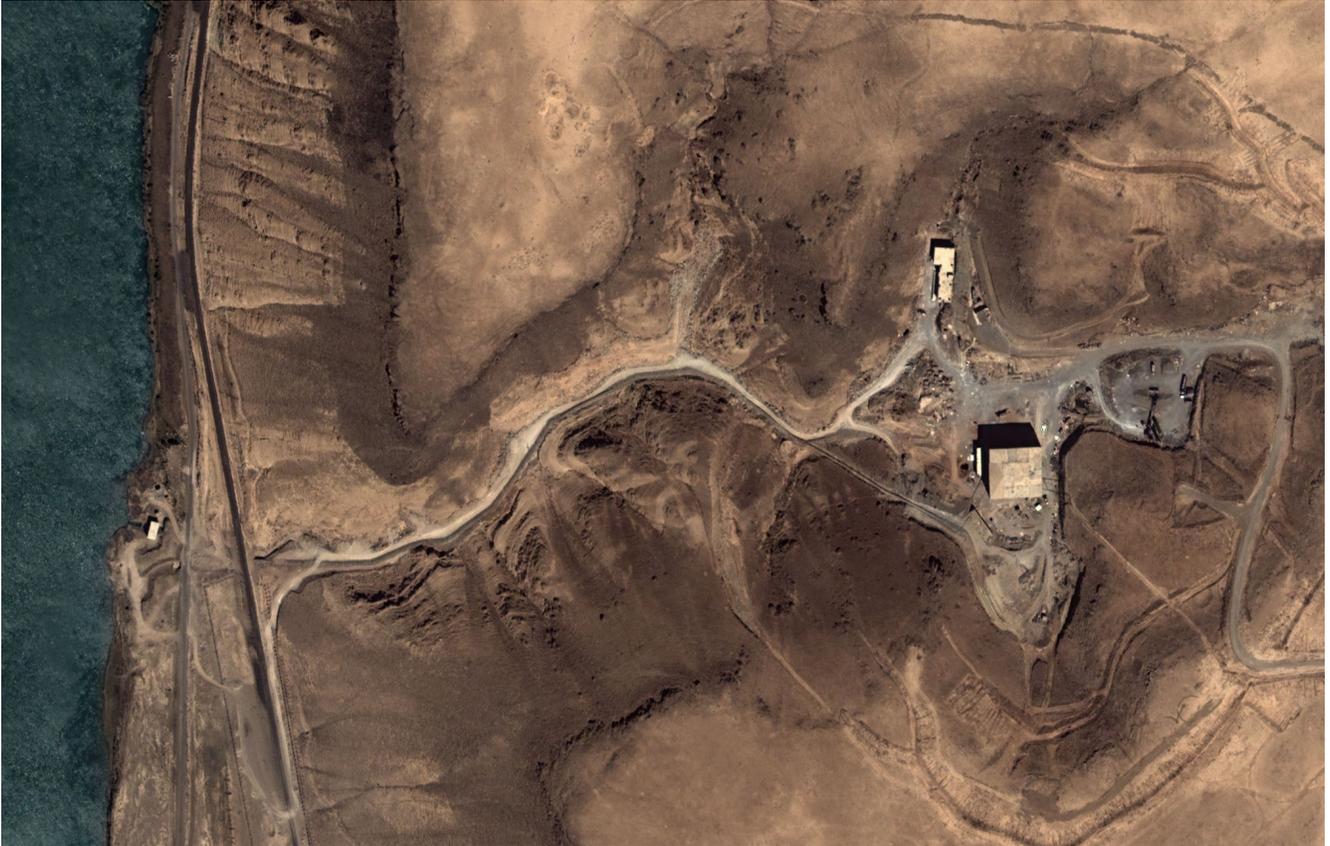


Image Credit: Digital Globe - ISIS

[DigitalGlobe imagery of 2007-08-10]

Photos show cleansing of suspect Syrian site

By William J. Broad and Mark Mazzetti

Thursday, October 25, 2007

New commercial satellite photos show that a Syrian site believed to have been attacked by Israel last month no longer bears any obvious traces of what some analysts said appeared to have been a partly built nuclear reactor.

Two photos, taken Wednesday from space by rival companies, show the site near the Euphrates River to have been wiped clean since August, when imagery showed a tall square building there measuring about 150 feet on a side.

The Syrians reported an attack by Israel in early September; the Israelis have not confirmed that. Senior Syrian officials continue to deny that a nuclear reactor was under construction, insisting that Israel hit a largely empty military warehouse.

But the images, federal and private analysts say, suggest that the Syrian authorities rushed to dismantle the facility after the strike, calling it a tacit admission of guilt.

"It's a magic act — here today, gone tomorrow," a senior intelligence official said. "It doesn't lower suspicions; it raises them. This was not a long-term decommissioning of a building, which can take a year. It was speedy. It's incredible that they could have gone to that effort to make something go away."

Any attempt by Syrian authorities to clean up the site would make it difficult, if not impossible, for international weapons inspectors to determine the exact nature of the activity there. Officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna have said they hoped to analyze the satellite images and ultimately inspect the site in person. David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that released a report on the Syrian site earlier this week, said the expurgation of the building was inherently suspicious.

"It looks like Syria is trying to hide something and destroy the evidence of some activity," Albright said in an interview. "But it won't work. Syria has got to answer questions about what it was doing."

The striking difference in the satellite photos surprised even some outside experts who were skeptical that Syria might be developing a nuclear program.

"It's clearly very suspicious," said Joseph Cirincione, an expert on nuclear proliferation at the Center for American Progress in Washington. "The Syrians were up to something that they clearly didn't want the world to know about."

Cirincione said the photographic evidence "tilts toward a nuclear program" but does not prove that Syria was building a reactor. Besides, he said, even if it was developing a nuclear program, Syria would be years away from being operational, and thus not an imminent threat.

Gordon Johndroe, a White House spokesman, declined to comment on the satellite pictures.

The new satellite images of the Syrian site were taken by DigitalGlobe, in Longmont, Colorado, and SPOT Image Corporation, in Chantilly, Virginia. They show just a smooth, unfurrowed area where the large building once stood.

The desolate Syrian site is located on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River some 90 miles north of the Iraqi border and 7 miles north of the desert village of At Tibnah. An airfield lies nearby. The new images reveal that the tall building is gone but still show a secondary structure and a pumping station on the Euphrates. Reactors need water for cooling.

The purported reactor at the site is believed to be modeled on a North Korean model, which uses buildings a few feet longer on each side than the Syrian building that vanished.

Albright called the Syrian site "consistent with being a North Korean reactor design." Imad Moustapha, the Syrian ambassador to the United States, denied in an interview last week with The Dallas Morning News that his country was trying to build a reactor.

"There is no Syrian nuclear program whatsoever," he said. "It's an absolutely blatant lie."

Later in the interview, he said, "We understand that if Syria even contemplated nuclear technology, then the gates of hell would open on us."

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gN-KBm9OPrmDDSMjAXJTEqEU2DKQ>

Diplomat tries to reassure US lawmakers on NKorea talks

Oct 25, 2007

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A senior US negotiator told lawmakers on Thursday Washington would keep an eye on reports North Korea may be selling nuclear know-how, but declined to discuss allegations Pyongyang had offered nuclear help to Syria.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill faced tough questioning by lawmakers at a committee hearing on the six-nation talks, in which North Korea has promised to abandon its nuclear program.

The legislators questioned the US administration's diplomatic approach with North Korea citing reports that Pyongyang may have assisted Syria to start building a nuclear reactor. Israel reportedly launched an air strike against the suspected site in September.

Hill said he could not discuss North Korea's alleged role in Syria's nuclear program at an open congressional hearing because that information was "classified."

"I'm not in a position here to discuss intelligence matters, which is the level one would need to discuss questions whether they did or did not," Hill said.

Asked by Democratic Representative David Scott of Georgia if the issue had been brought up in disarmament talks with North Korea, Hill said: "Yes, I have raised this issue."

The US diplomat said the disarmament deal would not go ahead if North Korea was found to be smuggling nuclear arms, equipment or know-how abroad.

"I think throughout the process we have made it clear we cannot accept any agreement that has us winking at proliferation issues. So proliferation, or non-proliferation, has to be at the heart of any agreement," Hill said.

Republican Ted Poe charged the White House had failed to brief lawmakers on intelligence related to North Korea's activities in Syria.

"I'm concerned about what they're doing in Syria. And I would like you to tell me why you can't tell us what they're doing in Syria?" said Poe.

Under the six-nation talks, North Korea has agreed to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs in return for a broad package of economic and diplomatic incentives.

Hill's testimony at the House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-Proliferation and Trade came as President George W. Bush faced criticism from fellow Republicans and a former administration official over the deal with North Korea.

In a commentary published this week in the Wall Street Journal, two Republican members of Congress said the reports of North Korean involvement raised serious concerns about the disarmament talks.

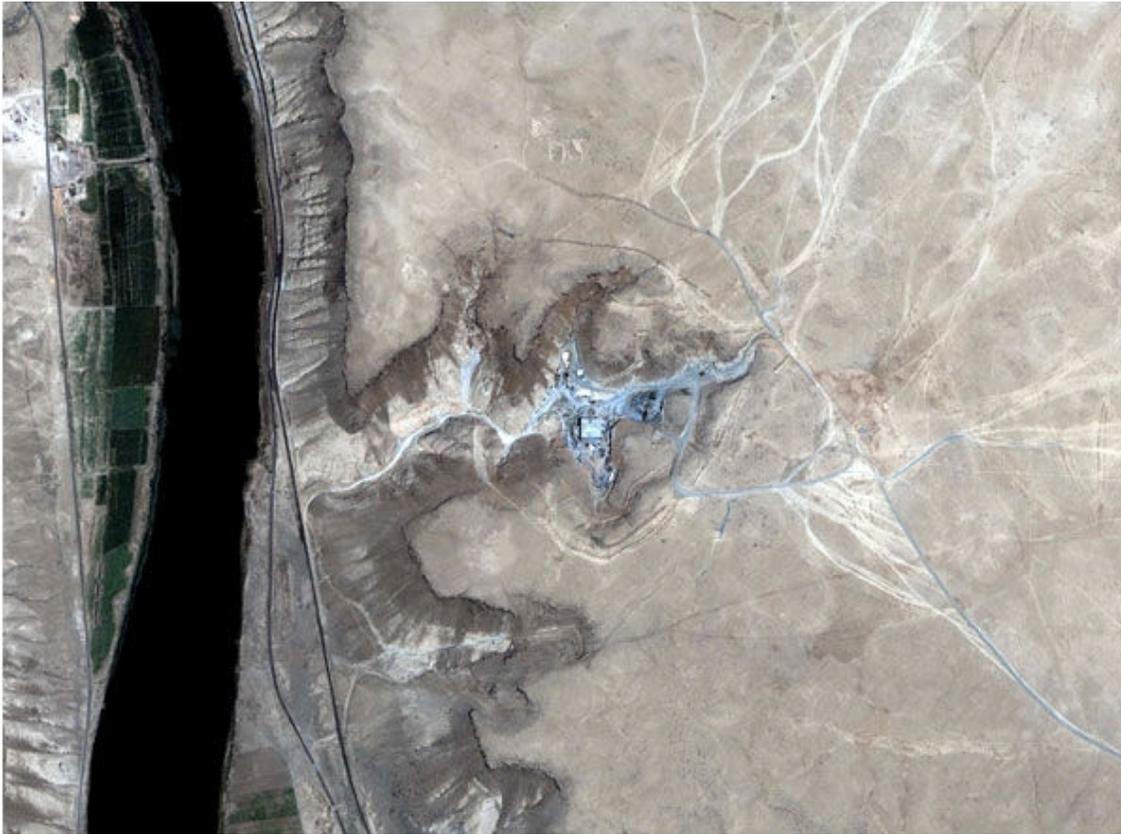
They complained that "only a handful" of lawmakers were given intelligence briefings by the Bush administration on the Israeli air strike.

Former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton, breaking ranks with the administration, has criticized the six-party talks with North Korea and reportedly lobbied Republican lawmakers on the issue.

North Korea has angrily denied sharing atomic know-how with Damascus.

If confirmed, the reports of nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria would deal a blow to Bush who has portrayed US policy towards Pyongyang as a success story.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/27/world/middleeast/27syria.html>



A satellite photo from Sept. 16, 2003, shows a large structure being built near a site in Syria that was bombed last month by Israel.

Yet Another Photo of Site in Syria, Yet More Questions

By WILLIAM J. BROAD and MARK MAZZETTI

Published: **October 27, 2007**

The mystery surrounding the construction of what might have been a nuclear reactor in Syria deepened yesterday, when a company released a satellite photo showing that the main building was well under way in September 2003 — four years before Israeli jets bombed it.

The long genesis is likely to raise questions about whether the Bush administration overlooked a nascent atomic threat in Syria while planning and executing a war in Iraq, which was later found to have no active nuclear program.

A senior American intelligence official said yesterday that American analysts had looked carefully at the site from its early days, but were unsure then whether it posed a nuclear threat.

In the time before the Iraq war, President Bush and his senior advisers sounded many alarms about Baghdad's reconstituting its nuclear program. But they have never publicly discussed what many analysts say appears to have been a long-running nuclear effort next door.

Yesterday independent analysts, examining the latest satellite image, suggested that work on the site might have begun around 2001, and the senior intelligence official agreed with that analysis. That early date is potentially significant in terms of North Korea's suspected aid to Syria, suggesting that North Korea could have begun its assistance in the late 1990s.

A dispute has broken out between conservatives and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice over the administration's pursuit of diplomacy with North Korea in the face of intelligence that North Korea might have helped Syria design a nuclear reactor.

The new image may give ammunition to those in the administration, including Ms. Rice, who call for diplomacy. If North Korea started its Syrian aid long ago, the officials could argue that the assistance was historical, not current, and that diplomacy should move ahead.

The progress of the site in late 2003 also raises new questions about a disagreement at the time between intelligence analysts and John R. Bolton, then the State Department's top arms control official. In the summer of 2003, Mr. Bolton's testimony on Capitol Hill was delayed after a dispute erupted in part over whether Syria was actively pursuing a nuclear weapon. Some intelligence officials said Mr. Bolton overstated the Syrian threat.

"There was disagreement about what Syria was interested in and how much we should be monitoring it," Mr. Bolton said in an interview yesterday. "There was activity in Syria that I felt was evidence that they were trying to develop a nuclear program."

Mr. Bolton declined to say whether he had knowledge at the time about the site that the Israelis struck in September.

Spokesmen for the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council declined to comment.

The new image of the desolate Syrian site was released yesterday by GeoEye, in Dulles, Va. Mark Brender, the company's vice president for communications and marketing, said the picture was taken on Sept. 16, 2003. He added that the image had been collected as part of the company's agenda of building a large archive of global images.

Earlier this week, federal and private analysts identified the precise location of the Syrian site, and since then rival companies have raced to release images. The site is on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, 90 miles north of the Iraqi border.

Images taken in August, before the Israeli raid, show a tall building about 150 feet wide on each side that analysts suspect might have sheltered a half-built nuclear reactor. Also visible is a pumping station on the Euphrates, which may be significant because reactors need water for cooling.

John E. Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, a private group in Alexandria, Va., that analyzes satellite images, said the 2003 picture showed the tall building in the midst of early construction, surrounded by churned earth. He put the groundbreaking in 2001.

“It’s uncommon to see such activity in the middle of nowhere,” he said, adding that it was sufficiently unusual to have worried American intelligence officials. “I’d have put it on my suspect site list and kept watching,” he said.

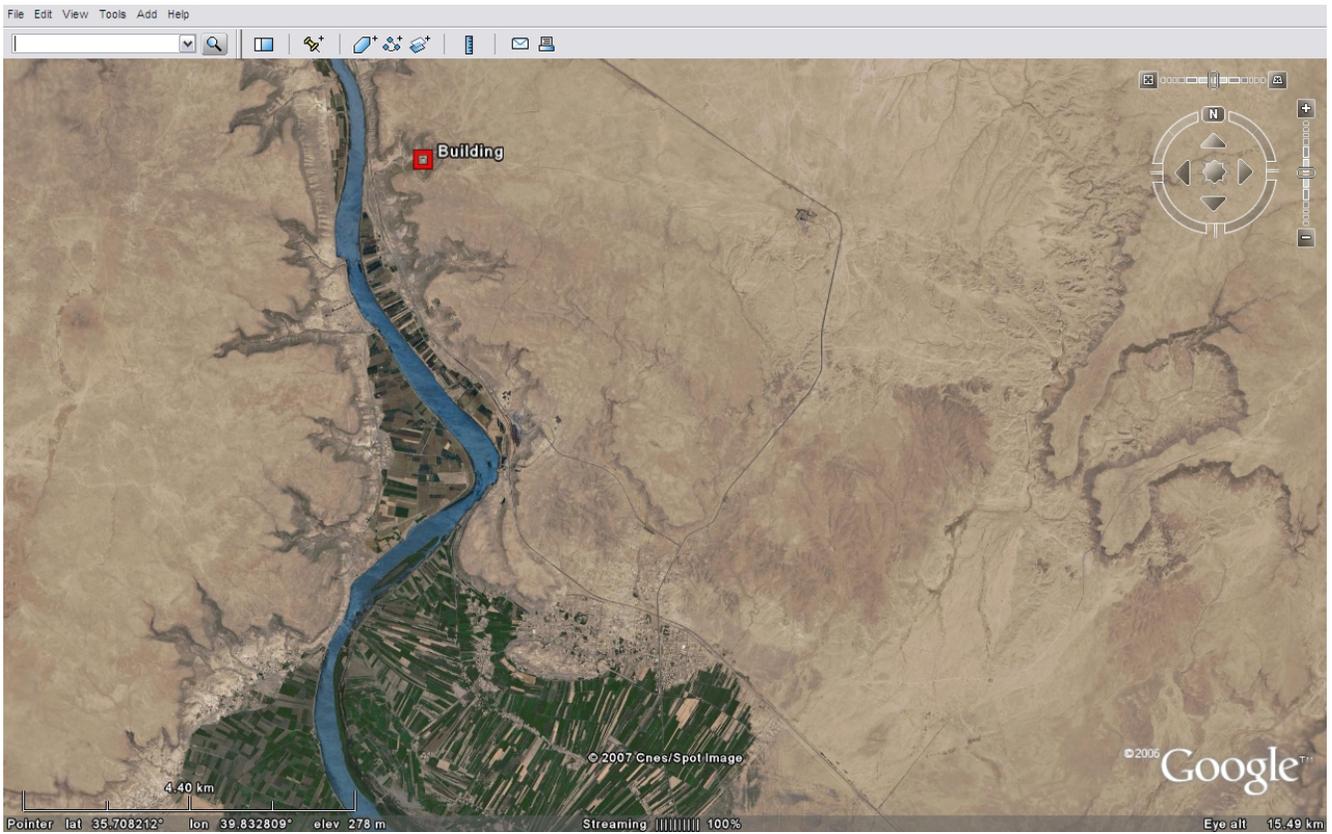
The senior intelligence official said that American spy satellites and analysts had, in fact, watched the site for years.

“It was noticed, without knowing what it was,” the official said. “You revisit every so often, but it was not a high priority. You see things that raise the flag and you know you have to keep looking. It was a case of watching it evolve.”

Jeffrey Lewis, an expert on nuclear proliferation at the New America Foundation in Washington, said it was surprising from the photos how little progress had been made at the site between 2003 and 2007. But Mr. Lewis said it was ironic that Syria might have been trying to build a nuclear program just as the United States was invading Iraq in the fear that Iraq was developing nuclear arms.



*Google Earth image of uncertain date , possibly from SPOT,
retrieved 2007-11-25 showing large building at 35.7079 N, 39.8331 E.
Note that the riverside building visible in imagery of August and October 2007 is not present.*



Google Earth image retrieved 2007-11-25 showing location of building relative to other features in the area.



Regional overview showing strike site

<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/SyriaUpdate25October2007.pdf>



Image Credit: Digital Globe - ISIS

DigitalGlobe imagery of 2007-10-24.

[Sourcebook note: Note that the shading caused by solar illumination on the cleared area where the large building formerly stood matches that on the hill to the right, suggesting that the area is mounded. Also note that the northwest corner of the hill was cut away between 2007-08-10 and the date of the image. Together, these suggest that dirt was removed from the hill and used to cover remains of the building.]

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21479058/>



The image at left was taken September 16, 2004. The middle image was taken on Aug. 10, 2007 before a Sept. 6, 2007 Israeli air attack. The one at right was taken Wednesday, October 24, 2007.

GeoEye/DigitalGlobe

[The date of the left image should be September 16, 2003]

Images raise suspicions of Syria facility

Site of a suspected nuclear reactor seems cleaned up after Israeli attack

By Robert Windrem and Andrea Mitchell

NBC News

updated 5:10 p.m. CT, Fri., **Oct. 26, 2007**

New satellite photos taken Wednesday show that Syria apparently cleaned up the site of a suspected nuclear reactor after it was bombed by Israeli aircraft last month.

The imagery, taken by Digital Globe, a private satellite imagery company, shows a cleared area where two months before the suspect facility stood. The boxy building is located at the end of a dirt road just off the Euphrates River. The site is about 100 miles from the Iraqi border near the town of At Tibnah in northeastern Syria.

Although reports indicated the the reactor had been in the early stages of construction, an earlier satellite photo, taken by another commercial imaging company, GeoEye, raised questions about those assertions. The imagery, taken on September 16, 2003, four year prior to the attack, shows the facility looking just as it did prior to the attack The only difference is the addition of a pumping station on the Euphrates River near the facility. Some U.S. officials have suggested the reactor was based on a North Korean design. The North has agreed to denuclearize, and if it was shown that it had helped Syria, that would complicate further relations with the United States.

David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, said the satellite imagery "effectively confirms that this site was indeed the target of the Israeli raid." Albright's group did its own analysis of the imagery.

Beyond the suspected reactor, the imagery also shows the pumping station on the Euphrates, which does not appear to have been bombed or cleaned up. The "before" picture was taken Aug. 10, the "after" on Oct. 24 (Wednesday). The raid, which Syria has confirmed but which Israel and the U.S. have officially declined to discuss, took place Sept. 6.

U.S. officials have said on background that following the Israeli attack, Syria bulldozed the debris from the site, apparently to avoid having the facility's purpose exposed. **The International Atomic Energy Agency has said it was studying satellite photos to determine if it should investigate Syria's nuclear activities and Israel's raid.** The Syrian foreign ministry on Wednesday denied the facility was a reactor. NBC News has learned that the Israelis used four F-16's in the attack, two acting as fighter bombers, two as jammers. The two bombers dropped six precision-guided thousand-pound bombs on the site. The site was believed to be in the early stages of construction and to not yet have been outfitted.

"Dismantling and removing the building at such a rapid pace dramatically complicates any inspection of the facilities and suggests that Syria may be trying to hide what was there," added Albright. "Iraq followed a similar strategy in 1991 after the first Gulf War, though eventually the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and U.N. inspectors pieced together a full picture of Iraq's activities."

Albright said tractors or bulldozers can be seen in the Oct. 24 imagery where the suspected reactor building once stood. Scrape marks can be seen around the razed part of the site as well.

"There also appears to be a trench in the Oct. 24, 2007, imagery that is better defined than in the Aug. 10, 2007, imagery," said Albright, a former IAEA inspector in Iraq. "This trench may be more visible as a result of the Syrians' digging up buried pipelines running from the pump station to the now-gone suspected reactor construction building. Because of a more prominent shadow in the Oct. 24, 2007, imagery, there appears to be evidence of an underground portion of the suspect reactor building."

Asked for a comment on whether its imagery matches Digital Globe's, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency said, "Sorry, we can't help you on that."

Olmert Hints at Israel Air Raid on Syria

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

October 28, 2007

Filed at 11:01 p.m. ET

JERUSALEM (AP) -- In the closest that Israel has come to confirming a mysterious air raid in Syria, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acknowledged to his Cabinet on Sunday [*October 28, 2007*] that Turkish airspace might have been violated during the operation.

Israel has not officially commented on the raid or acknowledged carrying it out. But at Sunday's Cabinet meeting, Olmert offered an ambiguous apology to Turkey, which has complained to Israel that its aircraft dropped fuel tanks on Turkish territory during the incursion.

"If Israeli planes indeed penetrated Turkish airspace, then it was without prior intent or any intent to infringe upon or undermine Turkish sovereignty, which we respect," a statement from Olmert's office cited him as telling the Cabinet.

In a conversation with Turkey's prime minister last week, Olmert "expressed Israel's apologies to the Turkish government and the Turkish people for any harm that might have been caused," the statement said.

The Sept. 6 air strike has been enveloped in secrecy. Syrian President Bashar Assad said the attack targeted an unused military building.

But reports following the incident have contradicted that account, and commercial satellite images have indicated a nuclear reactor site might have been destroyed. Syria has denied developing a nuclear reactor.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, on Sunday criticized the United States and Israel for failing to provide the U.N. watchdog with intelligence about Syria's purported nuclear program.

Roh says allegations of N.K.-Syria nuclear cooperation not backed by evidence

휴휴 By Yoo Cheong-mo

2007/11/03 10:39 KST

SEOUL, Nov. 3 (Yonhap) -- South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun said he has never seen evidence of nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria, denying U.S. media reports alleging that the communist North has helped Syria build nuclear facilities.

휴휴 Roh asserted in an interview with Japan's Asahi Shimbun, published on Saturday, that "uncertain and trifling matters" should not be obstacles to the ongoing international efforts to have North Korea dismantle its nuclear weapons program by the end of the year.

휴휴 "I have never seen or heard of evidence about North Korean transfer of nuclear technologies to Syria, as reported in the U.S. It is crucial to the settlement of the six-party talks (on the denuclearization of North Korea). Uncertain issues and insignificant obstacles should not be allowed to ruin the talks," said Roh.

휴휴 "All disputes should eventually be resolved through dialogue. Mutual trust should be built in order to create such an atmosphere (for dialogue). To that end, an aggressive act should be restrained and friendly acts should be encouraged," said the president.

휴휴 As the six-party negotiations involving the two Koreas, U.S., China, Russia and Japan were gaining momentum, suspicions surfaced recently that North Korea might be providing Syria with nuclear technology. An analysis of U.S. satellite photos indicated that a Syrian site that Israel raided in September appeared to have a building whose size and shape resembled those of the North Korean reactor.

휴휴 Washington has since stressed that for North Korea to receive any further benefits, it must fulfill its obligations, disabling the nuclear facilities and fully accounting for its nuclear programs. The controversy erupted as North Korea pledged in an Oct. 3 deal to disable its key nuclear installations and declare its atomic stockpile by the end of the year.

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휴휴 ycm@yna.co.kr
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<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/breaking/105120.html>

Turkey puts Israeli sortie behind it

Published: 11/06/2007

Turkey said the controversy over Israel's penetration of its airspace during a bombing run in Syria is over.

The discovery of jettisoned fuel tanks in Turkey's frontier with Syria after the mysterious Sept. 6 sortie prompted protests from Ankara. After weeks of silence, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert apologized to Turkey, one of the few Muslim powers to have good relations with the Jewish state.

"It is no easy thing to discover that combat jets from a friendly state have penetrated your skies overnight. It is good that you apologized, even though the apology was late," Turkish President Abdullah Gul said in a Maariv interview published Tuesday.

"As we see it, the matter is closed and we hope that it will not be repeated in the future."

Jerusalem has not given details on the air strike, which foreign analysts believe targeted a nascent nuclear facility. Syria complained about the incident to Turkey.

<http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=local&id=5747548>

Syrian ambassador talks about nuclear site bombing

Blasted Vice President Cheney

KGO By Alan Wang

BERKELEY, Calif. **Nov. 6, 2007** (KGO) - Syria's ambassador to the United States spoke only to ABC7 news on Tuesday. He accused Vice President Cheney of fueling the media with more rumors of weapons of mass destruction.

"The whole story about this North Korean/Syrian cooperation on nuclear technology is a total, sheer *[sic]*, absolute fabrication," said Syrian Ambassador to the U.S. Dr. Imad Moustapha.

In September, Israeli planes bombed a Syrian target reported to be a partly constructed nuclear reactor.

ABC7's Alan Wang: "If you could, what was the site bombed by Israel?"

"It was a military site and this is not the first air raid the history of the Syrian/Israeli conflict," said Dr. Moustapha.

Professor Michael Nacht, who is the dean of UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy says everyone is keeping eerily quiet about the attack.

"The Syrian government didn't really say anything about it. Bush refuses to talk about it. The Israeli government refuses to talk about it, and no Arab government has condemned Israel for it," said Goldman School of Public Policy Dean Professor Michael Nacht.

After the ambassador's speech we tried to press him more on the issue.

Dr. Imad Moustapha: "There are plenty of military sites."

ABC7 Alan Wang: "Why was it so crucial for Israel to bomb it?"

Dr. Imad Moustapha: "It was not crucial. They could have bombarded it or another military target. The problem is the sinister stories that are fabricated in Washington D.C. alleging a nuclear program in Syria which is absolutely categorically untrue.

Alan Wang: "But what was it? What do you mean what was it? What was the military site? Was it an airbase?"

Dr. Imad Moustapha: "I'm not privy to military details. Usually countries do not reveal their military installations publicly on TV. Everything else is a blatant terrible lie."

ABC7's Alan Wang: "Thank you very much."

Dr. Imad Moustapha: "Your *[sic]* welcome."



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
News Transcript

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and Republic of Korea Minister of National Defense Kim Jang-soo
November 07, 2007

Joint Press Conference with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and Republic of Korea Minister of National Defense Kim Jang-soo in Seoul, Korea

[EXCERPT]

Q. Yokip Reason from the Wall Street Journal. You both indicated that North Korea appears to have begun dismantling its known nuclear sites, at the same time, Israel, backed by many American and European security analysis, contends that North Korea has been actively proliferating nuclear technology to Syria. I would like to ask you if your two governments believe that North Korea continues to share nuclear technology with nations like Syria despite dismantling of its own program. And Secretary Gates, do you believe that the Israeli strike on what Israel claims to be a nuclear site in Syria was justified?

SEC GATES: With regard to whether the government of Israel believes that North Korea is proliferating nuclear material to Syria and whether it continues that activity, I think that is a matter to be addressed to the government of Israel.

Q. I am sorry, Secretary Gates, I meant if the U.S. Government believes that and not if the Israeli Government believes it.

SEC GATES: I think that involves intelligence matters that we don't discuss.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/11/14/africa/ME-GEN-Syria-Israel.php>

After mystery raid, the prospect of Syrian-Israeli talks

The Associated Press

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

DAMASCUS, Syria: Israel's reported new secret peace feelers to Syria have deepened the mystery over the countries' relations and the reason why Israeli warplanes bombed a target inside Syria two months ago.

The United States has unofficially said that Israel's target was a nascent Syrian nuclear program. But outside analysts and the U.N. maintain there isn't proof of that, and suggest the Syrian site could well have been something else, including possibly a radar station.

Syria also has disputed that the site contained anything of significance and drawn a parallel to satellite imagery before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which proved unreliable.

In addition, Syria has publicly said the Sept. 6 bombing proves Israel is not interested in peace.

Yet on Tuesday, Israel's Yediot Ahronot newspaper said that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had hinted in a briefing to an influential parliamentary committee that he was holding secret peace contacts with Syria.

Olmert also told parliament's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday that he was "ready for peace with Syria and prepared to conduct negotiations" as long as Syria abandoned any ties with North Korea and Iran and did not support terror, according to participants.

In addition, Olmert and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak have both said publicly in recent days that they hoped Syria would take part in a U.S.-sponsored peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland, later this month.

The focus of the conference will be on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however. And Syria has said it would not attend unless the issue of the Golan Heights also is on the table. Israel captured the strategic Golan from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war.

There was no immediate comment Wednesday from Syria on the latest Israeli report of peace talks, while state-run newspapers and the official news agency SANA ignored the report.

Damascus has in the past rejected claims that it was holding secret talks and has insisted on U.S. participation in peace talks to improve the chances of success.

Syria also might be loathe to give up ties to Iran, with whom it has economic and military relations. Both Syria and Iran also support Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian militants, and Syrian President Bashar Assad has said there is no conflict between supporting militants and working for peace.

The reports of talks are not the first between the two staunch enemies, who have no diplomatic ties and have fought four times since Israel's 1948 creation — three in Mideast wars and the latest in Lebanon in 1982 during the Israeli invasion of the neighboring country.

In 2000, formal U.S.-sponsored Israel-Syria talks neared agreement but broke down over final border and peace arrangements. Since then, reports of talks have popped up occasionally — most recently a half-year ago when Israeli media reported that Olmert had relayed messages to Assad through Turkey.

But those reported talks did not lead to a breakthrough, and over the summer, war talk between Syria and Israel heated up — capped by the September air strike by Israel into northern Syria.

Syria's slow move to provide any specific details of the raid afterward, and Israel's near-silence after the raid, were seen by some as a sign the two countries were engaged in some secret dance outside the public eye.

Likewise, the silence from other Arab countries, who did not condemn the raid, was seen as a sign of Syria's own poor relations with those countries. Syria, under pressure from the United States for allegedly interfering in Lebanon and without many Arab friends, could find talks with Israel a relief, and a chance for some regional political leverage.

Meanwhile, many in the region and in Europe remain skeptical about what proof the United States or Israel have that the bombed Syrian site was nuclear-linked.

"There hasn't been anything that constitutes a definitive smoking gun proof that this facility the Israelis attacked was indeed a nuclear facility," said David Hartwell, Middle East and North Africa editor for Jane's Country Risk in London.

Syria has denied any nuclear ambitions and the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, has asked the United States and Israel to show proof.

A diplomat familiar with IAEA affairs, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity, said one theory being considered within the agency is that the bombed site may have been a forward radar system, and not a nuclear site.

But John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said last week that the site indicated nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria, and perhaps also cooperation with Iran.

http://rawstory.com/news/2007/US_Israel_refuse_to_cooperate_with_1114.html

US, Israel refuse to cooperate with inquest into Syria strike

Larisa Alexandrovna

Published: Wednesday November 14, 2007

UN nuclear watchdog has no evidence Syria had nuclear facility

The International Atomic Energy Agency - the United Nations nuclear watchdog - has not been able to conduct an investigation into the events surrounding the Sept. 6 Israeli bombing of a Syrian military installation because neither the Bush administration nor Israel are cooperating.

A diplomatic source close to the Vienna based IAEA told Raw Story that both the United States and Israel have been approached by the organization requesting supporting evidence of a nuclear reactor which media sources have cited, based on anonymous sources in both governments, as the reason for the Israeli strike.

The source also explained that the satellite footage, which the IAEA obtained through commercial channels for lack of any "credible evidence," does not show a nuclear reactor in the early construction phase.

Another source, close to the IAEA, who wished to remain anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the topic, told RAW STORY last week that based on satellite imagery, evidence that "it was nuclear related is shaky" and pointed out that even basic security for such a facility - such as "security fences" - is missing.

Some IAEA experts have privately opined that the facility - located between the cities of Hama and Dayr az-Zawr in the Northeastern part of Syria - may have been "no more than a workshop for the pumice mining industry along the banks of the Euphrates."

Both individuals independently confirmed that the IAEA cannot conduct a formal investigation without the cooperation of either Israel or the United States, although both confirmed that the Syrian government is cooperating.

An IAEA spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Little is known about the attack

Little has been publicly revealed about the attack, which neither the US nor Israel has discussed. Israel did confirm in October that the bombing had taken place.

According to a report in the Guardian on Sept. 16, "Was Israeli raid a dry run for an attack on Iran?" the Israeli air raid was substantial and was code-named Operation Orchard.

"Far from being a minor incursion, the Israeli overflight of Syrian airspace through its ally, Turkey, was a far more major affair involving as many as eight aircraft, including Israel's most ultra-modern F-15s and F-16s equipped with Maverick missiles and 500lb bombs," the paper alleged. "Flying among the Israeli fighters at great height... was an ELINT - an electronic intelligence gathering aircraft."

Although the mystery surrounding exactly what Israel hit in Syria continues, US intelligence sources have told RAW STORY it was not a nuclear armaments site. In late September, Vincent Cannistraro - Director of Intelligence Programs for the National Security Council under President Ronald Reagan and Chief of Operations at the Central Intelligence Agency's Counterterrorism Center under President George H. W. Bush - told Raw Story that what the Israelis hit was "absolutely not a nuclear weapons facility."

According to another intelligence official, US intelligence "found no radiation signatures after the bombing, so there was no uranium or plutonium present."

"We don't have any independent intelligence that it was a nuclear facility - only the assertions by the Israelis and some ambiguous satellite photography from them that shows a building, which the Syrians admitted was a military facility," the source added.

The diplomat close to the IAEA also confirmed the lack of radiation signatures, but explained that a reactor still under construction would not yet be fully loaded with the necessary materials and would not therefore give off any radiation. The diplomat, however, again pointed to the satellite images, which do not show a nuclear reactor under construction in any case, explaining certain geometric configurations are necessary for such a facility, including certain height indicators as well as the lack of security such as armed guards.

Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, said he doesn't believe claims that the site contained nuclear weapons.

"I've heard so many versions of this story that I despair of ever knowing the real story," Wilkerson said in response to an email query. "However, I do not believe that the real story, if it is ever known, will have anything at all to do with nuclear weapons. In short, I believe that [former Bush UN ambassador John] Bolton, [Bush Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot] Abrams, et al. are lying again."

Media reports diverge

Some intelligence officials have voiced strong criticism about alleged leaks to the press, which they say have distorted actual US and Israeli intelligence surrounding the strike. One US intelligence official identified the Office of the Vice President and those close to Vice President Dick Cheney by name.

"The allegations that North Korea was helping to build a nuclear reactor have not been substantiated by US intelligence," said this intelligence official, adding, "but that hasn't stopped Dick Cheney and his minions at the NSC, Elliot Abrams and Steve Hadley, from leaking the information, which appears to be misleading in the extreme."

Claims of a Syrian nuclear weapons program have gone from the strange to the bizarre.

In mid-September, the Sunday Times reported that the Israelis had been planning the operation since the spring of this year, after learning that Syria was attempting to buy a nuclear device from North Korea, and that at the time of the airstrike on Sept. 6, the Israelis had managed to blow apart a "Syrian nuclear cache."

Former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton told the Times that he was worried about "North Korea and Iran outsourcing their nuclear programmes."

In late September, the Times reported again that Israeli commandos had descended on the facility and obtained samples of nuclear materials.

Yet on Sept. 17, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made what appeared to be a bizarre statement, considering the level of nuclear hysteria surrounding the Syrian incident.

"We want to make peace with everyone," Olmert said. "If the conditions allow for it, we are ready to make peace with Syria without preset conditions and without ultimatums."

An October report on the ABC News website alleged that Mossad - Israeli intelligence - had either directly infiltrated the nuclear facility or turned a Syrian agent, and were thus able to acquire detailed photographs of the building, although no samples of nuclear materials were mentioned.

Also in October, the New York Times reported that a "partially constructed" nuclear reactor had been hit, although details "remain unclear," and the veracity of the intelligence, which was based entirely on satellite imagery, was also uncertain. There was no mention of spies infiltrating the facility or commandos obtaining samples of nuclear materials.

By Nov. 2, the "partially constructed" nuclear reactor had morphed into a "suspected nuclear site" bombed by the United States, not Israel, with tactical nuclear weapons. This was reported by Arabic news agency, Al Jazeera, and then picked up by the Jerusalem Post.

Some have pointed to Syria's chemical weapons program as the likely target, and alleged attempts by Syria to weaponize a chemical warhead as the likely reason for the air raid. Yet the secrecy and ever-changing stories from all three governments continue to obscure what actually occurred on September 6. Coupled with the lack of cooperation from the US and Israel with the IAEA, there is little chance the mystery will soon be unraveled. What is known, however, is that no type of nuclear reactor or nuclear facility was hit, despite the many anonymous leaks to the press.

[Larisa Alexandrovna](mailto:larisa@rawstory.com) is managing editor of investigative news for Raw Story and regularly reports on intelligence and national security stories. Contact her at larisa@rawstory.com.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hrU7JZfpakwvkh3N1ZerzBYf7MmAD8SUUAUO2>

Text of Bush and Fukuda's Conference

By The Associated Press – 20 hours ago

Text of President Bush's news conference Friday **[16 November 2007]** with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in Washington, as provided by the White House.

BUSH: Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the White House. I really appreciate the opportunity to get to know you better. I'm looking forward to our lunch.

This is an important visit. It's the first visit the prime minister has taken since he has assumed his important office. It's a recognition that our alliance is vital for peace and security. The alliance between our two countries is rooted deeply in our strong commitments to freedom and democracy. The prime minister and I are going to keep it that way. One of the things we've decided to do is to continue to make sure the U.S.-Japanese relationship is the cornerstone of security and peace. And I appreciate you being here.

We'll continue to work together to advance freedom, security and prosperity in our respective regions and beyond. We discussed a lot of ways that we can make the world a better place by working together. We discussed North Korea and the six-party talks. I appreciate Japan's participation in the six-party talks. Together with China, Russia and South Korea, **our two nations are pressing North Korea to fulfill its obligation to abandon all its nuclear weapons programs, as well as its proliferation efforts.** The six-party talks have delivered measurable results. The plutonium production facilities at Yongbyon are now being disabled, under six-party supervision.

Hard work still remains to be done. **North Korea has agreed to provide a full declaration of all its nuclear programs and proliferation activities by the end of this year. Full declaration is one of the next steps North Korea must take to keep the six-party talks moving towards the goal of a Korean peninsula without nuclear weapons.**

We also discussed the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. I reminded the prime minister of one of the most moving moments of my presidency, when the mother of a young girl who had been abducted by the North Koreans came to visit me. I told her, and I'm going to tell the Japanese people once again, we will not forget this issue.

I understand, Mr. Prime Minister, how important the issue is to the Japanese people, and we will not forget the Japanese abductees, nor their families.

We discussed Afghanistan and Iraq. Japanese naval forces have made valued contributions to Operation Enduring Freedom, which supports Afghanistan's young democracy. Over six years, Japanese vessels refueled ships from 11 coalition nations nearly 800 times.

Mr. Prime Minister, I appreciate the great leadership that you are showing as you work to reauthorize the Japanese refueling mission. Japanese air defense — Self-Defense Forces continue to serve bravely to support coalition efforts in Iraq. Japanese planes have flown more than 600 sorties, carrying more than half a million tons of cargo from many nations. And, Mr. Prime Minister, like I told you in the

Oval Office, I appreciate the contribution that the Japanese people are making to help this young democracy.

We discussed the realignment of our military forces, and we'll continue to do so with Secretary (Robert) Gates over lunch. Our two nations continue to implement changes in our force posture that will help our alliance meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We discussed Iran. The prime minister and I agree that a nuclear-armed Iran would threaten the security of the Middle East and beyond. Our two nations are united in our efforts to change the regime's behavior through diplomacy. We agreed that unless Iran commits to suspend enrichment, international pressure must, and will, grow.

We discussed Burma. The prime minister and I condemned the regime's crackdown on democratic activists. We call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners. We're for a genuine dialogue between the regime and those who seek a democratic future for Burma. U.S. sanctions on the regime are in place. Japan has canceled an aid grant. The prime minister told me his government is reviewing other aid projects to ensure that they directly benefit the people of Burma.

We discussed our strong economic relationship. Prime Minister Fukuda and I discussed his plans for economic reform in Japan. We discussed Doha, and will continue our discussions over lunch.

I think we're going to serve the prime minister — I hope we serve him some good U.S. beef, which is a good way to bring up the subject of beef. We hope we're able to have the Japanese market fully open to all U.S. beef and beef products, consistent with international guidelines.

We discussed climate change and energy security. Our two nations share a similar approach to addressing the issues of climate change and energy security. We see real promise in our ongoing efforts to bring major developed and developing economies together around key elements of a future global agreement on climate change and energy security. And the truth of the matter is, we need to be in the lead, Mr. Prime Minister, because it's going to be our economies and our nations that develop most of the new technologies that will enable us to be better stewards of the environment.

And finally, we discussed the G8, and I want to thank you for taking the lead in the G8. I'm looking forward to attending.

All in all, we had a great discussion that will be continued during lunch. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the United States, and I thank you for your friendship.

FUKUDA: (As translated.) Well, on this first overseas trip after taking office, I have come to this one and only ally for Japan, the United States of America. And I had a very substantive meeting with President Bush just now. And I look forward to a further exchange of views with the president after this. But since this is a very good opportunity, I would like to express some of my views on the basis of the discussions we had earlier.

First of all, we agreed that Japan-U.S. alliance is playing an indispensable role in enabling Japan and the United States to address global issues together, and also provides the basis for our active diplomacy vis-a-vis Asia.

For over half a century Japan and the United States at times have overcome difficulties together and have built a solid and resilient alliance. And we today enjoy this relationship, thanks to the efforts made by countless people in our two countries and exchanges among them.

To further cement the foundation for our bilateral relations in the future, without taking for granted our current solid relations, I explained to the president my initiative to strengthen Japan-U.S. exchanges, including intellectual exchanges. And I received heartfelt support for this idea from President Bush.

Secondly, we discussed synergies between our respective Asia policies and Japan-U.S. alliance. I explained to the president that the solid Japan-U.S. alliance will provide the foundation for Asia's peace and prosperity. And realizing a stable and open Asia that advances in prosperity by further deepening our relations with Asian countries on the basis of Japan-U.S. alliance will be in our mutual interests. And I told the president I'm convinced that such active diplomacy vis-a-vis Asia in turn will further strengthen our alliance.

Following this meeting here, I shall be attending a series of ASEAN-related summit meetings in Singapore, and I desired to visit Washington, D.C. and have discussions with President Bush because of my belief regarding our alliance. And I'm extremely encouraged by the President's support.

We also discussed issues that Japan and U.S. need to address jointly, and particularly — in particular, North Korea and the fight against terrorism. With regard to North Korean nuclear programs, we agreed that Japan and U.S. need to maintain close coordination with each other, in order to achieve complete abandonment of all nuclear weapons and programs by North Korea, through the six-party talks. President Bush stated that he will never forget the abduction issue, and on that basis he once again expressed his commitment for unchanged support to the Japanese government.

We should never allow Afghanistan to once again become a hotbed for terrorism. And we agreed that Japan and the United States should continue to work together with the international community in the fight against terrorism. And I communicated to President Bush that I shall do my level best to achieve an early passage of a bill for the early resumption of the refuel act of — (inaudible) — in the Indian Ocean by the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force. President Bush expressed his appreciation for Japan's support for the international community's fight against terrorism and the hope that refueling operations will be resumed soon.

With regard to Myanmar, I stated that I have been working on the government of Myanmar for democratization and improvement of the human rights situation. And with regard to Iranian nuclear development, we cannot — never tolerate and we agreed that we shall together work to raise pressure with the international community so that Iran will comply with the relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions.

And in this age of rapid changes, on the basis of Japan-U.S. alliance, Japan intends to exercise more active leadership in addressing the problems of Asia and international community.

And further, we shall have discussion with President Bush over lunch on new, important issues. Japan shall be hosting two important national conferences next year. One is the G8 summit at Lake Toya in Hokkaido, in July. And the important theme for that meeting will be climate change. On this issue, Japan and the United States, through close coordination over the past half year or so, have led

international discussions. And through a new forum for negotiations at the U.N., we very much hope that we will have discussions with President on closer cooperation on global warming measures so that concrete results will be achieved for an effective framework for the future.

And through further coordination, we would like to achieve a successful G8 summit on the global climate change issue and other matters, as well, because I believe that we can have useful discussions that will allow science and technology to achieve continued economic growth, and also achieve global warming measures and energy security.

The other important conference Japan will be hosting is the International Conference in African Development, because that is a matter that the international community together should address. And this is the — (inaudible) — fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development that will be held in Japan in May. And we would like to tie the findings and results of that meeting to the G8 summit. And again, we'd like to engage in cooperation with the United States. And there also is a question of health care in Africa, and again we would like to work in cooperation with the United States on that health care issue.

As the world economy faces numerous challenges, Japan and the United States, I believe, should work together on a global scale in the economic area, including intellectual property protection and for the sustainable development of developing countries.

There was a reference to beef. I hope that — well, we are addressing the beef issue on the basis of scientific findings. We are still in the process of our bilateral meetings.

I wanted to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the very warm welcome by President Bush and the people of the United States. And I look forward to addressing our common challenges together, hand in hand with President Bush.

END

Informal U.S.-N.K. meeting turns tense as Washington raises Syria suspicions: sources

By Lee Dong-min

2007/11/19 14:21 KST

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18 (Yonhap) -- An off-the-record meeting Friday [November 16, 2007] between North Korean and U.S. officials turned tense when American officials pressed Pyongyang to explain its suspected nuclear ties with Syria when the North declares its atomic stockpile and activities in the coming weeks, sources who participated in the meeting said Sunday.

Kim Myong-gil, North Korea's deputy chief of mission to the United Nations who participated in the meeting, did not give a particular response, but he and his aides seemed "clearly taken aback" at the level of pressure from U.S. participants, the sources told Yonhap in separate phone calls.

"I think that at first, they thought the meeting was going to be more about sort of going through the motions," one source said.

"A lot of us at the meeting were very clear to the North Koreans that if their declaration doesn't include what is going on in Syria, it's really going to be a problem," another source said.

The meeting was sponsored by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), called a "track two" channel maintained for private-level talks between the two countries that have yet to establish formal relations.

The U.S. side included former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, who added prestige to the delegation largely made up of Democrat and Republican congressional staffers and State Department officials, and spoke out strongly on the Syria issue, according to the contacted sources.

"Once the Syria topic was raised, Mr. Kissinger was quite adamant," another source said. "He said there has to be clarity on Syria."

The same concerns shown by Volcker and other financial community leaders are also important, he said, because of another set of talks beginning Monday to address Pyongyang's alleged illicit activities such as counterfeiting American currency.

"The financial representatives were reminded of North Korea's proliferation issues. They were saying, 'That's right. We have to think about this as well,'" he said.

"We just kept coming back to the Syria issue.. and we were quite tough about it, including Mr. Kissinger," the participant said.

The four-hour session started on a positive note as representatives of the two governments, in their opening comments, focused on progress being made at six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

후후 In a series of agreements reached since September 2005, North Korea agreed to eventually give up all of its nuclear weapons and programs and in return receive economic and political rewards from the other five governments -- South Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan.

후후 Under the latest deal struck last month, Pyongyang committed itself to disabling its key nuclear facilities, a process which it started this month, and declaring all of its nuclear programs and activities.

후후 The U.S. is hoping that Pyongyang's declaration will satisfactorily address the allegations involving Damascus, which started following an air raid by Israel on a Syrian installation on Sept. 6. Press reports said Israeli officials believed the facility was a nuclear site being built with the assistance of the North, or was at least modeled after Pyongyang's nuclear reactor.

후후 Both Pyongyang and Damascus have denied the allegations of nuclear cooperation.

후후 After the opening statements in Friday's talks, the U.S. participants raised the issue, calling on North Korea to provide clarity on the country's proliferation activities, and promise that it will not continue them anymore.

후후 U.S. President George W. Bush and Washington's top nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill "are so over-extended on their policy" on North Korea, one source said, that "if there is nothing on Syria or nothing that explains it, the situation is going to very difficult for everybody."

ldm@yna.co.kr
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<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5huUBnG1swmDpqMV6Kk7vOIuZ0dzAD8T2S8RG1>

Israeli: Syrian Site Hit Not a Reactor

By STEVE WEIZMAN – 1 hour ago

[accessed on Google News 2007-11-22T19:45Z]

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Syrian site bombed by Israel in September was probably a plant for assembling a nuclear bomb, an Israeli nuclear expert said Thursday, challenging other analysts' conclusions that it housed a North Korean-style nuclear reactor.

Tel Aviv University chemistry professor Uzi Even, who worked in the past at Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor, said satellite pictures of the site taken before the Israeli strike on Sept. 6 showed no sign of the cooling towers and chimneys characteristic of reactors.

Even said the absence of telltale features of a reactor convinced him the building must have housed something else. And a rush by the Syrians after the attack to bury the site under tons of soil suggests the facility was a plutonium processing plant and they were trying to smother lethal doses of radiation leaking out.

Israel has maintained an almost total official silence over the strike, which Syria said hit an unused military installation. But foreign media reports, some quoting unidentified U.S. officials, have said the strike hit a nuclear facility made with North Korean help and modeled on the North's Yongbyon reactor.

Damascus denies it has an undeclared nuclear program, and North Korea has said it was not involved in any Syrian nuclear project.

Last month, American analyst David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, said commercial satellite images taken before and after the Israeli raid supported suspicions that the target was indeed a reactor and that the site was given a hasty cleanup by the Syrians to remove incriminating evidence.

Albright saw a clue in the fact that the structure was roofed at an early stage in its construction.

Other analysts have said the satellite images are too grainy to make any conclusive judgment.

But in an interview Thursday with the Haaretz newspaper — which first reported his assessment — Even compared pictures of a North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, in which a cooling tower with steam rising from it can clearly be seen, with the Syrian images, where no such structure appears.

Even told The Associated Press that another piece of evidence against the reactor theory was that satellite pictures of the Syrian installation taken since 2003 showed no sign of a plutonium separation facility, which prepares fuel for a nuclear reactor — typically a large structure with visible ventilation openings.

"It's very difficult to hide a separation plant," he said. "It's more difficult to hide a separation plant than to hide a nuclear reactor," Even added.

"In Yongbyon, the supposed sister facility in North Korea, you can see all those signs that I am pointing out that are missing in the Syrian place," Even said. "You can see the chimneys, you can see the ventilation, you can see the cooling towers, you can see the separation plant. All that is missing from this building in Syria."

Even said he believes the Syrian cleanup, in which large quantities of soil were bulldozed over the site, was an attempt to smother lethal radiation from a plutonium processing plant.

"I have no information, only an assessment, but I suspect that it was a plant for processing plutonium, namely a factory for assembling the bomb," he told Haaretz.

"Somebody made a lot of effort to bury deeply whatever remains of this facility," he told The AP. "Not just to hide it but to pile up a large mound of dirt on top of it."

Even said Syrian authorities might have taken similar cleanup action if the site had held chemical or biological weapons. But it would not have made sense for Israel to have taken the military and diplomatic risk of attacking such a facility, long a known element of Syria's arsenal.

"We know already that the Syrians have in place armed missiles with chemical weapons," he said. "They are already well-equipped in that department."

<http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story.jsp?id=news/ISRA112107.xml&headline=U.S.%20Electronic%20Surveillance%20Monitored%20Israeli%20Attack%20On%20Syria&channel=defense>

U.S. Electronic Surveillance Monitored Israeli Attack On Syria

Nov 21, 2007

David A. Fulghum and Robert Wall

AviationWeek.com

The U.S. provided Israel with information about Syrian air defenses before Israel attacked a suspected nuclear site in Syria, Aviation Week & Space Technology is reporting in its Nov. 26 edition.

The U.S. was monitoring the electronic emissions coming from Syria during Israel's Sept. 6 attack, and while there was no active American engagement in the operation, there was advice provided, according to military and aerospace industry officials.

The first event in the raid involved Israel's strike aircraft flying into Syria without alerting Syrian air defenses. The ultimate target was a suspected nuclear reactor being developed at Dayr az-Zawr. But the main attack was preceded by an engagement with a single Syrian radar site at Tall al-Abuad near the Turkish border.

The radar site was struck with a combination of electronic attack and precision bombs to allow the Israeli force to enter and exit Syrian airspace unobserved. Subsequently all of Syria's air-defense radar system went off the air for a period of time that encompassed the raid, U.S. intelligence analysts told Aviation Week.

However, there was "no U.S. active engagement other than consulting on potential target vulnerabilities," a U.S. electronic warfare specialist says.

Elements of the attack included some brute force jamming, which is still an important element of attacking air defenses, U.S. analysts say. Also, Syrian air defenses are still centralized and dependent on dedicated HF and VHF communications networks, which made them vulnerable.

The analysts don't believe that any part of Syria's electrical grid was shut down. They do contend that network penetration involved both remote air-to-ground electronic attack and penetration through computer-to-computer links.

"There also were some higher-level, non-tactical penetrations, either direct or as diversions and spoofs of the Syrian command and control capability, done through network attack," one U.S. intelligence specialist says.

These observations provide evidence that a sophisticated network attack and electronic hacking capability is an operational part of the Israeli Defense Force's arsenal of digital weapons.

Despite being hobbled by the restrictions of secrecy and diplomacy, Israeli military and government officials also confirm that network invasion, information warfare and electronic attack are part of Israel's defense capabilities.

These tools have been embraced operationally by key military units, but their development, use and the techniques employed are still a mystery even to other defense and government organizations. It remains "a shadowy world," an Israeli Air Force general confirms.

Israel is not alone in recent demonstrations of network warfare. Syria and Hezbollah revealed some basic expertise during the Lebanon conflict last year.

"Offensive and defensive network warfare is one of the most interesting new areas," says Pinchas Buchris, the director general of the Israeli Ministry of Defense. "I can only say we're following the [network attack] technology with great care. I doubted this [technology] five years ago. But we did it. Now everything has changed.

"You need this kind of capability," he says. "You're not being responsible if you're not dealing with it. And, if you can build this kind of capability, the sky's the limit."

ARTICLE COMMENTS

nayouf wrote:

I have read all the reports that have been by Mr.David A. Fulghum about the Israeli raid. I'm sorry to tell him that all the information he mentioned is but false. I know the Syrian Air-defense System as like as I know my hand's plate, and I was the first person who published pictures of the site bombed by the Israeli fighters , which was 3 weeks before David Albright (of www.isis.org) did on 24 October. In fact, there is no Syrian radar system near the Syrian-Turkish boarder. That is not mention the central radar of Shinshar (mid-Syria) can survey up to 4000 km.

Nizar NAYOUF
nizarnayouf@yahoo.com
Syrian journalist in exile
(Former missile-officer)
11/22/2007 10:40:23 AM
Recommend (5)

nayouf wrote:

Sorry, a mistake was made in my former comment. I meant the website:
www.isis-online.org , but not www.isis.org
11/22/2007 11:02:42 AM

nayouf wrote:

in order to see the pictures that we published 3 weeks before David Albright did, please click here:
http://syriatruth.org/Al-Hakikah/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1981
11/22/2007 11:06:16 AM

[Referenced URL follows]

11/10/2007

مصادر تركية وسورية متطابقة تكشف لـ " الحقيقة " طبيعة الهدف الذي استهدفته الطائرات الإسرائيلية الشهر الماضي :

صممت لتلائم رؤوسا حربية غير تقليدية ولا شيء Scud-D و Scud-C الطائرات استهدفت منشأة للصواريخ بعيدة المدى من طراز غير ذلك أبدا ، والرئيس السوري أبلغ وزير الخارجية التركي بحقيقة الهدف

الغارة أسفرت عن تدمير أو تخريب بضع عشرات من الصواريخ منزوعة الرؤوس

نادرة مطر (استانبول) ، دمشق - الحقيقة (خاص) : علمت " الحقيقة " من مصادر سورية وتركية موثوق بها أن الغارة التي شنتها إسرائيل الشهر الماضي على العمق السوري استهدفت مستودعا للصواريخ بعيدة المدى من طراز " سكود سي " و " سكود - دي " صممت لتكون ملائمة للتجهيز برؤوس حربية غير تقليدية . وقال مصدر تركي لـ " الحقيقة " في استانبول إن وزير الخارجية التركي علي بابا خان الذي زار دمشق الأسبوع الماضي حصل على معلومات وافية بهذا الشأن من السلطات السورية ، حيث أكد له الرئيس بشار الأسد أن " الطائرات الإسرائيلية استهدفت مستودعا للصواريخ بعيدة المدى " ، لكنه لم يحدد بشكل مفصل المواصفات التكتيكية والاستراتيجية لهذه الصواريخ . وأضاف المصدر " إن علي بابا خان طلب من الرئيس السوري تأكيدات بهذا الشأن لتستطيع الحكومة التركية الدفاع عن الموقف السوري حين تثار المشكلة في وجهها من قبل الولايات المتحدة وإسرائيل ، وحتى من قبل بعض القوى " . " الداخلية ، في إشارة للجيش التركي

على هذا الصعيد ، أكد ضابط في " هيئة التسليح " في الجيش السوري أن الغارة استهدفت مستودعا للصواريخ بعيدة المدى من طراز " سكود - سي " و " سكود - دي " بعيدة المدى في منطقة " حلبية - زلبيية " الواقعة إلى الشمال الغربي من دير الزور بحوالي 50 كم . وقال الضابط " أستطيع أن أؤكد أن ما قصف هو مستودع للصواريخ المذكورة ولا شيء غير ذلك على الإطلاق " . وأضاف موضحا " إن المستودعات كانت محفورة في باطن التلال الموجودة هناك على الضفة اليسرى من نهر الفرات مقابل المنطقة الأثرية المعروفة باسم حلبية - زلبيية ، والتي تقع إلى الشمال الغربي من المنطقة المعروفة باسم زنبوبيا . وقد استخدمت الطائرات صواريخ خارقة للأتفاق في عملية القصف ، وأن ما لا يقل عن 30 - 40 صاروخا موصبا في حاويات خاصة قد دمرت كلياً أو جزئياً ، فضلا عن البناء الرئيسي للمنشأة ، وهو وحدة تقنية خاصة بتعمير الرؤوس الحربية لهذا النوع من الصواريخ " ، وكشف عن أن " بعض الأثار القريبة من المنطقة تعرض لأذى ، لكنه أدى طفيف جدا " . ولدى سؤاله عما إذا كانت الصواريخ المصابة مجهزة برؤوس غير تقليدية ، قال المصدر " لحسن الحظ إنها لم تكن كذلك . فحين تخزين هذه الصواريخ تكون رؤوسها الحربية غير التقليدية مفرغة من شحناتها " . لأسباب تتصل بحفظها بشكل آمن ، وإلا لكانت حصلت كارثة بيئية في المنطقة

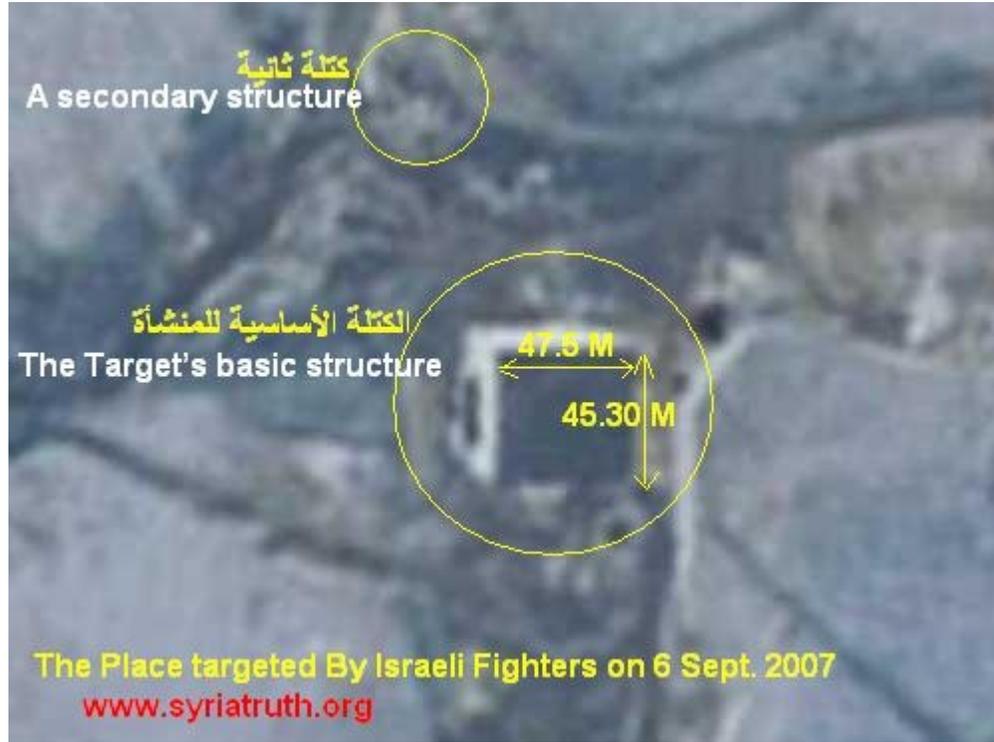
تبقى الإشارة إلى أن " الحقيقة " كانت أول من أشار إلى أن الغارة استهدفت منطقة " حلبية - زلبيية " ، وذلك في تقرير نشرته في السابع عشر من الشهر الماضي مرفقا بصورة للمنطقة . كما أن " الحقيقة " تحتفظ بصورة فضائية للمنطقة من مصدر إسرائيلي يعود تاريخها إلى العام الماضي ، وهو ما يعني أنها كانت مراقبة من قبل إسرائيل منذ عام على الأقل . (الصورة 1 أدناه) . وكانت " الحقيقة " حصلت قبل يومين على أوضح صور تتوفر حتى الآن للمكان المستهدف ، يعود تاريخها إلى أكثر من عام . وبعد عرضها على الضابط المذكور ، أكد أنها " مطابقة تماما للمكان المستهدف قبل قصفه " (الصورتان 2 و 3 أدناه) . وكان تقرير " الحقيقة " المشار إليه قد نقل عن مصادر سورية خاصة قولها إن " إدارة الحرب الكيميائية " في الجيش لسوري قد أجرت اختبارات وفحوصا للمنطقة بعد القصف ، وهو ما يعني أن ثمة مخاوف كانت موجودة لجهة احتمال حصول تلوث كيميائي نتيجة لقصف المستودع



صورة رقم 1
Image 1



صورة رقم 2
Image 2



صورة رقم 3
Image 3

Above Arabic text automatically translated via
http://translate.google.com/translate_t?langpair=ar|en

Turkish sources, Syria identical to reveal "the truth" nature of the goal which target Israeli aircraft last month

أircraft targeted the facility for long-range missiles of the type Scud-C and Scud-D designed to suit non-conventional warheads and nothing but never, and the Syrian president told Turkish Foreign Minister fact goal

The raid resulted in the destruction or vandalism few dozen missiles without warheads

Rare Matar (Istanbul), Damascus truth (special): learned "the truth" from the Turkish and Syrian sources credible that the raid by Israel last month on the rear Syrian targeted repository of long-range missiles of the type "Scud C", "Scud D" designed to be suitable for processing non-conventional

warheads. A source said Turki told "the truth" in Istanbul that the Turkish Foreign Minister to Papa

Khan, who visited Damascus last week received adequate information in this regard from the Syrian authorities, which assured him of President Bashar al-Assad that "Israeli aircraft targeted a repository of long-range missiles," but he did not identify the detailed specifications of tactical and strategic of these rockets. The source added that "the Pope Khan asked the Syrian president assurances to that effect to the Turkish government can defend the Syrian position when the problem arose in me by the United States and Israel, and even by some internal forces, in a reference to the Turkish army."

At this level, the officer in a "militarization" of the Syrian army that the raid targeted a repository of long-range missiles of the type "Scud C", "Scud D" in the long term "ignited Zlp" located to the north-west of Deir Al-Zour about 50 km. The officer said "I can confirm that the bombing was the repository of rocket and nothing but mentioned that at all." He added, saying that "that the warehouses were dug in the subsoil of the hills there on the left bank of the Euphrates river against the region known as Sensationalism ignited Zlp, which lies to the north-west of the area known as Zenobia. Has Astkhaddt aircraft missiles extraordinary expenditure in the shelling, and what not less than 30 40 rockets Moilla in special containers had been destroyed in whole or in part, as well as the construction of the main plant, which is a unit of special technical reconstruction warheads of this type of missile, "and revealed that" some implications near the region suffered harm, but harm very little. " When asked whether the patient is equipped with missile warheads unconventional, the source said "fortunately they were not as well. Storage When these rockets are non-conventional warheads vicious cycle of shipments for reasons related to store it securely, and only got to the environmental disaster in the region."

Keep noted that the "truth" was first pointed out that the raid targeted "ignited Zlp", in a report published in the XVII of the facility last month in the region. The "truth" is a space reserved for the region from the Israeli source dating back to last year, which means it was controlled by Israel since at least. (Image 1 below). The "truth" obtained two days before the clearer images available so far to the target location, dates back to more than a year. After the presentation to the officer in question, he stressed that it was "fully correspond to the target before the bombing" (photographs 2 and 3 below). The report "the truth" referred to was quoted Syrian sources as saying that a special "management chemical warfare" in the Syrian army had conducted tests and examinations of the area after the bombing, which meant that there were fears exist regarding the possibility of a chemical contamination result of the bombing of the warehouse.

http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story_channel.jsp?channel=defense&id=news/aw112607p2.xml&headline=Israel%20Shows%20Electronic%20Prowess

Israel Shows Electronic Prowess

Nov 25, 2007

By David A. Fulghum, Robert Wall and Amy Butler

The U.S. was monitoring the electronic emissions coming from Syria during Israel's September attack; and—although there was no direct American help in destroying a nuclear reactor—there was some advice provided beforehand, military and aerospace industry officials tell Aviation Week & Space Technology.

That surveillance is providing clues about how Israeli aircraft managed to slip past Syrian air defenses to bomb the site at Dayr az-Zawr. The main attack was preceded by an engagement with a single Syrian radar site at Tall al-Abuad near the Turkish border. It was assaulted with what appears to be a combination of electronic attack and precision bombs to enable the Israeli force to enter and exit Syrian airspace. Almost immediately, the entire Syrian radar system went off the air for a period of time that included the raid, say U.S. intelligence analysts.

There was “no U.S. active engagement other than consulting on potential target vulnerabilities,” says a U.S. electronic warfare specialist.

Elements of the attack included some brute-force jamming, which is still an important element of attacking air defenses, U.S. analysts say. Also, Syrian air defenses are still centralized and dependent on dedicated HF and VHF communications, which made them vulnerable. The analysts don't believe any part of Syria's electrical grid was shut down. They do contend that network penetration involved both remote air-to-ground electronic attack and penetration through computer-to-computer links.

“There also were some higher-level, nontactical penetrations, either direct or as diversions and spoofs, of the Syrian command-and-control capability, done through network attack,” says an intelligence specialist.

These observations provide evidence that a sophisticated network attack and electronic hacking capability is an operational part of the Israel Defense Forces' arsenal of digital weapons.

Despite being hobbled by the restrictions of secrecy and diplomacy, Israeli military and government officials confirm that network invasion, information warfare and electronic attack are part of Israel's defense capabilities.

They've been embraced operationally by key military units, but their development, use and the techniques employed are still a mystery even to other defense and government organizations. It remains “a shadowy world,” says an Israeli air force general. Israel is not alone in recent demonstrations of network warfare. Syria and Hezbollah showed some basic expertise during the Lebanon conflict last year.

“Offensive and defensive network warfare is one of the most interesting new areas,” says Pinchas Buchris, director general of the Israeli defense ministry. “I can only say we're following the [network

attack] technology with great care. I doubted this [technology] five years ago. But we did it. Now everything has changed.

“You need this kind of capability,” he says. “You’re not being responsible if you’re not dealing with it. And, if you can build this kind of capability, the sky’s the limit [for sophisticated intelligence gathering and clandestine operations].”

So far, the most sophisticated example of nonkinetic warfare is the penetration of Syrian air defenses by Israeli aircraft on Sept. 6 to bomb a site—analyzed as a nascent nuclear facility—without being engaged or even detected. Commercial satellite pictures of the target on the Euphrates (about 90 mi. from the Iraq border) taken before and after the raid show that a large building (the suspected reactor building) in the center of the site has disappeared and the ground has been bulldozed flat.

The incident is attracting attention because “the Syrians have an extensive air defense system that they’ve been building for decades—since the [1967] Six-Day War,” says an Israeli defense planning official. “It may be the largest in the world.”

That ability of nonstealthy Israeli aircraft to penetrate without interference rests in part on technology, carried on board modified aircraft, that allowed specialists to hack into Syria’s networked air defense system, said U.S. military and industry officials in the attack’s aftermath. Network raiders can conduct their invasion from an aircraft into a network and then jump from network to network until they are into the target’s communications loop. “Whether the network is wireless or wired doesn’t matter anymore,” says a U.S. industry specialist (AW&ST Nov. 5, p. 32; Oct. 8, p. 28; Feb. 19, p. 31). Now development of the technology in Israel is being confirmed.

“The raid on Syria was a strategic signal, not a threat,” says a retired senior military official who flew combat in the region for decades. “This [raid] was about what we perceived are their capabilities [for developing weapons of mass destruction] and about deterrence more than creating damage.”

He contends that Syrian procedures even contributed to the successful bombing raid.

“Part of the vulnerability of the Syrian facility was that they kept it so secret that there weren’t enough air defenses assigned to it,” the official contends.

Israel’s capabilities are similar to the “Suter” network-invasion capability that was developed by the U.S. using the EC-130 Compass Call electronic attack aircraft to shoot data streams, laced with sophisticated algorithms, into enemy antennas. The passive, RC-135 Rivet Joint electronic surveillance aircraft then monitored enemy signals to ensure the data streams were having the intended effect on the target sensors. Israel duplicated the capability when it fielded its two new Gulfstream G550 special missions aircraft designs. Both were modified by Israel Aerospace Industries’ Elta Div. in time for the 2006 Lebanon war. The ground surveillance radar version can provide data streams from large active, electronically scanned array radars, while the intelligence version provided the signals surveillance and analyses.

Buchris contends that it’s not manpower and technology that limits development, but constructing systems (that can put invasive data streams into enemy networks and then monitor the results) and making them operational.

The new G550 radar and electronic surveillance aircraft, for example, are still “in the process of being integrated into the intelligence system,” the planning official agrees. “The name of the game is balance of systems, intelligence, training, communications and forces. It has to be conducted like an orchestra. If one instrument is out of tune, it doesn’t sound right.”

The special mission aircraft were used during the war with good results, but military officials expect better future exploitation as they are plugged into the Israel Defense Forces’ network. Another handicap in developing Israel’s network attack capabilities is that they haven’t directly enlisted the research potential of their universities as the Pentagon has done in the U.S.

“I know that in the U.S., universities are involved in these kinds of issues,” Buchris says. “But in Israel, we are not. It’s totally different. How the Israeli system works, you can’t share with anybody. I don’t want to go into the issues [of technology development, personnel training and who runs the organization]. It’s very interesting. It’s very sensitive. Any such capabilities are top secret.”

That secrecy is causing Israel problems. Compartmentalization means that those who know about the new capabilities aren’t allowed to tout their usefulness. Yet at least low-key publicity is needed to ensure government funding for additional development and acceptance of their operational use.

“Now I have to find a way to explain these capabilities to other people so that they understand,” Buchris says.

Israeli officials won’t address the raid on Syria directly.

“We want to ease feelings with Syria,” says Tzachi Hanegbi, chairman of the Israeli parliament’s foreign affairs and defense committee. “We don’t want them to feel humiliated.” Moreover, Israeli analysts aren’t really sure who to blame. “No one really knows whether President [Basher al-] Assad is the one who calls the shots. It may be senior army generals or other figures with influence. We don’t want a confrontation.

“It’s sensitive enough that the Army made an unprecedented decision to change an important exercise in the Golan Heights to another site,” Hanegbi says. “And, it was equally unusual for them to announce it. That’s a symptom of the atmosphere.”

Israeli officials reject any suggestion that the Syrian and Iranian nuclear programs were or are linked in any way.

“I don’t think Iran knew anything about what Syria was doing,” says a long-serving member of the Israeli parliament with insight into military affairs. “I don’t think they would have told the Iranians. They didn’t need Iranian assistance because they had help from the North Koreans.”

However, John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, disagrees. “I’d be very surprised if the Syrians were to engage at least without Iranian acquiescence,” he says. And, “it may be beyond that,” he tells Aviation Week. Since Syria alone lacks both the funding and expertise for a nuclear weapons program, it would logically turn to Pyongyang for technology and oil-rich Tehran for funding, he says.

Moreover, Bolton says the use of network attack is a clever move by the Israelis. He contends that it will serve as a deterrent for Iran. Or, at the very least, it sends a message that even the advanced, Russian-built air defense systems won't protect Iran's nuclear activities.

"I think it is very telling, obviously, in its potential impact on Iran since they've been supplied by the Russians with air defense equipment as well," Bolton says. He describes the Syrian facility as a "clone" of North Korea's primary nuclear plant in Yongbyon, and it share the same dimensions. The roof was covered with materials to mask it, apparently unsuccessfully, from overhead collection. Prior to his work at the U.N., Bolton was undersecretary of State for arms control during 2002 when construction of the Syrian site was said to have begun.

An indication of North Korea's involvement in the Syrian facility was a condemnation of the raid issued by the government there. "This was an almost automatic response," he says. "It is not because North Korea and Syria share a common border. To me, it was an inadvertent tipoff from North Koreans that they had involvement with that facility."

Israeli analysts closely watch foreign aid to Syria and that country's support of Hezbollah during last year's fighting in Lebanon and Israel. Of key interest was a signals and communications intercept operation that was run by the Syrian military. The intelligence products on location, makeup and intent of Israeli operations—much of it obtained from cell phone intercepts—were passed to Hezbollah.

In this case, they point to the involvement of Chinese and Russian advisory groups operating in Syria.

"When you're talking about selling high-tech systems, they need support and staffing," says a senior Israeli government official. "You can't just talk about an air defense system. You also have to talk about communications, networking and intelligence gathering," which includes the skills of communications and signals intelligence gathering and analysis.

"I can tell you that now, when I go into a [ministry] meeting, I have to take the battery out of my cell phone," the government official says. "We're aware of [traffic intercept during the Lebanon fighting]. There's also the issue that in the north of Israel you have very large Arab communities. Most wouldn't be involved, but you're talking about a half-million people up on the border. That means there are people with the ability to watch and pass on information."

Top US nuclear negotiator will make rare visit to North Korea to inspect disarmament work

The Associated Press

Tuesday, November 27, 2007

ANNAPOLIS, Maryland: The U.S. negotiator on North Korea's nuclear program is to become next week the highest-level U.S. official to inspect work under way to disable that country's main nuclear reactor.

A senior State Department official said Tuesday that Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill will leave Monday for the communist-led state to check the disabling of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor, a crucial milestone in the international bargain that North Korea made to eliminate its weapons in exchange for economic aid and other perquisites.

Hill was making the quick visit in between diplomatic meetings in neighboring Japan and South Korea, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the unannounced plans. North Korea invited Hill for only his second visit as an end-of-the-year deadline nears for Pyongyang to declare the extent of its once-secret nuclear program.

Hill and other envoys are expected to meet separately with the North Koreans next week in what will likely be the six-nation international bargaining group's final session before the deadline. The date of that session in Beijing also has not been announced.

The last previous round of six-party talks was in Beijing in late September. The sides announced an agreement in which North Korea promised to disable its closed Yongbyon nuclear reactor by the end of this year in exchange for economic aid and political concessions.

At the next meeting of the six — North and South Korea, the United States, China, Japan and Russia — North Korea is to lay out elements of a draft declaration detailing its nuclear programs.

U.S. nuclear experts have been in North Korea since early this month to disable the reactor, which produced plutonium for bombs.

"The process to disable the North's nuclear facilities is under way," South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon said. "The process is going well."

Hill became the first high-level U.S. official to visit the impoverished, secretive North in more than four years when he made a brief, surprise stop there in June. That visit followed resolution of a banking dispute that had held up progress toward disarmament for more than a year.

U.S. officials have said North Korea is cooperating with visiting experts to disable the weapons-making facilities, but there is skepticism in Congress and within the Bush administration that North Korea really will drop out of the nuclear club it joined last year with a successful underground nuclear test. South Africa is the only nuclear power to end its weapons program voluntarily.

North Korea's test detonation in October 2006 culminated decades of efforts to build the world's deadliest weapons. Experts estimate it has enough weapons-grade plutonium to make about a dozen bombs.

It is not clear how the North will deal with secret U.S. and Israeli intelligence findings that it was supporting an illicit nuclear effort in Syria this year. Israel bombed a facility widely believed to have housed the illicit program, but details of the raid and the Syrian program have remained largely secret.

Washington hopes future talks will yield an agreement for the North to dismantle the facility entirely and also wants nuclear bombs Pyongyang is believed to have built to be confiscated.

U.S. to set 3 more tasks for N. Korea / New hurdles for delisting as terror sponsor

Takashi Sakamoto / Yomiuri Shimbun Correspondent

Dec. 1, 2007

WASHINGTON--The U.S. government has decided to impose three new conditions for removing North Korea from Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism, sources close to the six-party talks said Friday.

Pyongyang must reveal the amount of plutonium it has extracted; the reality of its uranium enrichment program; and the alleged transfer of nuclear technology and materials to other countries such as Syria, the sources said.

These points should be made clear when North Korea completes its declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of this year, the sources added.

The new conditions will be in addition to the current U.S. requirement that North Korea complete the disablement of its nuclear facilities.

It is now likely that North Korea will not be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism anytime soon, since it is unlikely that the country will accept all four conditions, the sources said.

It is believed that the United States and North Korea had agreed on the removal of the reclusive state from the terrorism sponsor list and punitive measures mandated by the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act in return for Pyongyang disabling its nuclear facilities and fully declaring its nuclear programs by year's end.

Although the background of the new U.S. measures is unclear, the U.S. government is believed to have taken into consideration Japan's strong demand to keep North Korea on the terrorism sponsor list.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the chief U.S. delegate for the six-party talks, said Thursday in Seoul that North Korea "is required to list all of their [nuclear] programs, facilities and all of the materials. That is what the declaration is for." Hill will travel to Pyongyang on Monday and stay there until Wednesday.

However, North Korea has not submitted an initial draft nuclear listing, even though only one month remains before the the deadline to complete the declaration.

In relation to the three new conditions, North Korea has flatly denied the existence of an uranium enrichment program and of providing nuclear technology and materials to other countries.

It is also believed that North Korea is reluctant to declare its current nuclear weaponry stockpile, including plutonium, which is used to make nuclear bombs and warheads.

Hill is scheduled to meet North Korea's chief nuclear envoy, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan. However, negotiations on the declaration are likely to face rough going unless North Korea changes its stance.

Chief delegates to the six-party talks, scheduled to meet next week in Beijing, will highly likely face difficulties while discussing the declaration.

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'Aluminum pipes not for N-use'

Meanwhile, North Korea has denied it is using special aluminum pipes it imported from Russia for nuclear development to produce rocket bombs, it has been learned. The pipes are usually used in the process to develop highly enriched uranium.

The United States, which strongly suspects that North Korea has a uranium enrichment program, is not convinced by the explanation, according to an informed source. The U.S. government is asking North Korea to further clarify the matter, the source said.

Clarifying its uranium enrichment program is an important point of the declaration of North Korea's nuclear programs, and is expected to be a major agenda in next week's six-party Beijing talks.

North Korea admitted earlier this year that it has purchased the high-strength aluminum pipes, to be used in centrifuges necessary for uranium enrichment, according to sources close to the six-party talks.



FM Livni meets with South Korean FM Song Min-Soon

2 Dec 2007

In their meeting today, FM Livni and FM Song Min-Soon discussed issues relating to nuclear proliferation in the region and promoting closer relations and economic ties between the two countries

(Communicated by the Foreign Minister's Bureau)

Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni met this afternoon (Sunday, 2 December 2007) with South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-Soon. FM Livni congratulated her counterpart on the strengthening of direct relations between the two countries since her visit to South Korea last year, and asked him to rescind restrictions imposed by the South Korean government on travel to Israel.

FM Livni and FM Song Min-Soon also discussed issues relating to nuclear proliferation in the region. Regarding this, FM Livni stated: "The international community is concentrating efforts to sever commercial and financial relations with Iran, to increase pressure on that country, and we must not allow Iran to evade these significant actions by presenting Asian alternatives. When Europe takes action against Iran - Iran turns to Asia. It is extremely important for Asian countries to avoid the creation of alternative relations with Iran, especially at this crucial point." **The two foreign ministers also discussed North Korea's decision to disable its nuclear program and the obligation of preventing proliferation of elements of its nuclear program in countries in the Middle East.**

FM Livni and FM Song Min-Soon agreed to renew the deliberations of the Joint Israel-South Korea Economic Commission, with the aim of strengthening economic relations between the two countries on issues such as tourism, hi-tech, trade and research & development.

North Korea moves to nuclear dismantling - U.S. envoy

By Chris Buckley

Wed Dec 5, 2007 8:41pm IST

BEIJING (Reuters) - North Korea is moving towards disabling its key nuclear complex, but has not yet agreed with the United States what nuclear activities it must disclose, the chief U.S. envoy to disarmament talks said on Wednesday.

Speaking after a rare trip by a U.S. official to the old Cold War foe, Christopher Hill told reporters that he had visited the Yongbyon nuclear complex, which contains the reactor at the heart of Pyongyang's atomic programme, and seen that dismantling was going forward at three key units of the facility.

But Hill also said he had cautioned Pyongyang that a declaration of the North's nuclear activities promised by the end of the year had to be "complete and correct" and contain no surprises.

"We wanted to make sure that they would include all the facilities, materials and programmes," Hill told reporters in Beijing. "There are definitely some differences there."

Hill said he still expected Yongbyon to be disabled by the end of the year and for North Korea to issue its disclosure.

But he was not sure there would be time for six-party talks involving the two Koreas, the United States, Japan, Russia and host China on the issue to be held by year-end.

Hill's was the highest-level U.S. visit so far to the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-12/05/content_7206431.htm

U.S. top envoy says DPRK's nuclear disablement "going well"

www.chinaview.cn

2007-12-05 22:54:13

BEIJING, Dec. 5 (Xinhua) -- Chief U.S. negotiator to the six-party talks on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue Christopher Hill said on Wednesday the disablement of DPRK's main nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, scheduled to be completed by year end, is going well.

"The disablement is going fine...there is disabling activity going on all three sections of the facility there: the fuel fabrication facilities, the reactor and the re-processing center," Hill said after arriving in Beijing Wednesday afternoon following a three-day visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

"They have done a lot of work in preparation of discharging the fuel in the reactor...which will enable the disabling to be of real value," he said.

Hill noted that China has been very helpful in assisting the disablement.

According to a six-party talks joint document released in Beijing on Oct. 3, the DPRK agreed to disable all the existing nuclear facilities and provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs by the end of this year.

The document said the disablement of the five-megawatt Experimental Reactor, the Reprocessing Plant (Radiochemical Laboratory) and the Nuclear Fuel Rod Fabrication Facility in Yongbyon would be completed by Dec. 31.

Hill said the DPRK is "pretty close to providing a declaration" and the atmosphere of the meeting with his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye Gwan was very cooperative.

"The declaration should be complete and correct...It should include all the facilities, materials and programs that the DPRK has had in the nuclear area," Hill said.

Hill said he will leave China early Friday, after meeting with Wu Dawei, head of the Chinese delegation to the six-party talks, on Thursday.

He dismissed chances for a six-party talk to convene by the end of this year, citing holiday reasons.

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hLVRV29PTZbF85_wJq9-mfA1hlYQ

US envoy says NKorea disablement on schedule: report

1 hour ago [accessed 2007-12-05T16:15Z]

BEIJING (AFP) — The US envoy on North Korean nuclear disarmament said Wednesday the regime's disablement was on schedule but that more remained to be done to meet deadlines, Chinese state media reported.

Christopher Hill was speaking as he left Pyongyang after what he called "good talks" with officials in North Korea, Xinhua news agency said.

He had arrived on Monday to witness the US-supervised disablement of the country's main Yongbyon nuclear facility.

"We had good talks and had a full tour of Yongbyon. I would say the disablement activities are well on schedule," the assistant US secretary of state was quoted as saying.

Hill's visit was also aimed at keeping the North on track for a complete declaration of all its atomic programmes by a year-end deadline.

"We have to keep working because we have more to do to meet our deadlines," he said, summarising talks on the issue with his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-gwan.

Hill arrived later Wednesday in Beijing for talks with Chinese officials, the US embassy in the Chinese capital said.

The North said in October 2006 it had successfully tested its first nuclear device, but in February it agreed to a six-nation accord to disable such programmes in return for energy aid and various diplomatic and security guarantees.

A new round of six-nation talks was expected this week in Beijing but they appeared to have been put off, and the United States and China have not set a date for when the discussions restart.

The lack of a date comes amid reports of a delay in Pyongyang's nuclear declaration, considered a vital part of the multi-faceted six-nation deal.

The US wants Pyongyang to declare all material, including a plutonium stockpile and any warheads.

"We have to see what the DPRK does, but it has to give a full declaration and it has to be a complete declaration," Xinhua quoted Hill as saying.

DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

Cho Hee-Yong, spokesman for South Korea's foreign ministry, said Tuesday the North had not yet handed over the list.

North Korea has a history of striking deals on its nuclear programmes only to scupper them at the last minute with new demands, but Hill said that the deadline still could be met.

"I think (North Korea) is working very hard for the declaration and we have some discussions about that... so I'm assured they will be prepared to meet the deadline," he told Xinhua.

US State Department spokesman Tom Casey said Tuesday the talks delay was due to scheduling problems and that they would take place in the "near future".

Hill is expected to return to Washington on Friday.

The six-party negotiations involving the two Koreas, the United States, Japan, China and Russia began in August 2003.



Evening Walk-Through at Six-Party Talks
Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Kerry Center Hotel
Beijing, China
December 5, 2007

QUESTION: How was the discussion with the DPRK?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It was a good two and a half day trip. The first part of it was, I made a visit down to Yongbyon. And, indeed, there is a lot of disabling activity going on. We went through all three sections of the facility there. That is, the fuel fabrication facility, the reactor, and then finally the reprocessing center. There is disabling activity going on at all three. They have done a lot of work in preparation of discharging the fuel in the reactor, which I think will have a big effect -- because that will mean they can't easily put it back. That will enable the disabling to be of real value, so that we have over a year worth of disabling.

We have Americans there on the spot staying in the guest quarters there and working together with the DPRK counterparts. I'd say the work is proceeding rather well. We put on protective gear in order to go inside some of the facilities and see what they are doing. And it really involves taking apart equipment and making it very difficult to get the facility started again. So that was mainly Monday's activities. Then on Tuesday I had talks, first of all, starting with the Foreign Minister. Or -- I should say -- on Monday, at the end of that day at Yongbyon, I met with the head of their nuclear energy agency, Dr. Rhee.

Then on Tuesday, I met with the Foreign Minister and then had lengthy discussions with Kim Kye Gwan. Now the discussions with Kim Kye Gwan centered on the activities leading to what we are calling Phase II. That is, leading to the end of the year. We talked about disabling, and I think we had a good understanding of what we are doing on disabling. But we also talked about the declaration that they are preparing. And we wanted to make very clear that when they submit the declaration to the Six Parties, it is important that the declaration, even as a first draft, should nonetheless be complete and correct. And we emphasized that. And I discussed some of the elements that I would want to see in the declaration to ensure that when the declaration comes forward there are no surprises.

So that was mainly the focus with Vice Minister Kim Kye Gwan. We also discussed the next phase, although I think Mr. Kim preferred to keep the discussion on Phase II -- because we have not yet completed Phase II. But I raised the issue of our strong view that we need to get through all of these phases and complete the process by „08. I saw the Vice President of the People's Assembly, Mr. Yang. Then I saw, the next day, I saw Kim Kye Gwan once again for additional discussions. We didn't really

have a lot of time to get around Pyongyang. I did see -- We have a person who is working on the disabling and working on the administrative arrangements for the disabling staying at the Koryo

Hotel, and I was able to see him. His name is Pat O'Brien. In addition, I did see, I did one trip to go down and have a look at their subway system. So that was about it.

QUESTION: Ambassador Hill, on the declaration, what seems to be the hold-up on that? You've been expecting a draft copy for quite a while now. What seems to be the hold up?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I hate to call it a hold-up -- except that our concern is, we don't want a declaration that arrives and that immediately people see what is missing. So the DPRK is under an obligation to provide a complete and correct declaration. So we wanted to discuss what we see as, what we believe is necessary for complete and correct. So I think the DPRK is pretty close to providing a declaration, but we want it to be as good as possible.

QUESTION: And did, while you were up there, you get a chance to talk about what is in the declaration, or did you get a chance to see a draft copy?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No. We discussed what they plan to have in the declaration, and we wanted to make sure that they would also include all the facilities, materials, and programs that the DPRK has had in the nuclear era in these many years that it has had these nuclear ambitions.

QUESTION: Is the problem with HEU?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm not prepared to say it is a problem. But we need to make sure that all programs need to be included.

QUESTION: South Korea has said that North Korea might not be able to dismantle by the end of the year. What is your take on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You mean disable by the end of the year?

QUESTION: Disable.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think the disabling has gone very well. You know, one of the issues has been the discharge of fuel -- which is very important, but we want it to be done safely. It was at our instigation that we slowed down the discharge to ensure that it would be done safely. I think it is fair to say the disabling is going very well.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) by the end of the year?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, we are not looking for some sort of cliffhanger, five minutes of twelve. What we want to see is that this is going on as quickly as possible and as safely as possible, and we are very much convinced that that is the case. So disabling is going fine. And I thought it was very significant that all members of the Six Parties came out and saw last week, and I think they had that same impression.

QUESTION: Is there a difference between what you think is necessary on the declaration and what the North Koreans think is necessary?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't want to go into details, but there are definitely some differences there, yes. But I don't want to go into details. We are trying to work with them to make sure we don't have differences, and the atmosphere of the meeting was very cooperative. So I don't want to suggest that we are at some impasse or that we can't seem to solve something, because the atmosphere was positive. But, yes indeed, there are some differences.

QUESTION: Not so big differences?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, I just told you I don't want to get into characterizing those differences.

QUESTION: But is this the reason why we can not have Six-Party Talks this week?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I am not sure what is the reason we are not having Six-Party Talks, because I think there are various things to talk about. But I'll be seeing the Chinese tomorrow. But you should ask the Chinese, who are the ones who talk to all the parties. I'm not sure that this has anything to do with the declaration, because although if we had had Six Parties we would have wanted to talk about the declaration, I don't think that it has been the issue. I think it's some other things, probably having to do with scheduling.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) tomorrow?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think my plan is, I'm going to stay here tomorrow. And then on Friday morning I will go through Narita, and I hope I will have the opportunity to meet with Ken Sasae and brief him in a little more detail than I am briefing you all.

QUESTION: Have you discussed with the North Koreans about the terrorism list issues, and also does that have anything to do with them not coming up with a list yet?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Second question, no, I do not think so. It does not seem to. And, yes, every time we talk to them we've talked about the terrorism list and the Trading with the Enemy Act.

QUESTION: Would you say that you made progress in your discussion with Mr. Kim Kye Gwan on the declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, I think we did actually.

QUESTION: Do you think you've narrowed your differences?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I can see you're writing an article, and you're looking for ready-made quotes to fit your article. But look, I think we have had a very useful exchange on the subject. In that sense, I think we have made progress. I won't really know until I see a declaration though. So I don't want to go too far in characterizing the progress, because I need to see what their declaration is going to look like.

QUESTION: Did they give you an estimate of when that declaration might be available?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Certainly in time to meet the December 31st deadline.

QUESTION: On the enrichment issue and the declaration, is your concern that North Korea is not going to include that entire program in the declaration, (inaudible) certain elements of the enrichment program?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I indicated that I do not want to discuss the specifics, but to be sure we are looking for elements. As we discussed the declaration, as we discussed materials, installations, and programs we found that items in each of these three lists were not there that in our view should be there. And so we discussed those items that we believe should be included in the declaration. Again, I don't want to get into specifics at this point.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate the heads of delegation meeting in December?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think it might have been possible in December. But I've just been out here this week, and I'm not sure I want to come around and turn back so soon before Christmas. So we will have to see, but it may slip to the beginning of January.

QUESTION: So you might not have a full declaration before the end of the year?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, no, I think we will have it, and then there will be the question of how it is looked at by the five other members. And I think, from a holiday point of view, it might be difficult to get the five members around a table – six all together, of course, since the DPRK will have to be there. So I am going to talk to the Chinese and see. This is their process, and let's see what they want to do.

And, by the way, the Chinese have been very, very helpful in terms of assisting in getting the material into the DPRK, because most of it is being purchased in China and being brought to the DPRK. We are talking about heavy earth-moving equipment, large lorries, front-end loaders, forklifts, large heaters for use inside warehouse-sized places. We have a lot of tanker trucks bringing fuel. We have a lot of major items that are being brought in through China. It has not been done before, and we're very pleased at the cooperation we're getting on that.

QUESTION: The original plan was to get the draft and then go back-and-forth and get it finalized. Since you will not have the heads of delegation meeting, will [it] be more like a one-time declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I don't think we're quite in a position to tell you. I think you are quite right; the original idea was to get a draft and start working it. But I think what we want to do is make sure that the draft we get is as complete and correct as possible, because we know there are a lot of people – cheering on from the sidelines or not cheering on from the sidelines – who would perhaps leap at the opportunity to look at a draft that is not complete and not correct. So, in short, I think it is very important that whatever first draft gets out there is as complete and as correct as possible.

Now you raise an important question. How are we going to do this in the Six Parties? Because we do at some point need a meeting. Ideally, we should be doing this in time for December 31, because it is the time we all laid out for us. But a lot of members have problems trying to leave their families at Christmas to go and look at some pieces of paper because we want it to be done before the 31st and not immediately after the 31st. So let me talk to the Chinese and see how they see this.

QUESTION: When you were in Pyongyang, did the light water reactor issue come up?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, it did not.

QUESTION: Did you suggest to the North Koreans that they not present the declaration because you wanted a more complete draft, or were they at this time prepared to present it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think the North Koreans are prepared to move very fast. But I think it was Mr. Kim Kye Gwan who also said, we don't want to rush this and cause problems. "Haste makes waste," I think is what he said. So I don't think we have any big disagreement on that. But they were very interested in showing that they are meeting our timelines.

QUESTION: Do the North Koreans have any other issues that they want resolved, energy issues or anything like that, before they present the declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, to be sure, we've been -- The various members of the Six Parties or, I should say, four of the Six Parties have been organizing energy assistance, and we've been kind of rotating each month. So the North Koreans are very aware of when the energy arrives. In fact, one of the plants had to shut down because the energy hadn't arrived on time. So, yes, they are very aware of energy issues, but they are also very aware that we are doing everything we can do to work on this and to keep it moving.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I am so looking forward to going up to my hotel room and sleeping, and then I'll think about tomorrow. But, yes, I am seeing Wu Dawei. I think I also have some bilateral meetings at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and I'm sure there are some other meetings. I'm sure the Embassy can give you a read out on what they all are. But my plan is to be here through tomorrow night, and then leave early Friday to get to Narita, and then see Ken Sasae.

QUESTION: And then continue on to Washington?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: And then continue on to Washington.

QUESTION: So what time are you leaving tomorrow morning?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Tomorrow morning? I think it's -- Check with the Embassy. I want to say it is a nine thirty meeting, but --

AIDE: Eight forty

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: So I'm leaving here at 8:40?

AIDE: Yes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: So if you show up at 8:41 – (Laughter)

All right. See you later.

Released on December 5, 2007

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gTZHujs4_sXZNNAQ9doBJk84STbQ

Bush sends letter to NKorean leader on nuke talks: US

4 hours ago [accessed 2007-12-06T16:05Z]

SEOUL (AFP) — US President George W. Bush has written to North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il urging Pyongyang to fully disclose its atomic activities, officials said Thursday, as doubts emerged over whether a year-end deadline will be met.

He also sent letters to the four other parties involved in the six-party talks aimed at disabling the communist state's atomic programmes, said US National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe.

"President Bush wrote letters to all the leaders involved in the six-party talks last Saturday, December 1," Johndroe said.

"In these letters, the president reiterated our commitment to the six-party talks and stressed the need for North Korea to come forward with a full and complete declaration of their nuclear programs, as called for in the September 2005 six-party agreement."

US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill delivered the letter to North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui-Chun this week, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said Thursday.

Hill, the US chief negotiator with Pyongyang, visited the North this week to observe the US-led disabling of its nuclear plants at Yongbyon.

Bush is not known to have communicated personally before with the hardline communist state, which he termed part of an "axis of evil" in 2002. He once reportedly said he "loathes" Kim Jong-Il.

The North shocked the world with its first nuclear test in October 2006.

But this year it agreed, under a six-nation pact which includes the US, to disable its plutonium-producing plants and declare all nuclear programmes and facilities by year-end.

In return it would receive major energy aid.

The letter comes at a crucial time in international efforts to scrap North Korea's nuclear programmes.

South Korea's Foreign Minister Song Min-Soon said earlier Thursday that Pyongyang may miss the deadline for the declaration.

"Currently the nuclear issue is at a crossroads where it may proceed towards a stable phase or to a rough road," Song said.

"As to the declaration part, progress is not yet being made. We are aiming at the end of the year as a target date but if we miss it, we will be flexible in readjusting it and doing it in a realistic way."

A South Korean official said later that a key problem is the North's refusal to address its suspected highly enriched uranium weapons (HEU) programme to US satisfaction.

The latest nuclear crisis began in late 2002 when the US accused North Korea of having a secret HEU programme in addition to its declared plutonium operation. Pyongyang has never admitted such a programme.

The North is also demanding that it be removed from a US list of state sponsors of terrorism in return for denuclearisation, as envisaged in the six-nation pact.

The designation prevents it receiving US economic aid and also blocks aid from multilateral bodies like the World Bank. Bush must notify the US Congress if he intends to remove the designation.

Song said such an action was conditional on getting a full declaration.

"The US is preparing to remove the North from the list of terror-sponsoring states if it (declaration) is carried out to an acceptable degree," he said.

Hill is currently visiting Beijing, which hosts the six-party talks also grouping the two Koreas, Russia and Japan. He stressed that the North must make credible declarations about all its programmes.

"We want to make sure that when they transfer (issue) even a first draft, that it is credible," Hill told journalists. "We need them to step up and show some trust in us and trust in the process."

Hill has said Washington has "credible evidence" of North Korea purchasing equipment and materials that could be used in a HEU programme.

Pyongyang must account for these before Washington moves towards establishing diplomatic relations, he said Thursday.

"We have had a lot of discussion with them about uranium enrichment. It is a very delicate... discussion," Hill said. "Being clear about what has happened in the past is the means for us to build a future relationship."

Following talks in Beijing, which will include discussions with the Russian ambassador, Hill said he would meet his Japanese counterpart to the talks in Tokyo on Friday before returning to Washington.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7130528.stm>

Bush sends letter to North Korea

Published: 2007/12/06 15:50:49 GMT

US President George W Bush has sent a personal letter to the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, the White House has confirmed.

The letter urged Pyongyang to honour its pledge to reveal all the details of its nuclear programme.

The letter was delivered by US envoy Christopher Hill.

Mr Hill has just visited North Korea to assess progress on the disabling of its main nuclear reactor at Yongbyon as part of an aid-for-disarmament deal.

US National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe said that Mr Bush had written to all leaders involved in the six-party talks about North Korea's nuclear programme.

"In these letters, the president reiterated our commitment to the six-party talks and stressed the need for North Korea to come forward with a full and complete declaration of their nuclear programmes, as called for in the September 2005 six-party agreement," he said.

The letter was handed over during Mr Hill's meeting on Tuesday [4 December 2007] with North Korea's foreign minister Pak Ui-chun.

Under an international deal, signed in February, Pyongyang pledged to declare all its nuclear programmes and disable Yongbyon by the end of the year.

Deal 'at a crossroads'

News of the letter comes a day after Mr Hill and South Korean ministers expressed concern that North Korea's declaration of its nuclear programme might not be completed on time.

Mr Hill said this declaration had to include details of the country's uranium enrichment programme.

"We want to make sure that when we do transfer, even the first draft, it is a credible effort," he said in Beijing.

"We need them to step up and show some trust in us and trust in the process," he said.

South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon said on Thursday that the deal was "at a crossroads where it may proceed towards a stable phase or to a rough road".

The US has said it would consider removing North Korea from a list of countries it says sponsors terrorism if Pyongyang fully complies with the deal.

Meanwhile negotiations are continuing over a date for the next round of six-party talks, between the Koreas, Russia, the US and China.

Talks were due to restart this week but were called off because of to "scheduling problems", according to a US State Department spokesman.

Mr Bush once branded North Korea part of the "axis of evil", along with Iran and pre-war Iraq, and said the country was "an oppressive regime [whose] people live in fear and starvation".

North Korea's nuclear ambitions first attracted international attention in 2002 and in October 2006 Pyongyang shocked the world by testing a nuclear missile.

Bush Writes Leaders in NK Nuclear Talks

Thursday December 6, 2007 5:46 PM

By DEB RIECHMANN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush directly told North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in a letter that the United States expects the secretive regime to keep its promise to fully disclose all nuclear programs, the White House said Thursday.

It was Bush's most personal intervention with Pyongyang since he called the country part of an "axis of evil."

The letter to North Korea underscored Bush's desire to resolve the nuclear standoff with the communist regime, and made plain that the North cannot skirt requirements to fully explain the extent, use and possible spread of nuclear material and technology, a U.S. official told The Associated Press.

That is the message the North has already heard from Bush's nuclear envoy, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, but the Bush letter is a diplomatic exclamation point. It also serves a domestic political purpose - signaling to conservative critics of the North Korea deal that the United States will not roll back its requirements or accept less than a full declaration of the North's nuclear program.

The North agreed to fully account for its nuclear activities by year's end, but U.S. officials acknowledged Thursday that the deadline is likely to slip.

Better to have the complete document in hand a couple of weeks late than to have a half-baked version by the Dec. 31 deadline, one official said, in part because the latter scenario opens the Bush administration to criticism that the North is still hiding things.

The North conducted a clandestine nuclear program for years and proved its entry into the world nuclear club with an underground test explosion last year.

The official said that Hill discussed the likelihood of a late declaration during meetings over the past week with the North and the other four nations bargaining alongside the United States to eventually rid the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to describe closed-door diplomatic meetings.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed optimism, but also suggested the schedule is sliding.

"It is going to take a monumental effort to get all of this done by the end of the year," she said, speaking to reporters on Thursday as she flew to Brussels for NATO meetings. "And I am not too concerned about whether it's December 31st or not. They seem to be on track. Everybody believes the cooperation is very good."

Hill delivered Bush's letter, dated Dec. 1, to North Korea's foreign minister during Hill's visit to

Pyongyang earlier this week. Hill also gave similar letters from Bush to China and South Korea and Japan, and another letter went to the fifth partner, Russia.

Neither the White House nor the State Department would release the letters or describe their content in detail.

"He sent a letter to Kim Jong Il that urged the North Koreans to fully declare their nuclear programs, as called for in the September 2005 six-party agreement," Gordon Johndroe, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said Thursday.

The U.S. official, however, said the letter to the North makes reference to the need to resolve three main sticking points: the exact amount of weapons-grade nuclear material the North produced, the number of warheads it built and whether and how North Korea may have passed nuclear material or knowledge to others.

Bush also called Chinese President Hu Jintao on Thursday to discuss several issues, including North Korea, Johndroe said. The Xinhua News Agency reported that Hu pointed out that the starting action of the relevant joint declaration has been implemented, and the second phase has started. Hu said all parties should keep the dialogue going to meet the target of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, Xinhua said.

The question of proliferation has taken on great significance, and become a political hurdle for the Bush administration, since Israel's air strike on a suspected Syrian nuclear site Sept. 6. Intelligence reports suggested that Syria was cooperating in some fashion with North Korea in building the site.

The news that North Korea may have been working with others as recently as this year, after it had agreed to give up its weapons, reinvigorated U.S. domestic opposition to what some conservatives in Congress see as an overly generous deal with an unreliable country.

White House press secretary Dana Perino said the president decided to send the letter to "so that we can keep it all on track."

In comments early Thursday, South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon sounded a gloomy note, saying: "There has not been progress on the declaration yet." A Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed disappointment that North Korea was likely to miss the year-end deadline, but that it is unlikely to affect the overall agreement.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said the six countries were consulting on whether to hold another round of meetings before the end of the year.

On Thursday, Hill suggested that negotiations had stalled on producing a draft declaration of North Korea's nuclear programs by the end of the year. The deadline was part of an agreement the six nations reached in February.

Under the deal, North Korea was promised 1 million tons of fuel oil or the equivalent, plus political concessions such as its removal from a U.S. list of terrorism-supporting nations, in return for disabling its nuclear program and making other moves.

“The disablement activities are going well,” Perino said. “I would characterize it as timely because we are nearing the deadline by which they had to declare.”

North Korea began disabling its reactor, which was shut down in July, and two other facilities last month under the watch of U.S. experts. It has promised to complete the process by the end of December, but South Korean nuclear envoy Chun Yung-woo said last week it would take longer to remove about 8,000 spent fuel rods from the reactor.

Hill said investigators were seeking to clear up questions over North Korea's purchase in past years of gas centrifuges for its nuclear program.

On the declaration, Hill told reporters in Beijing, where he was meeting diplomats following his visit to North Korea, that Washington and Pyongyang still had differences to resolve on the issue.

Speaking in Seoul, Song called on the U.S. and North Korea to allow some wiggle room on the issue.

“The issue of nuclear declaration is not easy,” he told reporters. Each side “should take a flexible attitude.”

INTELLIGENCE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR
2008

DECEMBER 6, 2007.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. REYES, from the committee of conference,
submitted the following

CONFERENCE REPORT

[To accompany H.R. 2082]

[EXCERPT]

SEC. 328. LIMITATION ON USE OF FUNDS.

Not more than 30 percent of the funds authorized to be appropriated for the Expenditure Center referred to on page 157 of Volume VI, Book 1 of the Fiscal Year 2008-Fiscal Year 2009 Congressional Budget Justification, National Intelligence Program, may be obligated or expended until each member of the congressional intelligence committees has been fully and currently informed with respect to intelligence regarding a facility in Syria subject to reported military action by the State of Israel on September 6, 2007, including intelligence relating to any agent or citizen of North Korea, Iran, or any other foreign country present at the facility, and any intelligence provided to the Federal Government by a foreign country regarding the facility (as available).

SEC. 329. INCORPORATION OF REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

Each requirement to submit a report to the congressional intelligence committees that is included in the classified annex to this Act is hereby incorporated into this Act and is hereby made a requirement in law.

Secrecy News

from the Federation of American Scientists Project on Government Secrecy

December 12, 2007

White House Objects to FY2008 Intelligence Authorization Bill

Perhaps the clearest indication lately that intelligence oversight still matters is a new White House Statement of Administration Policy (pdf) expressing strong opposition to the FY2008 Intelligence Authorization bill.

"If this bill were to pass the House and the Senate and be presented to the President for signature, the President's senior advisors would recommend that he veto the bill," the Statement notes.

On issue after issue, from interrogation to congressional reporting, the White House indicates disapproval of the new legislation, which has already been accepted by a House-Senate conference and awaits a final vote in each house.

Among other things, "The Administration also objects to section 328, which attempts to use Congress' power of the purse to circumvent the authority of the Executive Branch to control access to extraordinarily sensitive information."

This provision, which represents something of a new milestone in intelligence oversight, would impose a "fence" on certain spending until the Administration briefs the intelligence committees on the Israeli strike on a Syrian facility. It was introduced by Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) and adopted on a bipartisan basis.

US Says More Talks Needed on North Korea Nuclear Issue

By Kurt Achin

Seoul

07 December 2007

The senior U.S. delegate to multinational talks aimed at dismantling North Korea's nuclear capabilities says more discussions are needed before North Korea produces a formal declaration of its nuclear programs. VOA's Kurt Achin reports from Seoul, where South Korean officials are praising an unprecedented high-level outreach to North Korea by President Bush.

South Korean Foreign Ministry Spokesman Cho Hui-young told reporters Friday that Seoul welcomes President Bush's letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. He says the letter shows President Bush's determination to support the process of North Korea's denuclearization.

North Korean broadcasters have been confirming Kim Jong Il's receipt of the letter, after first announcing it Thursday night. Prior to the North Korean announcement, U.S. officials and their regional partners made no mention of such a letter.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill delivered the letter last week in Pyongyang. Hill is Washington's representative at multinational talks to end North Korea's nuclear arsenal by diplomatic means.

He told reporters during a stop in Tokyo Friday North Korea is "quite on schedule" in disabling key nuclear facilities, as it promised South Korea, China, Russia, Japan and the United States it would do as part of a multi-stage agreement. He says the North will soon advance that process by removing spent fuel from its main reactor at Yongbyon.

However, Hill says more discussions are needed before North Korea fulfills another part of the agreement by producing a full declaration of all its nuclear facilities, materials, and existing weapons.

The United States has insisted the North account for an alleged uranium enrichment program Pyongyang has never publicly admitted. It also wants North Korea to address Washington's concerns about the possible transfer of nuclear equipment and technology to Syria.

White House officials say Mr. Bush's letter urged Kim Jong Il to make a full and accurate declaration of its nuclear activities, and said the U.S. will know if North Korea leaves the declaration incomplete.

Cheon Ho-seon, a spokesman for South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, says South Korea played a significant role in the White House decision to send the letter. He says U.S. envoy Hill did not have the letter when he was in Seoul, shortly before leaving for North Korea. He says the idea to send the letter arose during Hill's consultations with South Korean officials.

The White House has not released the full contents of Mr. Bush's letter to Kim Jong Il, but say it underscores Washington's view that the six-nation negotiations are at a critical juncture.

<http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7009397913>

Chinese Nuclear Negotiator To Visit North Korea

December 8, 2007 1:00 p.m. EST

John Concepcion - AHN News Writer

Tokyo, Japan (AHN) - China is apparently concerned about whether North Korea will keep its pledge to reveal the extent of its nuclear programs.

In an attempt to find out how sincere North Korea is, China's vice foreign minister is reportedly planning to visit that nation next week. His anticipated trip is in an effort to ensure that North Korea does not renege on its promise of a full disclosure of all its nuclear programs by the end of the year, according to an article that appeared in Kyodo News.

The news agency quoted an unnamed source close to the United States-North Korea relations, who said that Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, also the chairman of the six-party North Korea nuclear talks, will be pressing for proof on the promise when he meets with his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye Gwan.

North Korea has agreed to a disclosure of its nuclear programs and the dismantling of its nuclear facility by the end of the year, according to a deal it signed with five other nations that include China and the U.S, in exchange for energy aid.

The dismantling of a key nuclear facility started in early November, but the North has yet to disclose its nuclear program.

Wu is expected to talk to Kim and press for the disclosure in order to satisfy those who signed the deal.

Last week the Associated Press reported that the U.S. was confident that North Korea would meet the year-end deadline to disclose details of its nuclear program.

[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:S.RES.399:](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:S.RES.399)

SRES 399 IS

110th CONGRESS

1st Session

S. RES. 399

Expressing the sense of the Senate that certain benchmarks must be met before certain restrictions against the Government of North Korea are lifted, and that the United States Government should not provide any financial assistance to North Korea until the Secretary of State makes certain certifications regarding the submission of applications for refugee status.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

December 10, 2007

Mr. BROWNBACK (for himself, Mr. KYL, Mr. LIEBERMAN, and Mr. GRASSLEY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate that certain benchmarks must be met before certain restrictions against the Government of North Korea are lifted, and that the United States Government should not provide any financial assistance to North Korea until the Secretary of State makes certain certifications regarding the submission of applications for refugee status.

Whereas international press reports noted that Iranian officials traveled to North Korea to observe the long and short-range missile tests conducted by the North Korean regime on July 4, 2006, and this was confirmed by Ambassador Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, during testimony before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate on July 20, 2006;

Whereas international press reports in the summer of 2006 indicated that North Korea was involved in training in guerrilla warfare of Hezbollah cadres who subsequently were involved in operations against Israeli forces in south Lebanon;

Whereas the United Nations Security Council, under the presidency of Japan, unanimously adopted Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006, 'condemning' the nuclear weapon test conducted by North Korea on October 9, 2006, and imposing sanctions on North Korea;

Whereas President George W. Bush stated in November 2006 that: 'The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action. ... It is vital that the nations of this region send a message to North Korea that the proliferation of nuclear technology to hostile regimes or terrorist networks will not be tolerated.';

Whereas Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated in October 2006 that 'a North Korean decision to try to transfer a nuclear weapon or technologies either to another state or to a non-state actor' would be an 'extremely grave' action for which the United States would 'hold North Korea accountable'; and

Whereas Congress authoritatively expressed its view, in section 202(b)(2) of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-333; 22 U.S.C. 7832(b)(2)), that 'United States nonhumanitarian assistance to North Korea shall be contingent on North Korea's substantial progress' on human rights improvements, release of and accounting for abductees, family reunification, reform of North Korea's labor camp system, and the decriminalization of political expression, none of which has occurred: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate--

(1) recognizes that restrictions against the Government of North Korea were imposed by reason of a determination of the Secretary of State that the Government of North Korea, for purposes of section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979 (as continued in effect pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act; 50 U.S.C. App. 2405(j)), section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2780), section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2371), and other provisions of law, was a government that has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism;

(2) believes that this designation should remain in effect and should not be lifted unless it can be demonstrated that the Government of North Korea--

(A) is no longer engaged in the illegal transfer of missile or nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons technology, particularly to the Governments of Iran, Syria, or any other country, the government of which the Secretary of State has determined, for purposes of any of the provisions of law specified in paragraph (1), is a government that has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism;

(B) is no longer engaged in training, harboring, supplying, financing, or supporting in any way--

(i) Hamas, Hezbollah, or the Japanese Red Army, or any member of such organizations;

(ii) any organization designated by the Secretary of State as a foreign terrorist organization in accordance with section 219(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1189(a)); and

(iii) any person included on the Annex to Executive Order 13224 (September 23, 2001) and any other person identified under section 1 of that Executive Order whose property and interests in property are blocked by that section (commonly known as a 'specially designated global terrorist');

(C) is no longer engaged in the counterfeiting of United States currency 'supernotes';

(D) has made inoperable Bureau No. 39 under the North Korean Workers Party headed by Kim Jong Il, which is charged with laundering illicit funds obtained by narcotics trafficking and other criminal activities;

(E) has released United States permanent resident Kim Dong-Shik who, according to the findings of a South Korean court, was abducted by North Korean agents on the Chinese border in January 2000;

(F) has released or fully accounted to the satisfaction of the Government of the United States and the Government of the Republic of Korea for the whereabouts of the 15 Japanese nationals recognized as abduction victims by the National Police Agency (NPA) of Japan;

(G) has released or fully accounted to the satisfaction of the Government of the United States and the Government of the Republic of Korea for the whereabouts of an estimated 600 surviving South Korean prisoners of war, comrades-in-arms of United States and Allied forces, who have been held in North Korea against their will and in violation of the Armistice Agreement since hostilities ended in July 1953; and

(H) has ceased and desisted from engaging in further terrorist activities subsequent to the 1987 bombing of Korean Air Flight 858 over Burma, the 1996 murder in Vladivostok, Russia, of South Korean diplomat Choi Duck-keun, following Pyongyang's threats of retaliation for the deaths of North Korean commandoes whose submarine ran aground in South Korea, and the 1997 assassination on the streets of Seoul of North Korean defector Lee Han Young; and

(3) believes that the United States Government should not provide any financial assistance to North Korea (except for adequately monitored humanitarian assistance in the form of food and medicine) unless the Secretary of State certifies that--

(A) appropriate guidance has been provided to all foreign embassies and consular offices regarding their responsibility under section 303 of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (22 U.S.C. 7843) to facilitate the submission of applications by citizens of North Korea seeking protection as refugees under section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1157);

(B) such guidance has been published in the Federal Register; and

(C) the facilities described in subparagraph (A) are carrying out the responsibility described in subparagraph (A) in good faith.

<http://www.pr-inside.com/south-korean-prime-minister-arrives-for-r339652.htm>

South Korean prime minister arrives for talks in Beijing

2007-12-10 09:26:30 -

BEIJING (AP) - South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-Soo arrived in China on Monday [10 December 2007] for talks with Premier Wen Jiabao concerning North Korea's nuclear weapons programs and economic ties.

Han will also meet President Hu Jintao during his two-day visit, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

Han's office in Seoul said he would hold talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, economic cooperation and other bilateral issues.

China has played host to the six-party talks in which North Korea has agreed to dismantle and account for its nuclear activities by the end of the year. That deadline is unlikely to be met, but U.S. nuclear envoy Christopher Hill said last week he was still pleased with the progress.

U.S. President George W. Bush sent a letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il last week urging his government to fully disclose its nuclear programs, the White House said.

Han's trip will also mark the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/12/116_15273.html

12-10-2007 17:20

Six-Party Talks' Energy Group to Meet in Beijing Tuesday

By Yoon Won-sup

Staff Reporter

The six-party talks' working group on economic and energy aid for North Korea will take place in Beijing on Dec. 11-12, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Monday.

The ministry said the group will discuss mainly the ways of providing heavy fuel oil and non-oil economic aid to North Korea as promised.

The meeting will be chaired by Lim Sung-nam, deputy chief of South Korea's delegation to the North Korea denuclearization talks that also involve North Korea, the United States, Japan, China and Russia.

Under the February accord, North Korea will receive 1 million tons of oil or equivalent assistance in return for shutting down and disabling its key nuclear facilities and disclosing all its nuclear programs.

Hoekstra Sets His Sights on CIA Chief

BY ELI LAKE - Staff Reporter of the Sun

December 12, 2007

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON — When the CIA director, Michael Hayden, testifies today before the House intelligence panel, he will face particular scrutiny from the committee's top-ranking Republican.

In an interview yesterday *[December 11, 2007]*, Rep. Peter Hoekstra, a Republican from Michigan, said Mr. Hayden's memo to CIA employees last week, claiming that oversight committees were informed of the agency's plans to destroy the interrogation videos, was inaccurate. Stopping just short of calling Mr. Hayden a liar, Mr. Hoekstra, who headed the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in 2005 and 2006, said, "He says Congress was adequately and fully informed. We were never informed. He contends that briefings in 2002 and 2003 are more than sufficient for activities that took place in 2005 when you had new leadership of the community. That makes no sense."

[deletia]

Mr. Hoekstra has been a tough critic of Mr. Hayden's since Mr. Hayden was the principal deputy director of national intelligence in 2005. Mr. Hoekstra at the time pressed the intelligence community to re-open the inquiry into Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, noting that even the final report of the Iraq Survey Group concluded that key sites were modified and stripped clean before inspectors could get to them.

Mr. Hayden and Mr. Hoekstra have also clashed on questions of declassification. Mr. Hoekstra sponsored an amendment yesterday to force the executive branch to make public what it knows about Israel's bombing of an alleged nuclear facility in Syria in September. "It is so compelling and necessary to get people briefed in on what happened in Syria, that would give you insights into a lot of this," Mr. Hoekstra said. That said, Mr. Hoekstra's frustration with the spy chief now comes at a terrible time for Mr. Hayden, who testified yesterday before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence about his agency's decision to destroy videotapes of interrogation of at least two Al Qaeda suspects.

[deletia]

Straight talk: Syrian ambassador says Americans have been misled about his country

By MICHAEL MOORE of the Missoulian

Thursday, December 13 2007

[EXCERPTS]

When Americans think about the war in Iraq, they mostly confine their thoughts to American soldiers there.

But the war has had a dramatic effect throughout the Middle East, creating tensions that reverberate through American diplomatic relationships with other countries.

One of those countries is Syria, which has seen 1.5 million Iraqis pour across its eastern border as the war has progressed. Syria supported America against Saddam Hussein in the Desert Storm war in Kuwait, but opposed the 2003 American war on Iraq.

The country did not, however, close its doors to the displaced.

“We have 1.5 million Iraqi refugees in Syria, and that has imposed a tremendous burden on our country,” the Syrian ambassador, Imad Moustapha, said in an interview Tuesday [December 11, 2007]. “That’s the equivalent of 30 million refugees coming to the United States. How do you think your country would deal with that?”

That’s pretty direct communication coming from a diplomat, but that is Imad Moustapha, a Renaissance man who rose to diplomatic prominence along the unlikely path of an academic.

Moustapha was in Missoula on Tuesday to “directly address Americans” in a speech at the University of Montana. The ambassador’s speech was sponsored by the World Affairs Council of Montana.

In the interview, Moustapha said Americans, to the extent that they know anything at all about Syria, have a mistaken view of his country.

[deletia]

Syria, of course, has a fractious relationship with Israel, epitomized most recently by the Israeli bombing of a military site in Syria in September.

Although information about the attack has been murky at best, Israel suspected that Syria was attempting to develop some sort of nuclear capability through its relationship with North Korea.

Moustapha said that was a lie.

“There are no nuclear projects in Syria,” he said. “Anything else is ... a lie, totally, no truthfulness whatsoever.”

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-12/11/content_7231306.htm

China's chief nuclear envoy to visit DPRK next week

www.chinaview.cn

2007-12-11 18:59:15

BEIJING, Dec. 11 (Xinhua) -- China's Foreign Ministry announced here on Tuesday [*December 11, 2007*] that Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei would visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) next week to discuss the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.

Wu, top negotiator of the Chinese delegation to the six-party talks, would meet with his DPRK counterpart, Kim Kye Gwan, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told a regular press conference.

Also on Tuesday, a meeting of the working group on economic and energy cooperation, one of the five working groups under the framework of the six-party talks, was held in Beijing.

The two-day meeting was led by the Republic of Korea, Qin said, adding that the main topic was to discuss relevant issues of economic and energy assistance to the DPRK.

Qin said he hoped the six parties could have a full exchange of views at the meeting.

Qin also urged the parties concerned to take advantage of the current positive momentum of the nuclear talks, express their own concerns and respect others' reasonable concerns as well, so as to promote mutual trust and produce a positive outcome from the negotiations.

The six-party talks include China, the DPRK, the United State, the Republic of Korea, Russia and Japan.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-cia13dec13,1,1615643.story>

CIA failed to fully inform Congress on tapes, director says

Michael Hayden said the agency should have kept lawmakers better apprised on videotaped interrogations.

By Greg Miller, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

December 13, 2007

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON -- CIA Director Michael V. Hayden acknowledged Wednesday *[December 12, 2007]* that the agency failed to keep key congressional committees adequately informed of the CIA's decision to destroy videotapes of secret interrogations.

"I think that it's fair to say that, particularly at the time of the destruction, we could have done an awful lot better in keeping the committee alerted and informed as to that activity," Hayden said in brief remarks after a three-hour meeting with the House Intelligence Committee on the tapes controversy.

[deletia]

Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the top Republican on the committee, said the case is part of a pattern that prompted him to write to President Bush last year expressing concern about the CIA and other agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community.

"I didn't believe the administration and the community was fully keeping Congress informed on all of the different types of programs and issues that the intelligence community might be working on," he said.

Hoekstra noted that many lawmakers still are seeking more information from U.S. intelligence agencies on the Israeli military strike on a suspected nuclear facility in Syria earlier this year.

Hoekstra suggested that Hayden didn't deserve to be the focus of the criticism, saying that the committee knew less about the tapes "than maybe what Gen. Hayden had been led to believe" by his staff.

UPDATE 1

US envoy hopes for N. Korea nuclear disclosure soon

Wed Dec 12, 2007 7:55pm GMT

By Susan Cornwell

(Adds detail, quotes, background)

WASHINGTON, Dec 12 (Reuters) - The United States hopes that North Korea will keep its promise and disclose all its nuclear activities by the end of this year, Washington's envoy to nuclear talks on North Korea said on Wednesday.

"We are hopeful that we will have the complete declaration provided by around the year end," Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill told reporters on Capitol Hill.

He spoke after briefing senators on efforts to get North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons program -- and winning rare Democratic praise for Bush administration foreign policy.

"This is real," California Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer, who presided at the closed-door briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said of the progress Hill described. She is a big critic of some other White House undertakings, such as the war in Iraq.

"We support the president in his request to the North Koreans that this be full disclosure," said Boxer, who chairs the foreign relations subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

President George W. Bush, in his first direct communication with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il, wrote to him last week urging Pyongyang to reveal all nuclear programs.

Under an agreement in six-party talks over North Korea's nuclear program, Pyongyang has pledged to disable its main nuclear complex and declare all of its nuclear activities in exchange for economic and diplomatic incentives.

Hill, who handed Bush's letter to the reclusive state's foreign minister last week while on a visit to Pyongyang, said progress was being made on disabling North Korean nuclear facilities.

Boxer thought Congress would approve "reasonable sums of money" needed to support the process, including \$106 million that Hill requested as the U.S. contribution toward fuel oil that is being provided to North Korea as an incentive.

Hill described more diplomatic activity directly ahead, including a trip soon by chairman of the six-party talks, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, to North Korea.

North Korea is "very interested" in being removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, Hill noted. "We will follow the letter of the law in that regard," he said, but added: "We are making progress on the issue."

Asked about concerns North Korea had nuclear ties with Syria, another country on the terrorism blacklist, Boxer said, "I came away (from the briefing) with the sense that whatever, if anything ever had occurred in the past, it is not occurring now. And I think our negotiators feel that with good confidence."

Hill, standing next to Boxer, did not contradict her. He said the United States must "ensure that as we make progress on this, that proliferation issues, whether they've existed in the past or not, certainly don't exist in the present or in the future."

Boxer said White House policy on North Korea had evolved and such progress demonstrated "we must never take diplomacy off the table. ... Talking to your enemies is hard work, but it's important work."

(Editing by Cynthia Osterman)

(2nd LD) Senator supports funding for N.K. Denuclearization, says Syria connection likely in past

By Lee Dong-min

2007/12/13 04:52 KST

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12 (Yonhap) -- A U.S. senator said Wednesday [December 12, 2007] she and her colleagues would support American funding for North Korea's denuclearization as a senior U.S. envoy expressed hope that the communist state will meet the benchmark deadline in disclosing its nuclear activities.

"Things can change at any point, but we want to be very supportive," Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-California) told reporters.

She also said she "came away with a sense" that the alleged North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria, if it ever took place, was in the past and "not occurring now."

On approving funding for North Korea, Boxer said, "I can imagine no scenario where the (George W.) Bush administration comes to the Congress now and says, 'We have an opportunity to work with North Korea, to make sure that North Korea is no longer an isolated nation and therefore a threat to the world'" and not receive a positive response.

"The point is, we think the answer will be yes to the reasonable sums of money that are needed to avoid a disaster," she said.

Drawing parallel with the war in Iraq, she said, "If we can avoid such an end, I think the American people will embrace it."

Boxer, chair of the Senate subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs, received a closed-door briefing from Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, who represents the U.S. at what is known as the six-party talks.

Also involving South and North Korea, China, Russia and Japan, the forum aims at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. In a series of agreements dating back to September 2005, Pyongyang agreed to eventually give up its nuclear weapons and programs. As interim steps, it pledged to disable its core nuclear facilities and submit a declaration of all its nuclear stockpile by the end of this year.

In return, North Korea would receive wide-ranging political and economic incentives, including a total of 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent. The Bush administration has asked for \$106 million to participate in the heavy fuel oil delivery.

The U.S. has said it will foot the initial cost of North Korea's nuclear disablement, as well as provide economic assistance as denuclearization progresses. Once in the final dismantlement phase, the U.S. is considering the Nunn-Lugar formula that was applied to the former Soviet Union and which required massive international funding to disassemble and discard its atomic weapons and to retrain and employ nuclear scientists.

후후 But as a Dec. 31 deadline was nearing, the nuclear declaration has not yet been presented. Hill was in Pyongyang last week to remind the North Koreans that the disclosure has to be complete and correct, but ensuing reports indicated that the initial draft did not meet Washington's expectations.

후후 China's top nuclear envoy, Wu Dawei, is expected to travel to Pyongyang next week, also with the same message for the North to make a complete declaration.

후후 Speaking side by side with Boxer, Hill said the North Koreans are continuing to work on their declaration.

후후 "We envision some additional discussions with the North Koreans later this month, so we are hopeful that we will have the complete declaration provided by around the year end," he said.

후후 The push for an honest disclosure took on urgency after new allegations that Pyongyang may have transferred its nuclear technology or parts to Damascus, a proliferation issue that the U.S. considers a red line.

후후 Israeli air forces raided a Syrian facility early September, claiming it was a nuclear installation being equipped with the help of North Korea. But information surrounding the incident remains closely held, and no evidence has been provided in the open to either prove or disprove the allegations.

후후 Boxer and Hill said the issue did come up at the briefing.

후후 "We need to continue to be vigilant on this point as we go forward," said the envoy, "to ensure that...the proliferation issues, whether they've existed in the past or not, certainly don't exist in the present or in the future."

The senator said although she and her colleagues are asking questions, "we don't really know the answer at this point."

"I came away with a sense that if anything ever had occurred in the past, it is not occurring now," she said.

후후 "And I think our negotiators feel that with good confidence."

But if North Korea is engaged in proliferation, "that's a deal breaker from my perspective," she said.

후후 ldm@yna.co.kr

Hill: North Korea refused nuclear declaration

Takashi Sakamoto and Takeo Miyazaki / Yomiuri Shimbun Correspondents

(Dec. 14, 2007)

Christopher Hill, the chief U.S. envoy at the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programs, told the U.S. Congress on Wednesday [December 12, 2007] that North Korea had refused to declare its past uranium enrichment programs and nuclear technology transfers, according to sources close to Congress.

Speaking during a closed-door hearing at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on North Korea's nuclear program and U.S.-North Korea ties, Hill made clear that negotiations at the six-party talks have degenerated into a standoff, the sources said.

Hill previously said North Korea's complete declaration of its nuclear programs and disablement of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon are "political conditions" to remove North Korea from the list of nations supporting terrorism.

There was speculation from the start that the United States would not delist North Korea by the end of the year. With the latest development, it is likely to become even more difficult for the United States to start the procedure.

Hill told the closed-door meeting that among steps to be taken in the second phase of North Korea's denuclearization, disablement of the Pyongyang's key nuclear facilities is in progress, according to the sources.

As for a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs, however, Hill reportedly said that North Korea failed to meet any U.S. requests. The United States had demanded that Pyongyang make declarations on all:

-- Nuclear-related materials, facilities and plans.

-- Uranium enrichment programs.

-- Transfer of nuclear technology.

More specifically, North Korea refused to elaborate on its use of plutonium, which can be used to develop nuclear warheads.

As for uranium enrichment programs and nuclear technology transfers, North Korea is reluctant to disclose what it had done in the past, while insisting that it is currently not engaged in such activities.

Hill also indicated that North Korea has failed to meet political conditions to be removed from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism at this stage, according to the sources.

To achieve the goal, North Korea should cooperate with the United States through denuclearization, apart from legal procedures, Hill reportedly told the meeting.

The fact that North Korea is showing a negative attitude on the declaration of its nuclear programs may significantly impact on the future prospects of the six-party talks, observers say.

Because denuclearization will be carried out based on North Korea's declaration of its nuclear programs, the declaration is considered a key step in the negotiations.

With a meeting of the heads of the six delegations originally scheduled for early December having been postponed, the resumption of the ministerial meeting is expected to be significantly delayed.

Hill, who has been making a series of concessions to keep North Korea at the negotiating table, is taking a self-assured approach toward Pyongyang's declaration of its nuclear programs.

Therefore, the future of the six-party talks is seen to largely depend on how North Korea will respond from now, according to the observers.

According to sources close to the nuclear negotiators, U.S. President George W. Bush asked North Korean leader Kim Jong Il to make a full declaration of North Korea's nuclear programs in a personal letter to Kim early this month.

The sources expressed expectations that Kim would take a forward-looking step, saying that if there is a will on the North Korean side to develop negotiations, it would be possible to bridge the gap between Washington and Pyongyang.

N.K. acknowledges Bush's letter but stays mum on future intentions

2007/12/14 14:36 KST

훈훈 WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 (Yonhap) -- North Korea, in its first formal response to a letter sent by U.S. President George W. Bush, said it appreciated the missive but did not mention its intentions on the denuclearization steps mentioned in the letter, diplomatic sources here said Thursday.

훈훈 "It was a verbal message," one of the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The message was delivered through New York where North Korea has a representative mission to the United Nations, he said.

훈훈 The response was brief, acknowledging the receipt of the letter and expressing appreciation, the sources said. On U.S. calls for the North to implement its immediate denuclearization commitment, the message was basically that "you do your part, we will do our part," they said.

훈훈 President Bush last week sent letters to all other members of the so-called six-party talks, a multinational process aimed at removing all nuclear weapons and programs from the Korean Peninsula. South and North Korea, China, Russia and Japan are participants in the talks.

훈훈 The letter to Pyongyang emphasized that the negotiations were at a critical juncture and "reminded" North Korea of its commitments under the six-party agreements, the White House said. The letter also reaffirmed that should the North fulfill its commitments, the U.S. would reciprocate with its own pledges, including diplomatic normalization with Pyongyang.

훈훈 The six-party talks are approaching an important year-end deadline, when the North is required to submit a declaration disclosing all of its nuclear programs. The U.S. and others have been pressing for a complete and correct declaration, considering it a test of North Korea's sincerity.

훈훈 As an initial incentive, the U.S. would reciprocate by removing the North from its list of terrorism-sponsoring states, a designation that effectively prohibits any meaningful political and economic exchanges with the North.

훈훈 ldm@yna.co.kr

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5huSr2cto6oXklRH0nXdM8i7PEQ0wD8THDJQO1>

Bush to N. Korea: Disclose Nuclear Plans

By DEB RIECHMANN – 2 hours ago

[Accessed 2007-12-14T21:45Z]

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush said Friday that he got Kim Jong Il's attention by writing the North Korean leader a letter and that Kim can get his attention by fully disclosing his nuclear programs and proliferation activities.

The White House said Kim verbally responded through a diplomatic channel on Tuesday to a letter Bush sent to him earlier this month. The letter, the president's first to the leader of the communist regime, was viewed as a personal gesture from Bush, who once branded North Korea as part of an "axis of evil."

"I got his attention with a letter and he can get my attention by fully disclosing his programs, including any plutonium he may have processed and converted some of that into whatever he's used it for. We just need to know," Bush said in the Rose Garden after a meeting with his Cabinet. "As well, he can get our attention by fully disclosing his proliferation activities."

"An important step is a full declaration of programs, materials that may have been developed to create weapons, as well as the proliferation activities of the regime."

A senior U.S. official with knowledge of the contents of North Korea's message said it contained what appeared to be a pledge from Pyongyang to follow through on its denuclearization deal as long as the United States held to its end of the bargain.

North Korea began disabling its plutonium-producing reactor last month under watch of U.S. experts. In exchange, the U.S. agreed to seek normalizing ties with North Korea and remove the country from terrorism and trade sanctions blacklists.

"We'll live up to our side, we hope you'll live up to yours," the official paraphrased Kim's message as saying. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the private diplomatic exchange.

The message was the country's first official response to the letter from Bush.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the message was delivered through channels in New York, where North Korea has its only diplomatic mission in the United States at the United Nations.

"We heard it via the New York channel," he said. "It was an oral message and it was on Tuesday [11 December 2007]."

He declined to comment on the details of the message and referred questions about it to the White House.

(This version CORRECTS that North Korea responded to Bush's letter on Tuesday, instead of Wednesday.))

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071214.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
December 14, 2007

President Bush Meets with Cabinet
Rose Garden
10:32 A.M. EST

[EXCERPTS]

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. I just finished meeting with members of my Cabinet. I am proud of this team; I appreciate their service to the country. We discussed the priorities that we're working on to meet for the needs of the American people; we're talking about the business that remains on Capitol Hill.

[deletia]

[THE PRESIDENT:] Toby.

Q Mr. President, what was Kim Jong-il's message to you in response to your letter to him? And what was -- what is your response to him?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first I'm -- you know, I got his attention with a letter, and he can get my attention by fully disclosing his programs, including any plutonium he may have processed and converted -- into whatever he's used it for; we just need to know.

As well, he can get our attention by fully disclosing his proliferation activities. We have laid out a way forward -- and I say "we" -- there's four other countries that have joined us; we've got what's called the six-party talks. And the five of us agree that there's a way forward for the -- Kim Jong-il, and an important step is a full declaration of programs, materials that may have been developed to create weapons, as well as the proliferation activities of the regime.

Thank you very much.

Q Oh, don't stop now.

THE PRESIDENT: I had a -- well, I've got freezing Cabinet members out here. (Laughter.) They're whispering; you can't hear their whispers. (Laughter.) I can just feel their vibe saying, I'm envious,

they're all wearing these expensive coats, and here we are. (Laughter.)

I hope you enjoyed the holiday bash as much as I did. I noticed some of the silverware is missing. (Laughter.) We'll be taking a full inventory. (Laughter.) Happy holidays.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/14/AR2007121401841.html?>

Progress Is Reported on Nuclear Pact

N. Korea Is Disabling Plant but Holding Back on Data, U.S. Aides Say

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, December 15, 2007; A16

North Korea has made significant progress in disabling its nuclear facility in Yongbyon but has hesitated at providing key details about the extent of its nuclear programs, including whether it has weaponized the plutonium harvested from the reactor, according to U.S. officials.

Under a six-nation agreement, North Korea is supposed to finish disabling the facility and to provide a detailed declaration of its nuclear activities by Dec. 31, but officials acknowledge both deadlines will slip.

Technicians disabling the plant have completed or nearly completed seven of the 11 key tasks expected under the agreement. A key factor in the delay is that officials discovered that water in a cooling pond for spent fuel rods is contaminated, a potentially dangerous situation that North Korea was willing to ignore to meet the deadline. But U.S. officials objected and insisted that the water must first be filtered.

In the case of the declaration, large gaps exist between what Washington expects and what Pyongyang wants to deliver, officials said. "You are dealing with a country that is not instinctively given to handing out information," one official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of diplomatic sensitivities.

President Bush last week sent a private letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, urging him to provide a complete declaration and laying out the elements the United States needs to see to keep the delicate process going. North Korea, via its ambassador at the United Nations, told the State Department on Wednesday that North Korea wants to stick to the agreement as long as the United States fulfills its commitments.

"I got his attention with a letter," Bush told reporters yesterday. "And he can get my attention by fully disclosing his program, including any plutonium he may have processed and converted into whatever he's used it for. We just need to know. As well, he can get our attention by fully disclosing his proliferation activities."

The Yongbyon facility includes a five-megawatt reactor, a fuel fabrication facility and a reprocessing laboratory for making bomb-grade material. Yesterday, North Korean officials began removing irradiated fuel rods from the reactor, a major step that continues a process that experts say will go well beyond the "freezing" of the reactor negotiated by the Clinton administration in 1994.

When that agreement collapsed in 2002, after the Bush administration accused Pyongyang of having a clandestine uranium-enrichment program, North Korea was able to restart the plutonium facility within three months. Under the current agreement, experts say, it could take as long as a year for North Korea to restart the facility.

Four key steps in disabling the plant have been completed, and three are nearly completed, administration officials said, citing reports from U.S. observers at the site.

At the reactor, the concrete bottom of its cooling tower has been broken through, rendering it unusable. A secondary cooling loop has also been severed. At the reprocessing plant, workers have removed machinery that helped transfer spent fuel rods into hot cells and have severed steam-line valves used to heat the reprocessing areas of the building. In the fuel fabrication facility, workers are close to removing casting furnaces and uranium metal reduction furnaces necessary to shape the fuel rods.

David Albright, president of the nonpartisan Institute for Science and International Security, said that during the negotiations, North Korea was anxious that there be no language suggesting that disablement would make the facility completely unusable, but he said the steps taken so far are impressive. Albright, who co-wrote a paper earlier this year outlining possible options for disabling the facilities, said removing the machinery needed to transfer fuel rods into hot cells is important because the cells are necessary to prevent exposure to radiation.

Albright said that bursting through the concrete of the cooling tower was visually symbolic -- wisps of vapor from the cooling tower appear in most satellite photographs of Yongbyon -- but the hot water could still be dumped directly in a nearby river if North Korea were unconcerned about possible ecological damage.

One lingering question is what should be done with fuel rods prepared for a never-completed 50-megawatt facility. Although those rods do not fit in the five-megawatt reactor, they could be reshaped unless they were bent.

U.S. officials outlined several key gaps in the declaration. First, the United States is seeking information on North Korea's past proliferation activities, especially any help it may have provided to Syria for a facility attacked by Israel in September. North Korea has indicated that it would assure that it is not currently exporting its expertise, but does not want to dwell on past practices.

Second, the United States wants to know whether any plutonium has been weaponized. North Korea simply wants to say how much plutonium it has produced.

Third, U.S. officials want a complete list of nuclear-related facilities but suspect that North Korea will provide an incomplete list.

Finally, the United States is seeking clarity on North Korea's uranium enrichment activities. The United States tracked purchases of material and equipment that could be used in such a program, but North Korea wants to say only what happened to the materials and how they are being used or whether they were smelted. It does not want to disclose its reasons for purchasing the equipment.

"To say what they were purchased for in the first place would involve acknowledging something they are not quite prepared to acknowledge," the official said. "We need to know what's been going on there."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/15/washington/15korea.html?ref=world>

North Korea Replies to Bush With an Offer and a Condition

By HELENE COOPER

Published: December 15, 2007

WASHINGTON — Responding to a recent letter from President Bush, North Korea agreed on Friday to follow through on its pledge to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, provided the United States reciprocates by normalizing relations between the countries.

President Bush said Friday that his initial letter, which was delivered by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill to the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, on Dec. 5, achieved its purpose.

“I got his attention with a letter and he can get my attention by fully disclosing his programs, including any plutonium he may have processed and converted some of that into whatever he’s used it for. We just need to know,” Mr. Bush told reporters in the Rose Garden after a cabinet meeting. “As well, he can get our attention by fully disclosing his proliferation activities.”

North Korea agreed in October to dismantle all of its nuclear facilities and to disclose all of its past and present nuclear programs by the end of the year in return for 950,000 metric tons of fuel oil or its equivalent in economic aid.

That agreement has come under fierce criticism from national security hawks, in part because it does not require North Korea to turn over its existing stockpiles of weapons-grade plutonium and any nuclear warheads it may already have produced. But many foreign policy experts point to it as a rare diplomatic success for President Bush in a period that has been dominated by frustration in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East.

“An important step is a full declaration of programs, materials that may have been developed to create weapons, as well as the proliferation activities of the regime,” Mr. Bush said.

A White House official said that Mr. Kim’s response was delivered to State Department officials through an intermediary, North Korea’s representative to the United Nations. The official said that the reply contained a pledge that the North would follow through on its promise as long as the United States held to its end of the bargain.

The proliferation issue has taken on new importance after an Israeli strike in Syria in September, which administration and Israeli officials say was conducted against a nuclear-related facility near the Euphrates River that was supplied with material from North Korea. Administration officials want North Korea to disclose whatever help it may have given Syria, although they note that the help for Syria predated the North’s agreement to dismantle its nuclear reactor and disclose its nuclear programs.

The exchange between Mr. Bush and Mr. Kim is a huge leap from the veritable cold war that prevailed throughout most of the Bush administration. In 2002, during a meeting with Republican senators, Mr. Bush compared Mr. Kim to a “spoiled child at a dinner table,” according to news reports at the time.

Syrian envoy denies nuclear cooperation with North Korea

2007/12/18 06:43 KST

☞☞ WASHINGTON, Dec. 17 (Yonhap) -- The top Syrian envoy to the United States denied on Monday allegations of nuclear cooperation with North Korea, brushing it off as "silly, absurd, ridiculous hype."

Speaking at the Woodrow Wilson Center, a think tank in Washington, Amb. Imad Moustapha said Syria was "never told" that its relations with North Korea were an issue with the U.S.

☞☞ "Now, if you are referring to the hype in the U.S. media -- not by even the Israeli government or the American government -- about the alleged Syrian-Korean nuclear link or cooperation or problem, well, I think nobody is discussing this anymore," the envoy said.

☞☞ Syria, whose relations with the U.S. are strained, was brought into the North Korean nuclear debate in early September. Israel struck a site in Syria its intelligence agencies say was a nuclear facility being equipped in part by North Korea.

☞☞ The site has since been razed, and information surrounding the strike or the facility has been closely held, leaving the allegations unconfirmed. Some satellite photos, released and analyzed by the Institute of Science and International Security, indicated the installation may have been a reactor closely resembling a North Korean reactor in size and construction.

☞☞ Pyongyang is known to have sold and passed on missile parts and technology to Damascus in the past. But both countries have denied any nuclear cooperation, an issue that touches on proliferation by North Korea, which the U.S. has set as a red line not to be crossed.

☞☞ A six-nation forum, involving South and North Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan, is in the middle of implementing a deal intended to eventually denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. Under the agreement, North Korea is required to declare its nuclear stockpile and any proliferation activities.

☞☞ Moustapha claimed U.S. officials quietly have said they do not believe Syria is collaborating with North Korea on the nuclear front.

☞☞ "Even here at the United States, at a highly classified hearing that was presented at the U.S. conference a couple of weeks ago, key officials from the U.S. administration had to say behind closed doors that there are no Syrian nuclear projects, no Syrian-Korean nuclear cooperation," the envoy said.

☞☞ "So this is, you know, the sort of silly, absurd, ridiculous hype" reminiscent of pre-war claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, he said.

☞☞ "It's so easy to fabricate stories if you are ideologically motivated, and if you have a gullible audience that does not critically read and analyze the sort of information they are being fed or told," the envoy said.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jAH1tUJ568ATWbh3wOjU9YsDSO2Q>

China's top nuclear envoy inspects NKorea nuke disablement process

18 hours ago *[accessed 2007-12-18T22:50Z]*

BEIJING (AFP) — China's top nuclear envoy inspected the atomic disarmament process in North Korea Tuesday, as part of efforts to push the reclusive country to meet a key agreement, state media and officials said.

Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei was also to meet North Korean leaders, including top nuclear envoy Kim Kye-Gwan, during his visit that began Tuesday, ministry spokesman Qin Gang told journalists.

"The purpose of his visit is to exchange ideas with the DPRK (North Korean) side... on the current situation in the six-party talks and the work for the next phase," Qin said, without saying how long Wu would stay in Pyongyang.

"We believe that the six-party talks have made positive progress and that the good momentum should be maintained and pushed forward."

Xinhua news agency said Wu inspected the disablement process at the Yongbyon atomic power plant, while North Korea's state media said the Chinese envoy had also met with North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui-Chun.

Qin refused to discuss recent concerns over whether North Korea would declare and disable all of its nuclear programmes by the end of this month, as agreed in a six-nation pact, but said all sides should make efforts for more progress.

"Relevant parties should overcome difficulties, deepen mutual trust and cooperation so as to implement the (denuclearisation) agreement in a comprehensive way," Qin said.

The six-party pact calls on Pyongyang to disable its plutonium-producing plants and declare all nuclear programmes and facilities by December 31, in return for energy aid and the promise of future major diplomatic concessions.

But the process has reportedly hit a key problem -- the North's refusal to address its suspected highly enriched uranium weapons programme to the satisfaction of the United States.

US President George W. Bush this month wrote to North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il, urging him to fully disclose his country's nuclear programmes.

On Friday Bush reiterated the demand after Kim gave what US officials said was a "verbal reply" to the unprecedented letter.

Bush called for a full declaration of "programmes, materials that may have been developed to create weapons, as well as the proliferation activities of the regime".

The latest nuclear crisis began in late 2002, when the United States accused North Korea of having a secret highly enriched uranium weapons programme in addition to its declared plutonium operation.

Pyongyang has never publicly admitted having a highly enriched uranium programme.

The crisis escalated last year when North Korea tested a nuclear bomb.

The six-party talks group the two Koreas, host China, the United States, Russia and Japan.

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,317475,00.html>

Syrian Leader Reportedly Says His Country Was Approached by Head of Nuclear Black Market

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Associated Press

VIENNA, Austria — Syria received a letter purportedly written by the head of the same nuclear black market that supplied Iran and Libya with its atomic technology but did not respond, the country's president said in comments published Wednesday.

President Bashar Assad's comments appeared to be the first time that a senior Syrian official linked the country to Abdul Qadeer Khan, the top Pakistani scientist who was exposed in 2004 as the head of an international black market in nuclear technology.

Assad also told the Austrian daily "Die Presse" that the target hit by Israeli combat jets in September was not a nuclear site, describing it only as a "military facility in the process of being built."

Israel has kept silent on what it thought it was targeting in the September air strike, but media reports have cited unnamed U.S. officials and analysts that it was a North Korean-style nuclear reactor.

Former U.N. nuclear inspector David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, subsequently circulated commercial satellite images taken before and after the Israeli raid that he said supported suspicions that the target was indeed a reactor and that the site was given a hasty cleanup by the Syrians to remove incriminating evidence.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which looked at its own set of images, has said nothing publicly about them, but diplomats linked to the agency have told the AP that they were too grainy to draw concrete conclusions. On Wednesday, one of the diplomats — who demanded anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue — said the Syrians have not reacted to agency requests for more information.

Khan's black market network was the key supplier of both Iran and Libya.

In the interview, Assad said that in early 2001, "someone brought a letter from a certain Khan," adding, "we didn't know whether the letter was real or a fake from the Israelis who wanted to entice us into a trap.

"In any case, we turned it down," he was quoted as saying. "We had no interest in nuclear weapons or a nuclear reactor. We never met with Khan."

Libya has voluntarily scrapped its nuclear arms program since acknowledging its existence in 2003. Iran has admitted to being a Khan customer of know-how and equipment that included the basis of its present uranium enrichment program — which can be used to create the fissile core of nuclear warheads — but insists it wants to perfect the technology only for its other use, generating reactor fuel. Its refusal to cease enrichment has resulted in two sets of U.N. Security Council sanctions.

<http://diepresse.com/text/home/politik/aussenpolitik/349740>

Assad: „Ohne die USA geht gar nichts“

18.12.2007 | 18:15 |

CHRISTIAN ULTSCH (Die Presse)

[EXCERPTS]

Syriens Präsident Assad signalisiert Friedensbereitschaft, glaubt aber nicht an einen Durchbruch im kommenden Jahr. Und er denkt nicht daran, seine Allianz mit dem Iran aufzugeben.

[deletia]

Am 6. September haben israelische Kampfflugzeug eine Einrichtung In Syrien angegriffen. Welche?

Assad: Es war eine im Bau befindliche Militäranlage. Und weil es eine Militäranlage war, kann ich Ihnen keine Details geben. Das heißt aber nicht, dass es eine Nuklearanlage war, wie die Israelis behauptet haben.

Warum hat Syrien so zurückhaltend reagiert?

Assad: Wir haben das Recht, jederzeit zurückzuschlagen. Das haben wir auch gesagt. Aber es geht nicht nur um Rache. Man kann eine Rakete auf Israel abfeuern. Aber was erreicht man damit? Man würde den Israelis helfen, einen neuen Krieg anzuzetteln. Und wohin würde ein neuer Krieg führen?

Hat Syrien Kontakte zu pakistanischen Atomingenieuren?

Assad: Tatsächlich war es so: Anfang 2001 brachte jemand einen Brief von einem gewissen Khan (dem Vater der pakistanischen Atombombe; Anm.). Wir wussten nicht, ob der Brief echt war oder eine Fälschung der Israelis, die uns in eine Falle locken wollten. Wir lehnten jedenfalls ab. Wir waren nicht interessiert daran, Kernwaffen oder einen Nuklearreaktor zu haben. Wir trafen Khan nie.

Das Interview wurde gemeinsam mit dem „Kurier“ geführt.

(„Die Presse“, Print-Ausgabe, 19.12.2007)

http://www.newsmax.com/timmerman/bolton_state_department/2007/12/25/59694.html

Bolton: State Department Leftists Have Defeated Bush

Tuesday, December 25, 2007 6:41 PM

By: Kenneth R. Timmerman

[EXCERPTS]

Resistance by partisan "shadow warriors" at the Department of State has limited the president's options and is bringing us dangerously close to a military showdown with Iran, former Bush administration official John Bolton told Newsmax in an exclusive interview.

[deletia]

Excerpts from the interview:

[deletia]

NEWSMAX: How is this Administration's track record on hiring and keeping conservatives in key positions?

BOLTON: I think it is unfortunately not very good. I talk about this in my book, about what happens when Presidential personnel doesn't focus on the very difficult circumstances appointees face within the State department, which is one of the savviest bureaucracies in Washington experts in co-opting, seducing or subverting political appointees who try to pursue policies it disagrees with. And I think in this Administration, it has had considerable success. I use the example of North Korea, and what's happened to our policy there. What has happened since I wrote the book is an even more graphic example of the bureaucracy in effect turning the President's policy in effect in a 180 degree U-turn.

NEWSMAX: Do you think the North Korean have agreed to talk and to shut down the reactor because they have sold off the critical elements?

BOLTON: I think they are doing the same thing they did under the [1994] Agreed Framework. I think they have been planning to cheat on their declaration and their program and hope they get away with it, which they will if we don't have an adequate verification program.

And I think this facility [in Syria] that the Israelis bombed on September 6 is an indication of yet another alternative, which is either to clone the Yongbyon reactor or outsource some of the nuclear weapons program. How better to hide your North Korean program than to build it in Syria where nobody is looking!

Just this morning there was a story that it may be harder to shut down Yongbyon than people thought. Now this will extend into the next year, which I think is part of North Korea's pattern of slow-rolling the program. But which also shows something which I and others have been saying for some time, which is that Yongbyon is at or beyond its useful life. Part of the reason they have difficulties extracting the fuel rods that are in there now is that the whole facility is in terrible repair, which means they agreeing to freeze it or even to dismantle it is not such a big concession from the North Koreans.

They may already have been able to extract as much plutonium as they were going to be able to. Shutting down a broken facility is hardly a sign of good faith.

NEWSMAX: There is a lot of dispute about North Korea's uranium program. You write in your book that the North Koreans talked to our delegation in 2002 about the uranium enrichment program. Do you think that is what they transferred to Syria?

BOLTON: It's hard to say what they've transferred. There was no sign of radiation escaping after the Israeli attack [on Syria], which seems to indicate that they proceeded before there was any actual enriched uranium or even unenriched uranium there. Otherwise you would see likely release of radiation.

[deletia]



Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
Washington, DC
December 27, 2007

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: The latest out of Seoul was that North Korea has cited delays in aid for -- as a reason why it will not be able to make its declaration or may not be able to make its declaration. Have you confirmed these North Korean statements and what is the state of play as far as the aid pipeline that you know of, as well as North Korea's progress ahead of December 31st?

MR. CASEY: Well, a couple things. First of all, the agreement that the six parties reached called for North Korea to provide a full and complete declaration by December 31st. And we certainly think that they are capable of meeting that deadline. We encourage them to do so and we'll see what happens over the next few days.

In terms of questions about aid shipments, as you know, there's been sort of a rotating schedule of heavy fuel oil equivalent that's been provided. I am not certain, to be honest with you, what the exact status of the last -- you know, latest shipment is, whether there have been any delays or not. Certainly, there's been no policy decision on the part of our government or any of the other six parties to change our basic approach to that, so I'm not aware that there is any substantive problem with those deliveries. As to what the North Koreans will or will not do, it's the obligation of all parties to honor their commitments and we intend to honor ours and we certainly hope they'd honor theirs as well.

Glenn.

QUESTION: Yeah. The South Korean Foreign Minister was actually quoted today as saying that the big hitch in this was North Korea admitting to the uranium enrichment program that the U.S. has said that they have maintained. Would you agree with that assessment? Is that your understanding as well that this is really the thing holding up the declaration?

MR. CASEY: Certainly, don't want to try and get myself into a public argument with the South Korean Foreign Minister, but I'll let him speak to his understanding of it.

QUESTION: Well, what is your understanding of it?

MR. CASEY: Well, my understanding of it is they have an obligation to provide us with a full and complete declaration by the 31st. We'd hope they'd honor it. We've had numerous discussions with

them about what such a declaration should include. You've heard from Chris Hill repeatedly that that does need to include any accounting for the highly enriched uranium activities that they've pursued in the past and may be pursuing currently. It certainly also includes dealing with things like proliferation and the other concerns that we've raised. Full and complete is probably the best way to describe it. There can't be fudging around the edges here. We need to really understand the full extent of the program and the full extent of the activities because that's the only way that you can guarantee that when we get to the end of this process, we've actually achieved our goal, which is full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: And do you have any readout of Sung Kim's visit last week to Pyongyang?

MR. CASEY: I don't, but let's see if we can get you something.

QUESTION: There's only three days left for this year. How are you going to guarantee for the -- by the end of this year for the declaration?

MR. CASEY: Well, look, I'm not going to guarantee the North Korean Government's going to do anything. That's up for them -- up to them to do. What I did say and what I will repeat is that we believe they're certainly capable of meeting the deadline and providing the declaration by the 31st. We encourage them to do so and we'll see what happens in the next couple of days.



Press Statement
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
Washington, DC
December 30, 2007

North Korea Declaration

In September 2005, the United States, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea agreed on a Joint Statement with North Korea that charted the way forward toward achieving a nuclear weapons free Korean peninsula. Under the terms of the Initial Actions Agreement of February 2007, North Korea shut down operations at the Yongbyon nuclear facility where it had produced weapons-grade plutonium and international inspectors returned to North Korea to verify and monitor this process. In October 2007, North Korea committed to declare all its nuclear programs and to disable the three key nuclear facilities at Yongbyon by the end of December 2007 as an initial step toward eventually abandoning all its nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs. The other parties, in turn, agreed to cooperate in economic and energy assistance to North Korea. Such assistance has been provided under a formula of "actions for actions" as the North carried out its commitments to disable its nuclear facilities.

It is unfortunate that North Korea has not yet met its commitments by providing a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear programs and slowing down the process of disablement. We will continue to work with our close allies Japan and South Korea, and partners China and Russia, as we urge North Korea to deliver a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear weapons programs and nuclear weapons and proliferation activities and complete the agreed disablement. The United States is committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Six Party agreements as North Korea fulfills all its obligations.

2007/1170

Released on December 30, 2007

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071231-3.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
December 31, 2007

Press Gaggle by Scott Stanzel
Crawford Middle School
Crawford, Texas

11:15 A.M. CST

[EXCERPT]

Q Scott, on North Korea -- North Korea has missed the deadline for the disablement of the reactor and the declaration on the programs. What's the President's reaction to this?

MR. STANZEL: Well, you saw the statement last night from the administration. Tom Casey, from the State Department, did issue a statement. You've also seen statements from the Japanese and the South Koreans. It has been clear that the North Koreans would not provide a declaration by the deadline, and a full and complete declaration we believe is critical in order to move to the next phase.

So it is our view that that process should move forward. There is an opportunity to do that. Good progress has been made at Yongbyon. The United States has been working with North Korea in terms of the removal of the fuel rods and making sure that that's done safely and securely. But there does have to be a complete and full declaration, and this cannot be a situation where the North Koreans pretend to give a complete declaration. So we want that process to move forward and we will be pressing and working with all of the parties in the six-party talks to make sure that happens. Secretary of State Rice, Deputy Secretary Negroponte, Ambassador Chris Hill all have open lines of communication with members of the six-party talks and we hope and expect that that process will move forward.

Q Do you envision the United States pushing for sanctions or any sort of action like that?

MR. STANZEL: Well, those conversations about moving the process forward are ongoing. I think we think it's possible for the North Koreans to provide a full and complete declaration, and we hope that they will do that as soon as possible. I'm not going to speculate beyond that about other actions that could occur.

Q Are you surprised that North Korea didn't meet the deadline?

MR. STANZEL: I think that we had all hoped that North Korea would meet the December 31st deadline. We think that there is an opportunity to move forward. You saw the statement last night from the State Department that it is unfortunate that they didn't meet the deadline, but we'll be working with all the parties to make sure that this process moves forward.

Q Do you believe they are committed to the deadline?

MR. STANZEL: Well, they did not meet --

Q Or the talks, rather?

MR. STANZEL: I think there is reason to believe that all of the members of the six-party talks think that this process should move forward, and we expect a full and complete declaration. So we hope that it will move forward.

Q North Korea -- have you gotten any indications that they will be filing a report or providing this information in the near term?

MR. STANZEL: It was our understanding, based on recent conversations, that obviously they were not going to make the December 31st deadline. You know, the United States actually slowed down part of the disablement process, and that is not something that we blamed the North Koreans for, but we wanted that to be done in a safe and secure manner. So we are not blaming the North Koreans for the slowdown in that disablement process.

However, we believe that the full and complete declaration is key to this process and we think there is an opportunity for them to do that.

Q Do you expect it soon?

MR. STANZEL: I'm not going to put a timeline on it, but we'll be working with all the parties in pressing North Korea to make sure that that does happen.

Q I hear you saying that there are no consequences, though, for missing a deadline.

MR. STANZEL: Well, as you know, this is an action-for-action process, where at each point if North Korea meets certain deadlines they can move forward with the process and there is aid that can be provided. I would refer you to the State Department about all of the specifics on that, but it is an action-for-action process, and in order to have action on one side, we have to have action on the other side as well.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/12/31/nkorea.us/>

Experts differ on significance of N. Korea missing nuclear deadline

December 31, 2007 --

Updated 0136 GMT (0936 HKT) [2008-01-01]

From State Department Producer Charley Keyes
CNN

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The Bush administration was hoping to spend the early hours of 2008 poring over a new document from the North Koreans: a full list of its nuclear secrets. No such luck.

The North Koreans let the New Year's Eve deadline come and go without revealing anything.

The United States is now hoping the delay will only be temporary and that the official declaration will be sent along in the coming days. The U.S. goal is to press ahead with negotiations and achieve full denuclearization of the Korean peninsula by the end of the new year.

State Department spokesman Tom Casey told reporters in his office Monday morning that the delay in the declaration is unfortunate. "We want to see it provided as soon as possible," he said. "The important thing is not whether we have the declaration today. It is that it needs to be full and complete."

Meanwhile, an international team remains in North Korea overseeing the "disabling" of the country's reactor at Yongbyon. This will be followed by the "dismantling" phase, in which buildings will be destroyed and key facilities filled with cement or cut apart and shipped out of the country.

In exchange for its cooperation so far, North Korea has received food and fuel oil aid. It also wants to be removed from the list of terrorism-sponsoring countries.

President Bush, who once labeled North Korea as part of "the axis of evil," took the extremely rare step of writing to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in early December, urging him to meet the December 31 deadline. The "Dear Mr. Chairman" letter, signed by hand by Bush, said continued progress would be tied to a full declaration.

Bruce Klingner, senior research fellow in the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation, said delays can now be traced back to negotiations earlier this year, and what he called "vague texts" about what North Korea is required to do. Klingner is a long-time observer of North Korea and a 20-year veteran of the CIA and intelligence community.

"I think the North Koreans are going to try to drag it out," he said by telephone from his Washington office. "Even more important is what's going to be in the declaration. Does it comply with what North Korea is required to do or is it just what North Korea wants to declare?"

Still unknown is just how much plutonium, the raw material of nuclear bombs, the North Koreans have. There are also big question marks over how much enriched uranium they have and how they shared or sold nuclear technology and expertise to other countries.

The still-mysterious bombing by Israel of an industrial installation in Syria raised questions about whether North Korea's proliferation activities have extended even further than realized. The Bush

administration has ducked any questions about what the Syrians may have been doing, and whether North Korea was involved.

Joe Cirincione of the Center for American Progress downplayed the importance of North Korea missing the deadline for the declaration.

"This is not a big deal," Cirincione said in an e-mail to CNN. "The momentum is still very positive, the reactor has been shut down and disabled; the disablement will proceed over the next 100 days and could then move into permanent dismantlement." He is the author of "Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons."

And Cirincione predicts some hard bargaining ahead for the United States -- as well as its partners in the talks, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea -- to get North Korea to spill all its secrets. "The North Koreans see everything as negotiations. So the declaration itself will likely not be complete," he said in his e-mail. "They will see it as something else to negotiate over as we point out that it does not include, for example, a full description of the gas centrifuge equipment they bought from Pakistan, or details on whether or not they fashioned their plutonium into weapons."

And the Heritage Foundation's Klingner said the Bush administration may be tempted to ease up on North Korea, realizing the clock is running out on Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and their international policy team.

"The Bush administration is perhaps becoming increasingly desperate to secure a foreign policy legacy to counter the concern over the situation in Iraq," he said, "so may be more willing to accept a lower level of compliance by North Korea as to its data reporting as well as a verification regimen later."



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
January 2, 2008
12:34 P.M. EST

Press Briefing by Dana Perino
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

[EXCERPT]

[MS. PERINO:] James.

Q Dana, earlier today I asked you if there was any reason to believe that North Korea was actually going to provide a complete and correct declaration of all of its nuclear programs and materiel, and your reply was that "We are skeptical of that." And so I wonder why the administration is proceeding forward with the entire agreement if it has such skepticism.

MS. PERINO: We -- as we've dealt with North Korea over the past several years, it is only appropriate that we would be skeptical. This is a very closed society that has had a secret program that's been ongoing. But North Korea did agree with the other members of the five -- of the six-party talks to disable and to provide a complete and accurate declaration. We don't have any indication that they will not provide one, but we -- they missed the deadline, and we are waiting to hear from them. And I would remind you that the State Department continues to be in regular contact with all the members of the six-party talks, and Deputy Secretary Negroponte will be in the region, in Beijing, middle of January, a couple weeks from now.

Q And you also said this morning that you imagine that this topic will be very high on Deputy Secretary Negroponte's agenda in Beijing, and he's going there in mid-month. Should we infer from that that you don't expect to receive this declaration by at least the middle of this month?

MS. PERINO: No, I really don't have any time frame as to when we would get the declaration. We would like it as soon as possible, but we do want it to be complete and accurate, because that's what they agreed to. And we'll continue to help them with the disablement. We have people on the ground now who are making sure it's done in a safe and proper manner.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
January 2, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: North Korea; we know what happened on January 1st and didn't happen.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: Can you sketch out for us what Chris Hill has -- maybe has already done or will be doing this week?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, he's going to be headed out to the region to do his Northeast Asia tour, leaving at the end of this week. I can't tell you whether that's Thursday or Friday. We'll try to get you some details on that. I don't know his stops, but I would anticipate that he's going to do the usual tour. I will see if he has any planned interactions with North Korean officials at this point. I don't have the details of the Chris Hill January 2008 Northeast Asia tour yet, but we'll get them to you.

QUESTION: On the same note, do you have any more details about the itinerary and agenda for Deputy Secretary Negroponte's trip to China in the middle of the month?

MR. MCCORMACK: Not yet. We'll -- more to follow on that.

Yeah, Gollust.

QUESTION: Would you say you're becoming increasingly --

MR. MCCORMACK: Sorry about the Browns, man.

QUESTION: No, it was a good season.

MR. MCCORMACK: It was a good season, (inaudible) since.

QUESTION: Would you say that you're becoming increasingly apprehensive about the lack of a declaration?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, I think everybody knows that -- a healthy appreciation for the pace at which this process moves. Sometimes it moves according to schedule, sometimes it moves in what some

might consider tectonic or glacial fashion, but it does move forward. But the fact that it doesn't progress at the pace that we would perhaps desire doesn't mean that people aren't working hard to try to make it work. Sometimes, the reason why it moves a little bit more slowly than we would have hoped is because we're doing new things and we're doing hard things.

The fact that the North Koreans have agreed to provide a full and complete declaration is something new. This is groundbreaking, just as it is new that they are disabling these facilities at Yongbyon. And that process continues. The reports we get back from the team are that that process is continuing. Now there are some technical questions about the cooling of the fuel rods. We want to make sure that that happens, it happens in an appropriate way. So that was the reason behind the delay in terms of the disablement that it is not completed by December 31st.

In terms of the declaration, we're going to keep hammering away on it. And we're not lowering the bar. North Korea has to come out with a full and complete declaration. Nobody is holding them to an unfair statement. They set out to provide a full and complete declaration, not to the United States but to the other five members of the six-party talks. And the other members of the six-party talks are going to hold them -- hold them to that. No standard, no higher, no lower, but just what they said that they were going to do.

QUESTION: Is the Deputy Secretary heading to the region as well?

MR. MCCORMACK: Excuse me?

QUESTION: Deputy Secretary Negroponte --

MR. MCCORMACK: He's going to -- that's what Kirit was talking about. He's going to be headed out there. I don't have a date for you, but he will be headed out to China, I believe. I think there was some discussion of that.

QUESTION: Before the bell rings --

MR. MCCORMACK: No, no, we got plenty of time.

QUESTION: Are you guys still encouraged, though? Are you still encouraged by the North Koreans? I mean, is -- though they haven't finished the declaration, are you still seeing a positive trend towards one?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, yeah, you still have the continuation of the disablement process. The teams on the ground there who are engaged in the disablement process helping with technical assistance. The disablement process -- that's continuing. That continues to move forward and that's -- and that's good. That's a good sign.

We're trending in the right direction. I mean, remember where we were, what, not quite a year ago with the Banco Delta Asia. Well, that took a lot longer than everybody would have hoped, but it did get resolved. And again, we're trying to do new things here, new things in a positive sense and a responsible way. It's not as though we're -- we are adhering to the pathway that was laid out back in September '05. And you know, would we have hoped that we could have been further along in this process? Yeah. We do. We do.

QUESTION: Without a declaration itself?

MR. MCCORMACK: A declaration itself? Well, again, we'll see. You know, we'll see what the final declaration says. That's what really matters. And we'll make a judgment once the North Koreans say this is our final declaration. We'll see what gets handed over to, I would expect, the Chinese as the chair of the six-party talks and we'll make an assessment at that point -- a final public assessment, at least.

QUESTION: Are there any U.S. -- any measures the U.S. is considering in response to the failure to meet the deadline on the declaration, or are there any corresponding measures such as the fuel shipments that you would sort of hold back on at this point till they produce something?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, it's going to be action for action. And they are doing things. They are making positive steps in some areas, as I noted with the disablement. There are some areas where they're still working on it.

I didn't -- I'll check for you what exactly -- check for you where exactly we stand in terms of our obligations as well as the other parties providing fuel, heavy fuel oil or in-kind assistance. I haven't read up on that recently. So we'll -- you know, we'll check for that. But we are still committed to fulfilling our obligations under the agreement, under the idea of action for action. So, but we'll check for you where we stand on that.



DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of October 3 Agreement

Pyongyang, January 4 [2008] (KCNA) -- A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK released the following statement Friday as regards the delay in the implementation of the October 3 agreement made at the six-party talks:

It is beyond Dec. 31, 2007, the deadline set in the Oct. 3 agreement.

It is regrettable that points agreed there remain unimplemented except the disablement of the DPRK's nuclear facilities.

The disablement started early in November last year and all the operations were completed within the "technologically possible scope" as of Dec. 31.

At present, the unloading of spent fuel rods scheduled to be completed in about 100 days is underway as the last process.

However, the delivery of heavy fuel oil and energy-related equipment and materials to the DPRK, commitments of other participating nations, has not been done even 50 per cent.

The schedule for the monthly delivery of heavy fuel oil as well as the delivery of energy-related equipment and materials and relevant technical processes are being steadily delayed.

The U.S. has not honored its commitments to cross the DPRK off the list of "sponsors of terrorism" and stop applying the "Trading with the Enemy Act" against it.

Looking back on what has been done, one may say that the DPRK is going ahead of others in fulfilling its commitment.

As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, the DPRK has done what it should do.

The DPRK worked out a report on the nuclear declaration in November last year and notified the U.S. side of its contents.

It had a sufficient consultation with the U.S. side after receiving a request from it to have further discussion on the contents of the report.

When the U.S. side raised "suspicion" about uranium enrichment, the DPRK allowed it to visit some military facilities in which imported aluminum tubes were used as an exception and offered its samples

as requested by it, clarifying with sincerity that the controversial aluminum tubes had nothing to do with the uranium enrichment.

As far as the fiction about nuclear cooperation with Syria is concerned, the DPRK stipulated in the October 3 agreement that "it does not transfer nuclear weapons, technology and knowledge". This is our answer to this question.

This was also done in line with the prior discussion with the U.S. Side.

All facts go to clearly show what is the reason behind the delayed process of the implementation of the October 3 agreement.

Consistent in all agreements reached at the six-party talks including the September 19 joint statement is the principle of "action for action".

Now that other participating nations delay the fulfillment of their commitments, the DPRK is compelled to adjust the tempo of the disablement of some nuclear facilities on the principle of "action for action."

The DPRK still hopes that the October 3 agreement can be smoothly implemented should all the participating nations make concerted sincere efforts on the principle of simultaneous action.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jDsrn5qmVUANHrmtASfggyXfhI9gD8TV4K7G0>

NKorea Says It Gave US Nuclear List

By JAE-SOON CHANG

26 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-01-04T15:25Z]

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea said Friday [2008-01-04] it gave a list of its nuclear programs to the United States in November, claiming it tried to meet commitments under an international disarmament agreement and accusing the U.S. of not doing its part to deliver aid.

North Korea also said that because of the delays by the U.S. and other parties to the six-nation talks, it was slowing the pace of disabling its nuclear facilities.

The North's Foreign Ministry did not list the contents of what it gave Washington, but stressed it had follow-up consultations with U.S. officials and tried its best to defuse allegations that Pyongyang had a uranium-based nuclear weapons program.

U.S. officials have voiced skepticism about the North's commitment to a February aid-for-disarmament deal worked out in the talks after Pyongyang failed to meet a year-end deadline on the nuclear declaration. The six nations are the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and North Korea.

"As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, (North Korea) has done what it should do," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by the country's official Korean Central News Agency.

The North accused the U.S. and other parties in the six-nation talks of delays in carrying out their commitments, such as shipping energy aid and removing the North from U.S. terrorism and trade blacklists. That forced Pyongyang to "adjust the tempo of the disablement of some nuclear facilities on the principle of action for action," it said.

North Korea last year promised to abandon its nuclear ambitions in return for the equivalent of 1 million tons of oil and political concessions. In October, it pledged to disable its nuclear facilities and issue a declaration on its atomic programs by the end of 2007.

The North began disabling the facilities under the watch of U.S. experts in November. On Friday, the North said the last process in the disablement work — removing spent fuel rods from its sole operational reactor — was continuing, and that work was expected to be completed in 100 days.

But the real hurdle was the nuclear declaration, as Pyongyang and Washington remain far apart over North Korea's suspected uranium enrichment program — an allegation that touched off the latest nuclear standoff in late 2002, and that the North has long denied.

U.S. officials have charged that the North's purchase of suspicious material and equipment — including aluminum tubes that could be used in the process of converting hot uranium gas into fuel for nuclear weapons — showed it pursued a uranium enrichment program.

On Friday, the North's Foreign Ministry said it offered an explanation to the U.S. about the uranium program, showing American officials military facilities where the aluminum tubes were used, and providing samples to clarify "the controversial aluminum tubes had nothing to do with the uranium enrichment."

Regarding suspicions about its nuclear connection with Syria, the North's ministry repeated its earlier stance that it had already pledged in the Oct. 3 agreement that it would never transfer any nuclear material, technology or know-how out of the country.

The North said the aid-for-disarmement deal could still be implemented smoothly "should all the participating nations make concerted sincere efforts on the principle of simultaneous action."

http://groups.google.com/group/alt.war.nuclear/browse_thread/thread/71bc47e344d80638

Newsgroups: alt.war.nuclear
From: Allen Thomson <thoms...@flash.net>
Date: Thu, 3 Jan 2008 15:02:14 -0800 (PST)
Local: Thurs, Jan 3 2008 5:02 pm
Subject: Weirdness in Syria

In a probably vain attempt to figure out the Israeli strike in Syria on 6 Sep 2007, I've been keeping an eye on the available commercial satellite imagery of the area. There's now a GeoEye IKONOS image of 23 November that's, well, strange.

I don't have the disposable cash to get the 1-meter resolution image itself, but just the browse image on the geoeye.com site is very interesting. What it shows is an apparently new, or at least seriously refurbished, road between the bombed building and a previously noted facility five kilometers to the east. This road is not apparent in any earlier image, including the DigitalGlobe one of 24 October.

And, more weirdly, there is definitely a square structure on the site of the former building. In the 24 October image there was nothing there but a low mound of dirt.

I have no clue what this means, but it is interesting...

*[Sourcebook note: The 23 November IKONOS browse image is at
http://archive.spaceimaging.com/ikonos/2/kpms/2007/11/browse.23487.crss_sat.0.0.jpg]*

US, NKorea, differ on nuke issue

By FOSTER KLUG Associated Press Writer

Jan. 4, 2008, 10:04AM

WASHINGTON — The United States on Friday disputed North Korean claims that Pyongyang had handed over a list of its nuclear programs ahead of a year-end disarmament deadline. Despite the North's charges of U.S. obstruction, the State Department expressed confidence that the process was moving ahead.

Spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters that North Korea has yet to provide a complete nuclear declaration, a key part of a February aid-for-disarmament deal worked out in six-nation talks.

"They're engaging the international media, in their own way," McCormack said of the North Korean Foreign Ministry's statements. "It is an important point that in none of this have any of the parties been backing away at all from their commitment to the process."

North Korea said Friday it gave the U.S. a list of its nuclear programs in November and accused the U.S. of not doing its part to move the process forward.

The North's Foreign Ministry did not elaborate on the contents of what it gave Washington but stressed it had follow-up consultations with U.S. officials and tried its best to clear their suspicions that Pyongyang had a secret uranium-based nuclear weapons program.

The North's claims came as the chief U.S. envoy at disarmament talks, Christopher Hill, headed to Asia to discuss the disarmament accord.

U.S. officials have voiced skepticism about the North's commitment to the deal after saying that Pyongyang failed to deliver the declaration by the end of the year. The six nations involved in the talks are the U.S., China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and North Korea.

The North's producing what the U.S. calls a "complete and accurate" declaration is seen as key to the process moving forward. Washington is especially keen for the declaration to address the suspected uranium enrichment program — an important sticking point that touched off a nuclear standoff in late 2002.

North Korean and U.S. officials have had ongoing talks on the declaration, McCormack said. But, he said, the U.S. is still waiting for a final declaration. He would not elaborate on the discussions.

McCormack also would not discuss the North's claim that it had offered an explanation to U.S. officials about its alleged uranium program.

Hill told reporters in December, after visiting North Korea, that he had not seen a draft of the declaration but that U.S. and North Korean negotiators had had extensive talks about what the U.S. expects to see in the list of nuclear programs.

When asked at the time if the North was prepared to present a draft of the declaration, he said his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye Gwan, told him, "We don't want to rush this and cause problems. Haste makes waste, I think is what he said."

North Korea has promised to abandon its nuclear ambitions in return for energy aid and political concessions. In October, it pledged to disable its nuclear facilities and declare its programs by the end of the year in return for the equivalent of 1 million tons of oil.

The North shut down its sole functioning atomic reactor in July and began to disable it and other facilities under watch of U.S. experts in November; that process, though slowed by technical difficulties, continues.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
January 4, 2008

[EXCERPT]

[MR. MCCORMACK:] Yeah, Nina.

QUESTION: On North Korea, the -- I just watched a response to their foreign ministry saying that they've already made this -- about (inaudible)?

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Well, the first thing I'll note about what they said is that they are committed to the six-party process. That is, I think, the kicker line in their statement and there is every evidence that they are still committed to the six-party process and are moving forward with the implementation of this phase of the agreement as was outlined back in October.

So disablement continues. They have yet to produce a declaration. Would we have wished they had produced a declaration by now? Absolutely, and when I say "we," all the other five members of the six-party talks. Chris Hill, when he was in Pyongyang and Sung Kim, when he was in North Korea, talked to them about the importance of producing a full and complete declaration. The Chinese have and I know others have as well. We're going to continue doing that. We want to see this as soon as possible, but we're not going to sacrifice fullness and completeness in the interest of time.

But the North Koreans need to get about the business of completing this declaration. It's important to the process. It is another data point that will indicate that they are, in fact, serious about denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, which is, of course, the objective of the six-party talks. So it proceeds. It is not -- would we have wished that it had gone faster? Yes. Part of what Chris Hill is going to do in his tour in Northeast Asia as well as to Moscow is talk about this, talk about it with the other members of the six-party talks and urge them to do what they can to encourage the North Koreans to produce a full and complete declaration.

QUESTION: Is he in Tokyo today or is he en route?

MR. MCCORMACK: He left today. He left the United States today, so -- I don't have his schedule in front of me right now. I went through it yesterday.

QUESTION: Are you suggesting that there's something about Hawaii that has changed?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, no.

QUESTION: Is it no longer a part of the United States?

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, I left that (inaudible) there.

QUESTION: He left Washington today?

MR. MCCORMACK: He left Washington today. I think -- what did I say, he left here today?

QUESTION: You said he left the United States today.

MR. MCCORMACK: Touché, Matt. There we are.

QUESTION: Sean, is the Bush Administration emphasis on this complete and correct declaration, because what they showed you originally wasn't complete and correct? I mean, it's -- you keep saying it has to be complete and correct --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- leads one to assume, well, maybe what they originally showed you wasn't complete and correct.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, look, I know Chris talked to them about this when he was up there and we have had several conversations, as have others about the declaration and I'm not going to get into the specifics of the back and forth, but the fact is they haven't turned in a final declaration yet. They're going to turn that in to the Chinese as chair, conveners of the six-party meetings and we don't have that yet. We look forward to a full and complete declaration. We also look forward to their completing the disablement phase up at Yongbyon. That is moving forward and there is good progress on that.

I just have to emphasize to everybody, when you're looking at this process, if -- while we all wish that these diplomatic processes would unfold as we had planned them, sometimes they don't. And part of the reasons why they are not right now is we are breaking new ground in terms of what we're doing, in terms of disabling Yongbyon and in terms of working with North Korea in the six-party talks to get a full, complete picture of their nuclear program, not something that has ever been done before.

So that is why, when you say, "Well, it hasn't been done by December 31st, what are you going to do," and we say, well, we're going to keep working on it within a reasonable period of time, that's the reason why, because we're breaking new ground here. This hasn't been done before. But all of that said, none of what we're doing is lowering the bar. The North Koreans made certain commitments. We expect them to live up to those commitments. We as well as the other members of the six-party talks made commitments and we are going to fulfill those commitments. It's going to be action in return for action.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Is Mr. Hill going to meet with President Lee in Seoul? Is that on the agenda?

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't have his list of meetings for you. We'll try to detail those for you if we can.

North Korea Says Earlier Disclosure Was Enough

By CHOE SANG-HUN and STEVEN LEE MYERS

January 5, 2008

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Friday that it had already explained enough about its nuclear programs to meet a deadline for declaring its nuclear activities, saying the information was in a nuclear declaration it prepared in November and gave to the United States.

The statement from the North Korean Foreign Ministry on Friday was carried by the Korean Central News Agency, North Korea's voice to the outside world. It was the country's first official pronouncement after it missed a Dec. 31 deadline to disable its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, and, according to other nations involved in six-nation talks, failed to provide a full list of its nuclear activities, including weapons, facilities and fissile material.

The statement said that North Korea had already conducted "enough discussions" with the United States officials after they demanded more negotiations on its November draft declaration. Using the abbreviation of the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Foreign Ministry said, "As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, the D.P.R.K. has done what it should do."

In Washington, officials disputed North Korea's claims, saying the government in Pyongyang had not yet provided a declaration. They muted their criticism, however, and said that issue had not reached an impasse.

"The North Koreans know what's expected of them and what the rest of the parties are looking for, and that is a full and complete and accurate declaration of their nuclear activity," said Tony Fratto, a White House spokesman. "They know that."

The chief American negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, left Washington on Friday en route to China, where the status of North Korea's adherence to its commitments to dismantle its nuclear weapons program will be the focus of a new round of negotiations. An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the situation, played down the North Korean statement, saying it followed a pattern of public posturing in advance of new talks.

Since the passing of the deadline, agreed on in October, the United States, South Korea and Japan have criticized the North and called for details on how much plutonium it had produced at Yongbyon, whether it had provided nuclear assistance to Syria and what it had done with tons of aluminum tubes it had bought from Russia, the type that could be used to build centrifuges to enrich uranium.

The State Department's spokesman, Sean McCormack, said that the United States and the other countries involved in the talks had not reacted more strongly to the missed deadline because foreign nuclear experts were continuing their work to dismantle the Yongbyon plant, hoping through that work to learn more about aspects of North Korea's nuclear program.

"We're breaking new ground here," Mr. McCormack said. "This hasn't been done before."

Earlier in the day, North Korea also renewed its threat to bolster its “war deterrent,” a phrase it uses for its nuclear arsenal. The North, with one of the world’s largest standing armies, usually threatens to bolster its deterrent when it feels international pressure in crucial negotiations.

North Korea has acknowledged building bombs with plutonium, but has denied pursuing an alternative weapons program using enriched uranium.

In the October deal that North Korea struck with the United States, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia, it promised to disable its nuclear facilities and give a full list of its nuclear programs in exchange for one million tons of heavy fuel oil, or its economic equivalent, and diplomatic concessions.

It has so far received 150,000 tons of oil and 5,010 tons of steel products to renovate its aging power plants.

On Friday, North Korea accused the United States and other countries of delaying the fulfillment of their commitments to provide the aid and remove the North from American terrorism and trade blacklists.

“We still hold hope that the Oct. 3 agreement will be implemented smoothly if all countries participating in the six-party talks make sincere efforts based on the principle of action for action,” the statement said.

North Korea said the disablement work at Yongbyon was “completed within the technologically possible scope as of Dec. 31.”

But since the aid delivery “has not been done even 50 percent,” the North had to “adjust the speed of the nuclear disablement process,” it said. The work of unloading spent fuel rods from the North’s nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, a crucial part of the disablement, will take an additional 100 days, it said.

Choe Sang-hun reported from Seoul, and Steven Lee Myers from Washington.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-usnorkor5jan05,0,4497143.story>

N. Korea says it fulfilled nuclear deal

By Paul Richter

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

January 5, 2008

WASHINGTON — American and North Korean officials traded charges Friday over the lagging effort to shut down Pyongyang's nuclear program, raising new doubts about an initiative that the Bush administration has hoped would yield a rare diplomatic success.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry declared that it had fulfilled a commitment to provide U.S. officials with a full list of its nuclear activities before a Dec. 31 deadline, and intended to do no more.

"As far as the nuclear declaration on which wrong opinion is being built up by some quarters is concerned, [North Korea] has done what it should do," the ministry said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

U.S. officials insisted that Pyongyang had not yet provided the declaration that it promised on two occasions last year.

"The North Koreans need to get about the business of completing the declaration," said Sean McCormack, the chief State Department spokesman. "It is another data point that will indicate that they are serious about denuclearizing the Korean peninsula."

The North Korean government last year pledged a step-by-step program of disabling and then dismantling its nuclear complex in return for various rewards, including fuel oil, steel products and normalization of diplomatic relations.

By the end of last year, North Korea was to have dismantled a decrepit reactor at Yongbyon and disclosed all nuclear assets and activities, including its inventory of bombs and fissile materials and a uranium enrichment program that Pyongyang has so far denied.

But as the year-end deadline passed without completion of the nuclear inventory or full disabling of the reactor, criticism has grown in the United States that Kim Jong Il's government is following a familiar pattern of probing to see what it can obtain without giving up the nuclear program it considers a precious asset.

U.S. officials, who have clung to optimism despite a series of snags, said it was important not to overlook that North Korea said in its statement that it remained committed to the effort.

"I think we're seeing progress on parts of this agreement," said Tony Fratto, a White House spokesman.

But Robert Einhorn, a former senior U.S. official on nonproliferation, said North Korea's statement may be more than just bluster aimed at improving its bargaining position in talks with the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia. Pyongyang regards secrecy about its nuclear program as a "strategic asset," and may be unwilling to come clean, said Einhorn, who is at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"Obviously, a failure to make a full and accurate declaration will cast real doubt on whether they are willing to get rid of their nuclear capability completely," he said. For that reason, he said, it is "potentially a showstopper" for the six-nation denuclearization talks.

North Korean officials and the U.S. negotiating team, headed by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, had discussed what the nuclear inventory declaration would include, American officials have said. U.S. officials hoped those discussions would avoid a later confrontation over an inadequate declaration.

But North Korea said Friday that it had offered the United States a document in November, which the Americans apparently found insufficient. The North Koreans said that although the U.S. officials wanted more talks, Pyongyang had had "enough discussions."

The ministry's statement again denied that the North Koreans had aided Syria in a nuclear weapons program, calling that allegation "a fiction." U.S. officials have demanded to know whether North Korea had a hand in building an alleged Syrian nuclear facility that reportedly was bombed by Israel in early September.

The North Koreans said that in response to American suspicions that Pyongyang had imported aluminum tubes for uranium enrichment, they had shown U.S. officials a military site at which aluminum tubes were used for other purposes.

The North Koreans accused the United States of failing to honor its commitment to take North Korea off the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and to lift sanctions under American trade laws.

The ministry asserted that North Korea had done more than other countries as part of the denuclearization deal. But it said it refused to go further because the deal provided that each side would move ahead "action for action."

Charles L. Pritchard, a former Bush administration envoy who is president of the Korea Economic Institute, said the North Korean statements were aimed at rebutting accusations from several countries that Pyongyang had failed to meet its commitments by the year-end deadline. He said he did not view them as a threat to the denuclearization effort.

The countries are "signaling each other in a PR kind of way," he said.

The Bush administration, after taking a hard line on North Korea for its first six years, has made a series of concessions in the last year to keep negotiations going. Einhorn said the administration might change its tune if the latest statement proves to be a signal of intransigence.

The administration "has already taken a lot of hits from the right wing," he said. "I think the administration will feel it's under pressure to do something to show that it doesn't have infinite patience."

paul.richter@latimes.com

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/942425.html>

IAEA: We hope to visit site of IAF strike on Syria

By Yoav Stern, Haaretz Correspondent, and Reuters

Last update - 17:18 07/01/2008

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has no information on any Syrian nuclear plans, but does hope to pay a visit soon to the Syrian site bombed by the Israel Air Force in September, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei told the London-based Arabic-language newspaper Al-Hayat on Monday [2008-01-07].

ElBaradei said the IAF strike three months ago, which foreign media has reported targeted a nascent nuclear facility, "set a bad precedent."

ElBaradei also said that an information network established by the Pakistani scientist Abd al-Qadir, which reportedly stretched over 30 countries, aided Libya, Iran and possibly North Korea with obtaining nuclear technologies.

However, he did not mention Syria in this context.

In the interview, ElBaradei also expressed his concern over attempts made by terrorist organizations to produce a radioactive or "dirty" bomb that would potentially explode in a crowded city, spreading radioactive radiation.

"Hundreds or even thousands could die [from the radioactive bomb]," ElBaradei said, adding that "it would have severe long-term economic ramifications."

ElBaradei warned that such a scenario would be far worse than the attack of September 11, and that it was "in the interest of extremist groups," who are "more likely to execute such an attack than obtain nuclear weapons."

ElBaradei to visit Tehran

The IAEA will visit Iran on January 11-12 to help resolve outstanding questions about Iran's disputed atomic program, an spokeswoman from the agency said on Monday.

ElBaradei would be making the rare trip at the invitation of the Islamic Republic, following diplomatic reports late last month that Iran's staged plan for transparency agreed with the UN watchdog agency was getting bogged down.

"The Director-General will visit Tehran on Friday and Saturday. During the visit he will meet with a number of high officials," IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said.

"[ElBaradei] hopes that the visit will develop ways and means to enhance and accelerate implementation of (nuclear) safeguards in Iran, with a view of resolving all remaining outstanding issues and enabling the agency to provide assurance about Iran's past and present nuclear activities," she said in an emailed statement.

US Nuclear Envoy Says Completeness More Important than Speed in North Korean Nuclear

By Kurt Achin

Seoul

08 January 2008

[EXCERPT]

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill's stop here Tuesday is the second on his latest attempt to push the North Korean nuclear disarmament process

He continues to express concern over Pyongyang's failure to meet a deadline for issuing a full list of its nuclear activities.

North Korea promised its five partners in the six-nation nuclear talks last year that it would declare all of its nuclear weapons, programs and stockpiles by December 31. That date passed, to silence from Pyongyang.

But Hill says accuracy in Pyongyang's report is more important than speed.

"I'm not too concerned about them being a little late. The main concern is that when they do give a declaration, that it be complete," Hill said.

Last week, the North Korean Foreign Ministry said a declaration provided to U.S. officials in November was sufficient. Hill says it was not.

"They can make as many declarations as they want. The issue is, have they made a complete one? And the answer is no," Hill said.

Hill flew here from Japan Tuesday, and after his stop in South Korea he plans to head to China and Russia - all participants in the six-nation talks, which are aimed at ending the North's nuclear weapons programs for good.

On his arrival in Seoul, he called for patience with Pyongyang - up to a point.

"I think we need to kind of stick with it, be a little patient with it - but be tough, and try to get through," Hill said.

He says North Korea's reticence can be understood, to the extent that the country is "not automatically inclined toward transparency." However, he says providing a complete declaration is something that "needs to be done."

He also says China, as the host nation of the talks, has a special responsibility to push North Korea to honor its nuclear obligations.

http://www.domain-b.com/defence/general/20080110_nukes.html

IAEA chief, el Baradei, voices concern over safety of Pakistani nukes news

10 January 2008

[EXCERPTS]

Beirut: The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN atomic watchdog, Mohamed el Baradei, has added his voice to mounting concerns over the safety of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. In an interview to Arabic daily Al-Hayat on **Tuesday [2008-01-08]**, Baradei expressed his fear that it could fall into extremist hands.

[deletia]

With regard to Syria, the United Nations nuclear chief also told Al-Hayat that authorities in that country did not authorise international inspectors to visit a site bombed by Israel last September. Speculation fed into international media after the September 6 attack by Israeli jets suggested that the site may have been used to store nuclear materials from North Korea.

Syria had denied these allegations.

[deletia]

Al Baradei To Al-Hayat (2/2): Old And Renewed Nuclear Fears Abdul-Qadeer Khan aided Libya and Iran...No information on Syria's nuclear program

By Ghassan Charbel

Al-Hayat

11/01/08//

Syria and North Korea

> Israel launched a strike against a target on Syrian territories claiming that it was linked to North Korea. Is there any information about a Syrian nuclear program?

- We have no information about a Syrian nuclear program. I was surprised by this step. If anything had to do with a nuclear program, the Israelis and the Americans must inform us first so we can conduct inspections. The solution cannot be by striking first and then asking questions. Any state that has information about the nuclear program of another state must inform the Agency. So far, we have not received any information about any nuclear programs in Syria. When I spoke to the Syrian brothers, they said that the target was a military facility. I asked for their permission to allow the Agency to visit the facility and to verify that it was not nuclear.

> The Syrians said the target was a military facility?

-Yes, they said it was a military facility, but I am not concerned with the nature of the military facility targeted as long as it is not within my jurisdiction. Yet, the Syrian brothers did not allow us to visit and inspect the location.

>It is said that they have flattened the facility?

- The location was razed down according to our information. Yet, even if this is the case, we have technologies to assure that the location did not host a nuclear facility. Based on satellite photographs, experts believe it is unlikely that the targeted construction was a nuclear facility. I consider the Israeli strike to be a negative precedent.

> Have you demanded information and evidence from the Israelis?

- We made requests but they offered us no information, neither they nor any other intelligence agencies. I deal with the issue on the basis that the target was a military but not a nuclear facility. I still hope that the brothers in Syria will permit us to visit the targeted location to verify that it was not a nuclear facility.

U.S. sets new deadline for N. Korea's declaration of nuclear programs

By Lee Chi-dong

2008/01/10 13:56 KST

INCHEON, Jan. 10 (Yonhap) -- The United States wants North Korea to disclose all of its nuclear programs before the launch of South Korea's new government late next month, Washington's chief nuclear envoy said Thursday.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill presented the fresh deadline for recalcitrant North Korea after his meeting with South Korea's incoming leader Lee Myung-bak.

The United States accuses North Korea of failing to meet the year-end deadline to provide a "complete and correct" declaration on the North's nuclear activity, a key part of the second phase of the denuclearization process. But Pyongyang insists that it already explained enough about its nuclear programs. North Korea criticizes the U.S. and other dialogue partners over delays in their provision of further energy aid and political incentives.

It is very desirable to complete phase two even before Lee takes office so negotiators can focus on the last phase by the time his government begins its term, Hill told reporters at Incheon International Airport before heading to Beijing.

The envoy said he had a "very good discussion" with Lee about the need to work closely together for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Hill cited North Korea's lack of transparency as a reason for its failure to meet the deadline.

"We can't have a situation where we pretend programs didn't exist for we both know that they existed," he said. "We can't have a program, a process that goes forward on the basis of not being honest with each other."

His remarks were understood to refer to the North's alleged uranium enrichment program and nuclear black-market connection with Syria.

"It is a tougher issue than maybe it should be. I mean tougher from a psychological point of view," he said. "That is why I think we need to show a little patience with the situation." Asked about the timing for a new round of six-way talks on the nuclear crisis, Hill said it depends on consultations with host China.

He said he will discuss the issue with his Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei later Thursday. The other participants in the talks are Japan, Russia, and the two Koreas.

During his hectic three-day schedule in Seoul, he had a series of meetings with President Roh Moo-hyun, Foreign Minister Song Min-soon, and Seoul's top nuclear envoy Chun Yung-woo.

Hill and Chun agreed to push for a quick resumption of the six-way talks.

U.S. tells N.Korea to fully declare nuclear activities

Guy Faulconbridge , Reuters

Published: Friday, **January 11, 2008**

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The United States urged North Korea on Friday to give a full declaration of its nuclear activities after Pyongyang missed an end-2007 deadline for presenting the inventory under a disarmament-for-aid deal.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill held talks with Russia's chief negotiator in Moscow after a tour of Asia to discuss the deal, which would award fuel oil or aid for making the declaration and dismantling its nuclear facilities.

"They are obliged to give a complete and correct declaration, a declaration which would cover all their nuclear materials, all their nuclear facilities and all their nuclear programs and any nuclear cooperation they have with anyone," Hill told reporters after talks.

"That is what we are expecting," he said, declining to give any new deadlines for the declaration.

North Korea says it has accounted for its nuclear programs as required.

The United States says none of the countries party to the deal -- a result of six-party talks between the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia -- has seen the final declaration.

Russia's chief negotiator on North Korea, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov, expressed frustration with the speed of the process.

"We are unanimous in our regret at the slow movement we have within the process, but at the same time we recognize that this is a very difficult and bumpy road which we have to go along," he told reporters at a joint briefing with Hill.

DISARMING

If North Korea lives up to the deal, the energy starved state would get 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil or equivalent aid, and Washington would take it off its terrorism black list.

North Korea has been cooperating in disabling its three main nuclear facilities -- an ageing reactor, a plant that makes nuclear fuel and another that turns spent fuel into arms-grade plutonium -- U.S. and South Korean officials have said.

The disabling of North Korea's nuclear reactor is a key part of a complex nuclear deal struck after years of diplomatic wrangling and Pyongyang's test of a nuclear bomb in late 2006.

Hill said the next round of talks would take place soon but declined to give a date: "I think the Chinese will be looking to call a six-party meeting."

China is the host of the six party talks. Earlier, Itar-Tass news agency quoted Hill as saying the next round of the could take place in the next few weeks.

Russia will complete a delivery of 50,000 tons of fuel oil to North Korea this month under an agreement reached at the six-party negotiations, Losyukov told reporters.

"I think that around January 20-21 we will complete the delivery of our portion to North Korea of the oil which was envisaged by the six-party talks," Losyukov said. "So it can not be used as a pretext to slow the process down."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/12/world/middleeast/12syria.html>

Syria Rebuilds on Site Destroyed by Israeli Bombs

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

Published: **January 12, 2008**

The puzzling site in Syria that Israeli jets bombed in September grew more curious on Friday with the release of a satellite photograph showing new construction there that resembles the site's former main building.



DigitalGlobe

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/01/11/world/12syria-450.jpg>

New construction at a disputed Syrian site that Israeli and American analysts judged to be a partially built nuclear reactor.

Israel's air attack was directed against what Israeli and American intelligence analysts had judged to be a partly constructed nuclear reactor. The Syrians vigorously denied the atomic claim.

Before the attack, satellite imagery showed a tall, square building there measuring about 150 feet long per side.

After the attack, the Syrians wiped the area clean, with some analysis calling the speed of the cleanup a tacit admission of guilt. The barren site is on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, 90 miles north of the Iraqi border.

The image released Friday came from a private company, DigitalGlobe, in Longmont, Colo. It shows a tall, square building under construction that appears to closely resemble the original structure, with the exception that the roof is vaulted instead of flat. **The photo was taken from space on Wednesday [2008-01-09].**

Given the international uproar that unfolded after the bombing, "we can assume it's not a reactor," said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, a private group in Washington that has analyzed the Syrian site.

If international inspectors eventually get to the site, he added, they will have a more difficult time looking for nuclear evidence. "The new building," he noted, "covers whatever remained of the destroyed one."

Skeptics have criticized the nuclear accusation, saying the public evidence that has so far come to light was ambiguous at best. They noted, for instance, that at the time of the attack the site had no obvious barbed wire or air defenses that would normally ring a sensitive military facility.

The International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna recently became aware of the new construction, a European diplomat said Friday.

"Obviously, they're keeping an eye on the site," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the issue's diplomatic delicacy.

As a signer to an agreement with the atomic agency, Syria is obligated to report the construction of a nuclear reactor to international inspectors. Nuclear reactors can make plutonium for the core of atom bombs, and therefore secretive work on reactors is usually interpreted as military in nature.

Senior Syrian officials continue to deny that a nuclear reactor was under construction, insisting that what Israel destroyed was a largely empty military warehouse.

Mohamed ElBaradei, who directs the atomic agency, this week told Al-Hayat, an Arabic-language newspaper based in London, that his agency wanted to inspect the site.

"So far, we have not received any information about any nuclear programs in Syria," he said, according to a transcript posted on the newspaper's Web site. Dr. ElBaradei said he had asked for the Syrians' permission "to allow the agency to visit the facility and to verify that it was not nuclear."

He added: "The Syrian brothers did not allow us to visit and inspect the location."

While some analysts have suggested that the new building might slow down international inspectors, Dr. ElBaradei said in the interview that his agency had sensitive "technologies to assure that the location did not host a nuclear facility."

The satellite photographs, he added, led experts to doubt "that the targeted construction" was in fact a nuclear reactor.

Syria Builds at Ruined Site of Israeli Airstrike

Saturday, January 12, 2008; Page A11



U.S. officials said this Syrian site, now under construction, may have housed a partially constructed nuclear reactor. (Digital Globe-institute For Science And International Security)

Syria has begun new construction on the ruined site of a mysterious facility where some U.S. officials believe a secret nuclear reactor was being built.

However, nuclear experts played down the possibility that the new building has a nuclear purpose.

The facility, visible in images taken by a commercial satellite, is being built directly over the building that was destroyed Sept. 6 in an airstrike by Israeli warplanes. Syria has denied allegations that a partially constructed nuclear reactor was the target of the raid. North Korea had been helping Syria build the facility, U.S. officials said.

"It would be very unlikely for this to be a reactor, and we would be very surprised if they tried to put a reactor inside this building," said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, who analyzed the images and provided a copy to The Washington Post.

Albright said the new facility appears significantly different from the earlier one, having slightly larger dimensions and a vaulted roof. There are no visible signs suggesting a nuclear purpose, he said.

The new construction could complicate future efforts by outsiders to determine the purpose of the original building, Albright said. He added that it is possible that Syria might have constructed the facility to allow the country to secretly excavate all traces of the original building out of the view of spy satellites.

-- Joby Warrick

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/jan/99300.htm>



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
January 14, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Sean, another IAEA question. There were reports over the weekend that the agency has expressed interest in visiting, inspecting the site in Syria that was bombed by Israel in September because there was some new activity being detected there. Do you think that would be a good idea?

MR. MCCORMACK: It's up to the IAEA to make those requests. Certainly, we support the professionals of the IAEA in making these kinds of requests of a member state. I think it's up to those professionals to make those kinds of requests.

Bush Privately Lauds Israeli Attack on Syria

By BARBARA OPALL-ROME

And VAGO MURADIAN

Posted 01/14/08 16:02

TEL AVIV and WASHINGTON — In one of the most extensive, face-to-face security discussions since an Israel Air Force attack on a Syrian nuclear reactor last autumn, U.S. President George W. Bush privately commended his Israeli host on what was described as an important preventive action, according to an Israeli official briefed on the high-level exchange.

Bush's private endorsement of the Sept. 6 attack — offered in the context of Jan. 9 discussions in Jerusalem on the Iranian threat and Israel's cardinal opposition to nuclear weapon development programs in the region — was disputed by Olmert spokesman Mark Regev. "I don't know that to be true," Regev said.

Nevertheless, the Israeli official briefed on the Bush-Olmert talks said he understood the U.S. president's comments as endorsement of the pre-emptive necessity of the Syrian strike. If true, such a reference to the Syrian operation during talks devoted to denial options vis a vis Iran appears to support contentions that the Syrian reactor was very close to becoming operational prior to its destruction.

In a late December interview, a participant in Israeli security cabinet discussions in the months leading up to the Sept. 6 attack said information gathered on the Syrian facility was unequivocal. "There was no doubt about the time-critical need to act as we did," he said.

Israeli intelligence agencies concluded that Iran had no connection to the Syrian nuclear program and probably was not even aware of the clandestine site in eastern Syria along the Euphrates River, the official said.

According to U.S. officials and analysts, the challenge in attacking nuclear facilities is to attack them before they are fueled to minimize the chance of radioactive contamination that could be released in the strike. Achieving that level of precision, they said, requires pinpoint intelligence through external persistent aerial surveillance and human intelligence inside the facilities themselves.

Despite intense efforts by Tel Aviv to determine linkage between the Iranian and Syrian nuclear drives, "multiple examinations by various means" determined just the opposite, the official said. He added that Israeli political officials had hoped to use incriminating evidence of Iranian proliferation to ratchet up international pressure to halt Tehran's enrichment program.

"It was certainly disappointing to discover no connection between the two programs," the official said. "Apparently, this was an independent, high-priority Syrian-funded national project sustained and supported through bilateral ties with the North Korean regime."

That Israeli determination coincided with a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate in which American intelligence agencies concluded that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 while continuing to seek a civilian nuclear capability.

Bush, at a Jan. 9 joint news conference with Olmert, sought to clarify misperceptions stemming from the NIE.

“Iran is a threat towards peace. There was a recent intelligence report that came out that I think sent the signal to some that said perhaps the United States does not view an Iran with a nuclear weapon as serious problem,” Bush said. “Now I want to remind people ... that Iran was a threat. Iran is a threat, and Iran will be a threat, if the international community does not come together and prevent that nation from the development of the know-how to build a nuclear weapon.

“A country which once had a secret program can easily restart a secret program; a country which can enrich for civilian purposes can easily transfer that knowledge to a military program; a country which has made statements that it has made about the security of our friend Israel is a country that needs to be taken seriously, and the international community must understand with clarity the threat that Iran provides to world peace. And we will continue to work with European countries, Russia and China, as well as nations in this neighborhood, to make it abundantly clear the threat that Iran poses for world peace.”

But with the Israeli government intent on using the occasion of the first American presidential visit here in more than a decade to showcase the Iranian threat, that findings absolving Iranian involvement in the Syrian program were presented to Bush or his considerable entourage.

According to the Israeli official present at most of the Olmert-Bush events, the two sides were adhering to a coordinated policy of discretion regarding the disabled Syrian nuclear program, in large part as a means of maintaining regional and international focus on the Iranian nuclear threat.

The official refused all additional comment on the Syrian nuclear program and its connection — or lack thereof — to Iran.

“That problem appears to be solved for the time being,” the official said of the Syrian nuclear threat. “Now more than ever, we need to keep focused on the problem of Iran.”

Indeed, neither leader mentioned the Syrian nuclear threat during a Jan. 9 joint news conference or in multiple public addresses offered during the first day of Bush’s three-day visit here.

In contrast, both leaders repeatedly aired their respective concerns and grievances regarding Iran, including the prospective threat that a nuclear-capable Islamic Republic would pose to Israel and others throughout the region.

“It seems [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad distrusted A.Q. Khan and his agents in Dubai,” the official added. “He suspected they may be agents of the West preparing for him a trap.”

In a Dec. 19 interview with the Austrian newspaper Die Press, Assad was quoted as saying Syria rejected overtures thought to have come from Khan back in 2001. “Someone brought us a letter from a certain Khan. We did not know if the letter was genuine or a forgery by Israel to lure us into a trap. In any case ... we never met Khan,” Assad was quoted as saying.

In the Austrian report, Assad acknowledged that the site bombed by the Israel Air Force was “a military facility under construction,” but insisted, “That does not mean this was a nuclear facility.”

John Bolton, a former U.S. State Department official and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, was one of the first to publicly shed light on the target of Israel's Sept. 6 air operation, all details of which remain heavily classified by Israel's military censor.

In a Dec. 25 interview with political analyst Kenneth Timmerman, Bolton restated contentions that the site was a North Korean-supplied nuclear reactor and went further by suggesting the Syrian project provided a convenient vehicle through which Pyongyang could renege on international inspection and verification agreements.

"I think this facility [in Syria] that the Israelis bombed on Sept. 6 is an indication of yet another alternative [for cheating on international commitments]. ... How better to hide your North Korean program than to build it in Syria where nobody is looking!" Bolton was quoted as saying in an interview published by Newsmax.com.

Prior to conclusions from the Israeli investigations clearing Iran of proliferation links with Syria, Tehran was widely presumed to have provided funding, or at the very least indirect support, for the reactor project.

A strategic update by analyst Emily Landau, published in November by Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies, reflected prevailing conventional wisdom: "Considering the nature of relations between the two countries, it is hard to believe that Iran had no involvement in the decision [to pursue an elevated regional standing through nuclear capabilities]."

She wrote that Iran was the likely source of funding for the project and that "It's possible that Iran and North Korea hoped to use Syria as a 'shelter' for their respective technologies and nuclear components at a time when they would be subject to more intrusive international inspections."

E-mail: bopallrome@defensenews.com, vmuradian@defensenews.com.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-syria17jan17,1,1225988.story>

West says N. Korea, Syria had nuclear link

A European diplomat says the consensus is that a site in the Mideast nation bombed by Israel was part of an atomic program.

By Paul Richter, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

January 17, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Western governments have concluded that Syria and North Korea were collaborating on a nuclear weapons program at a mysterious site in the Syrian desert that was bombed by Israel last year, a senior European diplomat said Wednesday in a rare comment about the episode by a high-ranking official.

The diplomat said that after a review of available intelligence, Western governments have reached "some sort of common ground . . . that there seems to have been cooperation between Syria and North Korea" at the site. The official's remarks were made on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

Since the Israeli bombing in September, U.S. and allied officials have said little about the attack, the site or the possible existence of a Syrian nuclear weapons program, which could further destabilize the turbulent Middle East. Officials at the CIA and the State Department declined comment again Wednesday.

But the European official's remarks represented both an acknowledgment of the attack and the conclusion of Western governments that the site was a nuclear installation. Before Wednesday, leading Americans, Israelis and Western allies had avoided addressing either issue.

An international consensus that the governments in Pyongyang and Damascus have collaborated on nuclear weapons would mark a new setback to U.S. efforts to entice North Korea to scrap its nuclear armament program. It also could blunt efforts to pursue engagement with Syria, after apparent U.S. overtures before November's Mideast peace conference in Annapolis, Md.

Yet some observers have remained skeptical that the Syrian structure was part of any nuclear program.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, has said that on the basis of satellite photos, IAEA experts believe it unlikely the site housed a nuclear reactor. ElBaradei's comments came in a Jan. 8 interview with the Arabic-language newspaper Al Hayat.

Syrian officials have said repeatedly that the building was not a nuclear installation but an empty military structure. Israeli officials have acknowledged the attack in vague terms but have provided no detailed information concerning the site.

U.S. allies acknowledge that the evidence of weapons activity could be stronger.

The European diplomat acknowledged that the available intelligence is "not as much as we would love to have about that."

He also said it was not clear how far along the Syrian effort was, or what the Syrian government is doing now at the site.

There have been some signs of rebuilding at the site, on the banks of the Euphrates in eastern Syria. Recent satellite photos by a private Colorado firm, DigitalGlobe, show a new building on part of the site, based on photos kept on the firm's website. However, private analysts said it was unlikely the Syrians would try to duplicate facilities destroyed in the Israeli attack.

The European diplomat said it was "possible" that the structure that seems to be under construction at the site was being built simply to conceal the nature of past activities.

David Schenker, a former Pentagon specialist on Syria now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said a general agreement among Western governments that North Korea and Syria collaborated at a nuclear site would be "a pretty significant development."

There has been wide agreement that North Korea has helped Syria on its arms program. Pyongyang helped Damascus build Scud missiles, the crude, short-range weapons used by Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, as well as more advanced designs, Schenker noted.

Syria has sought to buy nuclear reactors in years past from several countries, including Russia, analysts say. International officials know of only one small reactor operating in Syria, a 30-kilowatt Chinese-supplied plant at Dayr Al Hajar. .

ElBaradei, in his Al Hayat interview, said IAEA officials would like to examine the Syrian site but have so far been barred by Damascus. Syria is a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which allows for periodic inspections of declared nuclear materials and activities.

U.S. officials have asked North Korea whether it has worked with Syria on a nuclear program; the North Koreans have denied it.

As part of the ongoing denuclearization talks between North Korea and five international powers, U.S. officials are awaiting a formal declaration of Pyongyang's nuclear activities, including any nuclear collaboration with Damascus. North Korea, however, has said it plans no further disclosures, jeopardizing what had been considered a promising deal.

The potential warming between U.S. and Syrian officials already had begun to encounter strains.

After hints of progress last fall, friction has developed recently over Lebanon's selection of a new government. U.S. officials are unhappy with what they consider Syrian meddling in the process.

On Tuesday, as President Bush toured the Middle East, a bomb exploded near a U.S. Embassy convoy in Beirut, killing three people and injuring more than 20, including two U.S. Embassy employees who are Lebanese.

Schenker said the bomb may have been intended as a warning from Syrian-supported militants to U.S. officials.

paul.richter@latimes.com

<http://www.state.gov/g/senk/99467.htm>

[As of 2008-01-19T16:30Z this page appears to have been removed from www.state.gov.]



North Korean Human Rights and U.S. National Security

Jay Lefkowitz, U.S. Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea

Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute

Washington, DC

January 17, 2008

[EXCERPT]

Thank you Nick for that introduction. I'm pleased to be back here at the American Enterprise Institute. I would like to thank AEI for holding this conference, and for its ongoing commitment to freedom for people around the world, including, of course, North Koreans.

RECENT EVENTS

Quite a lot has happened in regard to North Korea since I last spoke at AEI nearly two years ago. That was not long after a joint statement had been issued six-party talks in September 2005, in which North Korea promised anew to abandon its nuclear weapons and rejoin the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. Talks had begun two years earlier after it became clear that North Korea had not ended its nuclear program as required under the 1994 Agreed Framework. Not long after the speech, I was making plans to visit the Kaesong Industrial Complex inside North Korea to assess human rights conditions, when the regime tested ballistic missiles on July 4, 2006.

I was again considering a trip when the regime conducted a nuclear test that October. Economists teach us that correlation does not prove causality, but I have remained wary of announcing future travel to North Korea for fear of what might happen next!

About this time last year, the North Korean regime and the other five negotiating parties reached the February 13 agreement, under which North Korea promised the abandonment of one of its known nuclear facilities and the full disclosure of all nuclear activities in return for economic and energy assistance and other inducements, including the normalization of relations. An initial requirement that North Korea "discuss" all its nuclear activities within 60 days of the agreement was not met, and it has since missed a December 31 deadline to disclose fully its activities. Recently, the regime said it will strengthen its "war deterrent."

This is rather unfortunate as it signals that North Korea is not serious about disarming in a timely manner. It is a regrettable development for our security, but it is also bad for North Korea. It is unlikely the regime will get from the international community a better deal than the current one.

In other recent developments, the Congressional Research Service noted in a study last month that there are “reports from reputable sources that North Korea has provided arms and possibly training to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka... two of the most active terrorist groups...” This comes on the heels of widespread reports that North Korea may have been engaging in nuclear proliferation to Syria, which likely prompted the preemptive air strike by Israel four months ago.

Taken together, these developments should remind us that North Korea remains one of the hardest foreign policy problems for the U.S. to solve. Its conduct does not appear to be that of a government that is willing to come in from the cold. Moreover, it is increasingly clear that North Korea will remain in its present nuclear status when the Administration leaves office in one year.

[deletia]



The North Korean Problem: Toward a Diplomatic Solution in 2008?

Start: Thursday, January 17, 2008 2:30 PM
End: Thursday, January 17, 2008 4:00 PM
Location: Wohlstetter Conference Center, Twelfth Floor, AEI
1150 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
[Directions to AEI](#)

In the final year of George W. Bush's presidency, Washington finds itself engaged in continued multilateral negotiations with Pyongyang. In striking contrast to its earlier approaches, the Bush administration now emphasizes the desirability of a comprehensive diplomatic solution to the North Korean problem.

Are talks and renegotiated agreements realistic means of mitigating the international community's current concerns about the Kim Jong Il regime? If so, what should the diplomatic agenda be? How should the United States approach the unresolved diplomatic issues, which range from North Korea's nuclear disclosure and the prospective removal of the country from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism to Pyongyang's alleged abduction of foreign nationals and the regime's persistent violation of human rights? On January 17, key experts and practitioners will discuss these and other pressing questions looming on this year's policy horizon. Jay P. Lefkowitz, special envoy for North Korean human rights at the State Department, will give the keynote speech.

2:15 p.m.	Registration	
2:30	Keynote Speaker:	Jay P. Lefkowitz, U.S. Department of State
3:00	Panelists:	Larry Niksch, Congressional Research Service L. Gordon Flake, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation Michael Auslin, AEI
	Moderator:	Nicholas Eberstadt, AEI
4:00	Adjournment	



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
January 18, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Have you been able to figure out what Mr. Lefkowitz was talking about yesterday when he did his --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah.

QUESTION: Or why he was --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, I don't know. You can talk to Jay. I don't know if he'll want to, but let me make it very clear. He is the envoy for issues related to human rights in North Korea. I know Jay is a very bright, dedicated person, a public servant who has taken on this responsibility on behalf of the Secretary of State. He is not, however, somebody who speaks authoritatively about the six-party talks. He -- his comments certainly don't represent the views of the Administration. We believe that the six-party talks provides a forum, a mechanism and an opportunity to realize the goal of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. So I can only say that he must have been expressing his own opinions when he was speaking about his assessment of the six-party talks.

QUESTION: Well, he was -- you know, he was asked directly if he was representing the Administration position and he kind of waffled on that answer.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I can tell you he was not.

QUESTION: But -- well --

MR. MCCORMACK: I can tell you categorically --

QUESTION: You know, considering the --

MR. MCCORMACK: You'll hear the same thing from the White House.

QUESTION: Okay. But considering the sensitivity of this issue and the fact that the North Koreans often take comments from U.S. officials, whether they are speaking authoritatively for the Administration or not, they take them seriously. Is it -- are you worried that this is going to complicate the whole process?

MR. MCCORMACK: It shouldn't. It shouldn't if North Korea truly intends to follow through on all of its commitments to a --

QUESTION: But how do they know what to believe?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, they -- as you would --

QUESTION: You (inaudible) speak about the opaque nature --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- of their regime. Well, they don't have anyone here who is looking in -- you know, they could say the same thing about you guys.

MR. MCCORMACK: I hear you, Matt, but they read the AP, they tune into CNN and they read reports from your news organizations. So if you faithfully report my comments here and accurately reflect them, I think they'll get the message.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, so did Mr. Lefkowitz get a little talking-to about --

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm not going to talk about any internal --

QUESTION: Would you expect him to be making comments --

MR. MCCORMACK: (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Would you expect him to make similar -- be making similar comments in the future?

MR. MCCORMACK: I'd be surprised, but again, this is -- there is a first amendment here and one can express one's own opinion and I have to emphasize that those were his own opinions and not the views of the Administration.

QUESTION: Did he make that clear to people in this building today or last evening?

MR. MCCORMACK: I think he understands where we stand on the matter.

QUESTION: Did he seek authorization before speaking out like this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Not that I'm -- not that I'm aware of. Again, let me repeat the only thing that I can say --

QUESTION: Is he going to in the future?

MR. MCCORMACK: What's that?

QUESTION: Is he going to in the future if he didn't this time?

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, Arshad, I don't know. You know, I don't know. Look, he has a job to do and with respect to being the envoy on the issue of North Korea and human rights. That's his lane. His lane is not talking about the six-party talks, the status thereof, his assessment for the prospects of success. I don't know if I can make it any more clear than that.

QUESTION: Well, except that he did speak about the six-party talks. So he was out of his lane?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yes. He was expressing his own opinions.

QUESTION: And can you tell us, has he been told that he was out of his lane?

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm not going to -- I'm not going to get into that.

QUESTION: Why is that such a sensitive question? I mean, if you're really trying to convince the North Koreans that this Administration isn't split down the middle --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- that there are some hawks who agree with the kind of John Boltons of the world who are fighting against what Chris Hill is trying to do or arguing against it.

MR. MCCORMACK: All I can tell you is --

QUESTION: You should say -- this guy has been told he was speaking out of turn.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, Matt, you know, we don't inquire every time your editors yell at you. (Laughter.) So --

QUESTION: I'd be happy to give you the details of all --

MR. MCCORMACK: I (inaudible) we would be quite busy, I know.

QUESTION: Well, I'm willing to --

MR. MCCORMACK: (inaudible)

QUESTION: I'd like to share those, if you're willing to tell me -- (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: Perhaps we can have a future discussion about that. But let me tell you that if you listened to what the President of the United States says, the Secretary of State says, and Ambassador Hill said, those are the people who are involved in the policy process who speak authoritatively. Of course, you hear from people like me as well. I'm speaking on behalf of Secretary Rice. Those are the people who have -- are sitting at the table making decisions about the policy. And at the end of the day, the only voice that matters is that of the President of the United States and this is his policy and I think you'll hear that from the White House. Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, does Mr. Lefkowitz -- does he still have his job?

MR. MCCORMACK: (Laughter.) He is still the envoy, yes.

QUESTION: For the moment.

MR. MCCORMACK: (Laughter.) He's still the envoy.

Yeah, Elise.

QUESTION: I mean, were these ideas that he's tried to advance in the Department? Or is this like the first --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Elise, I don't know. I mean, it doesn't really matter because it's --

QUESTION: I mean, are these views that shared that he shared with you?

MR. MCCORMACK: It's irrelevant. That's not his job. His job is to work on issues related to human rights in North Korea, not the six-party talks.

QUESTION: Well, part of his comments are saying that -- listen, we're not getting any -- we're not really going to get anywhere on the nuclear issue. I understand that's not part of his portfolio. But he's saying that the issue of human rights is not in the six-party talks. It should be and this needs to be more of a comprehensive dialogue with North Korea on the issue of human rights. I mean, specifically on his portfolio, he's saying that there's not enough attention put to human rights.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. But yeah, I don't think you're going to find anybody else who is more adamant in speaking out about the issue of human rights in North Korea than the President of the United States, followed by a close second by the Secretary of State. The fact of the matter is if you are successful in the six-party talks in reaching a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, you have a much different relationship between North Korea and the rest of the world. And certainly that opens up many, many different potential possibilities for North Korea as well as the North Korean people, on top of the fact, you have a much more stable security situation in the region. So any idea that somehow this President and this Secretary of State are not concerned about human rights in North Korea just couldn't be further from the truth.

QUESTION: So you would reject the idea that in an effort to rush to "yes" -- to get a "yes" on the agreement on security, you're not, you know, kind of giving them a pass at least for the foreseeable future on human rights?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, this is the first time that we've been accused of rushing the six-party talks. I think most of the questions that I've gotten over the past year in this room have talked about, well, why is this thing going so slowly. Well, we're going through this in a very deliberate way. We're not lowering the bar for anybody and we have made a lot of progress. We are now to a point where we're breaking new policy ground. You have the North Koreans. They are disabling the Yongbyon facility -- never happened before. We are working with them on a declaration. They haven't yet come forward with a complete declaration, but it's still our hope that they will and we're going to keep working with them on that. Once we have that, that is completely a new policy ground. And from that point on, you can think about a lot of other elements of that September 2005 agreement that you can implement, including getting to work on dismantling the entire North Korean nuclear program.

U.S. Sees Stalling by North Korea on Nuclear Pact

By HELENE COOPER

January 19, 2008

WASHINGTON — A debate is under way within the Bush administration over how long it can exercise patience with North Korea without jeopardizing the fulfillment of a nuclear agreement that President Bush has claimed as a foreign policy victory.

With North Korea sending signals that it may be trying to wait out Mr. Bush's time in office before making any more concessions, administration officials are grappling with how the United States should react.

The debate has fractured along familiar lines, with a handful of national security hawks in Vice President Dick Cheney's office and at the State Department arguing for a more confrontational approach with Pyongyang.

On the other side, Mr. Bush's lead North Korea nuclear negotiator, Christopher R. Hill, has argued that the United States should continue a more restrained approach, one that is widely credited with bringing about an agreement last year that is intended eventually to lead to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

While the restrained stance still appears to have support from Mr. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, it is coming under fire from conservative critics, both in and out of the administration.

In a public departure from administration policy, Jay Lefkowitz, a conservative lawyer who is Mr. Bush's envoy on North Korean human rights, said this week the North would likely "remain in its present nuclear status" when the next president took over in January 2009.

"North Korea is not serious about disarming in a timely manner," Mr. Lefkowitz told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "We should consider a new approach to North Korea."

At issue is a declaration that North Korea was supposed to make by the end of last year formally stating everything in its nuclear inventory. When the North missed that deadline, administration officials initially sought to minimize the significance of the lapse, but they have expressed increasing concern in the wake of a North Korean statement on Jan. 4, in which the North insisted that it had already disclosed everything that it needed to.

The North has cited a list of nuclear programs that it provided in November, but the United States has rejected the list as incomplete.

"Some people make the argument that we're just pursuing a policy of talks that go nowhere," said one administration official with knowledge of the debate within the administration.

John R. Bolton, the former United States ambassador to the United Nations, argued in a Wall Street Journal op-ed article last week that the Bush administration should dump the nuclear pact with North Korea because, he said, Pyongyang was not interested in giving up its nuclear program. “They’re in the classic North Korean role of deception,” Mr. Bolton said in an interview. “It’s like groundhog day; we’ve lived through this before.”

Mr. Bush said the two countries needed to resolve three sticking points: the number of warheads that North Korea has built; the amount of weapons-grade nuclear material produced by North Korea; and the need for North Korea to disclose that it has passed nuclear material to others.

The proliferation issue has taken on new importance after an Israeli strike in Syria in September, which American and Israeli officials said was conducted against a nuclear facility near the Euphrates River that was supplied with material from North Korea. Administration officials want North Korea to disclose what help it may have given Syria, although they also say that the help came before the North agreed to dismantle its nuclear reactor and disclose its nuclear programs.

Mr. Bolton and other critics of the agreement, including the officials in Mr. Cheney’s office, never liked the pact to begin with, and advocates of the deal with North Korea say their second-guessing is expected.

They argue that the Bush administration’s previous confrontational strategy with North Korea is part of what led to the North’s detonation of a nuclear device in October 2006.

Besides the United States and North Korea, the other parties to the nuclear pact include China, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

“People lambaste the six-party process, and sure, it offers no refuge for those in need of instant gratification,” Mr. Hill, the negotiator, said in an interview. “But when asked for alternatives” to the nuclear pact, Mr. Hill said, “even the noisiest critics fall silent.”

Administration officials say that the North has remained true to one part of the October agreement: It has made great strides in disabling and dismantling its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. “Bush can say, with credit, that he has achieved more than any other administration as far as dismantlement,” said Gary Samore, a vice president at the Council on Foreign Relations who helped negotiate the Clinton administration’s 1994 agreement with North Korea. “He can say that he managed to freeze further production, and handed the next administration a diplomatic process.”

But Bush administration officials say that they want more than just dismantlement on their record, and insist that they have not written off their chances of getting North Korea to make a complete declaration of its nuclear programs before the end of the administration.

Bush officials say they will not ultimately be able to verify that North Korea has got rid of its nuclear weapons program unless they first know what is in the program.

“The issue of the declaration is important because that which they declare must later be abandoned,” a senior administration official said.

The official, who asked that his name not be used because he was not authorized to speak publicly on the issue, said that the administration really wanted North Korea to provide an explanation for purchasing aluminum tubes that could be used to convert uranium gas into nuclear fuel.

In its Jan. 4 statement, North Korea accused the United States and the other countries in the six-party talks of renegeing on promises made under an October deal, including the shipment of one million tons of fuel and the removal of North Korea from the United States' list of states that sponsored terrorism.

So far, North Korea has received about 150,000 tons of fuel, and Bush administration officials say the removal of the North from the terrorism list will depend on whether it meets the requirements of the October deal.

North Korea agreed in October to dismantle its nuclear facilities and to disclose all of its past and present nuclear programs by the end of 2007 in return for 950,000 metric tons of fuel oil or its equivalent in economic aid. Last month, Mr. Bush reached out directly for the first time to the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il, holding out the prospect of normalized relations with the United States if North Korea fully disclosed all nuclear programs and got rid of its nuclear weapons.



Briefing En route Berlin, Germany
Secretary Condoleezza Rice
En route Berlin, Germany
January 22, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Can I ask about bilats (inaudible)? Do you get the sense that the Chinese and the Russians are confused at all about (inaudible) the Administration's position on North Korea after Mr. Lefkowitz's comments?

SECRETARY RICE: Since Jay Lefkowitz has nothing to do with the six-party talks and I would doubt very seriously that they would recognize the name, no, I don't think they're confused.

QUESTION: You don't think the Chinese (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: No.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) a Boston Journal editorial page doesn't (inaudible) suggested that he was (inaudible) the Administration.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I can tell you in no uncertain terms that he wasn't. He's the human rights envoy. That's what he knows. That's what he does. He doesn't work on the six-party talks. He doesn't know what's going on in the six-party talks and he certainly has no say in what American policy will be in the six-party talks.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: And by the way, the President has spoken as to what our policy is in the six-party talks. I think that's what --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: I know where the President stands and I know where I stand and those are the people who speak for American policy.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/947169.html>

Ex-U.S. envoy Bolton: Chance Bush will strike Iran near 'zero'

By Yuval Azoulay and Haaretz Service

Last update - 20:03 22/01/2008

Former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton said on Tuesday that there is almost no chance that U.S. President George W. Bush will approve a military strike on Iran before he leaves office in January 2009.

"It's close to zero percent chance that the Bush Administration will authorize military action against Iran before leaving office," he said.

Bolton addressed the Herzliya Conference of the Institute for Policy and Strategy, as part of a panel discussion on Iran's nuclear program.

He said the recent American intelligence assessment, according to which Iran halted its nuclear program in 2003, was a politically-motivated report intended to restrict the Bush Administration's room to maneuver.

"It seems that for the next few years the United States will be a bystander to the process," Bolton said.

Bolton also said that Israel's "stunningly successful" military strike on Syria last September could constitute a precedent for a similar attack on Iran in the future.

The Israel Air Force attacked a structure in northeast Syria that foreign media reports said was a nuclear facility built with North Korean assistance. Syria and North Korea both denied the reports, and Israel has remained silent. Bolton had warned of nuclear cooperation between the two countries before the strike.

"Why wouldn't the government of Israel want to take the credit for a stunningly successful military strike?" Bolton asked.

Bolton said Israel and the United States know very well that Syria's close relations with North Korea have not been severed, but refused to elaborate. He said North Korea might sell nuclear know-how and a ready-to-use nuclear bomb to the highest bidder.

"The proliferation of nuclear weapons in the middle east will start with North Korea. It counterfeits money, sells narcotics, and it will do anything for hard money," he said.

He insisted that Syria's nuclear efforts should be taken with the utmost seriousness, as North Korean expertise and Iranian willingness to fund are more available than ever.

He insisted that it be made known to the public that the facility that was hit was an offshoot of a joint Syrian, North Korean, and Iranian cooperation.

Bolton: Israel May Have to Strike Iran Soon

On: Thursday, January 24, 2008 - By: Israel e News

[EXCERPT]

Former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said on Monday [2008-01-21] that Israel may have to take military action to prevent its archfoe Iran from acquiring an atomic bomb.

Bolton also said that further UN sanctions against the Islamic republic will be ineffective in stopping Iran's controversial nuclear programme which Israel and the US believe is aimed at developing a bomb -- a claim denied by Tehran.

"One can say with some assurance that in the next year the use of force by the United States is highly unlikely," Bolton told AFP on the sidelines of the Herzliya conference on the balance of Israel's national security.

"That increases the pressure on Israel in that period of time... if it feels Iran is on the verge of acquiring that capability, it brings the decision point home to use force," he said.

The hawkish former diplomat said that after a US intelligence report published late last year that claimed Iran had suspended a nuclear weapons programme in 2003, the US was unlikely to take military action against it.

"The pressure is on Israel now after the National Intelligence Estimate because, I think, the likelihood of American use of force has been dramatically reduced," he said.

Ambassador Bolton devoted the first part of his speech to an attempt to push the Israeli press into revealing details of the strike against the suspected Syrian nuclear facility four months ago. "There is a lot that we don't know about the facility because of the veil of secrecy that the Israel government and the American government have tried to throw over it," he said.

"We don't know for example exactly what the facility was – whether it was a clone of the Yongbyon reactor; whether it was a uranium enrichment facility; whether it was a storage location for North Korean plutonium or plutonium based weapons," he added, and explained that he could speak freely at the conference because the American Constitution's First Amendment applied to him even when he was abroad (this elicited laughter from the audience).

Bolton calls Israeli press 'timid'

Bolton went on to list his conjectures: "We don't know if it was North Korea in effect renting space in Syria to recreate the North Korean program. We don't know if it was a sale of technology or equipment from North Korea directly to Syria and we don't know whether it was a joint venture perhaps between Syria and North Korea working together," he said. "Our governments, however, do know the answers to some of these questions."

He continued with a jab at Israel's media: "What I don't understand really is the timid nature of the Israeli press which I know knows a lot more about this strike than it's been willing to talk about. I am sure somewhere in the Israeli press there is a John Peter Zengler who is willing to risk something in order to give the public more information about this."

John Peter Zengler was an 18th century publisher who was arrested for libelous sedition after printing criticism of the governor of New York and then acquitted, in what is considered a landmark trial in the development of the freedom of the press in the U.S.

Bolton explained that this information is being withheld for fear that if it came out that North Korea once again, following its game plan, was engaged in nuclear proliferation contrary to its obligations, it would embarrass the U.S. which is seeking ways to back off of North Korea.

Iran 'noticed' IAF raid

Regarding the IAF Syria raid, Bolton said: "The daring and successful Israeli military strike... has obvious significance for the potential of a military strike against Iran's nuclear program. I think, given the debacle caused by our National Intelligence Estimate, that it's close to zero likelihood that President Bush will authorize use of military force against Iran's program before he leaves office, absent some dramatic new development."

He concluded: "Certainly in Teheran you can bet that they took careful notice of what the Israeli Defense Force did. Penetrating Russian supplied radars very similar to the air defenses that Teheran has; using techniques that could be very useful for a long range strike against Iran; this is the kind of operation that the Iranians need to continue to worry about. Because I think with the collapse of American policy, the Israeli strike against the Syrian / North Korea facility is the harbinger of what may be – absent regime change in Teheran – the last resort... Unless you are prepared to see Iran proceed unmolested toward a nuclear weapons capability, which this NIE has given them free rein to do in my judgment, you are coming very close to a decision point in this country of whether you will use military force to stop Iran."

[deletia]



Daily Press Briefing
Gonzalo R. Gallegos, Director, Office of Press Relations
Washington, DC
January 22, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Do you – on North Korea, they’re saying in a newspaper commentary that the U.S. is dragging its feet on its commitments to the nuclear deal and saying the U.S. is slowing progress on the deal.

MR. GALLEGOS: Yeah. Well, I have something on that. The U.S. has met and is meeting its commitments. As part of the February 13 agreement, the United States agreed to begin the process of removing the designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. We also agreed to advance the process of terminating the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act to North Korea. Criteria for removing a country’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism and lifting the application of the Trade with the Enemy Act – Trading with the Enemy Act are set forth in U.S. law. The U.S. action related to the terrorism designation and the Trading with the Enemy Act application are dependent on the – on North Korea’s fulfillment of the requirements

of U.S. law and its progress on addressing concerns on the nuclear issue and meeting its denuclearization commitments.

QUESTION: Is there any risk to this turning into a rift?

MR. GALLEGOS: We’re going to continue working with our close allies, Japan and South Korea, and our partners China and Russia, as well as North Korea, to deliver a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs, including its nuclear weapons and programs, facilities and proliferation activities and to complete the agreed disablement activities at the three core facilities at Yongbyon.

We’re going to make --

QUESTION: Is there any –

MR. GALLEGOS: We’ve been very clear in the past where we stand on this. Our policy has not changed. We’re going to continue.



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
January 23, 2008

Press Briefing by Dana Perino
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room
1:49 P.M. EST

[EXCERPT]

Q Regarding the removal in North Korea from the list of terrorist states, what is the United States government -- (inaudible) --

MS. PERINO: Well, regarding whether or not North Korea will be removed from the State Sponsor of Terrorism list, first and foremost, the ball is in North Korea's court right now. The agreement that we made with them is that there would be actions for actions. And right now, we are waiting on North Korea to release -- or to give to us their complete and accurate declaration of all of their nuclear activities, including proliferation activities. We don't have that yet from them; therefore, there's not any movement on any of the other parts of the agreement. So that's where we are right now. The ball is in their court. We are waiting for them.

Q That answer suggests, Dana, that the decision about whether to remove North Korea from the terror list is contingent on a quid pro quo, rather than on the merits of whether they should be on the list or not.

MS. PERINO: That's not what I was suggesting. So -- of course, there's a lot of factors that go into the President's decision as to whether or not to remove a country from the State Sponsor of Terrorism list. But where we are right now at this moment is waiting for North Korea to give to us their complete and accurate declaration that they said they would give to us last February.

Q So you're not concerned, for example, about the prospect that North Korea was proliferating with Syria --

MS. PERINO: I said that all of those activities -- nuclear activities, proliferation, et cetera, and I'm not commenting on anything specific, but all of those activities have to be disclosed.

Q They're not anywhere close to being removed, then?

MS. PERINO: I would say it's definitely not imminent. And so we need to have that declaration before we could even talk about any next steps.

Q Thank you.

END 2:11 P.M. EST

<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/breaking/106578.html>

Syria strike invoked in Olmert's defense

Published: 01/24/2008

One of Ehud Olmert's confidants invoked last year's Israeli air strike in Syria as proof of the prime minister's military mettle.

Vice Premier Haim Ramon was asked in a Channel Ten television interview broadcast Wednesday [2008-01-23] about the government's decision-making on security issues, a topic of pressing public interest ahead of next week's publication of an inquiry's final report on the setbacks of the Second Lebanon War.

"You all heard, from foreign sources, what happened at the beginning of September in Syria," Ramon said.

"The process of decision-making ahead of the event was, according to everyone involved in it, extraordinary - in terms of deliberations, organization, preparation, and considering the alternatives."

Israel issued a blanket gag on descriptions of the Sept. 6 bombing run, forcing local media to rely on foreign reports that suggested the target was a nascent Syrian nuclear reactor.

Though he stopped short of confirming this, Ramon's remarks - the most expansive by any Israeli official - drew charges that he was exploiting classified information in a bid to boost popular support for Olmert and off-set the criticism of the Winograd Commission of inquiry.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3498420,00.html>

Olmert expresses surprise over Ramon's Syria remarks

Published: **01.24.08**, 17:21 / Israel News

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says he was surprised about Vice Premier Haim Ramon's remarks regarding Israel's strike on a Syrian site last year. In an interview to Channel 10 Wednesday, Ramon praised the decision-making process that led to the operation.

"I was surprised by Ramon's words. They were not coordinated with me," Olmert said following a tour of the Arava region. (Roni Sofer)

<http://www.cfr.org/publication/15340/samore.html?>

Samore: North Korea May Delay Nuclear Treaty Implementation Until 2009

Interviewee:

Gary Samore, Vice President, Director of Studies, and Maurice R. Greenberg Chair

Interviewer:

Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor

January 25, 2008

Gary Samore, an arms control official in the Clinton administration, says the prevailing view in the Bush administration is that North Korea is unlikely to carry out the terms of the international nuclear disarmament agreement it signed in February 2007 until there is a new president in the White House. He says U.S. officials believe that “the North Koreans are certainly not, in the remainder of this year, going to give up their nuclear weapons.”

There’s been a certain amount of public confusion over whether North Korea is complying with the agreement it made at the Six-Party Talks last year, to close down the Yongbyon reactor and also provide full declaration of its past nuclear activities by last December 31 and eventually to close down all these activities. What’s causing this confusion?

You have to separate the two steps that North Korea was required to take. The first step was to disable the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. North Korea, in fact, has taken most of the steps required to disable the five-megawatt reactor. So it would not be easy for North Korea to resume production of plutonium. At the same time it appears that the reprocessing plant at the Yongbyon facility is still intact, so in theory, if the North Koreans wanted to play hardball, if they wanted to create a crisis, they could reprocess the spent fuel they already have on hand to recover enough plutonium for a weapon or two. They still have a threat in their arsenal even though the five-megawatt reactor has been pretty much disabled.

Weren’t they supposed to close down the reprocessing plant too?

Yes, part of the agreement is to disable both the reactor and the reprocessing facility. But the North Koreans have slowed down the disablement, in part because they are complaining that the heavy fuel oil, which they are getting paid in return for disabling the facilities, has been slow in coming. In part, this is because the second step of the process, the “nuclear declaration,” has completely gone off the rail. When Christopher Hill, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, was in Pyongyang in November, he was shown a draft declaration by the North Koreans. Hill told them that the declaration was completely inadequate in terms of the amount of plutonium that it declared, in terms of its explanation of North Korea’s secret uranium enrichment, and in terms of what the North said about possible nuclear exports to Syria. Hill told the North Koreans that unless they gave him a more credible, plausible declaration he would not be able to sell it back in Washington. In return for a plausible declaration, the United States has promised to take North Korea off the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The process is stuck now because North Korea has not given Hill a plausible declaration.

Is there a new deadline?

I don't think the administration wants to set a deadline. It is hoping that when the new South Korean government takes office in February—the new president-elect, Lee Myung-bak, has campaigned on a platform of being tougher with North Korea—that this might influence the North Koreans to make a more forthcoming declaration. That remains to be seen. It may be that the North Koreans have decided they are just going to freeze the process and wait until the next U.S. president takes office and then resume the negotiations. They may come forward with a more forthcoming declaration in the hopes of getting off the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Or they might, if they want to escalate, threaten to stop the disablement process and to actually separate plutonium from the spent fuel they have on hand. They have options in front of them.

In an article by nuclear experts David Albright and Jacqueline Shire that appeared in the Washington Post on Thursday [January 24, 2008], they said that North Korea had revealed that it had a separated plutonium stockpile of thirty kilograms and denied that it had a uranium enrichment program. Were the North Koreans that specific?

That's my understanding. The problem is that [chief U.S. negotiator] Chris Hill was expecting a much bigger number. Privately he has been saying the number would be closer to sixty. The natural question is why did the North Koreans come in with a very low number? David Albright is right; thirty kilograms is still within the range, because we don't know of course how much plutonium they actually have, but it's at the lower end of the range. The natural suspicion is that North Korea has deliberately given us a low number so they can hide the other twenty or thirty kilograms that they have. Chris Hill just thought that thirty kilograms wasn't credible enough to take back to Washington. On the uranium-enrichment side, we know that we have extremely good information that the North Koreans were out trying to buy large quantities of specialized materials of components for enrichment programs.

Some of their efforts to buy this specialty material were intercepted and stopped mid-shipment. We know that they were trying to buy very large quantities; enough for thousands of centrifuges. For the North Koreans to come back and say "we didn't really have an enrichment program" just is not plausible.

This is the issue which halted the North Korea-U.S. talks in 2002, wasn't it?

Absolutely. The CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] concluded that North Korea was cheating on the Agreed Framework, signed by the Clinton administration in 1994, by pursuing the secret enrichment program. That judgment was correct. What we don't know is how far that program went. We know that North Korea got a small quantity of centrifuge machines from Pakistan. We know that they were out trying to buy much larger quantities of raw material, which would allow them to reverse engineer and build thousands of centrifuge machines. But how far that program proceeded and what the status is now, we just don't know. Unless North Korea comes forward with a more plausible explanation rather than just denying everything, then the whole process of an accurate declaration is at a standstill.

If they don't comply then they don't get the oil?

No, there's a separation for disablement of Yongbyon, for which they are getting the oil, and the declaration, for which they would be taken off the list of state sponsors of terrorism. In theory, the

process could be on hold for the rest of this year. As long as they don't reverse disablement, they would continue to get paid the heavy fuel oil.

What do they still have to do on disablement?

My understanding is they have done most of what needs to be done on the five-megawatt reactor. There's still a question of how to dispose of the existing spent fuel, which has to be removed from the reactor and stored in a cooling pond right on site. As I understand it, they still have to take some steps to disable the reprocessing facility but that's on the very end of the list. My guess is that the North Koreans are holding that in reserve as it allows them to threaten to resume reprocessing.

Let's talk about Jay Lefkowitz, who is a human rights ambassador on North Korea. He says the North Koreans are not going to comply and it's all a failure by the Bush administration. What do you make of his comments?

He said publicly what a lot of administration officials believe privately—that the North Koreans are certainly not, in the remainder of this year, going to give up their nuclear weapons. And it looks like they may not even submit a credible declaration, in which case the whole process would stop. In that case, the next administration would have to pick the whole issue up.

Do you think the North Koreans now figure they should wait for the next administration?

Everybody in Asia is beginning to think beyond the Bush administration, and in the view of all the important players—China, South Korea, Japan and North Korea—the Bush administration has very little time left in order to make much more progress with the North Koreans. That doesn't mean it is all over. It is still possible that the North Koreans would make a credible declaration, in which case, the United States would remove them from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and the next steps in the process would begin, which would include negotiations for a peace treaty, and negotiations for the dismantlement and removal of North Korea's nuclear weapons. But the longer this stalemate goes on, the more and more it looks like the North Koreans might have decided they would be better off trying to make a deal with the next administration.

That's one subject that most candidates seem to have avoided speaking about. I know they all have prepared statements.

It's true. What is interesting is that the Democrats are more sympathetic and supportive of the new approach the Bush administration has taken than the Republican candidates. At least in the past, Senator John McCain [R-AZ] has been very critical of this kind of approach which the Clinton administration began in trying to negotiate these kinds of incremental arms-control agreements with North Korea. So my guess is that Senator McCain is not very sympathetic with what President Bush has done, but there is very little value in raising this issue as long as the situation seems to be under control. It is certainly not a crisis that any of the candidates have to address.

Do we know for sure how many nuclear weapons North Korea possesses?

We can guesstimate based on our estimates of how much plutonium they have and how much would be required for each weapon. Those are the two variables. It is reasonable to say that they have something

on the order of less than a dozen weapons unless they have some sources of plutonium that we don't know about.

What kinds of weapons are these?

These would be simple weapons.

Missile warheads?

It is another uncertainty. We don't know if the North Koreans can build warheads small enough to be delivered by the No-dong missile. That's an interesting issue because we know that the Pakistani bomb will fit on the No-dong missile. That's why Pakistan bought the No-dong missile. The question which has never been fully answered is whether in addition to providing centrifuge technology, the Pakistanis might have provided nuclear-warhead technology to North Korea, in which case the North Koreans would have in their possession the nuclear design that is capable of being delivered by missile. That's just speculation. We don't know the answer.

What about the Syrian connection—the secret Israeli bombing of a facility in Syria, said to have been put together with North Korean help?

I still hear different things. The Israelis are absolutely convinced that they bombed a nuclear reactor under construction and that the North Koreans were providing technical assistance and material for that project. Some people in the U.S. administration accept that. Others are more skeptical and say it was a kind of military facility but whether it was nuclear is really in doubt. Amazingly enough, unlike most situations, not enough has come out in the public domain to make an independent judgment. The people who are reviewing the actual evidence are not talking.

White House Mulls Giving North Korea Some Wiggle Room on Nuke Declaration

Friday, January 25, 2008

By James Rosen

WASHINGTON — With North Korea almost a month overdue on its obligation to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs and materiel, the Bush administration — under increasing pressure from American conservatives to take a harder line with Pyongyang, or abandon the talks altogether — is now considering accepting a declaration that would be less than complete, carving out the two most contentious issues for later resolution, sources told FOX News.

The foreign diplomatic sources, representing countries involved in the six-party nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea — a group of nations that includes the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea — told FOX News that the U.S. envoy to the talks, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, has floated the idea of allowing the North Koreans to exclude from their declaration both their highly enriched uranium (HEU) program and their nuclear collaboration with Syria, with the understanding that these issues would be revisited later.

However, Hill said the idea he is considering accepting a less-than-complete declaration from Pyongyang is "completely inaccurate." Such an option, Hill told FOX News in an e-mail message, "has never been under consideration."

The sources said such a less-than-complete declaration would mirror the very proposal made by the North Koreans in November, at which U.S. negotiators scoffed, dismissing the incomplete submission as mere "research" instead of a real declaration. But the North Koreans have since "put their foot down," said an American analyst familiar with the Bush administration's internal deliberations, and made clear their intention to withhold the declaration unless and until the U.S. capitulates swiftly on one of North Korea's key demands: that the country be removed, or "de-listed," from the State Department's list of nations that sponsor terrorism, where North Korea has had a spot since 1988. As another sign of Pyongyang's hardening position, analysts point to its recent and abrupt cancellation of a planned working group meeting between North and South Korean officials on the establishment of a rail line between the two Koreas.

In private talks, FOX News has learned, the North Koreans have also claimed that none of the three written agreements negotiated in the six-party process — neither the landmark September 19, 2005 agreement nor the implementation accords of February 13 and October 3, 2007 — requires the North to declare any activities with regard to proliferation with countries like Syria. The text of the September 19 agreement committed the North only to "returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards," nuclear accords from which the North has formally withdrawn but which, if observed, would bar the North from covertly exporting nuclear technology. Likewise, in the text of the October 3 implementation accord, North Korea committed not to "transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how beyond its borders." However, by that point, the suspected nuclear facility in Syria that was allegedly built with North Korean assistance had already been targeted by the Israeli Air Force and apparently destroyed.

"This is a matter of interpretation," said one foreign diplomat. But American conservatives, predictably, do not see it this way, and have forecast a "wild" eruption on Capitol Hill if North Korea is

taken off the terrorism list despite having covertly exported nuclear technology to Syria, another country on the State Department's terror list. These critics of Assistant Secretary Hill's approach — which sources say has the full backing of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice — cite the post-9/11 Bush Doctrine, which was perhaps most succinctly articulated by President Bush on September 25, 2001, during a joint appearance at the White House with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi: "[I]f you harbor a terrorist, if you aid a terrorist, if you hide terrorists, you're just as guilty as the terrorists." Thus North Korea cannot have earned the right to be de-listed, these critics argue, if it has "aided" a fellow terror-sponsoring state like Syria, let alone by providing it with nuclear technology.

A foreign diplomat suggested that the idea of carving out the HEU program and Syrian issue for later resolution will not fly because of the strong opposition it will encounter among American conservatives. "These two issues got too much publicity here," the diplomat said.

As recently as January 7, when he was visiting Tokyo, Assistant Secretary Hill appeared utterly unwilling to accept an incomplete declaration from North Korea, saying "complete means complete... We can't go with something that's 80 percent or 90 percent. We really need to go with something that's complete." The Japanese, whose top priority in the six-party Talks has been to determine the status of roughly two-dozen Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea over the past two decades, typically take the hardest line with Pyongyang, and are keen to see the North remain on the U.S. terror list until the abductions issue is fully resolved.

Yet on the same trip, just three days later, during a stop in Beijing, China — the North's chief patron and ally in the talks — Hill hinted at a sudden willingness to accept an incomplete declaration, if only to restore momentum to the stalemated six-party process. Because the North Koreans' original submission contained "some glaring omissions," Hill told reporters on January 10, the U.S. considered whether to "invite them to submit an incorrect and incomplete declaration and then start haggling over that. But instead we chose to continue the discussion with the idea that when they do produce a declaration, it ought to be pretty close to being final."

Besides the expected backlash from domestic conservatives within the Bush administration and on Capitol Hill, secretaries Rice and Hill face three major problems in their efforts to move beyond the impasse over the North Korean declaration. First, according to one foreign diplomat, is that the North "does not trust the U.S. promises," particularly on the de-listing issue.

Second is the clock: A number of sources contacted by FOX News suggested North Korea is determined to wait out the end of the Bush administration, in the hope, as one American analyst put it, that "another Madeleine Albright will come to Pyongyang and start toasting champagne glasses" with the regime of Kim Jong Il. This notion was most forcefully expressed in recent days by Jay Lefkowitz, the State Department human rights envoy who told the American Enterprise Institute on January 17 that North Korea is "not serious about disarming in a timely manner" — remarks that earned swift and unusually severe repudiation from State Department spokesmen and Secretary Rice herself.

A third problem, and perhaps the most serious, is that Washington's allies in the six-party process have grown openly skeptical about the reliability of American intelligence on the North's HEU program and its collaboration with Syria and other rogue states. This skepticism is borne of the celebrated intelligence failure with regard to Iraq's WMD programs, and, too, the seeming about-face, on the issue of Iran's nuclear program, contained in the National Intelligence Estimate released December 2. "If the

U.S. shared its information regarding the North Korean nuclear programs with the other parties [in the six-party process]," said one foreign diplomat, "and all agree it is really strong evidence, then it would be much easier to get the North to confess."

This diplomat also pointed to the public acknowledgment by senior Bush administration officials in early 2007 that their confidence in the U.S. intelligence data showing that North Korea was pursuing an HEU program had been downgraded from "high" to "at least moderate."

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/25/AR2008012502766_3.html

A Conversation With Ehud Barak

By Lally Weymouth

Saturday, January 26, 2008; A17

[EXCERPTS]

Newsweek-The Post's Lally Weymouth interviewed Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak in Davos, Switzerland, this week. Excerpts:

Can you say anything about the raid that Israel waged into Syria, supposedly against a nuclear facility, last September?

No.

Do you think that the Syrian track should be pursued?

I think that we have shown . . . a respect for Syria, its interests and its leaders. We expect from them to do the same regarding Israel. If this basic kind of element will be there, I think a Syrian track is . . . potentially positive.

I thought the U.S. has opposed Israel negotiating with Syria.

I think they realized in recent years that we understand the Syrian issue better.



KCNA Ridicules U.S. Mandarin's Reckless Remarks

Pyongyang, **January 28** (KCNA) -- Some days ago, Lefkowitz, special envoy for North Korean human rights issue of the U.S., was impudent enough to poke his nose into the nuclear issue, only to bring shame to himself.

What he uttered is nothing but rubbish which admits of no argument as it only provoked wry laughter.

But what merits attention here is that some American guys who do not know even where they stand, to say nothing of the way the world goes, are watching for a chance to scuttle the processes to settle the nuclear issue and improve the DPRK-U.S. relations, displeased with them.

According to the International Herald Tribune, a few hard-line officials in charge of national security at the office of the vice-president and the State Department were reported to have asserted a more confrontational approach towards the DPRK.

It was in this context that Lefkowitz underlined the need to include the human rights issue in the agenda items of the six-party talks and complained that China and south Korea are not pressurizing north Korea at the American Enterprise Institute, a center of conservatives.

This assertion was, in every respect, prompted by a dangerous attempt to sacrifice the process for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula directly related to the interests of the U.S. and other countries concerned and the peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia for meeting their selfish purpose as it is a revelation of their extreme uneasiness created by their impending political bankruptcy.

As well known, the U.S. conservative hardliners led by neo-conservatives are now seized with extreme uneasiness and anxiety, marginalized in the political arena for the catastrophic consequences entailed by their extreme and subjective way of thinking.

They have neither anything new nor future.

Lefkowitz, Bolton and others are keen to misuse the process for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula for achieving their political ambition under the slogan of hard-line and conservative policy which has already proven bankrupt inside the U.S. Nothing is graver mistake and crime against history than this.

The hackneyed methods used by the U.S. during the Cold War will never work on the DPRK although they may work on others. The six-party talks cannot be treated the same as the "Helsinki process" under any circumstances.

The agreements reached at the six-party talks on the principle of simultaneous action and progress made in this course are welcomed by all countries. Lefkowitz and others who seek to scuttle them cannot escape public censure and jeer.

The reality goes to prove that the negotiated settlement of the nuclear issue remains the general will of the international community and the trend of the times.

We would like to question them what they really seek by turning back the clock.

Such nonsensical remarks would never help stem the trend of the times.

Now that the denuclearization process has reached an important phase the U.S. should refrain from irresponsible remarks that may deflect it from its focus and countries concerned should thoroughly abide by the principle of "action for action."

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/02/11/080211fa_fact_hersh



ILLUSTRATION: GUY BILLOUT

Israel and the U.S. have avoided comment on press reports about a nuclear facility.

Annals of National Security

A Strike in the Dark

What did Israel bomb in Syria?

by Seymour M. Hersh

February 11, 2008

[Accessed 2008-02-04T15:40Z]

Sometime after midnight on September 6, 2007, at least four low-flying Israeli Air Force fighters crossed into Syrian airspace and carried out a secret bombing mission on the banks of the Euphrates River, about ninety miles north of the Iraq border. The seemingly unprovoked bombing, which came after months of heightened tension between Israel and Syria over military exercises and troop buildups by both sides along the Golan Heights, was, by almost any definition, an act of war. But in the immediate aftermath nothing was heard from the government of Israel. In contrast, in 1981, when the Israeli Air Force destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, near Baghdad, the Israeli government was triumphant, releasing reconnaissance photographs of the strike and permitting the pilots to be widely interviewed.

Within hours of the attack, Syria denounced Israel for invading its airspace, but its public statements were incomplete and contradictory—thus adding to the mystery. A Syrian military spokesman said only that Israeli planes had dropped some munitions in an unpopulated area after being challenged by Syrian air defenses, “which forced them to flee.” Four days later, Walid Moallem, the Syrian foreign minister, said during a state visit to Turkey that the Israeli aircraft had used live ammunition in the attack, but insisted that there were no casualties or property damage. It was not until October 1st that Syrian President Bashar Assad, in an interview with the BBC, acknowledged that the Israeli warplanes

had hit their target, which he described as an “unused military building.” Assad added that Syria reserved the right to retaliate, but his comments were muted.

Despite official silence in Tel Aviv (and in Washington), in the days after the bombing the American and European media were flooded with reports, primarily based on information from anonymous government sources, claiming that Israel had destroyed a nascent nuclear reactor that was secretly being assembled in Syria, with the help of North Korea. Beginning construction of a nuclear reactor in secret would be a violation of Syria’s obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and could potentially yield material for a nuclear weapon.

The evidence was circumstantial but seemingly damning. The first reports of Syrian and North Korean nuclear cooperation came on September 12th in the Times and elsewhere. By the end of October, the various media accounts generally agreed on four points: the Israeli intelligence community had learned of a North Korean connection to a construction site in an agricultural area in eastern Syria; three days before the bombing, a “North Korean ship,” identified as the Al Hamed, had arrived at the Syrian port of Tartus, on the Mediterranean; satellite imagery strongly suggested that the building under construction was designed to hold a nuclear reactor when completed; as such, Syria had crossed what the Israelis regarded as the “red line” on the path to building a bomb, and had to be stopped. There were also reports—by ABC News and others—that some of the Israeli intelligence had been shared in advance with the United States, which had raised no objection to the bombing.

The Israeli government still declined to make any statement about the incident. Military censorship on dispatches about the raid was imposed for several weeks, and the Israeli press resorted to recycling the disclosures in the foreign press. In the first days after the attack, there had been many critical stories in the Israeli press speculating about the bombing, and the possibility that it could lead to a conflict with Syria. Larry Derfner, a columnist writing in the Jerusalem Post, described the raid as “the sort of thing that starts wars.” But, once reports about the nuclear issue and other details circulated, the domestic criticism subsided.

At a news conference on September 20th, President George W. Bush was asked about the incident four times but said, “I’m not going to comment on the matter.” The lack of official statements became part of the story. “The silence from all parties has been deafening,” David Ignatius wrote in the Washington Post, “but the message to Iran”—which the Administration had long suspected of pursuing a nuclear weapon—“is clear: America and Israel can identify nuclear targets and penetrate air defenses to destroy them.”

It was evident that officials in Israel and the United States, although unwilling to be quoted, were eager for the news media to write about the bombing. Early on, a former officer in the Israel Defense Forces with close contacts in Israeli intelligence approached me, with a version of the standard story, including colorful but, as it turned out, unconfirmable details: Israeli intelligence tracking the ship from the moment it left a North Korean port; Syrian soldiers wearing protective gear as they off-loaded the cargo; Israeli intelligence monitoring trucks from the docks to the target site. On October 3rd, the London Spectator, citing much of the same information, published an overheated account of the September 6th raid, claiming that it “may have saved the world from a devastating threat,” and that “a very senior British ministerial source” had warned, “If people had known how close we came to World War Three that day there’d have been mass panic.”

However, in three months of reporting for this article, I was repeatedly told by current and former intelligence, diplomatic, and congressional officials that they were not aware of any solid evidence of ongoing nuclear-weapons programs in Syria. It is possible that Israel conveyed intelligence directly to senior members of the Bush Administration, without it being vetted by intelligence agencies. (This process, known as “stovepiping,” overwhelmed U.S. intelligence before the war in Iraq.) But Mohamed ElBaradei, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations group responsible for monitoring compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, said, “Our experts who have carefully analyzed the satellite imagery say it is unlikely that this building was a nuclear facility.”

Joseph Cirincione, the director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C., think tank, told me, “Syria does not have the technical, industrial, or financial ability to support a nuclear-weapons program. I’ve been following this issue for fifteen years, and every once in a while a suspicion arises and we investigate and there’s nothing. There was and is no nuclear-weapons threat from Syria. This is all political.” Cirincione castigated the press corps for its handling of the story. “I think some of our best journalists were used,” he said.

A similar message emerged at briefings given to select members of Congress within weeks of the attack. The briefings, conducted by intelligence agencies, focussed on what Washington knew about the September 6th raid. One concern was whether North Korea had done anything that might cause the U.S. to back away from ongoing six-nation talks about its nuclear program. A legislator who took part in one such briefing said afterward, according to a member of his staff, that he had heard nothing that caused him “to have any doubts” about the North Korean negotiations—“nothing that should cause a pause.” The legislator’s conclusion, the staff member said, was “There’s nothing that proves any perfidy involving the North Koreans.”

Morton Abramowitz, a former Assistant Secretary of State for intelligence and research, told me that he was astonished by the lack of response. “Anytime you bomb another state, that’s a big deal,” he said. “But where’s the outcry, particularly from the concerned states and the U.N.? Something’s amiss.”

Israel could, of course, have damning evidence that it refuses to disclose. But there are serious and unexamined contradictions in the various published accounts of the September 6th bombing.

The main piece of evidence to emerge publicly that Syria was building a reactor arrived on October 23rd, when David Albright, of the Institute for Science and International Security, a highly respected nonprofit research group, released a satellite image of the target. The photograph had been taken by a commercial satellite company, DigitalGlobe, of Longmont, Colorado, on August 10th, four weeks before the bombing, and showed a square building and a nearby water-pumping station. In an analysis released at the same time, Albright, a physicist who served as a weapons inspector in Iraq, concluded that the building, as viewed from space, had roughly the same length and width as a reactor building at Yongbyon, North Korea’s main nuclear facility. “The tall building in the image may house a reactor under construction and the pump station along the river may have been intended to supply cooling water to the reactor,” Albright said. He concluded his analysis by posing a series of rhetorical questions that assumed that the target was a nuclear facility:

How far along was the reactor construction project when it was bombed? What was the extent of

nuclear assistance from North Korea? Which reactor components did Syria obtain from North Korea or elsewhere, and where are they now?

He was later quoted in the Washington Post saying, “I’m pretty convinced that Syria was trying to build a nuclear reactor.”

When I asked Albright how he had pinpointed the target, he told me that he and a colleague, Paul Brannan, “did a lot of hard work”—culling press reports and poring over DigitalGlobe imagery—“before coming up with the site.” Albright then shared his findings with Robin Wright and other journalists at the Post, who, after checking with Administration officials, told him that the building was, indeed, the one targeted by the Israelis. “We did not release the information until we got direct confirmation from the Washington Post,” he told me. The Post’s sources in the Administration, he understood, had access to far more detailed images obtained by U.S. intelligence satellites. The Post ran a story, without printing the imagery, on October 19th, reporting that “U.S. and foreign officials familiar with the aftermath of the attack” had concluded that the site had the “signature,” or characteristics, of a reactor “similar in structure to North Korea’s facilities”—a conclusion with which Albright then agreed. In other words, the Albright and the Post reports, which appeared to independently reinforce each other, stemmed in part from the same sources.

Albright told me that before going public he had met privately with Israeli officials. “I wanted to be sure in my own mind that the Israelis thought it was a reactor, and I was,” he said. “They never explicitly said it was nuclear, but they ruled out the possibility that it was a missile, chemical-warfare, or radar site. By a process of elimination, I was left with nuclear.”

Two days after his first report, Albright released a satellite image of the bombed site, taken by DigitalGlobe on October 24th, seven weeks after the bombing. The new image showed that the target area had been levelled and the ground scraped. Albright said that it hinted of a coverup—cleansing the bombing site could make it difficult for weapons inspectors to determine its precise nature. “It looks like Syria is trying to hide something and destroy the evidence of some activity,” he told the Times. “But it won’t work. Syria has got to answer questions about what it was doing.” This assessment was widely shared in the press. (In mid-January, the Times reported that recent imagery from DigitalGlobe showed that a storage facility, or something similar, had been constructed, in an obvious rush, at the bombing site.)

Proliferation experts at the International Atomic Energy Agency and others in the arms-control community disputed Albright’s interpretation of the images. “People here were baffled by this, and thought that Albright had stuck his neck out,” a diplomat in Vienna, where the I.A.E.A. is headquartered, told me. “The I.A.E.A. has been consistently telling journalists that it is skeptical about the Syrian nuclear story, but the reporters are so convinced.”

A second diplomat in Vienna acidly commented on the images: “A square building is a square building.” The diplomat, who is familiar with the use of satellite imagery for nuclear verification, added that the I.A.E.A. “does not have enough information to conclude anything about the exact nature of the facility. They see a building with some geometry near a river that could be identified as nuclear-related. But they cannot credibly conclude that is so. As far as information coming from open sources beyond imagery, it’s a struggle to extract information from all of the noise that comes from political agendas.”

Much of what one would expect to see around a secret nuclear site was lacking at the target, a former State Department intelligence expert who now deals with proliferation issues for the Congress said.

“There is no security around the building,” he said. “No barracks for the Army or the workers. No associated complex.” Jeffrey Lewis, who heads the non-proliferation program at the New America Foundation, a think tank in Washington, told me that, even if the width and the length of the building were similar to the Korean site, its height was simply not sufficient to contain a Yongbyon-size reactor and also have enough room to extract the control rods, an essential step in the operation of the reactor; nor was there evidence in the published imagery of major underground construction. “All you could see was a box,” Lewis said. “You couldn’t see enough to know how big it will be or what it will do. It’s just a box.”

A former senior U.S. intelligence official, who has access to current intelligence, said, “We don’t have any proof of a reactor—no signals intelligence, no human intelligence, no satellite intelligence.” Some well-informed defense consultants and former intelligence officials asked why, if there was compelling evidence of nuclear cheating involving North Korea, a member of the President’s axis of evil, and Syria, which the U.S. considers a state sponsor of terrorism, the Bush Administration would not insist on making it public.

When I went to Israel in late December, the government was still maintaining secrecy about the raid, but some current and former officials and military officers were willing to speak without attribution. Most were adamant that Israel’s intelligence had been accurate. “Don’t you write that there was nothing there!” a senior Israeli official, who is in a position to know the details of the raid on Syria, said, shaking a finger at me. “The thing in Syria was real.”

Retired Brigadier General Shlomo Brom, who served as deputy national-security adviser under Prime Minister Ehud Barak, told me that Israel wouldn’t have acted if it hadn’t been convinced that there was a threat. “It may have been a perception of a conviction, but there was something there,” Brom said. “It was the beginning of a nuclear project.” However, by the date of our talk, Brom told me, “The question of whether it was there or not is not that relevant anymore.”

Albright, when I spoke to him in December, was far more circumspect than he had been in October. “We never said ‘we know’ it was a reactor, based on the image,” Albright said. “We wanted to make sure that the image was consistent with a reactor, and, from my point of view, it was. But that doesn’t confirm it’s a reactor.”

The journey of the Al Hamed, a small coastal trader, became a centerpiece in accounts of the September 6th bombing. On September 15th, the Washington Post reported that “a prominent U.S. expert on the Middle East” said that the attack “appears to have been linked to the arrival . . . of a ship carrying material from North Korea labeled as cement.” The article went on to cite the expert’s belief that “the emerging consensus in Israel was that it delivered nuclear equipment.” Other press reports identified the Al Hamed as a “suspicious North Korean” ship.

But there is evidence that the Al Hamed could not have been carrying sensitive cargo—or any cargo—from North Korea. International shipping is carefully monitored by Lloyd’s Marine Intelligence Unit, which relies on a network of agents as well as on port logs and other records. In addition, most merchant ships are now required to operate a transponder device called an A.I.S., for automatic

identification system. This device, which was on board the Al Hamed, works in a manner similar to a transponder on a commercial aircraft—beaming a constant, very high-frequency position report. (The U.S. Navy monitors international sea traffic with the aid of dedicated satellites, at a secret facility in suburban Washington.)

According to Marine Intelligence Unit records, the Al Hamed, which was built in 1965, had been operating for years in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, with no indication of any recent visits to North Korea. The records show that the Al Hamed arrived at Tartus on September 3rd—the ship’s fifth visit to Syria in five months. (It was one of eight ships that arrived that day; although it is possible that one of the others was carrying illicit materials, only the Al Hamed has been named in the media.) The ship’s registry was constantly changing. The Al Hamed flew the South Korean flag before switching to North Korea in November of 2005, and then to Comoros. (Ships often fly flags of convenience, registering with different countries, in many cases to avoid taxes or onerous regulations.) At the time of the bombing, according to Lloyd’s, it was flying a Comoran flag and was owned by four Syrian nationals. In earlier years, under other owners, the ship seems to have operated under Russian, Estonian, Turkish, and Honduran flags. Lloyd’s records show that the ship had apparently not passed through the Suez Canal—the main route from the Mediterranean to the Far East—since at least 1998.

Among the groups that keep track of international shipping is Greenpeace. Martini Gotjé, who monitors illegal fishing for the organization and was among the first to raise questions about the Al Hamed, told me, “I’ve been at sea for forty-one years, and I can tell you, as a captain, that the Al Hamed was nothing—in rotten shape. You wouldn’t be able to load heavy cargo on it, as the floorboards wouldn’t be that strong.”

If the Israelis’ target in Syria was not a nuclear site, why didn’t the Syrians respond more forcefully? Syria complained at the United Nations but did little to press the issue. And, if the site wasn’t a partially built reactor, what was it?

During two trips to Damascus after the Israeli raid, I interviewed many senior government and intelligence officials. None of President Assad’s close advisers told me the same story, though some of the stories were more revealing—and more plausible—than others. In general, Syrian officials seemed more eager to analyze Israel’s motives than to discuss what had been attacked. “I hesitate to answer any journalist’s questions about it,” Faruq al-Shara, the Syrian Vice-President, told me. “Israel bombed to restore its credibility, and their objective is for us to keep talking about it. And by answering your questions I serve their objective. Why should I volunteer to do that?” Shara denied that his nation has a nuclear-weapons program. “The volume of articles about the bombing is incredible, and it’s not important that it’s a lie,” he said.

One top foreign-ministry official in Damascus told me that the target “was an old military building that had been abandoned by the Syrian military” years ago. But a senior Syrian intelligence general gave me a different account. “What they targeted was a building used for fertilizer and water pumps,” he said—part of a government effort to revitalize farming. “There is a large city”—Dayr az Zawr—“fifty kilometres away. Why would Syria put nuclear material near a city?” I interviewed the intelligence general again on my second visit to Damascus, and he reiterated that the targeted building was “at no time a military facility.” As to why Syria had not had a more aggressive response, if the target was so benign, the general said, “It was not fear—that’s all I’ll say.” As I left, I asked the general why Syria had not invited representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit the bombing site and

declare that no nuclear activity was taking place there. “They did not ask to come,” he said, and “Syria had no reason to ask them to come.”

An I.A.E.A. official dismissed that assertion when we spoke in Vienna a few days later. “The I.A.E.A. asked the Syrians to allow the agency to visit the site to verify its nature,” the I.A.E.A. official said.

“Syria’s reply was that it was a military, not a nuclear, installation, and there would be no reason for the I.A.E.A. to go there. It would be in their and everyone’s interest to have the I.A.E.A. visit the site. If it was nuclear, it would leave fingerprints.”

In a subsequent interview, Imad Moustapha, the Syrian Ambassador to Washington, defended Syria’s decision not to invite the I.A.E.A. inspectors. “We will not get into the game of inviting foreign experts to visit every site that Israel claims is a nuclear facility,” Moustapha told me. “If we bring them in and they say there is nothing there, then Israel will say it made a mistake and bomb another site two weeks later. And if we then don’t let the I.A.E.A. in, Israel will say, ‘You see?’ This is nonsense. Why should we have to do this?”

Even if the site was not a nuclear installation, it is possible that the Syrians feared that an I.A.E.A. inquiry would uncover the presence of North Koreans there. In Syria, I was able to get some confirmation that North Koreans were at the target. A senior officer in Damascus with firsthand knowledge of the incident agreed to see me alone, at his home; my other interviews in Damascus took place in government offices. According to his account, North Koreans were present at the site, but only as paid construction workers. The senior officer said that the targeted building, when completed, would most likely have been used as a chemical-warfare facility. (Syria is not a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention and has been believed, for decades, to have a substantial chemical-weapons arsenal.)

The building contract with North Korea was a routine business deal, the senior officer said—from design to construction. (North Korea may, of course, have sent skilled technicians capable of doing less routine work.) Syria and North Korea have a long-standing partnership on military matters. “The contract between Syria and North Korea was old, from 2002, and it was running late,” the senior officer told me. “It was initially to be finished in 2005, and the Israelis might have expected it was further along.”

The North Korean laborers had been coming and going for “maybe six months” before the September bombing, the senior officer said, and his government concluded that the Israelis had picked up North Korean telephone chatter at the site. (This fit the timeline that Israeli officials had given me.) “The Israelis may have their own spies and watched the laborers being driven to the area,” the senior officer said. “The Koreans were not there at night, but slept in their quarters and were driven to the site in the morning. The building was in an isolated area, and the Israelis may have concluded that even if there was a slight chance”—of it being a nuclear facility—“we’ll take that risk.”

On the days before the bombing, the Koreans had been working on the second floor, and were using a tarp on top of the building to shield the site from rain and sun. “It was just the North Korean way of working,” the Syrian senior officer said, adding that the possibility that the Israelis could not see what was underneath the tarp might have added to their determination.

The attack was especially dramatic, the Syrian senior officer said, because the Israelis used bright magnesium illumination flares to light up the target before the bombing. Night suddenly turned into day, he told me. “When the people in the area saw the lights and the bombing, they thought there would be a commando raid,” the senior officer said. The building was destroyed, and his government eventually concluded that there were no Israeli ground forces in the area. But if Israelis had been on the ground seeking contaminated soil samples, the senior officer said, “they found only cement.”

A senior Syrian official confirmed that a group of North Koreans had been at work at the site, but he denied that the structure was related to chemical warfare. Syria had concluded, he said, that chemical warfare had little deterrent value against Israel, given its nuclear capability. The facility that was attacked, the official said, was to be one of a string of missile-manufacturing plants scattered throughout Syria—“all low tech. Not strategic.” (North Korea has been a major exporter of missile technology and expertise to Syria for decades.) He added, “We’ve gone asymmetrical, and have been improving our capability to build low-tech missiles that will enable us to inflict as much damage as possible without confronting the Israeli Army. We now can hit all of Israel, and not just the north.”

Whatever was under construction, with North Korean help, it apparently had little to do with agriculture—or with nuclear reactors—but much to do with Syria’s defense posture, and its military relationship with North Korea. And that, perhaps, was enough to silence the Syrian government after the September 6th bombing.

It is unclear to what extent the Bush Administration was involved in the Israeli attack. The most detailed report of cooperation was made in mid-October by ABC News. Citing a senior U.S. official, the network reported that Israel had shared intelligence with the United States and received satellite help and targeting information in response. At one point, it was reported, the Bush Administration considered attacking Syria itself, but rejected that option. The implication was that the Israeli intelligence about the nuclear threat had been vetted by the U.S., and had been found to be convincing.

Yet officials I spoke to in Israel heatedly denied the notion that they had extensive help from Washington in planning the attack. When I told the senior Israeli official that I found little support in Washington for Israel’s claim that it had bombed a nuclear facility in Syria, he responded with an expletive, and then said, angrily, “Nobody helped us. We did it on our own.” He added, “What I’m saying is that nobody discovered it for us.” (The White House declined to comment on this story.)

There is evidence to support this view. The satellite operated by DigitalGlobe, the Colorado firm that supplied Albright’s images, is for hire; anyone can order the satellite to photograph specific coordinates, a process that can cost anywhere from several hundred to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The company displays the results of these requests on its Web page, but not the identity of the customer. On five occasions between August 5th and August 27th of last year—before the Israeli bombing—DigitalGlobe was paid to take a tight image of the targeted building in Syria.

Clearly, whoever ordered the images likely had some involvement in plans for the attack. DigitalGlobe does about sixty per cent of its business with the U.S. government, but those contracts are for unclassified work, such as mapping. The government’s own military and intelligence satellite system, with an unmatched ability to achieve what analysts call “highly granular images,” could have supplied superior versions of the target sites. Israel has at least two military satellite systems, but, according to Allen Thomson, a former C.I.A. analyst, DigitalGlobe’s satellite has advantages for reconnaissance,

making Israel a logical customer. (“Customer anonymity is crucial to us,” Chuck Herring, a spokesman for DigitalGlobe, said. “I don’t know who placed the order and couldn’t disclose it if I did.”) It is also possible that Israel or the United States ordered the imagery in order to have something unclassified to pass to the press if needed. If the Bush Administration had been aggressively cooperating with Israel before the attack, why would Israel have to turn to a commercial firm?

Last fall, aerospace industry and military sources told *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, an authoritative trade journal, that the United States had provided Israel with advice about “potential target vulnerabilities” before the September 6th attack, and monitored the radar as the mission took place. The magazine reported that the Israeli fighters, prior to bombing the target on the Euphrates, struck a Syrian radar facility near the Turkish border, knocking the radar out of commission and permitting them to complete their mission without interference.

The former U.S. senior intelligence official told me that, as he understood it, America’s involvement in the Israeli raid dated back months earlier, and was linked to the Administration’s planning for a possible air war against Iran. Last summer, the Defense Intelligence Agency came to believe that Syria was installing a new Russian-supplied radar-and-air-defense system that was similar to the radar complexes in Iran. Entering Syrian airspace would trigger those defenses and expose them to Israeli and American exploitation, yielding valuable information about their capabilities. Vice-President Dick Cheney supported the idea of overflights, the former senior intelligence official said, because “it would stick it to Syria and show that we’re serious about Iran.” (The Vice-President’s office declined to comment.) The former senior intelligence official said that Israeli military jets have flown over Syria repeatedly, without retaliation from Syria. At the time, the former senior intelligence official said, the focus was on radar and air defenses, and not on any real or suspected nuclear facility. Israel’s claims about the target, which emerged later, caught many in the military and intelligence community—if not in the White House—by surprise.

The senior Israeli official, asked whether the attack was rooted in his country’s interest in Syria’s radar installations, told me, “Bullshit.” Whatever the Administration’s initial agenda, Israel seems to have been after something more.

The story of the Israeli bombing of Syria, with its mixture of satellite intelligence, intercepts, newspaper leaks, and shared assumptions, reminded some American diplomats and intelligence officials of an incident, ten years ago, involving North Korea. In mid-1998, American reconnaissance satellites photographed imagery of a major underground construction project at Kumchang-ri, twenty-five miles northwest of Yongbyon. “We were briefed that, without a doubt, this was a nuclear-related facility, and there was signals intelligence linking the construction brigade at Kumchang-ri to the nuclear complex at Yongbyon,” the former State Department intelligence expert recalled.

Charles Kartman, who was President Bill Clinton’s special envoy for peace talks with Korea, told me that the intelligence was considered a slam dunk by analysts in the Defense Intelligence Agency, even though other agencies disagreed. “We had a debate going on inside the community, but the D.I.A. unilaterally took it to Capitol Hill,” Kartman said, forcing the issue and leading to a front-page Times story.

After months of negotiations, Kartman recalled, the North Koreans agreed, under diplomatic pressure, to grant access to Kumchang-ri. In return, they received aid, including assistance with a new potato-

production program. Inspectors found little besides a series of empty tunnels. Robert Carlin, an expert on North Korea who retired in 2005 after serving more than thirty years with the C.I.A. and the State Department's intelligence bureau, told me that the Kumchang-ri incident highlighted "an endemic weakness" in the American intelligence community. "People think they know the ending and then they go back and find the evidence that fits their story," he said. "And then you get groupthink—and people reinforce each other."

It seems that, as with Kumchang-ri, there was a genuine, if not unanimous, belief by Israeli intelligence that the Syrians were constructing something that could have serious national-security consequences.

But why would the Israelis take the risk of provoking a military response, and perhaps a war, if there was, as it seems, no smoking gun? Mohamed ElBaradei, expressing his frustration, said, "If a country has any information about a nuclear activity in another country, it should inform the I.A.E.A.—not bomb first and ask questions later."

One answer, suggested by David Albright, is that Israel did not trust the international arms-control community. "I can understand the Israeli point of view, given the history with Iran and Algeria," Albright said. "Both nations had nuclear-weapons programs and, after being caught cheating, declared their reactors to be civil reactors, for peacetime use. The international groups, like the U.N. and the I.A.E.A, never shut them down." Also, Israel may have calculated that risk of a counterattack was low: President Assad would undoubtedly conclude that the attack had the support of the Bush Administration and, therefore, that any response by Syria would also engage the U.S. (My conversations with officials in Syria bore out this assumption.)

In Tel Aviv, the senior Israeli official pointedly told me, "Syria still thinks Hezbollah won the war in Lebanon"—referring to the summer, 2006, fight between Israel and the Shiite organization headed by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. "Nasrallah knows how much that war cost—one-third of his fighters were killed, infrastructure was bombed, and ninety-five per cent of his strategic weapons were wiped out," the Israeli official said. "But Assad has a Nasrallah complex and thinks Hezbollah won. And, 'If he did it, I can do it.' This led to an adventurous mood in Damascus. Today, they are more sober."

That notion was echoed by the ambassador of an Israeli ally who is posted in Tel Aviv. "The truth is not important," the ambassador told me. "Israel was able to restore its credibility as a deterrent. That is the whole thing. No one will know what the real story is."

There is evidence that the preëemptive raid on Syria was also meant as a warning about—and a model for—a preëemptive attack on Iran. When I visited Israel this winter, Iran was the overriding concern among political and defense officials I spoke to—not Syria. There was palpable anger toward Washington, in the wake of a National Intelligence Estimate that concluded, on behalf of the American intelligence community, that Iran is not now constructing a nuclear weapon. Many in Israel view Iran's nuclear ambitions as an existential threat; they believe that military action against Iran may be inevitable, and worry that America may not be there when needed. The N.I.E. was published in November, after a yearlong standoff involving Cheney's office, which resisted the report's findings. At the time of the raid, reports about the forthcoming N.I.E. and its general conclusion had already appeared.

Retired Major General Giora Eiland, who served as the national-security adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, told me, "The Israeli military takes it as an assumption that one day we will need to have

a military campaign against Iran, to slow and eliminate the nuclear option.” He added, “Whether the political situation will allow this is another question.”

In the weeks after the N.I.E.’s release, Bush insisted that the Iranian nuclear-weapons threat was as acute as ever, a theme he amplified during his nine-day Middle East trip after the New Year. “A lot of people heard that N.I.E. out here and said that George Bush and the Americans don’t take the Iranian threat seriously,” he told Greta Van Susteren, of Fox News. “And so this trip has been successful from the perspective of saying . . . we will keep the pressure on.”

Shortly after the bombing, a Chinese envoy and one of the Bush Administration’s senior national-security officials met in Washington. The Chinese envoy had just returned from a visit to Tehran, a person familiar with the discussion told me, and he wanted the White House to know that there were moderates there who were interested in talks. The national-security official rejected that possibility and told the envoy, as the person familiar with the discussion recalled, ““You are aware of the recent Israeli statements about Syria. The Israelis are extremely serious about Iran and its nuclear program, and I believe that, if the United States government is unsuccessful in its diplomatic dealings with Iran, the Israelis will take it out militarily.’ He then told the envoy that he wanted him to convey this to his government—that the Israelis were serious.

“He was telling the Chinese leadership that they’d better warn Iran that we can’t hold back Israel, and that the Iranians should look at Syria and see what’s coming next if diplomacy fails,” the person familiar with the discussion said. “His message was that the Syrian attack was in part aimed at Iran.”

http://www.isis-online.org/publications/ISIS_Statement_on_NewYorker.pdf

**ISIS STATEMENT REGARDING "A SHOT IN THE DARK" IN THE
FEBRUARY 11 ISSUE OF THE NEW YORKER, BY SEYMOUR HERSH**

**THE INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY (ISIS)
FEBRUARY 6, 2008**

Seymour Hersh recently published an article for the New Yorker magazine in which he seeks to find reasons behind the September 6, 2007 Israeli strike against a facility in eastern Syria. Mr. Hersh took one quote from David Albright out of its original context and used it to imply that ISIS had earlier concluded that the site attacked was a reactor and had since backed away from that conclusion. In fact, ISIS's analysis of the suspect site has been consistent since October 2007. Our continuing assessment is that the building is consistent with reactor construction, and thus consistent with credible reports in the media that U.S. and Israeli officials have concluded that the site represents a reactor under construction.

Mr. Hersh met with David Albright and Paul Brannan in January at ISIS's office to discuss the Israeli strike and ISIS's analysis of the imagery of the site. On the third page of his article, Hersh writes, "Albright, when I spoke with him in December, was far more circumspect than he had been in October." Hersh then quotes Albright as saying, "We never said 'we know' it was a reactor, based on the image. We wanted to make sure that the image was consistent with a reactor, and, from my point of view, it was. But that doesn't confirm that it was a reactor."

This quote was drawn from a point in our discussion related to the process by which ISIS confirmed the location of the attacked site in October by providing the imagery to the Washington Post. We did this by first analyzing a large, 2000 square kilometer area of Syria and identifying a site that was consistent with a nuclear reactor. The goal was also to show that the site was consistent with earlier reporting by the Washington Post and The New York Times that U.S. and Israeli officials had concluded the site was a reactor under construction. The fact that we independently found this site by searching for a reactor either is one of the world's most remarkable coincidences or is further evidence that the site could be a reactor.

Hersh, who we at ISIS greatly respect, is correct to raise the issue of whether Israeli and U.S. intelligence are right about the purpose of the site. We are committed to developing that information publicly. Moreover, the bombing of the site raises troubling questions that require public answers. Hersh has added interesting and important information to this critical debate. He clearly believes that the site did not house a reactor, and he is entitled to his opinion. But much of his argument hinges on Albright's statement that was taken out of context. His other evidence is from people who do not have direct knowledge of the case, or are limited to analyzing satellite imagery of the site, which we know cannot on its own answer the question of whether or not the site is a reactor

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601080&sid=avqqq_inzE8g&refer=asia

North Korea Maintains Uranium Enrichment Program, U.S. Says

By Ed Johnson

[EXCERPTS]

Feb. 5 [2008] (Bloomberg) -- North Korea maintains its uranium enrichment program and remains a nuclear proliferation risk, the top U.S. intelligence official said in his annual threat assessment to Congress.

"We remain uncertain about Kim Jong Il's commitment to full denuclearization as he promised in the six-party agreement," Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell told the Senate Intelligence Committee today.

[deletia]

"While Pyongyang denies a program for uranium enrichment, and they deny their proliferation activities, we believe North Korea continues to engage in both," McConnell said.

In the annual assessment of the global threats facing the U.S., McConnell noted North Korea has already sold ballistic missiles to "several Middle Eastern countries" including Iran.

"We remain concerned North Korea could proliferate nuclear weapons abroad," he said in the assessment.

Sourcebook note: The underlined quotes above do not appear in the following document; they may have been made during Q&A:

<http://intelligence.senate.gov/080205/mcconnell.pdf>

Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence

for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

5 February 2008

J. Michael McConnell

Director of National Intelligence

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5huSr2cto6oXklRH0nXdM8i7PEQ0wD8UKV1OG0>

US Envoy Urges NKorea to Hand Over List

By FOSTER KLUG – 59 minutes ago

[Accessed at 2008-02-06T18:35Z]

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chief U.S. envoy at North Korean nuclear talks urged leader Kim Jong Il to hand over a promised list of his country's nuclear efforts, saying Wednesday that nuclear negotiators are working to make sure "Pyongyang lives up to its word."

Christopher Hill told lawmakers that six-nation disarmament talks are at a "critical, challenging" point, noting "there is some sense of urgency."

The United States says the North has balked at providing a "complete and correct" disclosure of nuclear programs to eventually be dismantled; Washington has refused to take the North off a U.S. terrorism blacklist, a coveted goal of Pyongyang, until negotiators have the list.

"Let me be clear," Hill said at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing. "Complete and correct' means complete and correct. This declaration must include all nuclear weapons, programs, materials and facilities, including clarification of any proliferation activities."

His comments came a day after the director of U.S. intelligence, Mike McConnell, questioned North Korea's commitment to the stalled talks. McConnell also said the U.S. intelligence community believes North Korea continues to work on a secret uranium enrichment program and to sell its weapons around the world.

Conservatives have recently expressed worry that President Bush, seeking a foreign policy success before he leaves office in January, is ignoring North Korean abuse.

North Korea has begun disabling its main nuclear facilities under an agreement with the other countries at the international arms talks: China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the U.S. Most of the tasks of disabling those facilities have been completed, Hill said, with American experts working to ensure the plutonium-making facility would require at least a year to become operational again.

But the talks have faced an impasse since the North missed a Dec. 31 deadline on the declaration.

North Korea accuses the United States of failing to meet its commitments and claims it gave the U.S. a nuclear list in November. Washington says Pyongyang never produced a complete list.

The North's declaration, Hill said, must also address its alleged uranium enrichment program. The U.S. accused North Korea in 2002 of seeking to secretly enrich uranium in violation of an earlier disarmament deal, sparking the latest nuclear standoff.

North Korea has insisted it does not have an active uranium program, but Hill has said Pyongyang officials have promised they would address the issue to Washington's satisfaction.

While the United States cannot accept an incomplete declaration, Hill testified, there is reason to believe that progress can still be made.

Still, he said, the U.S. is "very concerned about nuclear proliferation" and noted that the North has promised not to transfer nuclear materials to other countries. "We intend to hold North Korea to its word," he said.

U.S. lawmakers have expressed worry that North Korea may have helped Syria pursue a nuclear weapons program. Such cooperation would raise the specter of a country that conducted a nuclear test in 2006 — North Korea — providing atomic assistance to Syria, a nation Washington considers hostile and a sponsor of terrorism.

Syria has repeatedly denied that it is building a nuclear facility. North Korea denies accusations it spreads its nuclear expertise beyond its borders. Hill refused to publicly discuss specifics of the allegations.

A lawmaker at the hearing, Republican Sen. Dick Lugar, said that a U.S. program for dismantling Cold War-era weapons of mass destruction could be applied to North Korea. He said officials in Pyongyang have expressed interest in getting information on the program, which Lugar co-founded.



**U.S. Senate Committee
on
Foreign Relations**

**Chairman Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing
“Status of the Six Party Talks for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula”
February 6, 2008
Opening Remarks
As Prepared for Delivery**

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee will examine the efforts of the United States and the other participants in the Six Party Talks to remove the threat of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula and build a permanent peace there.

I want to welcome Ambassador Christopher Hill, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, back to the committee today. I thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your tireless efforts over the past three years to try to resolve this difficult problem.

I also want to take note of the fact that the Foreign Relations Committee was originally scheduled to have Assistant Secretary Hill up here today to testify on a different subject – Vietnam – at a hearing to be chaired by my friend Senator Boxer.

I want to thank Senator Boxer, the chairwoman of our East Asia Subcommittee, for agreeing to reschedule her hearing for early March, at which time we look forward to seeing Ambassador Hill again.

No Alternative to Patient Diplomacy

I look forward to the day that we can close the book on the nuclear issue and turn to other challenges, like how the United States and North Korea might cooperate to expand trade and cultural and educational exchanges between our two nations.

But we are not there yet.

The New York Philharmonic will be playing a concert in North Korea at the end of the month, the first ever visit by a U.S. orchestra to North Korea.

I understand they will perform the New World Symphony, by Dvorak. That is fitting. But for now we have to keep our eye on the ball and deal with the old world we still inhabit.

Our goal – and the stated objective of the Six Party Talks – is to peacefully dismantle North Korea’s nuclear weapons program in exchange for energy assistance, sanctions relief, and the creation of a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

This objective is consistent, in my view, with the vital national security interests of all six nations joined in the Six Party Talks. Nuclear weapons offer only a false sense of security to North Korea. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or DPRK as it is called, will find true security only when it has jettisoned its nuclear weapons program, rejoined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and fully normalized relations not only with the United States, but even more importantly, with its neighbors to the south.

South Korea is America’s close friend and ally. Last December, South Koreans went to the polls and elected a new president, Lee Myung-bak. Today, Senator Murkowski and I plan to introduce a resolution congratulating President-elect Lee and the people of the Republic of Korea on their nation’s vibrant democracy and affirming our desire to strengthen and deepen our alliance in the years ahead. There is much we can accomplish together both on and off the Korean Peninsula.

Some say we should never negotiate with North Korea because they can’t be trusted. This view offers no viable solution to a problem – a problem that got much worse when the Bush Administration disengaged from the effort.

We wasted a lot of time; time that North Korea used to acquire uranium enrichment equipment and to more than double its stockpile of plutonium, leading ultimately to an actual test of a nuclear device on October 9, 2006.

There is still no substitute for patient, principled, sustained, high level diplomacy. Moreover, our efforts are more likely to succeed when we enlist our allies South Korea and Japan and other friends to help us.

That is what this committee has been calling for on a bipartisan basis for six years. The formula for success is clear, and I am glad that President Bush finally embraced it and chose Ambassador Hill to undertake it.

The formula is validated by history. President George Herbert Walker Bush in 1991 agreed to remove U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula – weapons we no longer needed to station in Korea given advances in technology – and thereby convinced North Korea to remain inside the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and to accept inspections.

Inspections by the IAEA yielded evidence late in 1992 that North Korea was violating its NPT commitments as well as the terms of the 1991 South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Without the first Bush’s diplomatic efforts, we might have remained in the dark, giving North Korea a free path to pursue its nuclear ambitions unchecked.

Under President Clinton, the United States negotiated the October 1994 Agreed Framework.

The North agreed to freeze and eventually eliminate its nuclear facilities under international monitoring. In exchange, Pyongyang was to receive two proliferation-resistant Light Water nuclear reactors (LWRs) and annual shipments of heavy fuel oil during construction of the reactors. The LWRs were to be financed and constructed through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), a multinational consortium including South Korea, Japan, and the European Union.

The Agreed Framework failed to eliminate the North's nuclear programs. But it prevented the North from producing even one ounce of plutonium from 1994-2003. That is no small accomplishment.

And the creation of KEDO established a useful precedent – namely, that the United States should reach out to other nations that share our interest in a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula to help shoulder the financial and diplomatic burdens.

Under the terms of a February 17, 2007 agreement hammered out by our witness today and North Korea's lead nuclear negotiator, North Korea promised first to freeze and then to disable its key nuclear facilities and to provide a complete and accurate declaration of all of its nuclear programs, facilities, and materials. In exchange, the North is to receive energy assistance and sanctions relief. The ultimate goal remains the same: the complete dismantlement of the North's nuclear facilities in exchange for normalization of relations with the United States and the establishment of a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

The freeze was implemented without a hitch, and North Korean workers under the direct supervision of U.S. technicians are today in the process of disabling the three key nuclear facilities at Yongbyon – the reactor, the spent fuel reprocessing plant, and the fuel fabrication plant.

North Korea is no longer in the plutonium production business.

But as we will hear from our witness, we still have a long way to go.

The North has not yet submitted a complete and accurate declaration of its nuclear programs, as called for under the agreement. The original December 31, 2007 deadline has come and gone.

North Korea's preferred outcome still appears to be having both a limited nuclear deterrent and good relations with the United States. They must choose one or the other. The United States will never acquiesce to a nuclear-armed North Korea. I hope Assistant Secretary Hill will share with us the administration's game plan going forward. How does the Administration plan to convince North Korea to submit a declaration of its nuclear activities, including any proliferation of nuclear know-how, promptly so that we can get on with the business of dismantling the North's nuclear facilities, removing fissile material from the country, and ultimately normalizing our bilateral relations and integrating North Korea into the community of nations? What do we want South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia – as equal members of the Six Party Talks – to do to help us?

I also hope that Ambassador Hill will share with us some thoughts on how the Administration plans to actually implement the next phase of the agreement. Specifically, I hope he will address the concern that Senator Lugar and I have expressed about the Glenn Amendment, which currently prohibits the Department of Energy from providing more than token assistance to the denuclearization effort. Senator Lugar and I have drafted legislation that would provide the Department of Energy and the Department of State with the necessary authority to implement a robust denuclearization plan, and I hope the Administration will endorse it.

Mr. Ambassador, I look forward to your testimony. Let me now turn to my friend Senator Lugar.

**Statement of Christopher R. Hill
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs**

Before the

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

February 6, 2008

**Status of the Six-Party Talks
for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula**

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Biden, Ranking Member Lugar, and distinguished Members for inviting me to discuss with your committee recent developments in our efforts to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party process.

I have had the opportunity to brief many of you on the Six-Party Talks over the last few months. Since that time, we have made progress on implementation of the October 3, 2007 agreement on “Second Phase Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,” particularly on the disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facility. We continue to have good cooperation with the DPRK on implementation of agreed disablement tasks. These advances notwithstanding, we are again at a critical, challenging point in the Six-Party process, as we and our Six-Party partners work towards the completion of the Second Phase. Specifically, we are working to ensure that North Korea follows through on its commitment to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs, including its nuclear weapons.

Implementation of the October 3 Agreement

The October 3 agreement builds on the February 13, 2007, agreement on “Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,” under which the DPRK shut down and sealed the core nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and invited back the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct monitoring and verification activities, as provided for in the February 13 agreement. Under the October 3 agreement on Second-Phase actions, the DPRK agreed to disable all existing nuclear facilities subject to abandonment under the September 2005 Joint Statement and February 13 Agreement, beginning by disabling the three core facilities at Yongbyon by the end of the year. The DPRK also agreed to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs by the end of the year.

Disablement

Disablement of the three core facilities at Yongbyon – the 5-MW(e) nuclear reactor, reprocessing plant, and fuel rod fabrication facility – is proceeding well. A rotating team of U.S. experts has been on the ground overseeing the disablement of these facilities since early November and will remain in place throughout the completion of the agreed disablement activities. Upon completion, the specific disablement actions should ensure that the DPRK would have to expend significant effort and time (upwards of 12 months) to reconstitute all of the disabled facilities. This would curtail their ability to produce new weapons-grade plutonium at Yongbyon. Our experts report continued good cooperation with DPRK experts at the site, and most of the agreed disablement tasks at the three core facilities have been completed.

Specifically, all agreed disablement tasks at the reprocessing plant were completed prior to December 31, 2007, including the removal of several key pieces of equipment necessary for the separation of plutonium from spent fuel rods. Similarly, major pieces of equipment at the fuel fabrication plant were disabled and removed prior to December 31. One of the primary disablement tasks at the 5-MW(e) reactor – the discharge of spent fuel – is now underway. Due to health/safety and verification concerns, the parties understood that the fuel discharge (consisting of approximately 8,000 rods in the reactor core) would continue beyond December 31, 2007. In the meantime, other disablement tasks, including the destruction and removal of the interior structure of the cooling tower, were completed prior to December 31, 2007.

At the request of the Six Parties, in addition to leading the disablement activities, the United States is also providing initial funding for these activities. As we look to the tasks ahead in the next phase, dismantlement, we will request additional authorities in order to ensure that the United States is prepared to take timely action to facilitate completion of these important tasks. We are in active discussions within the administration on dismantlement costs and will consult with Congress.

Declaration

The other key element of Phase II – provision by the DPRK of a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs – remains to be implemented. Let me be clear – “complete and correct” means complete and correct. This declaration must include all nuclear weapons, programs, materials, and facilities, including clarification of any proliferation activities. The DPRK must also address concerns related to any uranium enrichment programs and activities. While we have had discussions of a declaration with the DPRK, the DPRK did not meet the December 31, 2007 deadline for this commitment, and we have still not received such a declaration. We and the other parties continue to press the DPRK for completion of this important commitment. A U.S. team was recently in Pyongyang to continue these discussions, and the other parties have also continued to engage with the DPRK to press for it to live up to its commitments. The DPRK, including leader Kim Jong-il, maintains that it is committed to the Six-Party process and to fulfilling all its obligations. Working closely with our Six-Party partners, we intend to ensure that Pyongyang lives up to its word by submitting to the Chinese chair as soon as possible a declaration that is in fact complete and correct.

As the DPRK fulfills its commitments, the United States remains committed to fulfilling ours. The other Parties agreed to provide the DPRK with one million tons of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) or equivalent

in return for its actions in the Initial and Second phases. To date, the DPRK has received almost 200,000 tons of HFO, including one shipment each from South Korea, China, Russia and the United States. The Six Party Talks Working Group on Economy and Energy Cooperation has informally agreed to provide half of the energy assistance in HFO and the remaining half in HFO-equivalent, namely materials and equipment related to refurbishing coal mines and thermal and hydro power plants. The United States has thus far only provided HFO, and we are in the process of preparing another shipment. We have also cooperated with the other Parties in ensuring that HFO-equivalent materials and equipment are consistent with U.S. laws controlling exports to the DPRK.

Under the October 3 agreement, the United States also reaffirmed its intent to fulfill its commitments regarding rescinding the designation of the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism and the termination of the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA) with respect to the DPRK. U.S. action related to the terrorism designation and TWEA application will depend on the DPRK's fulfillment of its Second-Phase commitments on providing a complete and correct declaration and disabling its nuclear facilities, as well as on satisfaction of legal requirements. The legal criteria for rescinding the designation of a country as a state sponsor of terrorism are set forth in U.S. law, and the Administration intends to consult closely with Congress and follow appropriate procedures on any decision to take action on the terrorism designation or TWEA.

At the same time, the United States will also continue to press the DPRK to address other important issues, including questions about Japanese abductees. We will continue to urge the DPRK at every opportunity to address Japan's concerns. Japan is an important friend and ally of the United States, and we will continue to consult closely with the Japanese government as we move forward.

We also remain very concerned about nuclear proliferation – the potential for such proliferation has always been one of our major concerns about the DPRK's nuclear weapons programs. In the October 3 agreement the DPRK reaffirmed its commitment “not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how,” and we intend to hold North Korea to its word. We have discussed this issue with the North Koreans many times and will remain vigilant about proliferation concerns. The North Koreans are cognizant of the fact that United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 remains in effect.

Offering the DPRK A Better Future

While we are in a difficult period, we remain confident that the Six-Party process is the best mechanism to address the danger to the United States and the international community posed by the DPRK's nuclear programs. We continue to urge the DPRK to provide a complete and correct declaration and complete the agreed disablement actions. Even once we have completed this phase, however, significant work remains. Following completion of the Second Phase, we hope to move quickly into a final Phase, which will be aimed at abandonment of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, dismantlement of all North Korea's nuclear facilities, capture of all fissile material the DPRK has produced, and verification of North Korea's denuclearization.

In exchange, the United States is prepared to transform our relations with the DPRK into a more normal relationship. The United States and DPRK have committed to improving bilateral relations and working toward full diplomatic relations. One way we will seek to do this is by increasing bilateral exchanges between the United States and DPRK aimed at enhancing mutual trust. Our goal through this process will remain improving the lives of the people of North Korea.

On a separate track, to address humanitarian assistance needs, the United States is aware of and concerned about possible food shortages in the DPRK in 2008. We are prepared to help respond to such shortages, subject to appropriate program management consistent with international standards. We assisted U.S. NGOs in providing aid to fight the outbreak of infectious diseases following floods in North Korea last summer. The United States is also working with U.S. NGOs to carry out a plan to improve the supply of electricity at provincial hospitals in North Korea.

We have also made clear to the DPRK how much we value the advancement of human rights in all societies and that discussion of important outstanding issues of concern, including the DPRK's human rights record, would be part of the normalization process.

Full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement could also provide a way forward for the transformation of overall security relations in Northeast Asia. We remain committed to replacing the 1953 Armistice with a permanent peace arrangement on the Korean Peninsula. The United States believes that discussions of a Korean Peninsula peace regime could begin among the directly related parties once the DPRK has disabled its existing nuclear facilities, has provided a complete and correct declaration of all of its nuclear programs, and is on the road to complete denuclearization. We can achieve a permanent peace arrangement on the Korean Peninsula once the DPRK fully discloses and abandons its nuclear weapons programs. We also hope to explore the development of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, which could help further solidify the cooperative relationships built through the Six-Party process.

The Road Ahead

While we have made important progress toward the full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement, much work remains on the road to verifiable denuclearization of the DPRK. We must continue to move forward in the Six-Party process to realize the DPRK's abandonment of all fissile material and nuclear weapons in accordance with the September 2005 Joint Statement, as well as its return to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. We will continue to work closely with our Six-Party partners as we move forward on the tough tasks that lie ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer your questions.

<http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5hA5B68KuThmYMGkB8F5tHItemsNg>

North Korea warns U.S. pressure could aggravate nuclear standoff

9 hours ago

[Accessed 2008-02-08T15:40Z]

SEOUL, South Korea - North Korea warned the United States on Friday [2008-02-08] pressure over its nuclear weapons programs will only aggravate the standoff and could lead to an "explosive crisis."

North Korea's Rodong Sinmun newspaper issued the warning, accusing what it called "hardline conservative forces in the U.S." of seeking to increase pressure on Pyongyang in an attempt to disrupt efforts to end the nuclear dispute through dialogue.

"As shown in the previous nuclear crises on the Korean peninsula, pursuing a policy of force would only bring about an explosive crisis, not a resolution of the problem," the paper said in a commentary, carried by the country's Korean Central News Agency.

"Everything achieved through dialogue so far would evaporate into the air," it said, warning of an unspecified "corresponding response if bellicose U.S. forces" continue to put pressure on North Korea.

The paper accused hardline U.S. officials of calling for an end to negotiations with North Korea on the nuclear dispute, raising the North's human rights record and seeking to build a missile-defence system in the region.

The warning came as six-country talks on the nuclear dispute, which made progress in shutting down and disabling the North's nuclear reactor, are now at a deadlock over Pyongyang's refusal to provide a complete list of its nuclear programs.

North Korea says it gave the U.S. a declaration in November as it promised to do by the end of 2007 but Washington says Pyongyang never produced "complete and correct" documentation.

The U.S. Embassy in Seoul was not immediately available for comment on the Lunar New Year holiday.

Meanwhile, an aide to U.S. Senator Richard Lugar and two U.S. experts on North Korea plan to visit the North next week to tour its main nuclear reactor and meet with officials, Lugar's spokesman Andy Fisher said.

A focus of the visit by Keith Luse, the Lugar aide, and North Korea specialists Joel Wit and Siegfried Hecker, will be Pyongyang's interest in a U.S. program for dismantling Cold War-era weapons of mass destruction, Fisher said.

Lugar said Wednesday the program, which he co-founded, could be applied to North Korea.



U.S. One-sided Hardline Policy Denounced

Pyongyang, **February 8** (KCNA) -- The U.S. hardline conservative forces are nowadays making outcries that the U.S. should show its "will" through the one-sided hardline policy and put the "human rights" issue on the table of negotiations for the settlement of the nuclear issue to intensify pressure upon the DPRK.

In the meantime they call for providing dialogues at all levels to establish the missile defence system involving the U.S., Japan and Australia and closely cooperate with one another.

In this regard Rodong Sinmun today in a signed commentary terms their ill-minded remarks an act of going against dialogue and peace aimed to strengthen the pressure upon the DPRK through the high-handed policy and destroy the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and thus drive the situation back to that before the six-party talks, instead of seeking a negotiated solution to the issue.

The attitude of the U.S. hardline conservative forces against dialogue and negotiation is a manifestation of their way of thinking in the Cold War era, the commentary says, and goes on:

The U.S. hardline conservative forces are playing a tacit trick, turning aside from the reality with the wrong viewpoint. Lurking behind such actions is a sinister purpose to extremely sharpen the DPRK-U.S. relations and create an international environment favorable for the realization of their hostile policy toward the DPRK.

It can be typically evidenced by the fact that they are scheming to expand the sphere of MD by enlisting not only Japan but Australia in it. The high-handed attitude of the U.S. hardline conservatives, who attach more importance to the military tough policy than to dialogue, is an expression of their unilateralism and supremacy.

If they continue to persist in one-sided hardline policy, the DPRK will be compelled to take due countermeasures. The DPRK has no debt to the U.S. The one-for-one principle is the DPRK's way of counteraction and it is its stand that if one do a thing for the other, latter would do the same. The DPRK never allows anything of defaming its self-confidence and dignity to be done. The U.S. hardline conservative forces should give up their one-sided tough policy, well aware of the DPRK's unshakable principle and will. The one-sided hardline policy will bring no good but only harm.

If the U.S. hardline conservative forces drive the situation of the Korean Peninsula and the DPRK-U.S. relations to the worst phase, persistently refusing to find a negotiated solution to the issue, the efforts made so far will come to naught and the U.S. would be chiefly to blame for the results.

U.S. Pact With North Korea May Hinge on Syria

By JAY SOLOMON

February 8, 2008; Page A5

WASHINGTON -- As the Bush administration seeks to cinch a disarmament deal with North Korea, questions about Pyongyang's past defense cooperation with Syria have emerged as perhaps the principal stumbling block to a successful completion of the pact.

North Korea missed a Dec. 31 deadline to fully declare the extent of its nuclear activities, as called for under a six-country negotiating process. But U.S. negotiators are voicing guarded confidence that they will eventually gain disclosure from Pyongyang on two key elements of its nuclear program: the number of atomic weapons and North Korea's believed attempt to develop a uranium-enrichment capacity to produce nuclear fuel.

It is the issue of North Korea's believed assistance to third countries, particularly Syria, where U.S. officials say there remains significant distance between Washington and Pyongyang. North Korea continues to deny it has given any nuclear assistance to Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, though it hasn't denied conventional military support. And the international community itself remains divided over what they believe was the full extent of Pyongyang's military assistance to Damascus in recent years.

"The Syria issue is where we really need to push," said a U.S. official involved in the six-party negotiations, which also include Russia, China, Japan and South Korea. "It's the one where we haven't made any headway."

Media disclosure of an Israeli missile strike inside Syria last September brought to international attention the issue of North Korea's possible nuclear assistance to Damascus. The Israeli government declined to comment on its raid along Syria's Euphrates River, and Damascus has denied it has been attempting to develop a nuclear capacity, either for civilian or military use. But a number of U.S. and European officials familiar with the intelligence have said in recent weeks that they believe Israel destroyed a nascent nuclear reactor Syria was developing in cooperation with North Korea.

These officials said spy satellites detected North Korean workers regularly appearing at the Euphrates site. And photographs taken of the facility showed its dimensions and structure bore numerous similarities to the Yongbyon nuclear reactor North Korea is currently disabling as part of its disarmament agreement with the U.S. Satellite photos also showed Syrian bulldozers had cleared the site days after the Israeli strike, a sign to some counterproliferation experts that Damascus was attempting to cover up its activities. A senior European diplomat working on Middle East issues said Western governments, after reviewing intelligence on the Israeli strike, have reached "some sort of common ground...that there seems to have been cooperation between Syria and North Korea" on nuclear development.

Still, seeking to clarify the extent of North Korea's activities inside Syria remains a major obstacle for the U.S. and other countries attempting to finalize the nuclear agreement with Pyongyang, say U.S. officials. Neither Syria nor Israel has been willing to provide information to inspectors from the United

Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, about the activities of the site the Israelis destroyed. And, even inside the U.S. government, intelligence information concerning the Israeli action has been tightly controlled by just a few senior officials.

The result is that there remains a lack of consensus among the five nations negotiating with North Korea over what exactly Pyongyang is supposed to divulge. "Some actors believe that what's been disclosed [about Syria] is serious and it's nuclear. But it's not universally accepted," said the official close to the six-party talks.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1202657414564&pagename=JPost%2FJArticle%2FShowFull>

Report: Syria has built 3 facilities at site of IAF strike

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Feb 10, 2008 20:24

Three more installations near the location bombed by IAF planes in Syria have been built, Channel 2 reported on Sunday evening.

It was unclear what purpose the facilities were to serve but satellite images taken by DigitalGlobe, a private company in Longmont, Colorado, clearly showed three new compounds circling an installation which was built in place of the old one, destroyed by Israel in September 2007.

Foreign media reports, some quoting unidentified US officials, have said the strike hit a nuclear installation linked to North Korea. Damascus denies it has an undeclared atomic program, and North Korea has said it was not involved in any such project.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/14/AR2008021400897.html>

US Intel Links Iran With Nuke Bomb Bid

By GEORGE JAHN

The Associated Press

Thursday, February 14, 2008; 8:38 AM

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA, Austria -- The U.S. has recently shared sensitive information with the International Atomic Energy Agency on key aspects of Iran's nuclear program that Washington says shows Tehran was directly engaged in trying to make an atomic weapon, diplomats told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The diplomats said Washington also gave the IAEA permission to confront Iran with at least some of the evidence in an attempt to pry details out of the Islamic republic on the activities, as part of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's attempts to investigate Iran's suspicious nuclear past.

The decision by the U.S. administration to declassify its intelligence and indirectly share it with Iran through the IAEA was a clear reflection of Washington's drive to pressure Iran into admitting that it had focused part of its nuclear efforts toward developing a weapons program.

While the Americans have previously declassified and then forwarded intelligence to the IAEA to help its investigations, they do so on a selective basis.

Following Israel's bombing of a Syrian site late last year, and media reports citing unidentified U.S. officials as saying the target was a nuclear installation, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei turned, in vain to the U.S. in asking for details on what was struck, said a diplomat who like others asked for anonymity in exchange for divulging confidential information.

Shared in the past two weeks was material on a laptop computer reportedly smuggled out of Iran, said another diplomat, accredited to the IAEA. In 2005, U.S. intelligence assessed that information as indicating that Tehran had been working on details of nuclear weapons, including missile trajectories and ideal altitudes for exploding warheads.

He said that after declassification, U.S. intelligence also was forwarded on two other issues _ the "Green Salt Project" _ a plan the U.S. alleges links diverse components of a nuclear weapons program, including uranium enrichment, high explosives testing and a missile re-entry vehicle, and material in Iran's possession showing how to mold uranium metal into warhead form.

North Korean Newspaper Denies North Korea's Alleged Nuclear Connection with Syria

By Jeong Jae Sung

[2008-02-14 15:49]

Chosun Shinbo once again denied North Korea's alleged nuclear connection with Syria, saying the allegation was unfounded.

"North Korea clearly stipulated its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how in the October 3 Agreement. That alone should dismiss the allegation," said Chosun Shinbo in the article published in its internet edition under the title, "The U.S.' maneuver against North Korea (Part II)- Arbitrary stigmatization against North Korea as one responsible for nuclear proliferation." Chosun Shinbo is a pro-Pyongyang newspaper published by Chongryon (the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan).

The Foreign Ministry spokesman of North Korea also said on January 4, "The North Korea has already stipulated its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how under the October 3 Agreement. That fact itself is enough to dismiss the allegation against North Korea."

Chosun Shinbo denounced those neoconservative forces of the U.S. saying, "American hard-line conservatives are arguing that North Korea should include an explanation about the allegation when it submits a declaration of nuclear programs. By doing so, they are trying to sway the media to their side and putting an obstacle to the efforts to settle the current nuclear dispute."

"The allegation of North Korea's nuclear collaboration with Syria began circulating in the U.S. media in September last year. However, the Six Party Talks meeting that took place shortly after did not make a big issue out of the allegation," Chosun Shinbo said.

The newspaper stressed that U.S. envoy Christopher Hill also dismissed the allegation at the closed session meeting of U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian Pacific Affairs that took place on December 12 last year.

At that time, South Korean media reported that Hill had said at the meeting that whether or not North Korea collaborated with Syria on a nuclear program in the past would not have any influence on the current nuclear negotiations between North Korea and the U.S. as long as North Korea has no nuclear connection with Syria at the present time. However, Hill was also reported to have said that North Korea must prove that North Korea did and will not pose a nuclear threat regardless of whether or not North Korea engaged in any nuclear proliferation activities in the past

In addition, Chosun Shinbo contended that it is unfair to demand North Korea to provide an explanation about the allegation of UEP (Uranium Enrichment Program). The newspaper quoted David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) as saying, "No one believes that North Korea has technology to use a uranium enrichment program to develop nuclear weapons."

On February 10, David Albright said in his interview with Radio Free Asia that what needs to be declared by North Korea is plutonium and the U.S. should not lower the bar for declaration standards. However, the U.S. needs to extend the deadline for declaration and makes sure North Korea declares its plutonium stockpile, said David Albright.

David Albright said that he confirmed from a high rank official that North Korea declared to have produced a total of 30 kg of plutonium in its first declaration draft. He added that although the issues of UEP and nuclear proliferation can be discussed later, North Korea must provide a full and complete declaration of its nuclear facilities.

Envoy urges not to dwell on past N.K. nuclear acts

2008/02/14 06:03 KST

한 한 WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (Yonhap) -- A Chinese diplomat on Wednesday urged negotiators at the North Korean denuclearization talks not to dwell on Pyongyang's past conduct, the main sticking point between North Korea and the United States.

한 한 "The point is, we should not just go back in the past to say what you have done. The most important thing is what we should do in the future," Ruan Zongze, minister counselor at the Chinese embassy in Washington, said at a forum.

한 한 The diplomat said North Korea was making efforts to implement the six-party agreements by disabling its nuclear reactor and facilities. The accords call for action for action, requiring other countries to provide economic assistance and other incentives, he said, and the North Korea-U.S. arguments over removing Pyongyang from the U.S. list of terrorist-sponsoring states, one of the incentives most coveted by Pyongyang, "play a part in handicapping" progress, the diplomat said.

한 한 But he described the current impasse as a tactical one rather than strategic.

한 한 China is the host of the six-party talks, also involving South and North Korea, the U.S., Russia and Japan, aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Wednesday marks the anniversary of the Feb. 13, 2007, agreement in which Pyongyang agreed to eventually give up its nuclear weapons and programs, in return for financial and political benefits.

한 한 As interim steps, Pyongyang was required by the end of 2007 to disable its reactor and auxiliary facilities that were churning out weapons-grade plutonium, and submit a declaration detailing its nuclear activities and any proliferation overseas.

한 한 But North Korea missed the deadline, and while disablement was proceeding, Pyongyang's initial offer on the declaration fell short of U.S. expectations. Washington wants a "complete and correct" disclosure that addresses nuclear facilities, material and any transfer to other countries.

한 한 Christopher Hill, the top U.S. nuclear negotiator, told a Senate hearing last week the six-party members need to know about the history of Pyongyang's nuclear activities, specifically proliferation.

한 한 "We believe that, as we go forward, we need more transparency from the North Koreans on this," he said. "We need to know what they were up to in the past. We need to have a clear picture of that so that we can go forward."

Critics often cite Pyongyang's previous conduct to argue the communist regime cannot be trusted. North Korea is accused of running a secret nuclear weapons program, violating a 1994 bilateral agreement with Washington to suspend all atomic activities. The deal, known as the Geneva Agreed Framework, collapsed as a result.

한 한 Ruan, speaking at a forum sponsored by the Institute of Corean (Korean)-American Studies, talked about "speculation of some disagreement" between North Korea and the U.S., apparently referring to the dispute over Pyongyang's past activities, and hoped for a "creative" resolution.

후후 He repeatedly emphasized that the six-party agreements clearly require action for action. "What does action for action mean? That means once DPRK is moving towards, is taking some measures for disablement or for declaration, at some time that requires economic assistance, not only from the U.S., but from other countries," he said. DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

후후 "At the same time, there are some very critical issues," the diplomat said, citing the removal of Pyongyang from the U.S. terrorism list.

후후 The issue is under discussion, "but certainly they play a part in handicapping the progress," he said.

후후 On China's relations with North Korea, Ruan said economic relations were growing, but it was "really hard" to say how much leverage Beijing has over its neighbor and ideological ally.

후후 "It is not China's way, or China's philosophy, to urge another country to do something it doesn't want," he said. "So everything should be conducted through political dialogue."

U.S. Envoy Says North Korean Uranium Program Remains Stumbling Block

Interviewee:

Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Interviewer:

Robert McMahon, Deputy Editor

February 15, 2008

The denuclearization deal signed by North Korea on February 13, 2007, marked its first anniversary stalled over Pyongyang's lack of a full declaration of its programs. The envoy leading the U.S. effort in the Six-Party Talks, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, says the dismantling of the Yongbyon reactor remains a positive sign of cooperation. But he says a chief problem at this stage is getting North Korea to admit to any past uranium-enrichment efforts as well as to dealings with third parties like Syria. North Korean officials are prepared to say they have no enrichment or export programs under way, but that is not sufficient, Hill says. "We really do need to know what all went on before, if it stopped, when did it stop." In response to criticism of the negotiating process by the U.S. human rights envoy, Hill said rights issues will eventually become central to the talks.

We're about six weeks past the deadline for North Korea to declare its nuclear activities and at the one-year anniversary of the denuclearization deal. In some circles it's seen as stopped in its tracks or even off the rails. Should we expect to see a declaration from North Korea in the near future?

In order to go forward, we're going to need to get a declaration. A declaration is part of what is called Phase Two, and it's called for very explicitly in the agreement, including in the October [2007] agreement. So the North Koreans know they have to provide a declaration. The problem is not that they're not willing to provide a declaration. The problem is they don't want to give us a complete and correct one. And we don't want to accept something that's less than complete, less than correct. So we're continuing to go back and forth with them on this. And we certainly made it clear to our other partners in the process that we need a complete, correct [declaration]. So I don't want to talk about the process being off the rails. In many respects some good things have happened, including the disabling of the nuclear facility, which is something they had never done before. So we're going to stick with it and see if we can get something.

The weapons-grade plutonium—apparently toward the end of last year the North Koreans came in with an estimate that was seen as not realistic. Can you talk about that? And then separate from that, the uranium-enrichment program?

Let me break the declaration down into three major components. First, nuclear materials. Second, nuclear facilities. Third, nuclear programs. Under nuclear materials, they are prepared to give us a figure for the separated plutonium. The plutonium they produced from this facility is presumably sitting in a bunker somewhere. From my way of thinking, it is not so important what the figure is. What is important is that we be able to verify it. So people who say it's too small really are in no position to say that until we can verify it. Now, if it comes in at fifty kilos and the verification process turns out it

should be sixty, then we have a gap of ten. That's a problem. If it comes in at thirty and the verification shows that thirty is correct, then we don't have a problem. Under the facilities, we kind of know what kind of facilities they have. They know what kind of facilities they have. They know what we know about their facilities. We'll probably be okay on facilities.

The third area is the big problem: that's programs. And here they're prepared to tell us all about the plutonium program, but we already know about the plutonium program. We have U.S. technicians crawling around Yongbyon as we speak dealing with that. **The real thing we need to know about is the uranium enrichment and any export programs that they've had.** Now they're prepared to say, in the category of uranium enrichment and the export programs, that they don't have anything going now, and they won't in the future. And some of our partners are saying, "Well, two out of three is not bad." But we really do need to know what all went on before, if it stopped, when did it stop, etc. We really need clarity on this. **Again, some people say, "Why do you worry so much about the past?" Well, frankly we need to know what they've been up to. And I don't think we can really go forward with some of our obligations until we have a complete picture.**

Another stumbling block mentioned is the issue of third-state assistance, in this case Syria. That's generating a lot of concern. What is the extent of dialogue on that issue, on assistance to Syria, the site that was targeted by the Israelis [in September 2007]? And will the Six-Party Talks get into that issue?

We've made it abundantly clear to the North Koreans that the issue of nuclear cooperation with abroad, whether it's Syria or other states—we need to know all about that. And it's not enough to do as they're doing now which is to say, "We don't have any, we won't in the future." We need to know what they've done in the past. We do know some information about some of their programs from the past. Some of this came out only recently, and some of the issues you are alluding to in Syria are fairly new issues. So we need to know what they've been up to. And I would say that in order to go forward, we need to get some clarity on that.

There's been some calls within the United States from the human rights community, human rights envoys, for making human rights part of the dialogue, and maybe even raising the issue of a Helsinki-type process [of engagement]. Could that work at this stage?

Well, people who are well informed on this issue understand that as we get through this declaration, we will then go to something called the Third Phase. Now what we would like in the Third Phase is for North Korea to not only dismantle all of their programs, but also to give up, to abandon, pursuant to the September 2005 agreement, to abandon their separated plutonium, and any other fissile material they have. Now, in order to get that, we're going to put a few things on the table. And one of them is normalization with the United States, a bilateral normalization process. As part of normalization, we will of course be discussing human rights, and we have been discussing human rights. And I don't think we should ever be afraid to discuss human rights.

The problem is not that they're not willing to provide a declaration. The problem is they don't want to give us a complete and correct one. And we don't want to accept something that's less than complete, less than correct.

Human rights needs to be understood by the North Koreans as really the price of admission to the international community. So as we discuss our normalization, of course this subject will be discussed.

But what we would like the North Koreans to come to understand is that human rights is something that they don't have a choice on, that if they want to join the international community, they have to start living up to some human rights standards. This is not just some desiderata on the part of the United States. This has to do with international obligations. And so, to the extent that we can convey this, of course we'll convey it through this bilateral process of leading to normalization.

So in Phase Three, that focus comes more into sharper relief?

Yes, because in Phase Three, we would put several things on the table. One is the normalization path with the United States. Obviously human rights would be a part of that as we go forward. But we will also be putting on the table an effort to get North Korea access to international financial institutions and to international organizations, generally, that they're not a part of. And here, too, human rights will be a part of that.

Very soon South Korea will have a new president taking office, President Lee [Myung-bak] . Do you see that as possibly a move that will create some sort of catalyst for momentum?

First of all we've worked well with the South Koreans throughout the Six-Party process. And this new administration is indicating it will have a somewhat different approach on some of the issues, namely North-South [relations]. The president-elect, President Lee Myung-bak, has talked about having more reciprocity involved in the assistance that South Korea gives to North Korea directly. So we can probably expect some change, but it will obviously be up to the new administration as it takes off to survey the situation and see what it wants, and what it wants to do.

South Korea and China, there are concerns that their sort of unconditional aid to North Korea has in some ways undermined the leverage that could be brought to bear in really forcing the North Koreans to accept more readily some of the conditions of the agreement. What is your view on that?

Well, it's important that what South Korea and what China does directly with North Korea gets somehow coordinated with the Six-Party process because we can't have a situation where the things we give North Korea through the Six-Party process become sort of to the right of the decimal point compared to what's going in directly.

But I do want to caution American audiences, in particular, to understand that in Korea, there is a real feeling that what happened in Korea in the middle of the twentieth century that resulted in the division of the Korean peninsula came about through no fault of Korean people, but rather through sort of international big powers arrangements. And indeed, the division of the Korean peninsula came about by happenstance, where U.S. troops took surrendered Japanese troops south of the 38th parallel, and Soviet troops took their surrender north of the 38th parallel. In short, this division is a great tragedy in Korea. And we as Americans need to be sensitive to the fact that many Koreans—even Koreans who are not so anxious to reunite, or who see all the impediments of unification, the economic challenges involved—even to those Koreans, there is a great deal of anxiety about what happened in the mid-twentieth century. And if we end up wagging our finger at Koreans and telling them how to deal with North Korea, we could be doing that at some peril to the relationship.

At this stage what's the concern that there's this lame-duck feeling, that people are waiting for this process to play out, and then a new U.S. administration to come in? Has this been a hindrance at this point, this perception? Are you getting this from Asian diplomats?

I'm certainly not getting it from the North Koreans, who indicated a desire to try to wrap this up in 2008. But it is fair to say that as the days and weeks roll by, where we haven't got through Phase Two, obviously it becomes a greater challenge to try to wrap everything up on the timescale that we want it wrapped up. So we do need to pick up the pace if we're going to succeed here. But what's been very important for the North Koreans to understand is this issue of dealing with North Korea's nuclear ambitions has not been politicized in the United States. We have both parties, Democrats and Republicans, very much wanting to see this resolved, and pretty much wanting to see it resolved on similar terms. So I'm hopeful that the North Koreans understand that, and frankly the sooner the better. If we can get this resolved, the sooner North Korea can begin to address the very acute needs of their people.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/02/18/asia/AS-GEN-NKorea-Syria-Nuclear.php>

Report: North Korea provided technological assistance to Syria to build nuclear reactor

The Associated Press

Monday, February 18, 2008

SEOUL, South Korea: North Korea helped Syria build an underground nuclear reactor in the Middle East country, a South Korean news report said Monday.

"The U.S. government has circumstantial (evidence) that the North provided technology assistance to build an underground reactor in Syria," South Korea's Hankook Ilbo newspaper reported, citing an unidentified diplomatic channel.

U.S. Embassy officials in Seoul were not immediately available for comment on the report.

North Korea has repeatedly dismissed its alleged nuclear connection with Syria, saying that it had already pledged it would never transfer any nuclear material or technology out of the country.

Monday's report came as the international process aimed at stripping North Korea of its nuclear weapons programs was at a deadlock over Pyongyang's refusal to give a complete list of its nuclear programs as required by a landmark agreement.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill arrived in Beijing earlier Monday for talks with Chinese officials on how to jump-start the stalled disarmament deal with North Korea.

The U.S. nuclear envoy was scheduled to visit Seoul and Tokyo this week for similar consultations.



Evening Walk-Through at Six-Party Talks
Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Kerry Center Hotel
Beijing, China
February 18, 2008

[EXCERPT]

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Hello. It's nice to be back in Beijing. Are there any questions?

QUESTION: Did you have any meetings today? And, what are your plans for tomorrow?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I was over at the Foreign Ministry today, and we had a lengthy meeting on bilateral issues, in particular on preparation for Secretary Rice's trip here next week. And then tomorrow morning I have meeting also at the MFA with He Yafei.

QUESTION: So did you meet with Mr. Wu Dawei today?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, he is not here today. So I'm going to meet him later in the trip -- probably in Tokyo.

QUESTION: Are you going to meet with the North Koreans here? Is there still that possibility?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, as is always our practice, we always let them know that I am here, and we don't have anything set up yet. But if it's possible, I am here tomorrow. But we don't have any meetings scheduled just yet.

QUESTION: But you would like to have a meeting?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: If the DPRK is interested, I am here.

QUESTION: What would you say is the purpose of your trip? Because it seems like the Six-Party Talks are kind of stalled right now, is it to sort of revive the talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, the purpose is that we have Secretary Rice coming out here for her first trip in a quite a while actually. So I am here to discuss some of the elements of that visit. And also to talk to Six-Party members about how we are perceiving the situation. Just to sort of be in touch.

QUESTION: Can you tell us how the U.S. side is perceiving the Six-Party situation right now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think that everyone knows we are trying to get through phase two, which involves a declaration on the part of the DPRK. We don't have that declaration yet. And so we are a little stuck on the need for a complete and correct declaration.

QUESTION: There seems to be a stalemate over a couple of [inaudible] regarding the declaration and taking North Korea off the terrorism list. How do you plan to resolve that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: First of all, I don't know if things are in stalemate, because stalemate implies they cannot change. I think the issue is, the DPRK needs to be prepared to make a complete and correct declaration. I'm not too concerned about the sequencing of their obligations and our obligations. I think there are ways to deal with the sequencing. I think the real problem is they have not yet been willing to provide a complete and correct declaration.

QUESTION: So are you willing to move simultaneously?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I don't think sequencing is the problem. I think the problem is, as yet, they have not been prepared to provide a complete and correct declaration. So to talk about sequencing at this point is a little premature.

QUESTION: Do you plan to go to Pyongyang [inaudible] --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No --

QUESTION: -- with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, because I will be in Seoul for the inauguration of the new president. It happens to be on the same day.

[deletia]

Released on February 18, 2008



Airport Departure From Six-Party Talks

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Beijing, China

February 19, 2008

4 pm

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I had a good meeting this morning at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Mr. He Yafei, who deals with Asia-wide issues. So we discussed various issues in Asia. In addition, beginning at around 11:30 and concluding just a few minutes ago, I met with our DPRK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan at the DPRK Embassy, and we reviewed the overall situation in Phase II with particular attention paid to the issue of the declaration. And I think we had good, substantial discussions -- a good exchange of views on that. We agreed we will stay in contact, and now I'm off to Seoul.

QUESTION: Did you have any new ideas of how to move things forward?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We discussed ideas that China has had and how things could be moved. So it was a good, substantial discussion.

QUESTION: Was that concerning the declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It was mainly on the declaration, but we also had a look at what the next phase might look like -- that is, so-called Phase III. But of course we can't get to Phase III until we get through Phase II.

QUESTION: Were they prepared to submit full and complete declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we had a discussion of what we felt, what we believe needs to be included in that. I think they understand our point of view. But we won't have a complete and correct declaration until we have a complete and correct declaration. So I'm not sure if we yet have an understanding on that. But it was a good exchange of views on it.

QUESTION: So how long do you think you have to wait to get this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I want to report on my conversations. I want to give a report on that conversation to Secretary Rice, and obviously we will be discussing it in the next week. And of course she'll be in the region next week, and I'll be back in the region. So we'll see if we can get through this issue. We are going to work very hard on it on the coming weeks, and I think the Chinese

are also very interested in doing that. I'll be seeing Wu Dawei in Tokyo, and I'll be able to report to him on my discussions with the DPRK.

QUESTION: Any change [inaudible]? What's the indication from North Korea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't want to say that, except to say that it was a good and substantial discussion. We really went through all of the elements that we would expect to see in the declaration. And we also discussed the overall fulfillment of Phase II and what we can look ahead to in Phase III. So it was a very complete review of where we are and what we need to do in order to make progress.

QUESTION: Does [inaudible] the Syria project?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, we discussed all of the elements that we believe need to be included, including the Syrian matter and uranium enrichment. So all of the elements.

QUESTION: Sir, you've been involved in negotiations with Milosevic for a long time. Do you have any comments on the current situation in Kosovo?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I am not in the position really to comment on the ongoing situation in Kosovo. Of course, I spent some years there working on what was at the time a broad autonomy deal, in Rambouillet. As I emphasized to the Chinese interlocutors today, it is quite a unique situation in Kosovo -- really very unique. There is nothing like it in the world. Secretary Rice made clear in her statement we are pleased at the declaration of independence, and we also feel very strongly that we want to have a good and substantial relationship with Serbia and ultimately with a Balkans that is ultimately at peace and one that is integrated into a European-Atlantic system. OK, we'll see you later.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jDsrn5qmVUANHrmtASfggyXfhI9gD8UTEFRO0>

US, North Korean Envoys in Beijing Talks

By HENRY SANDERSON – 42 minutes ago

[Accessed 2008-02-19T15:10Z]

BEIJING (AP) — Senior U.S. and North Korean negotiators met Tuesday for hurriedly arranged talks on salvaging a sputtering process to eliminate the North's nuclear programs.

The meeting between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan was their first since December.

In the two months since, fitful progress in ending North Korea's nuclear programs has come to a virtual stop over differences on whether the North has made a full accounting of its nuclear facilities.

North Korea wants Washington to remove it from terrorism and other blacklists before making the disclosures.

Hill said he had "a good substantial discussion" with Kim inside North Korea's embassy in Beijing, but indicated no breakthroughs had been made.

Hill said he again urged North Korea to make a full disclosure of its nuclear programs to keep alive a year-old disarmament agreement.

"We had a discussion about what we think needs to be included in that. I think they understand our point of view, but we won't have a complete and correct declaration until we have a complete and correct declaration," he said at the Beijing airport before flying to Seoul.

"So I am not sure we yet have an understanding on that," Hill said.

Hill said a full declaration should include uranium enrichment and Pyongyang's relations with Syria, to which it has been accused of providing nuclear assistance. Damascus denies it has an undeclared atomic program, and North Korea has said it was not involved in any such project.

The wrangling is the latest in nearly five years of tortuous diplomacy over North Korea's nuclear programs, during which it exploded a nuclear device only to later agree to abandon the programs.

A February 2007 agreement and a follow-up pact in October — endorsed by China, Japan, Russia and South Korea as well as the United States and North Korea — promised the North energy and other assistance in return for relinquishing its nuclear programs. It also committed Washington to begin removing trade sanctions and the terrorism designation.

South Korea said Tuesday that 2,830 tons of steel will be shipped to North Korea on Friday as part of promised aid under the disarmament agreements. The shipment is about a 10th of what the South Korean government will send to North Korea before June, the South's Unification Ministry said.

While it has shut and begun dismantling its main nuclear facility as the agreement called for, North Korea missed a year-end deadline for disclosing all its nuclear programs. In recent weeks, it has shown

signs of slowing down its disarmament. At the same time, with President George W. Bush leaving office in a year, Washington has shown added urgency about North Korea.

"This administration is running out of time," said Jonathan Pollack, a Korea watcher at the U.S. Naval War College. "This was one of the few things we could say that the Bush administration could cite as a possible accomplishment of one kind or another by the end of the year. But it's looking tough, barring a sudden breakthrough."

Adding urgency to Hill's mission, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is to visit the region next week, stopping in Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul, where she is to attend the inauguration of South Korean President-elect Lee Myung-bak.

Hill said he would also meet China's nuclear envoy in Tokyo later this week in a bid to push the process forward.

"We're going to work very hard on it in the coming days and week. I think the Chinese are also very interested in doing that."

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080220/FOREIGN/435014368/1001>

U.S. presses N. Korea on Syria

By Nicholas Kralev

February 20, 2008

The United States, alarmed by mounting evidence that North Korea gave nuclear assistance to Syria, has rejected pressure from some of its partners in six-nation talks to compromise on an overdue declaration of Pyongyang's nuclear activities, U.S. officials said yesterday.

The declaration, which was due at the end of December, would complete the second phase of an October deal aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and clear the way for promised political and economic benefits to the communist state.

"We won't have a complete and correct declaration until we have a complete and correct declaration," Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator, said yesterday after meeting with his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, in Beijing. "So I'm not sure if we yet have an understanding on that."

The Syrian connection has become a major problem for the United States since an Israeli air strike in Syria in September. The target was widely reported to be a nuclear facility under construction with help from North Korea. Current and former U.S. officials said yesterday that intelligence points to a plutonium-related facility.

Yesterday, Mr. Hill said the North's declaration must account for the Syrian connection. "We discussed all of the elements that we believe need to be included, including the Syrian matter and uranium enrichment," he said of his talks with Mr. Kim.

U.S. and Israeli officials have refused to talk about the September strike, but diplomats and analysts said even the administration's strongest advocates of engagement with Pyongyang are worried by what they have learned from intelligence sources.

Only days after the bombing, the North's official KCNA news agency reported that a high-level meeting between Syria and North Korea had taken place in Pyongyang.

"We've made it abundantly clear to the North Koreans that the issue of nuclear cooperation abroad, whether it's with Syria or other states — we need to know all about that," Mr. Hill said in a little noticed interview on Friday.

North Korea currently is saying, " 'We don't have any [nuclear programs], we won't in the future,' " said Mr. Hill. But that "is not good enough. ... We need to know what they've done in the past."

He said in the interview on the Council on Foreign Relations Web site that "some of our partners" in the six-party talks have told him, "Well, two out of three is not bad," and "Why do you worry so much about the past?"

He did not name those countries, and U.S. officials yesterday declined to do so either. But analysts said it was unlikely that Japan was one of them. The other participants in the negotiations are China, South Korea and Russia.

Bruce Klingner, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said there has been "a mood shift in Washington" since the air attack in Syria.

"The administration has taken a firmer line with North Korea," he said.

At times over the past year, Mr. Klingner said, Mr. Hill has given the impression that he was "lowering the bar" on the requirements from the North, particularly on verification of Pyongyang's claims in the declaration.

But since the Israeli strike, which was followed by criticism of the administration's policy by some Republicans, there has been no room for trusting the North Koreans blindly, Mr. Klingner said.

The administration is also insisting that Pyongyang come clean about a uranium enrichment program, which the United States first accused it of having in 2002.

In their draft declaration, the North Koreans say they currently do not have any such program and will not have one in the future, U.S. officials said. There is no mention, however, of a past program.

"The real thing we need to know about is the uranium-enrichment and any export programs that they've had," Mr. Hill said. "I don't think we can really go forward with some of our obligations until we have a complete picture."

Mr. Hill, who is in the region to prepare for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo next week, yesterday denied reports that he had tried to separate the Syrian and the uranium issues from the declaration to help the North Koreans save face.

"We are not talking about breaking apart the declaration," he said.



Briefing on Recent Africa Trip and Upcoming Asia Trip

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

February 22, 2008

(3:35 p.m. EST)

[EXCERPTS]

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I thought I would stop off in Washington on my way from Africa to Asia and pick up those of you who will be going on with me to Asia. Let me just make a few opening remarks and then I'm happy to take your questions.

[deletia]

SECRETARY RICE: *[deletia]* Moving on, I, of course, tomorrow will travel to Asia, first to South Korea to attend the inauguration of the new South Korean President. I'll then go on to China and Japan. Asia is a place where we have put a lot of effort into strengthening our relationships, particularly our bilateral relationships, and I really look forward to meeting the new South Korean leadership. We've had an extensive period now of strengthening our bilateral security arrangements. We've had a period of negotiating an FTA, a free trade agreement and, of course, working together in the six-party talks to address the North Korean nuclear challenge. I will also meet, for the first time, my new Japanese counterpart and I look forward to that. And I look forward to going on to China.

Now obviously, we will have a broad range of discussions, but I do expect that there will be considerable discussion of the six-party talks and how we move forward. There has been progress, particularly on the disabling side. There is more work to do. We need a complete declaration from the North Koreans about both their proliferation activities, their current program – plutonium program, which they are in the process of disabling, but also the HEU program, that they need to make clear what has happened there. So we'll talk about how to do that.

Let me just note that we've been concerned, of course, about the proliferation issue for quite a long time and I will talk to our six-party partners about how we use the six-party framework to address proliferation issues. Because I am of the mind that we have the right group of countries at that table with the right set of incentives and disincentives to address not just denuclearization, which obviously is extremely important, but also proliferation. And I'll be carrying that message and discussing that with our partners.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Yes, Madame Secretary, on your forthcoming trip, when you're in Beijing, do you -- would you hope to meet with any North Korean delegate? If so -- since they're a part of the process, obviously? And did you plan to? And if you don't plan to, why don't you plan to?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't plan to. And I just don't think that it's something that's useful at this time or that is warranted. Chris Hill has recently had those contacts and he'll continue to have them. I think everybody knows what needs to happen here. North Korea is quite aware of what it needs to do. And I do look forward to talking to the Chinese, the Japanese, the South Koreans about how we can move this forward.

I want to say I do think that the progress that has been made on disabling is something that already moves us further along than we've really ever been with the North Korean nuclear program. But there is surely a lot of work to do in terms of next stages of really not just disabling but dismantling. There is work to be done on, of course, the accounting for various programs. But I don't see any purpose at this point in meeting with North Koreans.

[deletia]

Rice seeks North Korea solution before window closes

Fri Feb 22, 2008 3:53am EST

By Arshad Mohammed

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits South Korea, China and Japan next week to seek ways to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear programs before the window closes on the Bush administration.

[deletia]

At the top of her agenda will be reviving the six-party agreement under which North Korea has begun to dismantle key nuclear facilities at Yongbyon but has balked at providing a complete declaration of all of its nuclear programs.

[deletia]

According to U.S. officials and analysts, the declaration's sticking point has been Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

North Korea has produced plutonium, which can be used to make atomic bombs, at Yongbyon. Uranium enrichment would give it a second pathway to fissile material for nuclear weapons.

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear program but the case remains murky.

A senior U.S. official said Washington has begun exploring whether Pyongyang might disclose any proliferation and uranium enrichment in a separate document to be kept secret.

"We are flexible on this issue. We are open to ideas on how to do that," said the official, who spoke on condition that he not be named because of the sensitivity of the negotiations.

He said China and South Korea had floated ideas to North Korea on what it might say in such a separate document but the United States had not.

However, he insisted that North Korea must disclose all of its nuclear programs at the same time to be relieved of sanctions under the U.S. state sponsors of terrorism list and the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA).

He ruled out the idea of North Korea making a sequential declaration -- offering some information up front and disclosing the proliferation and uranium enrichment later.

"The difficulty with that is that the North is quite clear that ... their expectation is that they would be removed from the terrorism list and TWEA. And those things really are impossible to consider without this issue settled," he said.

[deletia]

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/957108.html>

Scholar: N. Korea denies link to alleged Syria nuke facility hit by IAF

By The Associated Press

Last update - 08:36 **23/02/2008**

North Korea denies any involvement with a suspected nuclear facility in Syria reportedly bombed by Israel Air Force planes in September, an American researcher who met with officials in Pyongyang said.

Four years after Pakistan's top nuclear scientist confessed to leaking weapons technology to North Korea, the North Koreans have denied receiving any such help, Siegfried Hecker, the Stanford University scientist who met with the officials, said.

The North Koreans dismissed the confessions from Pakistan, saying, "That's your story," Hecker said.

The North Koreans also told Hecker they had nothing to do with a suspected Syrian nuclear site destroyed by Israeli fighters in September, he said. News media reports, some quoting unidentified U.S. officials, have said the strike hit a nuclear installation linked to North Korea.

Hecker, a Stanford University professor and a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, said he questioned North Korean officials on the two issues during a trip to that country from Feb. 12-16. Hecker also visited the country's Yongbyon nuclear facility on Feb. 14.

Pyongyang's past actions are sticking points in disarmament efforts under way now, because under recent agreements, North Korea is supposed to provide a full accounting - "a declaration" - of its nuclear programs and activities.

Hecker has visited the North annually for the past five years, and last week's trip was unofficial. Nevertheless, he pressed North Korean officials, whom he would not identify, on issues of concern to the United States, he said.

He told a small group of reporters on Wednesday that he had made plain that the issue of the Syrian site destroyed in September was "high on the list of American concerns." And U.S. officials are still awaiting North Korea's account of nuclear ties to Pakistan following Islamabad's acknowledgments years ago of the transfers, he said.

In early 2004, Abdul Qadeer Khan, Pakistan's top nuclear expert, admitted that he transferred nuclear weapons technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf wrote in a memoir in late 2006 that he believed the equipment sent to North Korea included some of Pakistan's most technologically advanced nuclear centrifuges.

Enriching uranium, a step toward producing nuclear fuel for weapons, requires centrifuge technology.

Hecker said he told the North Koreans that "one of the reasons the Americans want a full accounting is because of those statements."

"When I bring up the Pakistan connection, they say, 'That's your story, we haven't dealt with the Pakistanis on uranium enrichment,'" Hecker said.

Asked whether the North Koreans meant they had never done so, Hecker said, "They're talking about all times: They have not done this with the Pakistanis now or in the past, meaning, have cooperated in uranium enrichment.

"Since I specifically posed the question in terms of having bought the uranium centrifuges, they said, 'We have not, that's your story.'"

As part of its push for a complete declaration from North Korea, the U.S. is asking it to address its suspected uranium enrichment program - an issue that touched off a nuclear standoff in late 2002. North Korea denies ever having such a program, and reiterated its denials to Hecker.

Earlier this week, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said North Korea's declaration must cover both uranium enrichment and Pyongyang's relations with Syria, to which it has been accused of providing nuclear assistance. Hecker said he believed it was possible there were North Korean connections to the site bombed in September, whose true purpose remains officially unknown. Damascus has denied having a secret atomic program.

"If you look at potential connections, North Korea has the capabilities in the nuclear arena, so one at least has to consider that as a possibility," Hecker said.

When he asked the North Korean officials about it, "their comment was, we don't have anything to do with Syria in the nuclear arena." An October agreement forbids North Korea to export nuclear materials and technology in the future.

Asked whether the North Koreans had denied any involvement with the site bombed by the Israelis, Hecker said: "No, they were not that specific, but then I didn't ask the questions in such a fashion to try to pin them down exactly to that site. I should add that I made it very clear that that's the site I was talking about in terms of a Syrian connection."

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601080&sid=acCZxnzyetrc&refer=asia>

South Korea, Japan, U.S. May Resume North Korea Preview Talks

By Viola Gienger

Last Updated: February 25, 2008 08:45 EST

Feb. 25 (Bloomberg) -- South Korea, Japan and the U.S. may resume meetings that preceded formal six-nation negotiations on North Korea's nuclear program, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said.

The meetings ended under previous administrations in Seoul and Tokyo because they "didn't go very well," Hill told reporters today in the South Korean capital, where he joined Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the start of a three-nation tour of East Asia.

"I would expect that that kind of trilateral process would be starting up again," said Hill, who is returning to East Asia after meetings there earlier this month. "There seems to be a political will to do that." He didn't say when they might resume.

Rice and Hill are visiting South Korea, China and Japan to confer on improving cooperation to salvage the so-called six-party talks. The stalled negotiations, which also involve North Korea and Russia, are aimed at persuading leader Kim Jong Il to reveal the extent of his nuclear activities in exchange for fuel aid and better relations with the U.S. and his neighbors.

"I'm not sure she'll have any breakthrough on this particular visit," said Wendy Sherman, a policy coordinator on North Korea when Bill Clinton was president and now a principal at the Albright Group consulting firm in Washington.

Rice, 53, led a U.S. delegation to Seoul for the inauguration of Lee Myung Bak as the new president of South Korea, also known as the Republic of Korea, before an outdoor audience of 50,000 people. The two met later in the day at the presidential Blue House, greeting each other with hugs.

Stronger Ties

Lee, 66, pledged during the 45-minute meeting to boost relations with the U.S. and demand more cooperation from North Korea for the diplomatic and other benefits its partners in the nuclear negotiations have provided, Hill said.

"President Lee said he would do all he could to strengthen cooperation with the U.S. on the six-party talks," Hill said. Lee asserted that, rather than increasing tensions with Pyongyang, stronger ties with the U.S. would bolster discussions between the peninsular neighbors.

Lee's designated foreign minister, Yu Myung Hwan, also reiterated in a meeting with Rice earlier in the day the new president's campaign promises to hold North Korean leader Kim Jong Il to greater accountability, Hill said.

Yu said the new administration in Seoul would "continue an overall policy of engagement with North Korea," Hill told reporters. "But they would be looking for greater reciprocity."

Compliance

The U.S. also is looking for ways to more effectively ensure compliance with agreements, such as an October joint statement signed by the six nations that required North Korea to take certain steps, including outlining the extent of its atomic programs. Pyongyang missed a Dec. 31 deadline for making that declaration, failing to fully account for its arms programs and its nuclear trade, including possible ties to Syria.

"I think the sentiment is that the six parties need to be responsible for making sure that agreements reached are agreements that are fulfilled," Hill said.

Ensuring compliance with provisions such as ending the spread of nuclear technology by North Korea might involve steps such as sharing information, he said. Hill declined to elaborate, saying it requires more discussion with others involved.

Such a process also might benefit North Korea, which has complained that its partners in the talks aren't fulfilling pledges to provide fuel aid in return for Pyongyang's cooperation on nuclear issues.

'Right Group of Countries'

Rice said on Feb. 22 in Washington that she wants to use the six-party process to "address proliferation issues."

"We have the right group of countries at that table with the right set of incentives and disincentives to address not just denuclearization, which obviously is extremely important, but also proliferation," Rice told reporters before her Asia trip. "I'll be carrying that message and discussing that with our partners."

Rice and Hill are headed next to Beijing tomorrow and then on to Tokyo.

To contact the reporter on this story: Viola Gienger in Seoul via Washington at vgienger@bloomberg.net.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080226/FOREIGN/66552437/1001>

U.S. urges monitoring flow of nuclear materials

By Nicholas Kralev

February 26, 2008

SEOUL — The United States wants six-nation talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear programs to begin monitoring transfers of nuclear materials and technology from the North to other countries, U.S. officials said yesterday.

The anti-proliferation focus, for which Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is trying to gather support during an East Asian tour this week, is a response to mounting evidence that the North gave nuclear assistance to Syria.

"The North Koreans promised not to engage in nuclear proliferation," said Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. envoy to the six-nation talks. "We want to make sure they follow through on their pledge."

Mr. Hill was referring to an October agreement in which the North "reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how."

All five countries negotiating with the communist state — the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia — have said that they expect Pyongyang to honor its promise.

The Oct. 3 deal, however, did not specify how the nonproliferation pledge would be verified.

Now the Bush administration, alarmed by the Syrian connection, is pushing for "monitoring" the implementation of North Korea's pledge.

In September, an Israeli air strike targeted what was widely reported to be a nuclear facility in Syria under construction with help from North Korea.

Miss Rice told reporters on Friday that she will discuss during her trip to South Korea, China and Japan "how we use the six-party framework to address proliferation issues."

"I'm of the mind that we have the right group of countries at that table, with the right set of incentives and disincentives to address not just denuclearization, which obviously is extremely important, but also proliferation," she said.

Japan and Russia are already members of the U.S.-sponsored "Proliferation Security Initiative," a voluntary agreement to share intelligence on illicit trade in deadly weapons. China, South Korea and North Korea — the primary target of the effort — have refused to join.

The U.S. initiated the program to avoid the repeat of a 2002 incident, in which it allowed 15 North Korean scud missiles to reach Yemen.

The missiles had been seized by a Spanish ship acting on U.S. intelligence, but the Bush administration decided it lacked authority under international law to block the sale.

Mr. Hill, briefing reporters traveling with Miss Rice yesterday, said the new proposal would involve monitoring the implementation of the entire Oct. 3 agreement, not just North Korea's obligations.

It would include seeking accountability for the heavy fuel oil the United States must deliver to the North at various stages of the process that would dismantle Pyongyang's nuclear programs in exchange for political and economic incentives, Mr. Hill said.

In October, North Korea also "agreed to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs" by Dec. 31, but it missed the deadline.

Although it has almost completed the required disablement of its Yongbyon reactor, the declaration remains a major problem.

Ms. Rice will seek to break the impasse when she visits Beijing today by enlisting Chinese help in persuading the North to explain the Syrian issue, a uranium-enrichment program that U.S. intelligence says it discovered in 2002 and other past activities.

Washington has rejected pressure from some of its partners in the six-party talks to compromise on the overdue declaration.

Mr. Hill said earlier this month that those countries had told him, "Well, two out of three is not bad," and "Why do you worry so much about the past?"

China, eager for progress in the negotiations, is said to be one of those countries. It is also expected to be cool to the new U.S. anti-proliferation proposal.

Japan appears to be on the same page with the United States, as does South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, who took office yesterday.

"We understand that the proliferation element is an important part of a complete and accurate declaration. In our view, it is already included in what we expect on the part of [North Korea] as part of the six-party framework," said Hiroshi Suzuki, a Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5j0v2Yiv48q45zwlUErUCEoS8j1yg>

Kim should not wait to declare nukes: former Clinton advisor

17 minutes ago

[Accessed 2008-02-26T15:40Z]

SEOUL (AFP) — A former senior US policymaker on North Korea urged the communist state Tuesday not to put off declaring its nuclear programmes until a new president takes office in Washington.

Wendy Sherman, who was former president Bill Clinton's North Korea policy coordinator, said Kim Jong-Il -- whom she called a "smart man" -- should take advantage of US President George W. Bush's shift to a more conciliatory policy.

"It (the situation) might get worse, not better," she told Yonhap news agency in an interview.

"If you (North Koreans) take too long to make the decision, even a Democratic president will have a hard time making rapid progress because there will be even less trust if you don't take action."

Under a six-nation accord, the North was supposed by last December to have disabled its main plutonium-producing atomic plants and to have declared all nuclear programmes.

But the declaration is being delayed by disagreements over what it should include. The United States says the North must fully answer suspicions that it bought equipment for a covert uranium enrichment bomb-making programme.

Sherman said US officials "believe very strongly" that North Korea has or had an uranium enrichment programme and had engaged in nuclear cooperation with Syria, allegations which Pyongyang flatly denies.

"People that I know, who are in the administration, do believe that they have evidence of a highly enriched uranium programme and that they do have evidence of cooperation between North Korea and Syria for reasons other than just regular cooperation," she told Yonhap.

"It is a proliferation concern. So those have to be addressed."

Americans, whether Republicans or Democrats, want the problem solved since it is not about domestic politics but national security, said Sherman.

Sherman had 12 hours of meetings with Kim in 2000 when she accompanied then-secretary of state Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang.

Current Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in Beijing Tuesday as part of a regional tour aimed at ending the impasse in the six-party talks, which group the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/26/AR2008022600894.html>

Iran and North Korea a threat to Asia stability: Olmert

By Tova Cohen

Reuters

Tuesday, February 26, 2008; 10:03 AM

[EXCERPTS]

TOKYO (Reuters) - Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert discussed in Japan on Tuesday North Korea's missile cooperation with Iran, cautioning that both countries posed threats to the stability of Asia and the Middle East, an Israeli official said.

[deletia]

Olmert, on a four-day official visit to Japan, provided Japanese officials with information regarding the sale of long-range missiles by North Korea to Iran, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

[deletia]

According to Japan's Nikkei newspaper, Olmert will provide Fukuda with information on North Korea's alleged military cooperation with Syria and Iran.

An Israeli official declined to comment on the report.

Last September, Israel carried out an air strike inside Syrian territory. Some U.S. officials have linked the raid to suspicions of secret nuclear cooperation between Damascus and North Korea. Syria and North Korea have denied any nuclear ties.

Can NY Phil Concert in NK Resolve Denuclearization?

By Yoon Won-sup

02-27-2008 18:22

Will the New York Philharmonic concert usher in the beginning of new era of diplomacy in Washington-Pyongyang relations amid North Korea's nuclear weapons standoff?

The concert could play at least a starting point for the two countries to reconsider their ties by this cultural gesture.

The musical diplomacy is reminiscent of the ping-pong diplomacy in which table tennis players went to Beijing to play in contests to help the United States soften its relations with China in the 1970s.

Among other things, U.S. President George W. Bush didn't exclude the possibility of further cultural exchange with North Korea on condition that the communist country makes progress toward denuclearization.

Plus, through the Pyongyang concert, the United States delivered a message that it hopes to resolve the nuclear problem during Bush's presidency, according to a report.

The U.S.-funded Voice of America (VOA) said former U.S. Ambassador to Seoul Donald Gregg and former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry conveyed such a message to Kim Kye-gwan, top North Korean nuclear envoy.

"We explained that it would be easier for North Korea to deal with the nuclear issue with the Bush administration than with the next administration," Gregg was quoted as saying. "The North's uranium enrichment program and alleged nuclear technology transfer to Syria should be cleared."

Now all eyes are turning to the stalled six-party talks, aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear ambition. The talks failed to make any progress for the North's denclearization since North Korea refused to submit a full list of nuclear weapons' programs by the end of 2007.

Yu Myung-hwan, nominee for foreign minister, also said the Lee Myung-bak government will maintain the six-party framework to resolve North Korea's nuclear stance.

"It is true that the six-party talks made some achievements on the nuclear issue," Yu said during a parliamentary confirmation hearing, Wednesday. "We will do our best to encourage North Korea to follow the denuclearization process as quickly as possible."

Yu added the nuclear issue is the most important agenda for the new government to tackle.

North Korean Concert Organizers Seek Momentum on Nuclear Issue

By Kurt Achin

Seoul

28 February 2008

This week's New York Philharmonic performance in the North Korean capital was more than just a night at the symphony. It was also a chance for several unofficial U.S. envoys to talk extensively with senior North Korean officials. VOA Seoul Correspondent Kurt Achin reports on what two of the concert's main organizers heard from Pyongyang about the stalled nuclear weapons talks.

Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Donald Gregg and Evans Revere, president of the New York-based Korea Society, said in Seoul Thursday they sensed an "overwhelming" feeling of good will at this week's Pyongyang concert.

The two former U.S. diplomats say the event, broadcast live across North Korea, may have created the right atmosphere for a breakthrough on stalled nuclear weapons diplomacy. North Korea promised early last year to declare all of its nuclear activities before the start of 2008, but has still failed to do so.

During their Pyongyang visit, Gregg and Revere held several hours of talks with senior North Korean nuclear negotiator Kim Kye Kwan. Ambassador Gregg says he asked Kim why the North's declaration was stalled, but received an incomplete answer.

"He fought that question off by saying, 'you Americans have been too slow in the delivery of heavy oil fuels and so he said you're not living up to the formula of action to action, and that explains why we are stalled,'" he said.

The declaration is part of a broader, multi-phase agreement, which rewards North Korea with energy aid, financial assistance, and the prospect of better relations in exchange for gradual steps toward completely abandoning nuclear weapons.

Gregg says a deeper reason for the declaration's delay is that North Korea fears possible embarrassment over its contents. Washington has insisted the North account for uranium enrichment Pyongyang has never publicly admitted, and also that it address U.S. suspicions the North may have provided nuclear assistance to Syria.

Gregg says former Defense Secretary William Perry told Kim Kye Kwan the best time to act is now, while President Bush is in office, rather than after one of the front-running candidates to replace him is sworn in next January.

"When we shifted to why it was imperative to move quickly, by describing what would happen under a McCain administration or an Obama administration - which would very clearly be a more difficult situation than the one today - he made no response," Ambassador Gregg said.

Gregg says he interpreted that silence as acceptance. Experts say a McCain administration would likely take a much harder line on North Korea, while a Democratic party president may find their options limited by Republican opponents in the U.S. Congress.

Revere says he remains convinced North Korea is serious about the negotiations.

"I came away from all of these discussions over several hours with the very clear sense that the North Koreans are prepared to engage in exploratory diplomacy, and creative diplomacy, designed at getting around the current obstacles," he said.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, Washington's chief envoy to the nuclear talks, left Beijing Thursday after looking for ways to renew the process. No new date has been set for the multinational talks to resume.

U.S. suggests secret disclosure of nuclear past

By Nicholas Kralev

February 28, 2008

BEIJING — The United States is urging North Korea to end a deadlock in six-nation nuclear talks by completing an overdue account of its nuclear past with a document that might remain secret.

In November, Pyongyang disclosed details of its efforts to make atomic bombs from plutonium. But the United States says it failed to explain a parallel program to make highly enriched uranium, an equally potent fuel for nuclear weapons.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice publicly raised the prospect of an additional disclosure yesterday in Tokyo, her last stop on a three-nation visit to East Asia.

"I really have less concern about what form it takes or how many different pieces of paper there may have to be or how many times it may have to go back and forth," Miss Rice said.

U.S. officials said privately last month that North Korea could submit a second list to account for uranium-enrichment efforts, which are thought to have led to transfers of equipment and technology to Syria.

At a private dinner in Washington late last month, Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. ambassador to South Korea, said the Bush administration is looking for a way to persuade North Koreans to cooperate without "rubbing it on their noses."

A separate document would give the United States the information it demands about dangerous North Korean activities and save Pyongyang public embarrassment by keeping part of the list secret, diplomats said.

The declaration, which was due at the end of December, would complete the second phase of an October deal aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and would clear the way for promised political and economic benefits to the communist state.

A Syrian facility targeted by an Israeli air strike in September has become a major issue for the United States because it was widely reported to be a nuclear site under construction with help from North Korea.

The matter was expected to be raised during a meeting between Miss Rice and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert today in Tokyo.

Mr. Olmert was in Tokyo to explain intelligence on North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria.

The Bush administration first accused North Korea of running a secret uranium-enrichment program in 2002.

Chinese negotiators have urged the United States to accept North Korea's November declaration and leave uranium enrichment and transfers to Syria for future negotiations.

Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea, remained in Beijing to continue talks with the Chinese yesterday while Miss Rice flew to Tokyo from Beijing. She visited Seoul on Monday.

South Korea, China and Japan, along with the U.S., Russia and North Korea, are in talks to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

North Korean cooperation would bring energy aid and other assistance from the United States and South Korea, including a supply of 1 million tons of fuel oil for conventional power plants.

"The third phase is going to be really hard, which is where you have to really talk about dismantling [the North's programs] and you have to account for the material and you have to figure out what to do with the material," Miss Rice said.

Diplomats and analysts said Washington must find a way to break the impasse while holding to its demands that North Korea explain any secret programs and proliferation activities.

<http://campaignspot.nationalreview.com/post/?q=OTYZMjIzM2RkMmM4YzY0NmFiNGQxNDdhMWQxNGMyZjg=>

The Campaign Spot
Jim Garaghty Reporting
Thursday, February 28, 2008

JOHN MCCAIN

John McCain, in between fund-raisers and events in Texas, held another conference call with bloggers. Selected highlights:

[deletia]

Michael Goldfarb of the Weekly Standard: Any thoughts on the NY Philharmonic going to North Korea?

McCain: The shipments to Syria had marks of North Korean involvement. I hope the starving people in the world's largest remaining gulag get a chance to see the philharmonic perform. Only a chosen 1400 got to see them perform. It's okay, but let's not delude ourselves. The Dear Leader didn't show up and he's going to do whatever it takes to remain in power. I'm disappointed in the Chinese on not bringing more pressure to bear.

[deletia]

[Sourcebook note: As ranking minority member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Senator McCain was presumably briefed on the available intelligence concerning the 6 September 2007 strike. See <http://pogoblog.typepad.com/pogo/2007/11/congress-still-.html> above.]



Press Roundtable in Hanoi, Vietnam

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Hanoi, Vietnam

March 3, 2008

Released on March 4, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

QUESTION: During your 16-day trip you spent more time than scheduled in Beijing.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes.

QUESTION: And this weekend Kim Jong-il visited the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang. It seems unusual. Are Washington and Beijing working together to ramp up the pressure a little bit?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You're quite correct, I spent a lot of time in Beijing. Actually, I made three separate trips to Beijing during this overall trip. Rather than talk about ramping up pressure, I'd rather ramp up the effort to find a solution. We are hopeful that we can find the formula for moving forward, but what we need from the North Koreans is a willingness to give us a complete and correct declaration. We look forward to meeting with the North Koreans and working toward that end. Of course, if we can get through this complete and correct declaration we will be able to move on to the third phase, which for us will be a very decisive phase -- because that's when we look forward to seeing if we can have the North Koreans fulfill the requirements of the September '05 joint statement and to try to get to the end of this very long process.

I met with the North Koreans about a week ago. We had looked forward to another meeting. I assume we will get that organized at some point in the near future and see if we can get through this phase two and on to phase three.

QUESTION: The meeting with Kim Jong-il at the Chinese Embassy, do you think it's significant?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think he's gone to the Chinese Embassy before. In fact, I think he's also visited the Russian embassy in the past. So I really am not in a position to weigh its significance. I don't think it was related to the talks I was having in Beijing.

QUESTION: I'm from NHK. When do you expect to resume the Six-Party Talks on North Korean nuclear issues?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We first need to get through this problem of getting a complete and correct declaration. When we're through that, we will take our obligations in the so-called second

phase and then try to move on to the third phase. So if we can resolve these matters in the next few weeks, let's say -- which I think is possible -- I think we could perhaps, depending on the views of the Chinese host, we could maybe get together for a Six-Party meeting to plan out the third phase. So time is short, and I would hope we can get on with that this month.

QUESTION: Complete and correct declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Complete and correct.

QUESTION: Complete and correct declaration is about plutonium or uranium or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's the overall declaration of all of their nuclear programs so that we will be able to identify all the programs that need to be abandoned pursuant to their requirements under the September '05 statement. We've had a number of discussions with the North Koreans on what is meant by complete and correct. We have to resolve this in order to move on to the next stage.

North Korea needs to understand that its security will be guaranteed when it has good relations with its neighbors. And it will have good relations with its neighbors when it gives up the nuclear ambition.

QUESTION: Do you think Vietnam shares some similar history with North Korea? Are you asking the Vietnamese to act as go-betweens or to deliver messages to Pyongyang?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we're not asking Vietnam to be a mediator or a go-between with North Korea. That's not a role we're asking them to play nor a role that they would be particularly interested in playing. Nor are we asking the North Koreans to ask the Vietnamese what the Vietnamese experience has been in getting their economy moving the way they have. But I wish the North Koreans would ask that question, and I wish the Vietnamese would answer it in as detailed as way as possible -- because what has happened in Vietnam in the last half decade is nothing short of extraordinary. I think every country, even North Korea, should be very inspired by the progress made by the Vietnamese people in bringing this economy up. So I do hope North Korea asks that question. Thank you very much. I've got a full program here thanks to Ambassador Michalak and the Embassy. They're kind of pulling me around to one meeting after the other. So it's great to see you all

N.K. wants more cultural exchanges with UK: envoy

2008/03/05 15:14 KST

후후 LONDON, March 5 (Yonhap) -- North Korea is exploring ways to expand cultural exchange with Britain following the New York Philharmonic's unprecedented performance in Pyongyang, the communist state's envoy to Britain said Tuesday [2008-03-04].

후후 Amb. Ja Song-nam delivered an address in a joint session of the British House of Lords and House of Commons for the first time as a North Korean diplomat.

후후 North Korea invited the legendary British rock guitarist Eric Clapton to perform in Pyongyang early next year in exchange for a performance in London by the North's State Symphony Orchestra scheduled for September, Ja said.

후후 "We haven't yet heard from Clapton and he will make a decision," the envoy said. He appealed for help from all participants in the meeting "to promote cultural exchange between the two countries." North Korea established diplomatic ties with Britain in 2000. The reclusive communist state has been making concerted efforts to beef up its cultural diplomacy as it struggles to join the international community.

후후 Clapton's concert in Pyongyang, if held, would be a rare opportunity for North Koreans to hear Western rock music, as the communist country has banned rock music out of fear that it would spread capitalist Western pop culture in the isolated society.

후후 During the meeting that lasted for one and a half hours, Ja gave a brief explanation of the past and present situations surrounding North Korea and answered questions on human rights, nuclear issues and cultural exchanges from participants. Among them were seven British lawmakers, human rights activists, Korea experts, businessmen and journalists.

후후 The envoy denied allegations of a covert uranium enrichment program by Pyongyang and nuclear technology transfers, both key sticking points delaying negotiations over North Korea's nuclear programs. "There is no uranium enrichment program and the allegation that our country has transferred nuclear technology to Syria is groundless," Ja said. "We cannot disclose a non-existent thing, whether the disclosure is made in public or in secret."

The six-party process for disarming North Korea is stalled over the dispute. Washington is insisting that Pyongyang provide a "complete and accurate" list of its nuclear programs, including an alleged uranium enrichment program and technology transfers. The North claims it has already provided the list.

후후 sshim@yna.co.kr

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/06/AR2008030603277.html>

U.S. negotiator wants North Korean declaration in March

Thursday, **March 6, 2008**; 7:32 PM

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The top U.S. negotiator with North Korea said on Thursday that he wants Pyongyang to submit a complete declaration of its nuclear activities by the end of March because further delays could slow the denuclearization process.

"It's important that we try to get through this in March, because we're kind of running out of time in calendar year '08," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said in remarks to Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute in New York.

North Korea committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and programs in exchange for economic and diplomatic benefits under a 2005 multilateral deal.

But the accord between the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States has become bogged down by Pyongyang's failure to produce a declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of last year.

"Everything we've asked them to do, they can certainly do. Moreover, everything we've asked them to do, they've already agreed to do," Hill told reporters after his speech.

Hill, who has been Washington's point man on North Korea, said he did not believe it would be impossible to work around problems with the declaration. But without a complete declaration this month and the U.S. presidential elections in November, Hill said it was important to finish the process with North Korea by the end of this year.

"What I'm worried about is getting enough time to finish the whole process because we don't want partial denuclearization," Hill said.

(Reporting by Emily Chasan, editing by Philip Barbara)

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-03-07-voa2.cfm>

US Lawmakers Seek Assurances From State Department On International Commitments

By Dan Robinson

Capitol Hill

07 March 2008

[EXCERPTS]

In a congressional hearing, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, faced questions from members of Congress on a range of international issues, including Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in the Middle East, and Darfur. VOA's Dan Robinson reports, a House subcommittee hearing came as the Bush administration seeks to unlock billions of dollars in funding for key priorities.

[deletia]

Negroponte also asked lawmakers to approve \$53 million needed to fund additional deliveries of heavy fuel oil for North Korea in support of Six-Party efforts to end that country's nuclear program.



45th Anniversary of March 8 Revolution in Syria Marked

Pyongyang, March 6 [2008]

(KCNA) -- A meeting and a film show took place at the Taedonggang Club for the Diplomatic Corps in Pyongyang on Thursday to mark the 45th anniversary of the March 8 revolution in Syria.

Present there on invitation were Charge d' Affaires ad Interim Muhammad Adib Al Hani and staff members of the Syrian embassy here.

Kim Jin Bom, vice-chairman of the Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and vice-chairman of the Korea-Syria Friendship Association, officials concerned and working people in the city were on hand.

Kim Jin Bom said at the meeting that the victory of the March 8 revolution in Syria was a brilliant result of the just struggle of the Arab people for independence, peace, progress and prosperity and a new history started in Syria since then.

The Syrian Arab people are now striving to defend the sovereignty of the country and build a modern state, he added.

Muhammad Adib Al Hani said that the friendly relations between Syria and the DPRK, provided by former President Hafez Al-Assad and eternal President Kim Il Sung, are now developing under the deep care of President Bashar Al-Assad and General Secretary Kim Jong Il.

Syria is fully supporting the Korean people in their efforts to build a great prosperous powerful nation and reunify the country, he added.

A congratulatory letter to the president of Syria was adopted there.

After the meeting the participants saw a Syrian feature film.



<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2008/200803/news03/10.htm#2>

Congratulations to Syrian President

Pyongyang, **March 8 [2008]** (KCNA) -- General Secretary Kim Jong Il sent a congratulatory message to Bashar Al-Assad, regional secretary of the Arab Baath Socialist Party and President of Syria, on Saturday on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the March 8 Revolution in Syria.

The message said:

The March 8 Revolution marked an occasion of historic turn in the Syrian people's struggle to safeguard the dignity and sovereignty of the country and achieve its political stability and economic development.

Our people have always and fully supported the Syrian people in their righteous cause of building independent and modern Syria and solving the Mid-east problems in a fair and comprehensive manner under the guidance of the Arab Baath Socialist Party headed by you.

Convinced that the relations of friendship and cooperation between our two countries will grow stronger in various fields, I take this opportunity to sincerely wish you good health and happiness and your friendly people greater progress and prosperity.

<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2008/200803/news03/10.htm#3>

Greetings to Syrian President

Pyongyang, **March 8 [2008]** (KCNA) -- Kim Yong Nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, sent a message of greetings to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad on Saturday on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the March 8 Revolution in Syria.

Kim in the message said: I am rejoiced over the fact that the Syrian Arab people have achieved many successes in the efforts to build independent and modern Syria while invariably maintaining the principled stand under the leadership of the Arab Baath Socialist Party headed by you.

Extending support and solidarity to the Syrian people in their just cause of defending sovereignty and security of the country, retaking occupied Arab territory including the Golan Heights and solving the Mid-east issues in a fair and comprehensive way, the message wished the Syrian people greater progress and success.

http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jFfwhKUyQcvjmRGM0jmHNa0T4W_wD8V95NVG0

N. Korea Hopes for Friendship With Syria

6 hours ago

[Accessed 2008-03-08T15:40Z]

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Il hopes for stronger friendship with Syria, the North's official news agency reported Saturday, amid lingering suspicions of a secret nuclear connection between the two countries.

Kim expressed the hope in a message to Syrian President Bashar Assad on the anniversary of a 1963 coup that brought Syria's Baath Arab Socialist Party to power, the North's Korean Central News Agency reported.

"I express my firm belief that the friendly cooperative relations between the two countries will be further expanded and strengthened in various areas," Kim said in the message.

The North's No. 2 leader, Kim Yong Nam, sent a similar message to the Syrian president, KCNA said.

North Korea has been suspected of helping Syria with a secret nuclear program.

But Pyongyang has strongly denied the accusations, saying it has never spread its nuclear expertise beyond its borders. Syria has also denied receiving any North Korean nuclear help.

The alleged nuclear link is believed to be a sticking point stalling international talks on the North's nuclear programs, along with the communist nation's suspected uranium enrichment program.

Under last year's agreement with the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia, the North is required to give a full account of its nuclear programs, including whether it spread nuclear technology beyond its borders.

Pyongyang claims it gave the nuclear declaration to the United States in November, but Washington says the North never produced a "complete and correct" declaration.

North Korea and Syria established diplomatic relations in 1966.

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8V8V0KG0&show_article=1

N. Korea admits to sending engineers to Syria

Mar 7 [2008] 08:45 PM US/Eastern

NEW YORK, March 7 (AP) - (Kyodo)—North Korea admitted to sending engineers to military-related and other facilities in Syria during its recent talks with the United States over its nuclear program, diplomatic sources in New York said Friday [2008-03-07].

Pyongyang, however, denied its involvement in Syrian nuclear development, according to the sources.

The dispatch of engineers and other personnel for bilateral cooperation, including on the military front, started in around 2000, North Korea told the United States in their talks from the end of last year to January.

The North also exported materials to Syria, the sources said.

Pyongyang claimed most of the personnel worked at civilian facilities, according to the sources.

US wants 'clear signal' from NKorea over nuclear declaration

SEOUL, March 10 (AFP)

Mar 10, 2008

North Korea must send a "clear signal" to fully declare its nuclear programmes in order to get itself removed from a list of state sponsors of terrorism, the US ambassador here said Monday.

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow's demand to South Korea came as the six-party nuclear disarmament talks on North Korea were stuck in a stalemate over Pyongyang's complaint over the list.

North Korea last year signed a landmark deal to abandon all its nuclear weapons in exchange for badly needed energy and economic aid and major security and diplomatic benefits.

But the disarmament process has been in a stalemate since North Korea missed an end-2007 deadline to declare all its nuclear programmes.

Pyongyang has said it submitted a full list in November, but Washington insists it is still awaiting a complete declaration, including a full account of a suspected covert uranium enrichment programme.

Last week, North Korea's ruling communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun blamed Washington for the deadlock, saying the US has yet to start removing the North from a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"We aren't able to do that until we see a clear signal from the North Koreans that they are going to do their part with regards to the declaration," Vershbow told a news conference.

"They have not yet shown us even the elements of what will constitute a complete and concrete declaration," the US ambassador to South Korea said.

He said Washington wants to push forward the disarmament process talks, which group the United States, both Koreas, China, Japan and Russia.

But he said North Korea was still "in a wait-and-see mode" in making progress in the six-party talks, after South Korea's new conservative government took over last month.

"It is clear that North Korea has to adjust, in fact, to much closer alignment between Washington and Seoul, as we move forward to the six-party talks," Vershbow said.

Last week, US State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said he hoped to seek a complete North Korean declaration in "the not too distant future" as US top negotiator Christopher Hill hoped six-party talks could resume this month.

Vershbow: "Impatience building up" on North

March 11, 2008

United States Ambassador to South Korea Alexander Vershbow said Pyongyang must "adjust" to warmer relations between Seoul and Washington after President Lee Myung-bak took office.

Vershbow also said there is a "sense of impatience building up" among participants in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program over the long delay by Pyongyang to fully declare its nuclear programs.

"We are pleased with President Lee's emphasis on strengthening U.S.-Korea relations, one of the central issues in his foreign policy doctrine," Vershbow said in a speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in Seoul yesterday.

"The key aspect of it is the nation's continued support for the global war against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction."

Vershbow also reiterated Washington's position that it would remove North Korea from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and lift trade restrictions only after the North fully completes the next step toward denuclearization.

North Korea, according to an agreement made last October, is committed to making a "complete and correct" declaration of all of its nuclear programs by Dec. 31, 2007, a deadline it missed.

"We will be prepared to do these two things only in parallel with North Korea's obligations," he said. "There is a sense of impatience building up, and we want to get on with it."

Vershbow cautioned that people "should not have any illusion" that the recent historic concert of the New York Philharmonic orchestra in Pyongyang could jump-start the stalled talks on North Korea. His comment echoed sentiment on Capitol Hill that downplayed the political significance of the event.

"My view is that North Korea is calculating what should be its next move in the six-party talks," he said. "It is clear that North Korea has to adjust to closer relations between Seoul and Washington."

[deletia]

http://seoul.usembassy.gov/113_031008.html



**"State of U.S.-Korea Relations – 2008 and Beyond"
Remarks to Members of the
American Chamber of Commerce in Korea**

**Alexander Vershbow
U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea**

Grand Hyatt Hotel, Seoul – March 10, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

A challenge that's been with us for a long time has been North Korea and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. We look forward to the closest possible cooperation with the new government to achieve the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and North Korea's abandonment of all its nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs.

The past year has seen some encouraging developments, including the shutdown and disablement of the North's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. Just two weeks ago, we all followed the events connected with the New York Philharmonic's historic concert in Pyongyang. It was an extraordinary event broadcast live across the entire peninsula. It was an opportunity for North Koreans to see Americans as they really are rather than through the prism of propaganda, and perhaps to see the possibility of a different kind of relationship with the United States.

But we shouldn't have any illusions. North Korea's nuclear program still remains a fundamental problem. North Korea has yet to present a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs, as they were supposed to do by the end of last year. As Assistant Secretary Hill has emphasized, it's crucial in the Six-Party process for the North Koreans to fulfill their commitments. When they're ready to do so, we'll be ready to deliver on our commitments to remove the North from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List and the Trading with the Enemy Act. We want to move on to the next stage, the stage of full denuclearization, which will open the way to normal relations between North Korea and the rest of the world, and to economic assistance that can improve the lives of the North Korean people.

[deletia]

SKorea reviews agreements due to NKorea nuke deadlock

SEOUL, March 10 (AFP)

Mar 10, 2008

South Korea will review inter-Korean economic projects agreed at an October summit due to deadlock in a nuclear disarmament deal, the minister responsible for relations with Pyongyang said Monday.

"In implementing the agreements, we must consider a change of circumstances," Unification Minister Kim Ha-Joong told a parliamentary confirmation hearing.

North Korea last year signed the deal to abandon its nuclear weapons. But the process is at an impasse while awaiting a North Korean declaration of all its nuclear programmes.

At the summit, the South pledged help to repair the North's dilapidated railways. A cross-border railway cargo service started in December for the first time since the 1950-1953 Korean War.

The two sides also agreed to develop a joint economic zone around the North's Haeju city on the west coast.

Since South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak took office last month, inter-Korean relations have been soured by a US-South Korea joint military exercise.

Lee, a conservative, pledged to take a firmer line with Pyongyang and to press the regime on its human rights record.

North Korea has warned that inter-Korean relations might slip back to confrontation.

Conservatives in the South want the government to stop providing unlimited aid to North Korea. They have criticised previous governments for giving too much while gaining little in return.

But Kim said South Korea should push ahead with humanitarian aid to its impoverished neighbour.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
March 11, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

QUESTION: Yes. Sean, we know Chris Hill is going to Geneva later this week --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- to meet with his North Korean counterpart. Do you consider the talks in trouble -- the six-party process in trouble? Do you consider this just another meeting in a long line of meetings?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well --

QUESTION: What's the status?

MR. MCCORMACK: Let's hope that it's a meeting that moves the process forward. And by moving the process forward, I mean taking some positive steps towards the -- or talking about positive steps towards completing dismantlement, to providing a complete declaration, which the North Korean Government has promised to do in the context of the six-party talks. We are prepared, along with our other partners in those discussions, to fulfill our commitments. So -- but this is a discussion that is based upon the principle of action for action, so the other five members of the six-party talks are looking for North Korea to fulfill their commitments, and all the while we are going to continue to fulfill ours.

As to the first part of your question, we believe that this diplomatic process still has a lot of life left in it. We are focused on trying to move the process forward. We're devoting a lot of energy and focus to it, as are other members of the six-party talks, most notably the Chinese Government.

So the diplomacy continues to move forward. While it may not move forward at the pace that we would have originally wished, we believe that there is the possibility to succeed in completing this phase and then move on to a new phase in which we would start to talk about actually dismantling the North Korean nuclear program and other aspects of the September 2005 agreement that talk about peace and security on the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: But you don't think it's in trouble?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, we still think that this process has a lot of life in it.

[deletia]

QUESTION: One on North Korea. Do you still expect their talks to be just one day?

MR. MCCORMACK: Right now I think they're scheduled for a day, but if they need a few hours more to discuss additional agenda items or to go deeper into the discussions, I'm sure they'll take that time. That will be up to Chris and his counterpart.

QUESTION: And have the North Koreans given any indication that they might provide a declaration or something to move this forward?

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, I'm not going to offer any particular comment. You can get comment from the North Korean Government as to their expectations for the meeting.

[deletia]

U.S., N. Korean nuke negotiators to meet Thursday in Geneva:

AP

Posted: 2008-03-11 12:14:19

WASHINGTON, March 11 (Kyodo) - (EDS: ADDING SPOKESMAN'S QUOTES)

The top U.S. and North Korean nuclear negotiators will meet Thursday in Geneva to discuss Pyongyang's declaration of its nuclear activities, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Tuesday.

Christopher Hill, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan are expected to try to bridge differences on the substance of the declaration that Pyongyang is obliged to submit under a six-party deal, the spokesman told reporters.

"This is part of the six-party process. They're going to be discussing ways in which to move that process forward," he said. "This phase has not yet been completed and we need to try to push forward."

The six-party nuclear talks have stalemated since Pyongyang missed an end-of-2007 deadline to reveal all details of its nuclear activity, in breach of the accord with the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

The differences include North Korea's alleged uranium enrichment program, as separate from its known plutonium-powered nuclear program, and Pyongyang's suspected transfer of nuclear technology to such countries as Syria.

The United States, which wants a "complete and correct" list, and North Korea have been discussing possible solutions, including separating the issues from the main declaration as an attachment or writing down both sides' arguments in the declaration.

"We have said that this should be a full and complete declaration and that means any proliferation activities, any activities related to highly-enriched uranium, any activities related to plutonium. Full and complete," McCormack said.

Hill and Kim met in Beijing on Feb. 19 but failed to achieve a breakthrough. Hill tried in vain to hold another round of talks there on March 1.

Hill said during a talk at Columbia University in New York Thursday that it is vital for North Korea to provide a full account of its nuclear activity by the end of this month.

"There is no drop-dead deadline, but it is important to try to get through this in March because we're running out of time," he said, referring to the change in the U.S. administration next year.

U.S. and North Korean officials to meet on Thursday

Tue Mar 11, 2008 4:43pm EDT

By Arshad Mohammed

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. and North Korean officials will meet in Geneva on Thursday to try to revive a deal for Pyongyang to disclose its nuclear activities in return for aid and the easing of U.S. sanctions, U.S. officials said.

If Pyongyang were to provide an accurate declaration, the United States could act "in a matter of days" to drop North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and to ease sanctions under the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act, said a senior U.S. official who spoke on condition he not be named.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill will meet his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-Gwan to discuss a 2005 deal under which Pyongyang agreed to abandon its nuclear programs, U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

The deal, which suffered a severe setback when Pyongyang tested a nuclear device in October 2006, has been bogged down more recently by North Korea's failure to produce a promised declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of last year.

"They are going to be discussing ways to move that process forward. ... We need to try to push forward," McCormack told reporters of the Geneva meeting, saying he did not know if an agreement on the document would emerge after the talks.

A sticking point of the declaration had been Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear program but the case remains murky.

A highly enriched uranium (HEU) program would give North Korea a second source of fissile material with which it could produce nuclear weapons in addition to its plutonium-based nuclear facilities.

The senior U.S. official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the negotiations, said he believed North Korea is comfortable with disclosing the proliferation and uranium-related activities in a separate, secret document.

"If the North provides what they need to in terms of a complete and correct declaration and what is required on HEU and proliferation, our actions (on sanctions) can occur very much at the same time," he said.

He also said Washington -- which wants Pyongyang to give up its atomic activities, any weapons and related materials before U.S. President George W. Bush leaves office in January -- was heartened by North Korea agreeing to the Geneva talks.

Under the so-called second phase of the denuclearization agreement, North Korea committed to disable its nuclear facility at Yongbyon, where it has produced plutonium, and to make the "complete and correct" declaration.

In return, the other parties to the accord reached among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, agreed to provide up to 1 million tonnes of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent.

There has been significant progress in disabling Yongbyon -- U.S. officials say 8 of 11 tasks are completed -- but North Korea has slowed down the process in recent months, arguing that the others have delayed keeping their end of the bargain.

The senior U.S. official said there had been no effort by the other five to delay deliveries of fuel oil or other aid.

The Chinese are giving North Korea coking coal, the South Koreans have provided steel plates to reinforce mine roofs and both countries are providing basic parts for power plants and mines.

"You will find on the South Korean and Chinese side that the (materials) will start to move very quickly now," he said. "The contracts have been let and things are beginning to flow into a pipeline of materials moving to the North."

News of the Geneva meeting came as the United States released its annual human rights report in which North Korea was listed among the worst offenders.

The State Department cited extrajudicial killings, disappearances and arbitrary detention, including of political prisoners, and called North Korea's regime "repressive."

(Additional reporting by Sue Fleming; Editing by Eric Walsh)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/11/AR2008031102544.html?>

U.S., N. Korea to Work Toward Ending Weapons Impasse

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, **March 12, 2008**; A08

Top U.S. and North Korean diplomats will gather in Geneva tomorrow amid signs that the two sides, with the help of China, have structured a diplomatic framework that could resolve an impasse that has blocked a deal to end Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator, will meet with North Korean counterpart Kim Gye Gwan for one or two days. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, "We're focused on trying to move the process forward."

Under an agreement reached in February 2007, North Korea was to have declared all of its nuclear programs and materials by the end of the year. **Pyongyang admitted to possessing 30 to 40 kilograms of plutonium, U.S. officials said, but balked at providing full details about a suspected uranium enrichment program and about whether it had cooperated with Syria in an alleged nuclear program destroyed by Israeli fighters last September.**

Now, diplomats said, a possible face-saving solution for North Korea may have been found in which those issues are separated from its initial declaration, such as in statements from Kim to Hill that would become part of the six-nation negotiations. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently signaled the new approach in a statement after talks last month in Asia: "I really have less concern about what form it takes or how many different pieces of paper there may have to be," as long as it results in progress.

Rice and Hill have increasingly focused on North Korea's stockpile of plutonium as the real threat to international security, officials said. But to persuade Pyongyang to abandon the plutonium, obtained from fuel rods in a small nuclear reactor, the administration must first settle the lingering questions concerning uranium enrichment and Syria. Increasingly, top U.S. officials view those as historical issues compared with the immediate proliferation risk posed by plutonium.

North Korea acquired much of its plutonium after the 2002 collapse of a Clinton administration agreement that froze the reactor. The Bush administration accused North Korea of cheating on the deal, citing evidence that Pyongyang had a clandestine uranium-enrichment program. Plutonium and highly enriched uranium are different routes to building nuclear weapons.

In a little-noticed speech at Amherst College on Jan. 30, Hill said that U.S. officials had largely concluded that thousands of aluminum tubes acquired by North Korea in 2002 -- which sparked the intelligence finding that Pyongyang was building a large-scale uranium-enrichment program -- were not currently being used to create fissile material.

"We have seen that these tubes are not being used for a centrifuge program," he said, according to an audio recording of the speech on Amherst's Web site. "We had American diplomats go and look at this aluminum that was used and see what they are actually using it for. We actually had American diplomats, people like myself, carry this aluminum back in our suitcases to verify this is the precise aluminum we knew the North Koreans had actually purchased."

Government scientists have discovered traces of enriched uranium on the aluminum samples, suggesting that they may have been used in such a program or that they came in contact with a centrifuge kit that North Korea acquired from a Pakistani smuggling network.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080312/NATION/169481933/1001>

Ethnic dispute tears al Qaeda, Hayden says

By Bill Gertz

March 12, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden said Osama bin Laden is putting more energy into hiding than into running his terror network.

Internal divisions between Saudi and Egyptian leaders of al Qaeda are producing "fissures" within the terrorist group and a possible battle over who will succeed Osama bin Laden, CIA Director Michael V. Hayden said yesterday *[2008-08-11]*... in a wide-ranging interview with editors and reporters of The Washington Times.

[deletia]

On other issues, Mr. Hayden said:

- North Korea's government has not provided a full accounting of its plutonium, uranium-enrichment program and arms proliferation. Pyongyang must "readmit" that it has the uranium program, and "our requirement as a nation is they've got to come clean on all three."

North Korea had a uranium-enrichment program, but the status is not clear.

[deletia]

Pressure building on North Korea

By LEE JONG-HEON

UPI Correspondent

Published: **March 12, 2008**

SEOUL, South Korea, North Korea is under mounting pressure to hasten its disarmament process in the face of a strengthening South Korea-U.S. alliance following the inauguration of a conservative administration in Seoul.

Seoul's Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan used his first press briefing since taking office on Wednesday **[2008-03-12]** to call for the North to fulfill its denuclearization obligations, warning that a further delay would sap the momentum of the hard-won disarmament process.

The North Korean nuclear issue "is making no progress" due to a deadlock over the country's alleged uranium enrichment program and nuclear technology transfer to Syria, Yu said. "I am concerned that the six-way (nuclear) talks may lose momentum," he said.

Under the six-nation agreement reached in February last year, the North completed the first phase of disarmament in July by shutting down and sealing its plutonium-producing reactor at the country's main nuclear complex in return for energy aid. But it has failed to finish the second phase of the disarmament deal that called for a declaration of all its nuclear programs by the end of last year, delaying the third and final phase of dismantling its atomic weapons programs.

The North says it submitted a nuclear list in November, but the United States insists it must account fully for a suspected uranium weapons program. Pyongyang has flatly denied the existence of a uranium enrichment program and any transfer of nuclear technology and materials to other countries.

"A complete and correct declaration is a key to moving to the next stage," Yu told the press conference. "I expect a quick resolution of the declaration issue," he said. The new diplomatic chief also vowed to strengthen policy coordination with the United States in dealing with the nuclear standoff and other regional and global issues.

"The (Seoul) government will work out a vision for the alliance in the 21st century through close consultations with the United States," he said. "We would deepen the alliance with the United States beyond the Korean peninsula to jointly handle Northeast Asian and global issues."

Yu plans to travel to the United States on March 25-29 to discuss the bilateral alliance and tackle the North Korean nuclear issues, ahead of a planned trip to Japan slated for April 5-6. He leaves for China next week for a three-day visit.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak plans to visit the United States April 15-19, which will be followed by a two-day trip to Japan on his way back home.

Adding to pressure on the North, the top U.S. envoy in Seoul said North Korea must send a "clear signal" that it plans to give a complete accounting of its nuclear programs so that Washington could move toward improving ties with Pyongyang.

The United States would not take North Korea off its terrorism blacklist "until we see a clear signal from the North Koreans that they are going to do their part with regards to the declaration," Ambassador Alexander Vershbow told a news conference in Seoul earlier this week. "There is a sense of impatience building up and we want to get on with it," he said.

The envoy called for a quick move from the North if it wishes to avoid a tougher stance from Seoul and Washington. "I think it is clear that North Korea has to adjust to closer relations between Washington and Seoul," he said.

The sense of urgency came as top nuclear negotiators from Washington and Pyongyang plan to meet in Geneva later this week, in a new push to break the nuclear impasse. "We hope that progress will be made at the Geneva talks so that the six-party process may move forward to the next stage," Yu said.

According to diplomatic sources, the Geneva talks may focus on a proposed compromise crafted by China, which has hosted the six-nation nuclear talks. Under the proposed deal, the North may declare its plutonium-producing facilities in an open document, while admitting the uranium-based program in a separate, secret document.

The next step would be closed-door two-way contacts between Pyongyang and Washington to resolve the uranium-based program, according to the sources.

Suh Jae-jean, a senior researcher at the government-run Korea Institute for National Unification, expects Pyongyang and Washington to accept the compromise deal because both want a resolution before the Bush administration leaves in early 2009.

"The current standoff can be resolved by drawing up two documents that will enable North Korea to save face and prevent backlash within the United States," Suh told a group of journalists. "One document should be an agreement made public and the other, an undisclosed document," he said.

Suh said the North is expected to make a strategic decision within this month. "North Korea wants normalization of diplomatic ties with the United States as a survival strategy. In addition, the North's economic situation is too dire to reject the aid-for-disarmament deal," he said.

Seoul Urges N. Korea Nuclear Negotiators to Preserve 'Momentum'

By Kurt Achin

Seoul

12 March 2008

South Korea's newly appointed foreign minister is warning talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities could stall over unresolved issues related to the North's promised declaration.

However, officials in Seoul are optimistic a one-on-one meeting this week between North Korean and American negotiators may produce progress. VOA's Kurt Achin reports from Seoul.

In his first media briefing since taking office, South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan expressed concern about the future of the North Korea nuclear talks.

He says he is concerned the six-nation talks may lose "momentum."

For five years, South Korea has worked with the United States, Japan, China and Russia to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear programs, in exchange for financial and energy aid along with diplomatic incentives.

The six-nation diplomacy has produced progress in shutting down the North's main plutonium-producing facilities. However, Pyongyang has failed to produce a complete declaration of its nuclear activities and stockpiles it promised to submit by the end of 2007.

Yu said Wednesday the delay is because of two basic obstacles.

He says there are roadblocks over accusations North Korea maintained a uranium enrichment program and engaged in nuclear cooperation with Syria.

North Korea has never publicly admitted having a uranium enrichment program, but the United States says it has abundant evidence such a program exists. Washington also suspects North Korea may have lent assistance to a possible nuclear facility in Syria which Israeli warplanes bombed in September.

Negotiators in the six-nation process are now pinning their hopes on a meeting scheduled Thursday in Geneva between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill and senior North Korean envoy Kim Kye Kwan. The diplomats are their respective countries' chief delegates to the multinational nuclear talks.

A similar one-on-one meeting last year in Berlin helped the two countries resolve a financial dispute that was paralyzing the diplomatic process. It is unclear what specific proposals the two envoys will discuss. However, experts and some U.S. officials have suggested North Korea may seek to address Washington's concerns on the most sensitive issues in a document, separate from the formal nuclear declaration.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iaoMroxkcjTDGuNZkWoctnsVjFAA>

US mulls new statement to break North Korea deadlock

1 day ago

[Accessed 2008-03-13T15Z]

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States is looking for a flexible way to unblock North Korea nuclear talks without letting the Stalinist state off the hook of full disclosure, officials said Wednesday.

One option set to be discussed at talks in Geneva Thursday is a separate declaration, addressing US concerns that North Korea has been secretly exporting nuclear technology to Syria, a diplomatic source said.

That would enable fuller six-party talks to resume, the source said, putting renewed pressure on North Korea to come clean on the full extent of its publicly disclosed nuclear program.

"We'll look at any and all ideas with the understanding that at the end of the day, we need a complete and correct declaration," chief US negotiator Christopher Hill told reporters before flying to Geneva.

"How we get that, what the pieces of paper look like, I think we should be a little flexible on the format, but with the understanding that flexibility on format doesn't mean flexibility on getting a complete and correct declaration."

North Korea last year signed a landmark deal to abandon all its nuclear weapons in exchange for badly needed energy and economic aid, along with major security and diplomatic benefits.

But the process -- involving the United States, China, both Koreas, Russia and Japan -- has been stalled since North Korea missed an end-2007 deadline to declare all its nuclear programs and disable a plutonium plant.

"I think we have some ideas that are maybe workable but they are only workable in the context of providing a complete and correct declaration," said Hill, the top State Department official for East Asia.

"We cannot have a situation where they don't give us a complete declaration and where we try to ignore elements that need to be there."

North Korea has blamed Washington for the deadlock, citing a US failure to remove it from a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

US accusations of North Korean complicity in a secret Syrian atomic drive, and allegations that Pyongyang has a furtive program to produce highly enriched uranium, have complicated the process.

Last September, Israeli military jets reportedly bombed a site in Syria after Israeli and US intelligence determined the location housed a partially built nuclear reactor constructed with North Korean help.

Washington, which is under pressure from security hawks to get tough with North Korea, has already rejected an initial declaration by Pyongyang that failed to address secret nuclear technology transfers to Syria.

But the separate declaration being negotiated in Geneva between Hill and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-Gwan, would allow the six-party talks to get back on track, the diplomatic source said.

The declaration would be submitted to the other countries in the process and made public, the source added, declining to be identified.

Whatever emerges cannot be a "secret agreement" but must be transparent, Hill said, before being asked if he was feeling upbeat about his trip to Switzerland.

"I never talk about optimism or pessimism, except with the Red Sox," the US official said, referring to his Boston baseball team.

U.S. flexibility on North Korea deal has limits: envoy

Wed Mar 12, 2008 9:40pm GMT

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States insists on receiving a "complete and correct" North Korean disclosure of its nuclear activities under a disarmament-for-aid pact but can be flexible on the form of that statement, the U.S. envoy to atomic talks with Pyongyang said on Wednesday.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill will meet his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-Gwan on Geneva on Thursday to discuss a 2005 deal under which Pyongyang agreed to abandon its nuclear programs.

The deal has been bogged down more recently by North Korea's failure to produce a promised declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of last year.

U.S. insistence on a "complete and correct" accounting of North Korea's nuclear programs and activities has clashed with Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfers of nuclear technology to other nations, notably Syria, as well as its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

"We have some ideas that may be workable, but they're only workable within the context of providing a complete and correct declaration," Hill told reporters in Washington before leaving for Switzerland.

A senior U.S. official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the negotiations, said on Tuesday he believed North Korea would be comfortable with disclosing the proliferation and uranium-related activities in a separate secret, document.

Asked about this formula, which analysts believe could help North Korea save face and advance the stalled talks, Hill said: "I think we should be a little flexible on format, but with the understanding that flexibility on format doesn't mean flexibility on getting a complete and correct declaration."

He indicated, however, that sensitive elements of any North Korean declaration would not be kept secret.

"I don't think we can have secret agreements, secretly arrived at," Hill said. "We have to make this understandable to the public."

The United States has questions about any possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. Syria has denied having a nuclear program but the case remains murky.

"Any nuclear cooperation abroad needs to be clarified and certainly (North Korea) has said that they don't have any now and won't have any in the future, but we also need to know what went on in the past," Hill said.

(Reporting by Paul Eckert; Editing by Cynthia Osterman)



Press Stake Out at The Hotel de La Paix
Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
The Hotel de La Paix
Geneva, Switzerland
March 13, 2008

QUESTION: What are your expectations for this meeting?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: First of all, let me just say that I am very grateful to the Swiss authorities for helping to facilitate this meeting.

As you know, the DPRK suggested we try to get together here in Geneva, and I think it was a good idea. Obviously what we are going to try to do is to have a thorough discussion of the declaration. Now I want to emphasize that the declaration is something that they have to deliver to the chair of the Six-Party process -- that is, the Chinese. But I would hope we would have a good discussion about it, and I would hope that we would be able to talk about all of the elements that we would expect to see.

QUESTION: Do you expect some movement, Mr. Secretary? Do you expect them to come up with something new regarding the declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, rather than handicap this thing, why don't I go and talk to them, and it would be easier if I came back and told you if we had some movement. I just don't know. I do know that we need to get some movement. We are already some ten weeks behind if we are going to get onto phase three and what we see as the complete denuclearization, and we need to get moving. So let's see if we can get that done.

QUESTION: You've said March is critical.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think it is pretty critical to get moving on this now. We are, as I said, ten weeks late already -- or something like ten weeks late -- and we have to get to the declaration. The declaration has to be a complete and correct declaration if we are going to get onto the next phase.

QUESTION: Any type of format is acceptable, if the content is --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Any type of format? Well, I wouldn't look for like a coloring book or something like that, but obviously I think we can be flexible on format. But we cannot be flexible on the fact that we need a complete and correct declaration. That is, we need all the elements there, and we need them to be expressed correctly.

QUESTION: What is your best case scenario?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't know. My best case scenario is this is all over, and I go home. (Laughter) But I think we are going to try to get through and have a good discussion on the declaration and try to come to an understanding of what it is they are going to be submitting to the Chinese.

QUESTION: Just one meeting or more?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think the plan is to meet early tomorrow morning as well.

QUESTION: How about the Uranium issue?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well that is part of the declaration. So obviously that has to be addressed. So we have a lot of work to.

QUESTION: There seems to be talk about separating --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Only from you. We have talked about different formats, but we have never talked about separating elements from the other, or separating them in time and space. We need all of the elements essentially at the same time. How the format, how many pieces of paper there are, we can discuss that.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well look, we are going to have a discussion about where we are and what we need to get done if we are going to stay on schedule.

QUESTION: Is some of this being done verbally or in private rather than on paper, or does everything have to be on paper?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we have emphasized throughout that this is not a U.S. problem. This is a problem of six parties. And when we need a complete and correct declaration, that is not some U.S. position; that is a position expressed in the October agreement. So I don't think verbal assurances to the U.S. is really what does it. I think we need a declaration to reflect all of these elements.

So let's see how we do. I will let you know.

All right. See you later.

Released on March 13, 2008



Press Briefing

Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

U.S. Mission Geneva

Geneva, Switzerland

March 13, 2008

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, for those of you who are not jet-lagged, you're up late. For the rest of us, it doesn't matter. [Laughter].

Thank you for coming.

We've had a long day of discussions today in the context of our consultation with the DPRK delegation. We've discussed a number of issues, especially the question of the substance of what has divided us for the last ten weeks, but also format questions. I want to stress this was not a decisional meeting. That is, we had good discussions about it. We looked at some of the issues that have been problematic. We explored some avenues for going forward, but we're still working on these issues. I look forward to communicating with Secretary Rice to give her an update on where we are and where we hope to be.

We agreed that we can sort of proceed on this basis. And our hope is that we can achieve what we need -- which is a declaration which will be complete and correct -- and that the declaration will be provided to the Chinese as the chair of the Six-Party process.

Again, I don't want to get into the substance at this point -- except to say that we talked about format questions, and then we talked about the actual substance. We talked about substance insofar as it relates to the October '07 agreement and the need to cover all aspects of that agreement. That includes such issues as proliferation, but also issues of uranium enrichment, of course. And, I might add, we had a good discussion of the need to address the question of Japanese concerns.

So I would say it was a very good consultation. We certainly are further along in this consultation than we were when we got off the plane this morning. So I would say there's been progress. But we are not there yet, and we still have to continue to work on this.

With those sort of opening comments let me take a couple of questions.

QUESTION: Saki Ouchi with the Yomiuri Shimbun, Japan. Ambassador Hill, would you be meeting the North Koreans again tomorrow? And are you so far, what is your analysis of whatever declaration they might have come up with?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry, what is my analysis of the --

QUESTION: How would you evaluate? Did the North Koreans come up with a satisfactory list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: As I said, we had some very good discussions, and we covered all of the issues we needed to cover. I might add that in addition to covering the format questions of how the declaration would look and in addition to the specific issues within the declaration -- as you recall, many of them are contained in the October '07 agreement -- we also had kind of a sneak preview of what the so-called phase three might look like. We discussed all aspects of what we're trying to do in phase three. We also discussed issues such as humanitarian assistance and where that stands. We discussed the issue of heavy fuel oil and the status of that, the up-to-date status of that.

As for tomorrow, our plan is: right now we need to report to our capitals. In particular, I need to report to Secretary Rice. I haven't done that as yet. And I know that Mr. Kim Kye-gwan needs to report to his capital. And so we'll see how it looks tomorrow.

QUESTION: [Inaudible], Fox News.

I know you're careful about the substance, but you haven't been satisfied with what the North Koreans have provided so far regarding this declaration, regarding proliferation and also uranium enrichment. Have they moved at all? Have they gone closer to what you want or expect?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, I don't want to get into too much of the substance. Frankly, I'd really rather report that to Secretary Rice. But let me just say we've had some good discussions on all substantive issues, including the ones that you mentioned.

Yes, Mike.

QUESTION: You said that you were coming here with some workable ideas to try to move the process forward. Do you feel after today's meeting that you have a basis for a declaration, to start moving forward on a declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Let me say that I believe that as we meet here at almost midnight Geneva time that we've moved the issues forward compared to when we arrived here this morning. I'm not in a position to say we've resolved these matters. But there's no question we've had a very thorough discussion of the format and of the substance and, I think importantly to us as well, of the next stage. So whether we've resolved these issues and whether we've achieved our goals, I'm not in a position right now to say so -- except to say that there is no question we've had some very good discussions, and I look forward to briefing Secretary Rice on precisely what those discussions were.

QUESTION: Are you starting to see a bit of light at the end of the tunnel? [Inaudible]

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: He's asking about light at the end of the tunnel. That's such a cliché. I mean I'm really surprised at you. [Laughter].

QUESTION: [Inaudible].

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well that's a rare example of restraint. But let me say we really went straight on in terms of dealing with some of the problems, especially the substantive problems,

because we've had an idea in format terms of how to address this for several weeks now. But I think our problem has been on the actual substance. So we were able to tackle that, and I think we're in a better position now than we were when we arrived here. But if you don't mind, I would really prefer to brief Secretary Rice on this before I brief you.

Tomo, ok. You're kind of a ringer though. I mean, you know all this stuff. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Ambassador, right after the dinner Kim Kye-gwan told us reporters that the two issues -- the proliferation and the enrichment -- that they haven't done it, and they are not doing it right now, and they are not going to do it in the future. So that sounds like they're still keeping a hard stance on it. So do you feel that you have narrowed the distance between you and the North Koreans on today's talk? And do you now have a more clear view that you can get this declaration done within this month?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I have made clear publicly -- and I must say I made clear with the DPRK delegation today -- that we need to pick up the pace. We are already in March of '08. We have some ambitions for trying to get done with this, get through this in '08. And so therefore there's no question we need to move faster.

I want to emphasize that what we did today was not decisional. That is, we did not reach an agreement today that will allow us to move on to phase three tomorrow. We did have, again, very substantive discussions of how to go forward, and we're going to report to capitals and see where we are tomorrow and the next day.

The DPRK has maintained a position on proliferation, on uranium enrichment that we have really had to challenge and had to work with them on. So I'm not really in a position to tell you whether we've resolved that -- except to say that I think we've made some progress today.

QUESTION: [Inaudible], working for the Korean Broadcasting System. Simply, can I translate this question to successfully pave the way to hold next Six-Party Talks or hold Six-Party Talks in a month? And second, are you going to meet him tomorrow again?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: On the second question, we don't have a plan yet. I think we both agreed we need to report to capitals very specifically about some of the discussions we had and the ideas we had. The first question, though, was -- I think you're asking me to write your lead, and I'm not sure I can. But --

QUESTION: Can I translate the good discussion successfully paved way to hold next Six-Party Talks in a month?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, I see. Well, we are trying to get ready for making that progress -- that is, for getting to phase three. And phase three would mean a Six-Party meeting, to be sure. This was not a decisional meeting. So I don't want to suggest that we have paved the way, and we're waiting for the cement to dry in order to move forward. I think we still have some work to do on the road forward. But it certainly -- Since we've run into this difficulty in early December, I think these were probably the most substantive discussions we've had on how to go forward. But I'm not prepared at this point to tell you we've paved the way and that this will be a cakewalk from now on in.

QUESTION: Ambassador, did you come up with the agreement or understanding when you can remove them from the terrorism list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We certainly had a discussion of the terrorism list and what the issues are and what the timing would be for the terrorism list.

QUESTION: You mentioned in your opening statement that you addressed the issue of the Japanese concerns.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, I did.

QUESTION: Did you talk about the abduction issue --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I sure did.

QUESTION: -- and was there anything new that they said?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No. Nor was there anything new that I said, because I raise the abduction issue just about every time we've met.

I think it's fair to say that as I addressed this issue of the DPRK's bilateral relationship with Japan, I did so in the context of the overall effort to go forward. And I think my comments were very much understood. But I think these issues, just as I need to report some issues to Washington, these need to be reported to Pyongyang. So I would say on this issue we had a very clear understanding of what we need to see happen.

QUESTION: Was there anything different in their position on this and [inaudible]?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, these were points that I made to the DPRK and that they need to report to [their] capital. So I think it was a very useful exchange, but I'm not in a position to characterize their response.

QUESTION: Could you elaborate about what you had talked with Kim Kye-gwan on the terrorist list and trading with the enemy act? And also, what did you talk about to normalize the relation between U.S. and DPRK? And the last question is, are you going to have some kind of a written, formal agreement or promise note or something?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think everything that we discussed ultimately needs to be reflected in some kind of written instrument. I don't think we're going to allow an oral conversation to be part of the historical record on this.

With respect to the issue of the terrorism list, abductions, etc., we also had a very good discussion of this, but we need to report to capitals. We have some ideas of how to move forward. But we need to report to capitals and see whether those are acceptable in capitals. And, in particular, I need to talk with Secretary Rice. So you'll forgive me if I don't tell you more than I'm going to tell Secretary Rice.

QUESTION: Considering the deadline for the terrorism list [inaudible] --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, the issue of the terrorism list -- there is an annual terrorism report, and then the issue of when a country is taken off the list of state sponsors of terrorism is quite separate from the publication of that report. So it's not tied to the timing of that report.

QUESTION: I'm from Nippon Television. I just want to ask you, you mentioned that this meeting was proposed by the North Koreans. In that sense, what was the difference in their attitude? What kind of new answers did you get from a week ago or ten days ago?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, I hate to be the spokesman for the DPRK and to talk about their attitudes or this or that. Certainly I had looked forward to having a discussion with them earlier, about a week ago in Beijing. Indeed, I flew up from Bangkok to do just that. We weren't able to get together. They proposed coming to Geneva.

I can't really give you much more information -- except to say that we had a very substantive discussion about format and about the actual substance, the issues that have really divided us for these last ten weeks. I do believe we're further along now than we were this morning. I need to report to my capital, to Secretary Rice. I know that Mr. Kim Kye-gwan needs to report to his capital. And we will see if this meeting that I believe was very substantive and very useful to all of us, whether it can really lead to or pave the way to the progress that we very much need in order to get on to phase three.

I want to emphasize that as difficult as phase two has been, phase three is going to be even more difficult. For those of you who from time to time look at video games, you know that phase two is always more difficult than phase one, and phase three is always more difficult than phase two. And so we're very much playing that kind of game.

All right? Thank you.

Sorry, one more. I always regret taking one more question, but go ahead. [Laughter].

QUESTION: Mark [inaudible] with Bloomberg News. Did you hear any complaint from North Korea? Did they say that the speed of the promises were too slow?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We discussed, as I mentioned earlier, we discussed all aspects of our interaction, and that includes heavy fuel oil. But, actually, I did not hear complaints about the heavy fuel oil -- because I think there was a realization that the U.S. has just in the past few days completed or is completing its requirement under the heavy fuel oil. I know that the Republic of Korea and China are working on heavy fuel oil equivalents. That is part of the issue, or the package with regard to the disablement of the Yongbyon facility. I think there was an understanding, including within the DPRK delegation, that that is moving forward.

So I think we are more or less ok on that. But, again, we're not playing this game for phase two. We're trying to get on to phase three and see if we can finish this job.

Thank you very much. Good to see you all.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5huSr2cto6oXklRH0nXdM8i7PEQ0wD8VCS4CG0>

US Sees Progress but No NKorean Pact

By ELIANE ENGELER –

13 hours ago [Accessed 2008-03-14T13:55Z]

GENEVA (AP) — The United States and North Korea made progress Thursday in overcoming obstacles that have stalled a major nuclear disarmament deal but remained short of a breakthrough, the chief U.S. negotiator said.

Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Christopher Hill told reporters that the talks in Geneva were probably the most substantive that Washington has had with North Korea since problems developed in December over disarming Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

"We certainly are further along in this consultation than we were when I arrived this morning," Hill said after meetings with North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan. "There has been progress."

Hill said he wanted to report to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice before going into more detail.

"We've had good discussions on all substantive issues," Hill said. "Whether we've resolved these issues and achieved our goals I'm not prepared to say."

Kim separately denied allegations that North Korea had a secret uranium enrichment program or that it had any connection with a nuclear program in Syria.

"We did not have, we don't have and we will not have," Kim said.

Hill went into the Geneva discussions insisting that Pyongyang fully reveal all details of its nuclear weapons program.

"We need to get some movement. We're already some 10 weeks behind," Hill said, referring to the North Korean commitment to make a full declaration of its program by Dec. 31.

North Korea agreed last year to provide a complete list of its nuclear programs and disable its facilities and its main reactor by the end of 2007 as part of a disarmament deal.

For its part, Washington promised aid and said it would consider removing North Korea from terrorism and economic sanctions blacklists.

Pyongyang made unprecedented progress, shutting down and starting to disable its main nuclear reactor last year. But the talks have faced an impasse since the North missed its December deadline.

North Korea complained that promised energy aid was late in coming. Washington said Pyongyang still had to provide a detailed declaration of its nuclear programs as a condition for receiving the assistance, and North Korea insisted it gave the U.S. a list of its nuclear programs in November.

South Korea, China, Japan and Russia have been working with the United States to resolve the dispute.

Hill said the United States, South Korea and China were well on the way to living up to their commitment to provide energy aid to North Korea in exchange for the declaration and disarmament.

"I think there's a realization that the U.S. has just in the past few days completed or is completing its requirement on the heavy fuel oil," Hill said. "I know that the Republic of Korea and China are working on heavy fuel oil equivalents."

"I think we are more or less OK on that," Hill said.

Associated Press writers Foster Klug in Washington, Kwang-tae Kim in Seoul and Alexander G. Higgins and Frank Jordans in Geneva contributed to this report.

U.S., North Korea stay in contact in Geneva

Fri Mar 14, 2008 8:22am EDT

(Recasts paragraph 1 and adds U.S. mission comment on Sung Kim meeting in paragraph 6)

By Jonathan Lynn GENEVA, March 14 (Reuters) - U.S. officials held further discussions in Geneva on Friday with North Korea a day after the two countries had substantive talks on getting the secretive communist state to abandon its nuclear activities.

The top U.S. negotiator on North Korea, Christopher Hill, told reporters he was departing for Warsaw, but leaving the state department's head of Korean affairs, Sung Kim, in Geneva to follow up on Thursday's talks.

The State Department's Kim is an expert on North Korea's nuclear programme and has visited the Yongbyon facility that is at the centre of negotiations and is currently being disabled.

"There's a growing understanding of the issues that need to be resolved," said Hill, who is pushing North Korea to speed up the pace of the talks.

His comments showed that relations between the two enemies had improved to the extent that they remained in touch, but they have still not agreed on how to carry out the deal in which Pyongyang will abandon its nuclear programme.

A spokesman for the U.S. mission in Geneva said State's Kim had held a brief follow-up discussion on Friday with his North Korean working-level counterparts, but gave no further details.

North Korea agreed to abandon its nuclear programme in 2005 but the deal has been stalled by Pyongyang's failure to produce a detailed declaration of its nuclear projects by the end of last year.

That deal was worked out in talks between six countries -- North and South Korea, Russia, Japan and the United States, with China chairing the negotiations.

In return for abandoning its nuclear programme, which can be used to produce nuclear weapons as well as energy, North Korea would receive humanitarian aid and fuel oil, and see relations with the rest of the world normalised.

That would include Washington dropping North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and easing sanctions.

SIX PARTY TALKS

At Thursday's meeting, Hill and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan discussed all the issues including enriched uranium, proliferation, humanitarian aid, heavy fuel oil for North Korea and the abduction of Japanese citizens.

For the talks to progress, North Korea must provide China with a full declaration of its nuclear activities.

That would culminate with the final dismantling of the Yongbyon facility, but Hill said they were not yet ready to move to that phase.

North Korea's reluctance to discuss transfers of nuclear technology to other countries and its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment have delayed the declaration.

The United States has questions about a possible North Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site bombed by Israel in September. A uranium enrichment programme would give North Korea a second source of fissile material to produce nuclear weapons besides its plutonium-based facilities.

North Korea's Kim was quoted by Japanese and Korean media as denying any involvement in enrichment or proliferation.

"Our position is that there have never been such programmes in the past, there are no such things going on currently and that we will not engage in them in the future," Kyodo News quoted him as saying.

Hill said further one-on-one meetings were needed before the six-party talks resumed, but said he had no meetings arranged.

"I think there might be another need for a consultation but frankly we'll all have to do a number of consultations with different parties before we have a six-party meeting," he said.

But Hill said the declaration from Pyongyang, whatever form it takes, was not the goal of the negotiations.

"The purpose of this six-party process is not a declaration. The purpose is the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and for that reason we really need to pick up the pace if we're going to achieve that," he said. (Editing by Ralph Boulton)



Remarks to the Media in Geneva

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Hotel de La Paix

Geneva, Switzerland

March 14, 2008

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Some of our team is still here, including Sung Kim, so we will follow up this morning to see the status of what we are trying to get accomplished. But again I want to emphasize that it was a very good meeting yesterday. We went through a lot. We talked a lot about the format, but we also talked a lot about substance.

I am not in a position though to say whether we are prepared to go on to phase three at this point, but we will continue to be in touch with the DPRK delegation through the weekend. I also had some discussions with other members of the Six Parties, and I talked to Saiki-san three or four times by telephone, including this morning. So we will see how it goes. But again it was a very good meeting, and I am very appreciative to the Swiss authorities for helping to facilitate this.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, the North again last night were reported as saying no on uranium enrichment, no on proliferation. It doesn't seem they have moved on those substantive issues that you want them to move on.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I am not responsible for what they say in their press conferences. I can just tell you we had some very good discussions, and we will see where we are.

QUESTION: How was the response from Secretary Rice? Was she satisfied with some improvements?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think you would have to ask the spokesman on that. I talked to her a couple of times, including at three in the morning our time. So I think we have been in touch, and she is very familiar with what we are trying to get accomplished here.

QUESTION: Would you be coming back from Warsaw to Geneva?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't have any plans to do that.

QUESTION: Do you think you need to meet with the Koreans bilaterally before going on to Six-Party Talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think there might be another need for consultation. But frankly, I think we will have to do a number of other consultations with other parties before we have a Six-Party meeting. But again, it was a very full day of discussion. We went through a lot of issues that we needed

to go through. I think there is a growing understanding of the issues that need to be resolved, so we will see how we do. And I will leave Sung Kim here for another day, in case there is any need for face-to-face follow up.

QUESTION: You said you need to make some progress within this month, it is critical.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think it is just a matter of the timing. We are going to get on to phase three and make some serious progress in '08 because the purpose of this Six-Party process is not a declaration. The purpose is denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and for that we need to really pick up the pace if we are going to achieve that.

QUESTION: Do you have a meeting scheduled?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't have a meeting scheduled right now.

QUESTION: Why did you have to talk to Saiki (inaudible) two or three times?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think I called him, and he called me. He had some messages to pass on to me. And we also were doing some logistics because I look forward to him as well in a bilateral consultation in the near future.

QUESTION: When do you leave for Warsaw?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: About two minutes ago.



Briefing En route Santiago, Chile

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

En route Santiago, Chile

March 14, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Do you have any kind of readout on the negotiations that Chris Hill (inaudible) Geneva now; I guess Sung Kim is going to carry on without him. Any progress, any (inaudible) uranium enrichment (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: My understanding – I haven't had a chance to (inaudible) readout. But my understanding is that there will now have to be some period of (inaudible) to the capitals and so I wouldn't expect anything immediate, but it's time to solve this issue in the declaration and that's what we're going to keep doing. The United States is ready to fulfill its obligations when North Korea fulfills its obligations. So North Korea needs to fulfill those obligations.

QUESTION: Are there any plans for any (inaudible) Chris Hill back from Geneva and can you give us any sense – you talked about (inaudible) maintaining about how you were sort of indifferent or flexible on form. Can you give us a sense now of what is left to sort out? **Is it a matter of form or is it still a matter of substance that they're actually --**

SECRETARY RICE: I would say it's still a matter of substance. And Chris doesn't have any plans to go back to Geneva at this point. It was intended to be a one-day meeting. He'll come back to the United States and we'll see where we are when he gets back. I'll have a chance to consult and he'll have a chance to talk himself with the allies.

http://www.upiasiaonline.com/Politics/2008/03/17/scenarios_for_nkorea_nuclear_resolution/8929/

Scenarios for N.Korea nuclear resolution

By LEE JONG-HEON

UPI Correspondent

Published: **March 17, 2008**

SEOUL, South Korea, Closed talks between North Korea and the United States last week fell short of producing a breakthrough to end the protracted nuclear standoff, with negotiators admitting substantive differences between the two sides.

But hope is cautiously reviving for a last-minute compromise. The two countries have left the door open for further meetings as both sides are under pressure to hasten the disarmament process.

Washington's chief nuclear envoy Christopher Hill said his country was ready to exercise "flexibility on the format" of North Korea's declaration of its nuclear programs, saying, "We have some ideas that may be workable."

Hill's North Korean counterpart Kim Kye Gwan also said differences between Pyongyang and Washington were not insurmountable, saying, "There are U.S. proposals we have been continually considering."

The North Korean nuclear envoy did not disclose what the U.S. proposals were, but diplomatic sources say Pyongyang and Washington are weighing three scenarios to bridge their differences and move forward to the next stage of the denuclearization process.

One scenario involves separating the issues of contention -- North Korea's alleged uranium enrichment program and suspected nuclear proliferation to Syria -- from the main declaration where the plutonium-powered nuclear program would be specified.

Under a six-nation agreement reached in February last year, the North completed the first phase of the disarmament in July by shutting down and sealing its plutonium-producing reactor at the country's main nuclear complex in return for energy aid. But it has failed to finish the second phase of the disarmament deal that called for a declaration of all its nuclear programs by the end of last year, delaying the third and final phase of dismantling its atomic weapons programs.

The North says it submitted a nuclear list in November, but the United States is calling for Pyongyang to fully clear up the suspicions about a uranium-based weapons program, including questions about how the centrifuges and aluminum tubes it had bought were used.

Pyongyang has flatly denied the existence of a uranium enrichment program. There is ample evidence that North Korea acquired components for a centrifuge-enrichment program, but it is unclear that the North produced highly enriched uranium or developed its enrichment capabilities in the manner claimed by the United States.

The North's alleged transfer of nuclear technology and materials to Syria is another thorny issue that has put the disarmament process in limbo. The United States has questions about any possible North

Korean role in a suspected Syrian covert nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in September. But Pyongyang denies any nuclear connection with Syria.

"By separating the plutonium problem from the sticky issues of uranium and proliferation, the two sides can break the nuclear stalemate," the diplomatic source said. "The proposed option would make it earlier for North Korea to submit the nuclear list," he said.

The second scenario would be that North Korea and the United States sign two separate agreements -- one open, the other secret. Under this idea, the North would declare plutonium-producing facilities in an open document, while acknowledge, in a separate, secret document, its initial research and development of enriched uranium while citing the import of centrifuges only for industrial purposes. This option may be related to Hill's remark of "flexibility on the format."

Suh Jae-jean, a senior researcher at the government-run Korea Institute for National Unification, has campaigned for this option, saying the secret agreement would "enable North Korea to save face and prevent backlash" from U.S. hawks.

The third and final scenario involves essentially agreeing to disagree, with each side stating its own views in the document. This idea calls for the United States to express its concerns about the possible uranium program and transfer of nuclear technology, while North Korea would state its denials in the document.

Suh and other analysts say both North Korea and the United States are concerned that time is running out to reach a breakthrough. If they fail to produce tangible results within weeks, the nuclear problem could be handed over to the next U.S. administration, given the upcoming U.S. presidential election.

The Bush administration, which is desperate to win a foreign policy success to offset its failures in the Middle East, is still pushing for a big bargain with North Korea to end the nuclear standoff, which would be a diplomatic victory for President George W. Bush, who leaves office at the beginning of 2009.

The North also does not want further delay into next year, after a new lineup is established in Washington, because Pyongyang desperately wants economic aid in return for hastening the disarmament process.

"Likely is a grand political compromise between North Korea and the United States to move forward the denuclearization process in the near future," Suh said.



Moving Forward in 2008: The U.S.-East Asia Relationship

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Foreign Press Center Briefing

Washington, DC

March 19, 2008

3:00 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPTS]

AMBASSADOR HILL:

[deletia]

And the problem, of course, that I, unfortunately, have to spend most of time on is the issue of denuclearization in North Korea. I had a meeting just last week, as many of you know, in Geneva. It was a good substantive discussion. I had hoped that we could reach some conclusion about having the DPRK, the North Koreans go forward with their declaration, which they need to give to the chair of the six-party process. They were unable to do that or unable to put together something that would meet, I think, the definition that is set out in the October '07 agreement, that is complete and correct. And so we talked about this. And now, I think, the DPRK's negotiating team is back in Pyongyang and we'll give them a few days and see what the next step is.

I've said in a number of settings that I think we are at a point where we really do need to make progress soon to wrap up this second phase. I certainly would like to see it done in -- even in this month, in March, because I think if we're going to get onto the next phase, which is a very ambitious phase where we would like to see the fulfillment of the September '05 statement in which the DPRK is required to denuclearize and rejoin the Nonproliferation Treaty, we better get moving on that very quickly if we're to get that done in '08. So we are trying to get this done as fast as we can. We've devoted a lot of attention to it in recent weeks as we've been in this sort of overtime period since the end of December, but we're not there yet.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Daguchi with Kyodo News. On your meeting with Kim Gye Gwan in Geneva, how was the discussion on sequence and timing of delisting them from the state sponsor of terrorism list? Are they still insisting on seeing delisting prior to the declaration? And can you be flexible on that timing and sequence issue?

AMBASSADOR HILL: You know, I'm not sure I want to get into the specifics of what we talked about except to say, as I've said before, that I don't see sequencing and timing as a problem. I think that can be worked out. And when you look at the issues that we're dealing with there, sequencing and timing has not emerged as a problematic element in the discussions. I think the really problematic element is we don't have a commitment from the DPRK to provide a complete and correct declaration. They'd rather have one that misses a few elements; that is, that's rather incomplete.

And I think the declaration, while some people think it's just a paper exercise, after all, one of the main issues has been the continued disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facility, disablement that followed the shutdown of that facility in the latter part of '07. So a lot of people say, "Well, why are you so concerned about the declaration when the real issues should be happening on the ground?" And I think the answer is very clear that as we move forward and as we achieve complete denuclearization, we need to have transparency in the process. We can't have a situation where they, you know, are - fail to list some of their nuclear programs, where they fail to list some of the experiences they've had, especially in their interest - in one case, in their interest in a uranium enrichment program. We need this to be clear.

So I know there's a great deal of impatience about it. People say, "Well, why can't you just accept something partial and work on the rest later?" And I think we are really at a point where we have to have a complete and correct declaration. That will be what enables us to wrap up phase two and then we will go to what I described earlier and what I continue to describe as a very, very difficult phase three. Getting a country that has produced fissile material on its own and getting that country to relinquish that fissile material is obviously going to be difficult. Again, I don't think we're asking the DPRK to do something that's not in its interest. I think it is very much in its interest to keep on this program. There will be a lot on the table in this next phase and so, a lot on the table in terms of their access to economic assistance, in terms of their diplomatic recognition, in terms of their security situation because we're prepared to replace the armistice with a more durable peace instrument.

So there is a great deal on the table that is in their interest, but they have to understand that we cannot, at the end of the day, permit them to hold on to nuclear material. So we're just going to have to keep making that clear and I've said it to them 50 times and I'll be happy to say it another 50 times. So this is where we are and I hope they will come to understand that they need to complete this phase two before we get on to phase three. And I can assure you that issues such as sequencing and, you know, who's going to step first and this sort of thing, that's not the issue. That really is not the issue. Those are issues that may come up in other negotiations, but not in this one.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Can we assume that to mean that you will accept North Korea making separate -- I know you don't like the word "separate," but separate pieces of paper of declaration, separating -- separate between plutonium, uranium, proliferation? And also, would you be willing to accept the declaration directly from North Korea to the U.S. instead of insisting that it be given to the chair, China?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Again, I don't think formatting is a problem. I really don't think how many pieces of paper are the issue here. Moreover, China has worked very hard in this process. China has taken their responsibilities very seriously. They have put together a very good diplomatic team. They are the chair of the six-party process. I don't quite see the purpose in having the DPRK give the U.S.

the declaration when, in any other multilateral diplomatic process, you would provide it to the chair. So I don't think -- I don't see the purpose of it, nor has the issue really come up. The North Koreans have not said, well, we'll give you the declaration but not the Chinese. So it's really not an issue.

So, again, what it finally looks like in terms of numbers of pieces of paper, I don't know now. I mean, I have an idea of what it's going to look like, but it's not the problem. The problem is we don't have all the elements of their nuclear program. And if they give to the Chinese as the chair an incomplete declaration that skips elements of the nuclear program, it is not politically sustainable for us or for other members of the six parties to say that we accepted a declaration, to say it fulfills the requirements in October to be complete and correct, when, in fact, it's incomplete and incorrect.

So this is a moment where I think we have to be pretty clear about what we need. Now, I know there's a lot of discussion about are there models, are there diplomatic models out there that can save people's face, are there ways to handle things that don't require people to be -- you know, to feel that they have had to change their position or something. Of course, there are things like that. And probably, in the end, some of these things can be put to use. **The basic problem, though, is that the DPRK is not yet prepared to provide the complete and correct declaration.**

I've also said that as difficult as this issue is, I think the next phase will probably be even more difficult, and therefore it's in -- it's my judgment that as we -- as we go forward here, I predict that if the six-party process does not work finally, the problem will not be the format of the declaration or even the scope of the declaration, because I think we will figure out a way through the declaration. I am much more focused on the next set of problems, which is what we're calling phase three.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Okay. I know in Geneva, you said that there were a lot of issues of substance that weren't cleared up, but you seem to be - have - be a little bit more optimistic on format. I'm wondering if you came to an understanding or close to an understanding on format in Geneva. And on the format, the issue of a secret document on the sensitive issues of uranium and proliferation, it's still in the press, it refuses to die down. Can you definitively say that the United States will not accept a secret - a separate, secret document on these issues?

(Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: I can definitively tell you that format is not the problem. How - you know, these things have to be explainable to our public, so the idea of a secret document secretly arrived at that one can never describe, you know, that's not what this is really about. I mean, this is about seeking transparency. So again, how we do that and the format, what documents are actually, you know, put out for people's perusal, you know, I'm not in a position to say with any great - in any great detail. But you know, we are not interested in more secrecy. We're interested in more openness.

And - I mean, that's what the declaration is all about too: Put things on the table, resolve issues that have taken place and move on. I think the - to some extent, one of the problems we seem to get from the DPRK is that as we ask questions, they feel that somehow, this will be a never-ending series of questions. They think that I have nothing better to do in my time or in my life than to keep asking them questions. And they've kind of misunderstood where I am. We ask questions because we need answers and when we get the complete and correct answers, we'll move on.

So the DPRK does not need to worry that our efforts to get clarity on this will somehow boomerang, will somehow come back to cause problems for them. They need to understand that this is how we resolve things and when we resolve them, we will move on and try to resolve the next problem. So it's a sequential, step-by-step approach and people always say, "Why are you going step by step?" And the answer is you can't just do it in one leap. You've got to, you know, work on each of these problems, resolve them, move on to the next.

And again, I think people do need to remind themselves that we have made some headway. We got Yongbyon shut down, we've got it disabled and with every passing day, it's more and more disabled. Now we've got to get a complete declaration in order to get on to some of the continuing -- the next elements and we'll continue to work that. And I'm telling you, at the end of the day, if this doesn't work, it's not because we didn't try hard enough.

QUESTION: Did you (inaudible) format?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We have discussed format and we anticipate we will not have a problem on format.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
March 24, 2008

[EXCERPT]

MR. MCCORMACK: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: The first one is: Has North Korea suggested additional bilateral talk with the U.S. after the recent Geneva meeting? And my second question is: Washington Post reported yesterday that North Korea had made a secret agreement to provide technical know-how and some materials for the reactor with Syria. Do you have any comment on this report?

MR. MCCORMACK: In terms of – in terms of the last part of your question, we have said that the North Korean declaration needs to be full and complete. That means talking about their plutonium program, their HEU program, as well as any proliferation-related activities. I'm not aware of any request for any further consultations within the context of the six-party talks with our – between the United States and North Korea. I'll check with Chris Hill to see if there is anything, but at this point, I'm not aware of any.



TRANSCRIPT

Ambassador Christopher R. Hill
Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Global Leadership Speaker Series
March 25, 2008

Frederick Kempe: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, I'm Fred Kempe. I'm President and CEO of Atlantic Council and I'd like to welcome you to this installment of our Global Leadership Speaker Series featuring Ambassador Christopher Hill.

I won't introduce Chris. I'll leave it to our executive committee member from our board, Frank Kramer, to do that-except to say that we've known each other a very long time. Dating back to the mid '80s in Poland and then in the first democratic elections in South Korea. And it's wonderful to have you here and following your incredibly distinguished career where you've done so much service to our country. And for that matter, I'd say also to the world.

Our mission here at the Atlantic Council is to renew the Atlantic Community for 21st century global challenges. And this speaker series brings key American and European policy makers to the Council to discuss how best to deal with the global challenges that we face together. I'd like to thank our board member, David Aufhauser and his company, UBS, for their generous support of this Global Leadership Speaker Series from the very beginning.

We were fortunate to have as the first speaker in this series Nick Burns, then the Undersecretary for Political Affairs of the State Department, who used his words to define a global agenda for the Euro-Atlantic Community. He spoke of a dramatic and undeniable shift in the European-American relationship. Perhaps the most important of a century. Likely to be felt for a generation to come. And that the United States policy towards Europe is no longer about Europe, it's about the rest of the world. He said, "It's about what we together have to do to be effective and purposeful around the world and in all regions of the world."

We for many years have had an Asia program at the Atlantic Council, but this new global focus on the Atlantic relations makes the Asia Program more important than ever before. I want to thank Joe Snyder who's the director of the Asia Program for bringing together this event tonight along with his deputy, Patrick deGateño.

Often our work on Asia has a direct Euro-America connection, as for example when we conduct trilateral discussions with the EU, China, and the U.S. on issues. And it's clear that almost everything that happens in Asia has implications, direct or indirect, for Europe and the United States. We've done work on U.S.-China security cooperation, we've done work on cross-Straits relationships – across the Taiwan Strait – and we've done work on energy cooperation between the U.S., China, and India.

Finally, one of our big projects for the last two years has been a study of what it will take to normalize U.S. relations with North Korea. We issued a major report on this last year and have just finished an interim report after discussing our findings with the South Koreans. Later this year we will be taking the report on the road to other countries of the Six-Party process after which we'll make some recommendations about a regional security structure. Many of our board members, including those serving on the Asia Committee have been critical to our efforts in this area. I want to thank Julia Chang-Bloch, General John Fu, and Harry Harding, who are here today for their help in this work. And now, here to introduce Ambassador Hill, is the chair of the Asia Committee of the Board and an executive committee member of the Atlantic Council, Frank Kramer. Frank has been an extraordinary public servant over the years. He was the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs from 1996 to 2001 where he was dealing with, among other issues, Korean and Asian matters. He's also been Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and NATO affairs. So with that Frank, let me hand it to you. Thank you very much.

Frank Kramer: Thanks, Fred. We're all here to listen, not to me, but to Chris Hill. Chris is one of the extraordinary Ambassadors for the United States, one of the extraordinary diplomats. He and I first met when he was the Ambassador in Macedonia. He then went on to [be] the [U.S.] Ambassador in Poland. He was Ambassador to South Korea; he was the Special Envoy for Kosovo; and obviously now he's the Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs and he heads the team of the Six-Party talks on the North Korea nuclear issue.

He's spent enormous amounts of time on this issue and he's probably been the person who is most associated with the fact that the talks have gone forward. He's been patient, he's been diplomatic, and he's been tough. And he has actually caused a certain amount of things to happen. The nuclear facility of Yongbyon has largely shut down. We have had fuel oil given to the North Koreans, and there are a number of steps forward, although I think many people would say there've been a number of steps backward. Two forward, one back, some people say; [others say] one forward, two back. And I think that's what he'll be talking about today. As to where we really go for the next six months, for the next year, how do we actually come to a conclusion? We have a new government in South Korea. Will that make a difference? We will have a new government in the United States. What impact will our elections have? What impact will the government have? These are all open questions. Chris is about as knowledgeable about this set of issues as anyone in the world.

This is an extraordinarily capable audience I can see by looking around. There are a whole variety of people. There are some long-term players on the nuclear issue and many, many diplomats, military and otherwise.

So, I'm going to turn it over to Chris. He will speak and then he will take questions and answers. And he'll deal with the issues of the declaration, which you all know, complete declaration. I'm sure he'll deal with the issue of 'What about actual destruction?' And he might even deal with the issue of Damascus, 'What about the Syrian side of the problem?' With that, let me turn it over to Chris, and let's hear what you have to say.

Ambassador Christopher Hill: Thank you very much, Frank. It's a great pleasure to be here. One issue I will not deal with is, I noticed on CNN this morning, I hadn't seen a picture of myself from some ten years ago on CNN, but there I was getting off an airplane in Tuzla, and I know the question was 'Was I concerned about sniper fire?' (laughter) All I can remember is getting off that plane and making a bee-line for the car because, you know, when you get off of a plane with a VIP you stand to be left behind if you don't get in that car in a hurry. So I crouched down and ran for the car.

But let me just say, it is a great pleasure to be here. Being here at the Atlantic Council brings back a lot of great memories, I must say. One, of course, is being with Fred Kempe back in Poland in the mid-'80s. We had a softball team at the American Embassy and we used to play the Marines and we were pretty unsuccessful at it. But one time I brought this ringer along, this reporter for the Wall Street Journal, who I assured our Marines had never played baseball before. I think we won 16 to 2 thanks to four grand slams by Fred. So Fred, great to see you again. It's the first day of baseball season . . . I don't know what you're doing here! Anyway.

I suppose it would seem in years past that the Atlantic Council was the wrong place to talk about Korea and Northeast Asia security, but I think in recent years especially, thanks to the work of Frank Kramer, but also Joe Snyder, who I know from previous assignments back when I was in Korea in the mid '80s. That I think the Atlantic Council is very much engaged on these security issues in Asia and I think it's very good news for Asia that the Atlantic Council is so engaged on it.

When I look at the situation that we're dealing with, these negotiations with North Korea, and in our times I describe myself as "the Assistant Secretary for North Korea" because it does take up an inordinate amount of time. I do try to bear in mind every single day what we're really trying to do in those negotiations. And what we're trying to do is the sort of thing the Atlantic Council has helped to do over the decades. Which is to form a greater sense of community in the North Atlantic and what we're trying to do in Northeast Asia is to do precisely that.

Of course, we're doing it through a rather intricate and difficult problem, that is, North Korea's nuclear ambitions, which, by the way, have been — they've had nuclear ambitions for as long as the Atlantic Council has been around. Those nuclear ambitions began sometime in the 1960s. They didn't just begin with their sense of upset and being labeled a member of the Axis of Evil, frankly speaking. They were well at it long before they felt bad listening to a speech. So I think we approach the task with the understanding that we've got to get through denuclearization. But as we work on denuclearization we can already see the beginnings of a sense, a greater sense I should say, of community in Northeast Asia.

We have a process called the Six-Party Talks. Everyone hates the word process. So do I. And a lot of people hate the word talks and so do I. But in putting together these six countries, very heterogeneous countries, very different countries, countries that look at this issue in North Korea from very different vantage points, very different perspectives, we can see that as we work on the issue we're beginning to form a greater sense of community. Even through the most difficult times of the Japan-China relationship a couple of years ago, you could see that Japan and China were able to work together at the Diaoyutai guest house. At times it seems like a prison because you get stuck there for a long time, but it's actually a very nice place to sit and have these multilateral meetings. But we were able to see how Japan and China were able to work together through difficult times, how Japan and South Korea were able to work together. You could see how the South Koreans in some respects were sort of still

introducing themselves to the Chinese, and working well together. And it wasn't so long ago. Indeed it was in the 1980's when there were no relations between China and South Korea, so you can see that that relationship is also functioning.

So what we're hoping to do as we go forward is not only solve the conundrum of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, but also form the sense of community and perhaps make it something lasting on the Northeast Asian landscape and seascape. That is, make these countries feel comfortable sitting together, working out things, and talking to each other but also at some point in the future maybe having some dispute mechanism — dispute resolution mechanism — and otherwise having a sense that they are all together in this region.

So as we face the various problems posed by not only North Korea's nuclear ambitions but also North Korea's extreme self isolation, that has caused this dark hole in the middle of this region, as we deal with that problem everyday we realize that we are addressing another problem, which is getting these countries together into sharing a sense of community. So I think that is going forward, but obviously we're not going to get there unless we can get through the North Korean nuclear issue. So let me briefly describe where we are and where we need to be.

Frank mentioned that we'd gotten the reactor, the nuclear facility at Yongbyon shut down, and that's — or I think Frank said largely shut down — actually that's completely shut down. What we also have been able to do through this painstaking step by step process is not only to get it completely shut down, but also disabled. The point about disabling is not so much to buy time during which it would take the North Koreans money and effort to get the reactor going again. The idea of disabling it is to make it clear to the North Koreans that this is a one-way ticket toward eventual abandonment. So as we set out on the Six-Party Talks to try to create a sort of step by step process toward denuclearization, first we set out a statement of principles, and then we came back and tried to implement each principle. And one of the most important principles, indeed I think the guiding principle if you will, is that we would have North Korea completely denuclearize, that is, abandon all their nuclear programs and all their nuclear weapons. And so obviously they didn't want to do that overnight, so we began on a step-by-step implementation. It took a while; there were a lot of problems that came up in the meantime, which I'm still in therapy over some of those problems and I certainly don't want to traumatize you with them, but what we managed to do is to, last July, to turn the switch, shut it off. Which is something that was done in the 90's, but then I think importantly we got them to begin the disabling process. Now I think it was encouraging to us as we got into disabling that the North Koreans said, 'we would like the American's to disable'. We appreciated being asked and indeed I think it is in everyone's interest that there are American technicians, as there are as I speak to you tonight, working and living in Yongbyon. But what we also wanted to do is make sure that the disabling process was pursuant to the six party process. Because, again, we want to continue to form this sense of community. We don't want to turn this process into a bilateral process. And so we worked it out with the six parties that the disabling would be conducted by the U.S. at the behest of the six parties. So since the fall we have had teams there taking a series of measures, there are eleven total measures which are aimed at the disabling of the facility, leading to the eventual dismantling and abandonment of the facility.

I must say this process is going well. People point out that some of these disabling measures can be redone and it's true. But what I think is important about it is that the North Korean technicians, with whom our people are working with on a daily basis, have understood this is a one-way ticket, that they're not planning to restart this thing. Indeed, when you look at the comparison of how they

conducted the freeze or the shutdown of the facilities in the 1990's with how they've handled this there is a big difference and I would say the most important for us is the fact that there's no maintenance going on in the facility today. That is, when they cut out the reverse cooling loop, it has sat, this huge hunk of metal, has sat on the ground through the winter months with no effort to, you know, make it so that it could somehow be reattached. Indeed it would take quite an effort to reverse the reverse cooling pipe. So we, by working there, by being there everyday, have gained the sense that the North Koreans really are committed to the abandonment of this facility. So much so that some of the critics of the whole process began by saying 'Well they could undo these activities in a matter of months' and as we looked through and as we summed up the eleven activities we could see that we were essentially were somehow buying some twelve, thirteen months of disabling. But as the months have gone by, it's pretty clear that that's not going to happen and now the critics I've heard say that actually the North Koreans want to give up on Yongbyon and they never intended to keep it and that's why they've allowed it to be disabled. I would say, by the way, to that second point, to the question to how long could North Korea have kept Yongbyon going if they wanted to. And I think the same is for a Cuban taxi driver, driving a 1956 Chevy: as long as he wants. So I think the North Koreans could have kept Yongbyon going and if you look at the actual time that its run compared to any sort of commercial power plant you can see that there are many days, years left on that reactor. So they have made the decision to shut down that facility and I think that we can feel positive about that.

The second element though, that we needed from them in this phase has proven to be a much more problematic element. And that is the question of them providing us a complete and correct — it's always easier to remember if you can alliterate it — a complete and correct declaration of all of their nuclear programs. Every year this problem has proven more difficult than many people anticipated. This is divided into three main areas.

First of all, of course is the issue of nuclear materials. Here we have very good reason to believe when they give the declaration we will get a complete picture of how much actual plutonium they have produced from the actual facility. What's important is, when you produce plutonium, from a facility like that, there are means, there are ways, to verify the exact amount of plutonium, and in the case of separated plutonium you want to be pretty exact in what you've got.

The second area is the question of facilities. We know what their nuclear programs or what their nuclear facilities are and what we need from the North Koreans to do is to list those facilities and to make sure they give us a complete list. Here too we don't anticipate a serious problem in terms of what the facilities are going to be.

But the third element, I think has proven to be much more problematic, that is, nuclear programs. To be sure the North Koreans are prepared to list the plutonium program. But we know — we know from as early as 2001-2002 — we know that they had aspirations to have a uranium enrichment facility, uranium enrichment program. We know they made certain purchases that were entirely consistent with these aspirations. We need to know about what that is. If it's continuing, we need to have it stopped. If it's already stopped, we need to know when it stopped and what the situation was. So that's one problem that we've had.

The second is the fact that we know, unfortunately, that North Korea has had some nuclear cooperation with abroad. Some proliferation issues, I think any reader of the popular press knows what country I'm talking about but there's an issue where also we need to know, very clearly from the North Koreans,

what happened and if it's stopped, as they say it has, when did it stop, how did it stop?. And if it's not going to continue, as they say its not, we need to have means to verify and to monitor that indeed there is no such program now or in the future. So as we've worked with the North Koreans, it has not been easy. The North Koreans have said 'we don't have anything now and we won't have anything in the future, why are you dwelling on the past? After all, two out of three's not bad...' We've made the point that we need clarity as to what's happened, we're not looking to cause problems, we're not looking to create a situation where somehow we would pull out of this, on the contrary we need clarity so that somehow we can pull forward. And we are way into overtime at this point. We have expected this phase of the denuclearization to have been completed at the end of December and here it is, already the end of March and it's still not completed. And that has prompted some people to say 'they have not fulfilled their part of the bargain, the United States should pull out of the Six-Party Talks. I mean, after all the North Koreans were supposed to provide a complete and correct declaration by December 31st, it hasn't happened, what are we doing still talking about this?'

So I think there's a question I think where you have to look very specifically at what your interests are. Are your interests served by exerting your right to pull out? After all we can pull out of this process any time we want. But, or do you look at your interests and conclude that your interests are better served by staying in it? Clearly from our vantage point our interests are better served by staying in the process. So I think, we have continued to work with the North Koreans, we have worked with them multilaterally through the six party process and bilaterally. By the way, I think a six party process, a multilateral process has never meant that you can't have bilateral contacts. It's a pretty broad, pretty solid platform to have a lot of different processes. We have three way talks, we have two way talks, we do all kinds of talks. So I mean, this is a multilateral process in which you can very easily imbed bilateral process and bilateral talks and we continue to work with the North Koreans on this.

Frankly, we went to Geneva last week or two weeks ago for what we thought would be talks that would lead to a resolution of this declaration issue. We had some very good discussions. But at this point we do not yet have a complete and correct declaration from the North Koreans. We've continued to have talks through the New York Channel. Which is the means by which we communicate to the DPRK government, to the North Korean government. And again, some of those discussions, some of those specific things that we've been talking about I think could lead to a resolution of this. It's my view, and this is a, really a guess, if the six party talks fail, it will not be for lack of a declaration. We will get through this phase. The problem I think will come to the next phase. And the next phase I think is a far more crucial phase because if we have a declaration, if we are able to rule out uranium enrichment as a continuing problem, as it was a problem. If we are able to rule out that it is an issue that is producing fissile material. If we are able to ensure that there is no proliferation or not further proliferation concerns, we will be down to the problem of getting North Korea to abandon the fissile material that it has already produce.

Now we will have a precise figure for that, a precise figure for how much plutonium they have produced but in this third phase we will need them to turn over to the international community that fissile material and that in effect, become a non-nuclear country. This will be a big challenge. As we get ready for this third phase, we look at some of the things that we might put on the table. For example, we believe we can put on the table an offer of the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea and normalization. We would do that in the context of a denuclearized North Korea. That is, they denuclearize, we will establish full relations with North Korea. Does that mean we don't have any more problems with North Korea? Of course not. We have a lot of issues with North Korea, but we

will address those issues as we do with many countries that we have diplomatic relations. We will talk about human rights as we do with many countries with whom we have diplomatic relations. We might set up a human rights dialogue as we do, we have many other issues that I think we will need to address. We will do that in the context of having relations with a country that we, in addition to having relations, we will continue to have some problems and we will deal with those through diplomatic means. So that's one thing we can put on the table.

Another thing we can put on the table is the fact that in Korea, in the Korean Peninsula we have had an armistice, which is a, since 1953, it's kind of an elaborate cease-fire, we're prepared to move that armistice to a peace treaty. And it's a peace treaty that would give to North Korea a southern border and South Korea a northern border. Obviously North Korea and South Korea would be primary players in this but I think other players, namely the U.S. and China would have to play an important role in this, but we're prepared sit down and see if we can work out a peace treaty with the understanding that there are a lot of complexities in this but we're prepared to do it.

Thirdly, we'd be prepared to assist with not only bilateral assistance trade packages but also assist in getting North Korea better access to the international financial institutions. This is not entirely within the, it's certainly not something the five parties can do on their own. Obviously North Korea will have to live up to certain standards. There are statistics in various things that they would have to provide if they're ever going to have membership in some of these organizations. But we're prepared to work with them and see if that could be accomplished and together also provide bilateral aid packages.

Fourthly, we would be prepared once they have denuclearized, once they are backed in the non-proliferation treaty and establish a record of non proliferation, we would be prepared to discuss with them their desire for a civil nuclear program. North Korea does not have a lot of fossil fuels at its command. Energy is a huge problem for North Korea, and we would be prepared, once they are out of the nuclear business and into the NPT and have established a record of no-proliferation, we would be prepared to talk to them about aspirations for a civil nuclear program. We are also prepared to work with them on retraining opportunities for their scientists. North Korea has many scientists who have been engaged in these nuclear programs over the years. We'd be prepared to sit down and see what can be done in terms of getting them out of these fields and into other scientific fields.

Finally, and this goes back to the first point I started with, we're prepared to create a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism, whether it looks like the OSCE, whether it looks like some other institution from some other part of the world, will depend on the participants, I would say. We at this point cannot say with any precision what it would look like, but North Korea could be one of the founding members of this Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism. So all of these elements would go on the table. And what North Korea needs to decide is does it want to keep its aspirations for nuclear weapons in lieu of all these other elements. So, again, if we thought North Korea was simply prepared to fall out of bed one day and get rid of their nuclear programs, we would have done it one day and I would be on to other things, but alas, they are the kind of people who move step by step, and we believe this is the best way to do this. We do feel it is an important accomplishment that not only is the nuclear facility shut down, but it is disabled. This means that, if we can get it down to that amount of plutonium, we know that it is that amount of plutonium. That is, the plutonium will not be increasing every month. We think that is an important accomplishment and an accomplishment worth keeping us in the game to continue on this. I know there's a lot of questions about can we get through this ambitious third phase, during the life of the Bush Administration, which has some 300 days to go. And

again, I think this is something North Koreans are going to have to answer. They have said on a number of occasions that they would like to reach this deal with the Bush Administration. They've said it to us on a couple of occasions. The question is whether they're willing to follow through. North Korea is a country that has a, how to put it, vertically oriented governing structure to be sure, but that —this is on live TV so I have to be a little diplomatic about that — but at the same time, it is a place with politics. And so I think it is fair to say that there are people in North Korea who are really not with the program here. Who'd really rather continue to be producing this plutonium for whatever reason. And so I think we're going to have to understand that they're just not going to wake up one day and everything's going to be O.K.

Finally, let me just say that as we have gone forward, we have done this in an interagency process to be sure. The State Department plays a big role, but we have worked with other agencies as well. I would say the teamwork has been pretty good. It's not to say that we don't have people who are less enthused about this than others but I think we have been able to work together. I'm very proud of the foreign service officers who have worked with me through this. But we have been able to get together a very good team. And I think overall our countries relationships with that part of the world have been helped by our efforts in this regard. I think when you work in Asia, you want to show people in Asia that you're sincere about what you're doing. I think we've managed to do that. I think you want to show people in Asia that you're willing to work hard. I like to think the team we have together has indeed shown that we can work hard. And I think when you work in Asia, although I wouldn't limit this to Asia, when you work anywhere, you want to be respectful of your interlocutors and you want to show an understanding that they come from different experiences, different national experiences than you do, that they have a different history than you. That you're willing to listen at least 50% of the time and that you're willing to understand where they're coming from and see if we can work things out together. And I think we've succeeded in doing that. So speaking of not speaking more than 50% of the time, maybe this is a good time to go to questions. Thank you.



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
March 26, 2008

Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on the President's Trip to the NATO Summit

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

[deletia]

Q Mr. Hadley, I was wondering -- back to China and the phone call today -- was there one particular thing that prompted the President to call today? The violence in Tibet has been going on for almost a couple weeks now. Is there anything that triggered today --

MR. HADLEY: Well, there are a couple things. One, the Taiwanese election presents an opportunity to encourage China to reach out to Taiwan and to try and resolve differences, and the President did not want to let that go by. And that election, of course, was just this last weekend.

Secondly, there seemed to us to be -- we have talked a lot about Tibet. The Secretary of State has made some comments. We've sent messages through a lot of channels. Particularly since the President was going to be talking to President Hu Jintao about Taiwan, he wanted to use that as an opportunity to talk about Tibet. And in some sense, the message is the same. There's an opportunity here and China needs to seize it.

Three, there have been ongoing discussions, as you know, on North Korea, an effort to get North Korea to come forward with a complete and correct declaration. This has been going on for a while. It's time to bring this to conclusion. As you know, China, as part of the six-party talks, has been critical in this conversation that members of the six-party talks together have had with North Korea. It was time, I think, for the President to signal to Hu Jintao that it's time for all the parties of the six-party talks, including China, to reengage with North Korea. And, again, if you've got that agenda, you don't want to not talk about Burma, because Burma is a very important issue, and China has real influence on it.

So you put all those together, seemed like a good time, and seemed like to be a fairly robust agenda. And as you can see from the readouts by the two sides, it was a very substantive conversation.



Remarks With Republic of Korea Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Benjamin Franklin Room

Washington, DC

March 26, 2008

SECRETARY RICE: It's a great pleasure to welcome Foreign Minister Yu of the Republic of Korea. I had an opportunity to meet with him when I was in Seoul for the inauguration of President Lee Myung-bak, but he was not yet officially Foreign Minister at the time and he has now taken up those duties.

[deletia]

And we've had an opportunity to discuss regional issues of interest. In particular, we've spent significant time talking about the six-party talks in which we are both engaged, talks that, if they can lead to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, if all parties follow their obligations, would really be landmark -- have a landmark agreement in terms of a more stable Korean Peninsula and a more stable region.

[deletia]

MINISTER YU: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Secretary Rice and I had a very good meeting and followed by a working luncheon. We discussed matters related to the preparation for the upcoming visit by the President Lee Myung-bak to Washington and Camp David, and we discussed ways to make it a success.

Secretary Rice and I shared a view that our alliance relationship has played an important role in maintaining peace and security for Korea, thus promoting this economic development and democratization for the last several decades. And we also agreed to strengthen joint efforts to develop the traditional friendly and cooperative relations into a future-oriented partnership.

Secretary Rice and I also discussed North Korean nuclear problem and shared the view that six-party talks is a useful venue to pursue a peaceful denuclearization of North Korea. We agreed to increase our efforts, in close coordination with other members of the six-party talks, to persuade North Korea to submit complete and correct declaration so that the next round of six-party talks can be convened to go into next phase of dismantlement of North Korean nuclear programs.

[deletia]

QUESTION: This question addressed to both the ministers. In your discussions, did you discuss the

current impasse in the efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons drive, particularly in terms of the declaration?

And the question of South Korea easing its restrictions on U.S. beef, as well as any timelines in terms of visa procedures for those two countries?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that was three questions, Minister -- (laughter) -- but we'll take them.

First of all, on North Korea, as the Minister said, we had extensive discussions about the six-party talks. We have made some progress in terms of the shutdown of the reactor and the disablement of the reactor. But it is really time now for there to be movement on the declaration so that, with that declaration in hand, we can move forward on the next phase in the agreed statement, which is to actually dismantle the North Korean program and account for all of the programs and materials and the like. Because, ultimately, that is the only way that we are going to be able to realize the vision of a completely denuclearized and peaceful Korean Peninsula. And so we did have that discussion.

[deletia]

MINISTER YU: Regarding North Korean nuclear issue and about the declaration, I think time and patience is running out. So I hope North Korea will submit a declaration as soon as possible, so as not to lose good timing.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Kim Ghattas from the BBC. Madame Secretary, we're wondering about the specifics of what is holding up the six-party talks and whether the issue of proliferation and Syria is still the sticking point.

Minister, you're also talking about the fact that time is running out. What are you suggesting to make this process move forward? What are you offering?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, as to what is holding it up, it is the declaration that is holding it up. And we expect that the declaration and any associated documents will show the full range of the North Korean programs and activities so that there can be an effort to verify and to deal with anything that has happened concerning North Korean programs and proliferation and the like. We've been concerned about North Korean proliferation for quite a long time.

The six-party framework should be able to deal with this problem – or these problems so that we can stay on course to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. But it requires, first, that there be an accounting for those activities and for those programs. And so that's the process in which we're engaged. And again, it should – it was supposed to have been completed on December 31st. I'm not one to say that exact deadlines are that important. To get it right is more important. But I completely agree with the Minister that we've been at this for quite a long time and we are prepared, the United States is prepared, to meet its obligations when North Korea has met its obligations.

MINISTER YU: North Korea was supposed to submit declaration by the end of last year, so in order not to lose timing and momentum of six-party talks, we hope that North Korea will submit declaration as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Thank you. My question is to both Madame Secretary and Foreign Minister Yu. What is the link, if there is any, between humanitarian aid to North Korea and the current impasse on the six-party talks? Given the delay in the declaration, are both governments still willing to go ahead with food assistance and other types of humanitarian assistance to North Korea?

MINISTER YU: To me or to Madame Secretary?

SECRETARY RICE: There's a very clear path ahead in terms of what is expected of North Korea and what is expected of the other parties to the six-party talks. And so as North Korea goes along the path that it is supposed to, fulfills its obligations, then other parties in the six-party talks will do the same. And for instance, the North Koreans have been disabling; fuel deliveries have therefore been available to the North Koreans. So it should be very clear, and this was laid out in a way -- it was the North Koreans who talk about action for action. It's been laid in a way that everyone knows what they need to do and they know in what sequence they need to do it, and so that's the path that we're following.

MINISTER YU: Well, food aid is basically humanitarian aid. But providing annually a larger scale of food is not 100 percent humanitarian. But if there is anything a big necessity in North Korea, I think we have to provide food aid without any conditions.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. And let me just say the United States has always believed that humanitarian needs of people need to be met wherever they are. So on that point, we're in complete agreement.

DPRK formally denies uranium enrichment, nuclear co-op with Syria

www.chinaview.cn

2008-03-28 19:58:14

PYONGYANG, March 28 (Xinhua) -- The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Friday categorically denied it had ever carried out uranium enrichment nor had it proliferated nuclear facilities to other countries.

"The DPRK has never enriched uranium nor rendered nuclear cooperation to any other country. It has never dreamed of such things. Such things will not happen in the future, either," the official news agency KCNA quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

"The Bush administration was so absurd as to raise the issue of suspected uranium enrichment," the spokesman said. But "taking into consideration the face of the Bush administration," the DPRK rendered necessary sincere help by allowing U.S. experts to see sensitive military objects and providing them with samples, he said.

As for the issue of "suspected nuclear cooperation with Syria" raised by the United States, the DPRK said it has nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, it still tries to meet the U.S. request for reconfirming its commitment not to proliferate the nuclear technology, the spokesman said.

"However, the further the negotiations went on, the greater disappointment the attitude of the Bush administration brought to the DPRK," said the spokesman, adding: "The DPRK can never fall victim to the Bush administration's move to justify its wrong assertion."

The six-party talks, which involve the United States, the DPRK, the Republic of Korea, China, Japan and Russia, on dismantling the DPRK's atomic programs remain stalled by disputes over the issues of "uranium enrichment" and "nuclear proliferation."

The DPRK has said it gave the U.S. a list of its nuclear programs in November, but the U.S. says it still awaits a "complete and correct " declaration.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/27/AR2008032704075.html>

North Korea Test-Fires Missiles

By Blaine Harden

Washington Post Foreign Service

Friday, March 28, 2008; 10:57 AM

TOKYO, March 28 -- North Korea test-fired a volley of missiles into the sea Friday and warned that it might stop disabling its nuclear facilities unless the United States drops its demands for more details about the North's nuclear arsenal.

The missile launch and the combative warning -- which accused the Bush administration of "persistently trying to cook up fictions" -- came one day after the North expelled 11 South Korean officials from an industrial park north of the border that separates the two Koreas.

The White House called the missile tests "not constructive" and said North Korea should "refrain from testing missiles," Reuters news service reported. But South Korea played down the missile firings, characterizing them as part of a routine military exercise. "We believe the North does not want a deterioration of relations between South and North," a government spokesman said.

The three truculent actions in two days suggest that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, after a relatively placid stretch of cooperative diplomacy, is increasingly peeved by demands from the United States and South Korea.

The Bush administration is refusing to lift diplomatic sanctions against the North until it explains its suspected uranium enrichment program and details any efforts to sell nuclear technology to Syria or other countries. "North Korea should focus on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and deliver a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear weapons programs and nuclear proliferation activities," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said after the tests were reported.

North Korea reiterated on Friday that it has "never enriched uranium nor rendered cooperation to any other country."

South Korea's new president, Lee Myung-bak, who was sworn in last month, is taking a much tougher line than his predecessors in dealing with the North. Lee's government has said it will condition food aid and economic assistance on human rights and on timely dismantlement of the North's nuclear program.

This week's flare-up in tension on the Korean peninsula comes at an unusually stressful time for Kim's government. It is facing dire food shortages due to weather-related crop failures, the soaring world price of food and declines in aid from South Korea, China and the U.N. World Food Program. The shortages are expected to reach their peak late this summer -- at a time when China, the North's closest ally and primary benefactor, will be hosting the Olympics.

Analysts say that China expects Kim's government not to allow disturbances inside North Korea that could, during the games, send hungry refugees spilling across the border into China.

For reasons that have not been explained publicly, China has been supplying less food assistance in the past three years to North Korea, according to figures compiled by the World Food Program.

At the same time, China -- in order to keep more food for its own population -- has this year slapped tariffs on food exports. Combined with much higher grain prices on world markets, the 22 percent Chinese tariff has substantially reduced the impoverished North's capacity to buy food from there.

Perhaps more important, South Korea has this spring delayed the delivery of the free fertilizer that the North has come to rely on. The delay, according to analysts, means that this year's harvest in North Korea will almost certainly fall far short of what is needed to feed the country next winter.

The World Food Program has warned that the North this summer will have about 25 percent less food than it needs to feed the country's 23 million people.

Most of the severely affected people are in rural northern areas of the country, but a South Korean aid group said this month that food shortages are also affecting the country's elite in the capital Pyongyang. Citing unnamed sources inside the country, Good Friends, a Buddhist group that sends food and other aid into North Korea, said that mid- and low-level officials in the capital were not receiving rations of rice.

With the near-collapse of the state-controlled economy in the North and a sharp increase in corruption among local police, analysts say that widespread discontent over food shortages -- especially if it spreads among the urban elite -- has the potential to destabilize Kim's government.

Complicating Kim's situation further, there are reports that North Korean military and industrial officials are unhappy with his government for granting access to U.S. diplomats to visit a missile factory. Speculation about the inner workings of the secretive North Korean government, of course, is mostly guesswork. But Keith Luse, an aide to Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.), visited North Korea in February and later wrote that Kim's efforts to strike a deal with the United States on nuclear weapons might be a "stretch too far" for hard-liners in his country.

Actions taken in the past two days show that, for whatever reasons, Kim's government is much less amiable than it was as recently as last month, when it welcomed the New York Philharmonic Orchestra for an unprecedented concert in Pyongyang. A statement Friday from the North Korean foreign ministry warned that the United States is endangering an agreement brokered last year by six nations. The deal was intended to rid the North of nuclear weapons while providing it with energy assistance and ending its diplomatic and economic isolation.

The North insisted in Friday's statement that it has submitted paperwork that fulfills all its obligations under the agreement.

"Should the U.S. delay the settlement of the nuclear issue, persistently trying to cook up fictions, it will seriously affect the disabling of nuclear facilities which has been under way so far with a great deal of effort," the statement said.

The Bush administration has said North Korea has, in fact, disabled much of its primary nuclear facility, a plutonium plant at Yongbyon.

But it says that the North has failed to explain the extent of a different bomb-making process -- uranium enrichment -- and has refused to talk about whether it has shared nuclear technology with other countries, including Syria.



DPRK Foreign Ministry's Spokesman Blasts U.S. Delaying Tactics in Solution of Nuclear Issue

Pyongyang, **March 28 /2008/**(KCNA) -- A spokesman for the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the following statement Friday blaming the U.S. for the deadlocked implementation of the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks:

The implementation of the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks is at a deadlock due to the behavior of the U.S.

The U.S. has not fulfilled its commitments as regards the lifting of the sanctions within the agreed period but insisted on its unreasonable demands concerning the nuclear declaration, thus throwing hurdles in the way of settling the issue.

As clarified in the statement issued by the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 4, the DPRK worked out a report on the nuclear declaration and informed the U.S. side of this in November last year. And when the U.S. proposed to have a further discussion on the content of the report with the DPRK, the latter has shown so far such magnanimity as responding to such negotiations.

Simple is the reason why the DPRK responded to the negotiations on the issue of the nuclear declaration.

The Bush administration was so absurd as to raise the issue of "suspected uranium enrichment" in 2002, scuttling the DPRK-U.S. dialogue and straining the situation to an extreme pitch of tension. This pushed the DPRK to its access to nuclear weapons in the end.

The DPRK rendered necessary sincere help in clarifying the issue raised by the U.S. side, taking into consideration the face of the Bush administration which was to blame for the former's access to nuclear weapons.

When the U.S. side claimed that the issue of "suspected uranium enrichment" can be solved if the DPRK tells about whereabouts of the imported aluminum tubes, the DPRK took such a measure as an exception as allowing U.S. experts to see even sensitive military objects and providing them with samples.

And when the U.S. side was the first to raise the issue of the "suspected nuclear cooperation with Syria," it asked the DPRK to reconfirm its commitment not to proliferate the nuclear technology as the relevant object of Syria was destroyed by the bombing of Israel, making it unnecessary to clarify it any longer.

This "suspicion", too, had nothing to do with the DPRK. But it was so broadminded as to meet this request as a part of its sincere efforts to help implement the October 3 agreement.

The DPRK has sincerely taken part in the negotiations taking the face of the U.S. side into consideration.

However, the further the negotiations went on, the greater disappointment the attitude of the Bush administration brought to the DPRK.

The U.S. side is playing a poor trick to brand the DPRK as a criminal at any cost in order to save its face.

The DPRK can never fall victim to the Bush administration's move to justify its wrong assertion.

Explicitly speaking, the DPRK has never enriched uranium nor rendered nuclear cooperation to any other country. It has never dreamed of such things.

Such things will not happen in the future, too.

Should the U.S. delay the settlement of the nuclear issue, persistently trying to cook up fictions, it will seriously affect the disabling of nuclear facilities which has been under way so far with a great deal of effort.

<http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200803310077.html>

Syria got N. Korea help for N-facility

BY NANAE KURASHIGE THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

03/31/2008

An Israeli airstrike against Syria last September targeted a nuclear-related facility that was under construction with technical assistance from North Korea, according to Israel's prime minister.

Japanese government sources said over the weekend that the Israeli leader, Ehud Olmert, briefed Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda about the attack during summit talks in Tokyo on Feb. 27.

It is apparently the first time that the intended target had been disclosed to the head of a foreign government.

Previously, Jerusalem had only acknowledged it carried out the Sept. 6, 2007, attack, but stopped short of identifying the type of facility.

Tokyo has shown keen interest in the disclosure as it suggests Pyongyang was providing nuclear technology to Damascus in violation of an agreement made at six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how.

According to the sources, Olmert told Fukuda that the site was a nuclear-related facility that was under construction with know-how and assistance from North Korean technicians dispatched by Pyongyang.

Olmert also said Israel remains concerned about the issue of nuclear proliferation by North Korea and sought greater information sharing with Tokyo through expanded dialogue on the issue.

Japanese government officials expressed differing views on how to interpret Olmert's statement.

"While we cannot confirm the facts, the fact that such an assertion was made at an official occasion such as a summit meeting is significant, making it highly credible," said one high-ranking Foreign Ministry official.

Another Foreign Ministry official pointed out, however, that the Israeli leader "may have only presented facts that were favorable for the Israeli side."

Under a joint statement issued at six-party talks in September 2005, Pyongyang agreed to "abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs."

North Korea agreed to "provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs" and reaffirmed its "commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how" to other countries, under a list of actions for implementation of the joint statement, agreed on during the talks in October.

Washington has since sought clarification from Pyongyang on suspected nuclear proliferation by North Korea to other countries such as Syria. Pyongyang has denied the allegations, leaving the talks stalled.

U.S. 'Called N.Korea's Bluff Over Syria'

Updated Apr.1,2008 09:22 KST

The U.S. in recent bilateral talks reportedly gave Pyongyang a list of North Korean officials involved in the supply of nuclear technology to Syria, a suspicion the North denies.

A high-level diplomatic source on Monday said that the U.S. obtained the list of officials including nuclear engineers, who were involved in the supply of nuclear technology to Syria, through various intelligence networks. This persuaded the U.S. that the North Korea-Syrian nuclear connection did exist.

According to the source, it was chief U.S. nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill who gave the list to his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-gwan during their latest nuclear talks. Kim denied knowing anything about it.

Japan's Asahi Shimbun on Sunday [2008-03-30] reported Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, during a visit to Japan last month, told Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda that attacks by Israeli warplanes inside Syria in September last year targeted a suspected nuclear facility where North Korean agents were reportedly operating.

The daily quoted Olmert as telling Fukuda that Israeli air strikes in Syria last September attacked a facility being built with a blueprint and technicians provided by North Korea. North Korea denies any past or present involvement in nuclear development abroad.

(englishnews@chosun.com)



Remarks Upon Arrival at Incheon Airport

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Incheon Airport

Seoul, South Korea

April 1, 2008

QUESTION: Welcome back.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Hi, how are you? Thank you. It's always great to get on the plane for 14 hours and speak to you.

QUESTION: Do you have any opening comment?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry? No I don't.

QUESTION: There has been a report that you showed Kim Kye-gwan a list of people who cooperated in Syria and Kim Kye-gwan quickly denied the list (inaudible). Do you have anything to say on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, look, I 'm not going to discuss what our private discussions are. Obviously we've had a lot of discussion with them on getting a proper declaration, and it has to include what their activities are in terms of nuclear cooperation with other countries. They know that. We've worked with them on this. We had a lot of discussion in Geneva. We've been in touch with them since then, and I hope we can figure out a way to get through this. But, obviously, we are kind of running out of time right now.

QUESTION: This week DPRK are delivering a continuous message, escalating message toward South Korea. What do you think about (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I saw those comments, which are obviously completely inappropriate and out of line. I would mention that [the source was] KCNA, which I don't think is the most reliable news agency in the world. Obviously, these are sorts of comments that are just inappropriate for discussing relations with other states. I don't think there's anything that people in the ROK or the U.S. need to be too concerned about. I think we should probably not overreact to comments that really have no basis in fact and seem to be entirely propagandistic and aimed at domestic audiences, whoever they are.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) missiles affects the Six-Party Talks process?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, no. I mean, I don't think I'll take a fire extinguisher with me

to the next set of talks. So it doesn't really make any difference.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) running out of time?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well you know, here we are April 1 and we still don't have this thing. Again, we had some progress in Geneva. We thought we had some progress after that. So we 'll see. They know what they need to do.

QUESTION: Sir, don't you think we need a real deadline? We just can't sit and wait like this forever. So don't you think -- .

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well this is not forever, okay? We haven't been waiting forever. But, obviously, we are getting to the point where we need to make some progress very quickly.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) How long? Do you have any specific deadline in mind?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I don't have a specific deadline. I'll know it when I see it.

QUESTION: Do you still think that it's possible to complete denuclearization of DPRK in calendar year 2008?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, they could complete it very quickly if they wanted to. I think the problem is that the DPRK needs to make this fundamental decision. Again, I think we have made progress on the declaration. But until we complete the declaration, we won't have succeeded. And then we need to get on to the third phase, which is the very important phase where they should be giving up all their nuclear ambitions. Obviously they are a -- You know, it's a country that has difficulty making decisions of this kind. When I look at some of the problems they're confronting right now with food production and other things like that, they're obviously in a difficult position.

Okay?

QUESTION: Do you feel that there are some sorts of (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I have no idea. I have absolutely no idea how that works.

QUESTION: Is there a downside to just waiting out the Bush Administration and doing nothing (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well look, if you've been to the States lately you know it's quite a political season. We have several political candidates who are running for president. Absolutely nobody has suggested that they want this problem. Nobody has suggested that they are interested in giving the DPRK a better deal than the one we have put on the table. So I would say, from the DPRK's point of view, the time to settle is now.

QUESTION: Is there a talk of when to meet next -- Six-Party Talks (inaudible) any discussion on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, again, we've got to get through this declaration. So no point in having a meeting until we have a willingness on the DPRK's part to discuss all of the nuclear programs, which is the requirement that they have under the October declaration. So until we get that, no point in discussing further.

QUESTION: Has there been some progress in your Geneva meeting with Kim Kye-gwan until now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Has there been some progress in your Geneva meeting with Kim Kye-gwan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we've had some indirect contacts, and I would say there is some progress on that. But, again, it doesn't really mean anything until we actually get a declaration

QUESTION: They at least agreed they have to provide the declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think they agreed they have to provide a declaration, yes.

QUESTION: Do they still insist they already did so in November?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Not to us. Not to us. They never showed us the declaration. They showed us some research materials, research reference materials rather, and it was very clear it was not a complete and correct declaration. So you bet they are on the hook to do that.

QUESTION: Can we expect some developments in U.S. food aid in the near future?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think we continue to monitor what we believe to be a deteriorating food situation in North Korea. We continue to monitor it and be guided by what we can do to help the North Korean people overcome these issues. But I think everyone is concerned about the deteriorating food situation.-- I think everyone except, I guess, for KCNA.

QUESTION: So, now you haven't come up with any concrete idea of moving forward on that food assistance?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we haven't. Obviously, whenever you have a food assistance problem in a country, that country's government needs to come forward, acknowledge they have some problems, and make some specific requests. And we haven't had that yet.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think -- I am not sure there is much more I can tell you. I mean, you know the situation. I mean, they are just not quite there yet.

QUESTION: Are you still stuck over the same old issues (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Basically. Basically --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) it's all about wording now (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I'll let you know when it's done. It's not good to talk about things in the middle, because you can end up making more work for yourself.

QUESTION: Do you have plans for a meeting with Kim Kye-gwan anytime during your (inaudible) Asian trip?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we have no specific plans.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I don't like to talk about those things, because it just makes my job more difficult.

So, all right?

(Later in the airport)

QUESTION: Two reporters from Kyodo here. Is it true that your talks with Kim Kye-gwan in Geneva have come close to complete agreement?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, no, because we don't have a declaration, and when we do I will let you know. We don't have one, so --

QUESTION: Do you plan to meet with Kim Kye-gwan during your Asian tour?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, I have no plans right now.

QUESTION: Do you think it's possible to resume Six-Party Talks this month?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It depends on the North Koreans. It depends entirely on them.

QUESTION: Reportedly you have a list of North Korean engineers who gave assistance to Syria.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't know what they are talking about. But, anyway, if we had any private discussions, I would keep them private.

QUESTION: What is the focus of your discussion with Korean officials here?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, I think we will be talking about a lot of things, including the situation in (inaudible).

All right. See you later.

Released on April 1, 2008



Comments by Assistant Secretary Hill in Jakarta, Indonesia
Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Jakarta, Indonesia

April 4, 2008

There is some thought of a possible meeting, there's nothing that has been confirmed therefore I can't make any announcements but I can tell you that we really need to get moving on this declaration. This has held us up now for over three months. We don't have three months to spare anymore so we've really got to see if we can make some progress on this.

We have made very clear that the comments that were made in some cases by anonymous spokesmen of the Korea Central News Agency, the so called KCNA, that those comments were very, in many cases very inappropriate and very unhelpful to the situation. The DPRK (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) needs to be reaching out to its neighbors, not, should not be engaged in that sort of commitment.

We have not seen, with respect to the six-party process, we have not seen how the six-party process is affected by those comments. But I want to say that I have not seen, I've not met with any DPRK representatives since Geneva and so we'll have to see whether those comments affected or not.

Released on April 4, 2008



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC

April 4, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

QUESTION: Can you give us what you have on the U.S.-North Korean talks for next week, please?

MR. CASEY: Oh, well, where in the world is Chris Hill? Let's see what we can do for you there. I apologize. There was some confusion this morning about the exact timing of his visit. So let me give you a dramatic reading of what I've got here from EAP and we'll see if we can clarify it for you.

First of all, I think everyone knows that Chris met today in Jakarta with a variety of officials, including President Yudhoyono and had some discussions about bilateral issues there. He then returned to Bali, where he's been attending the Asia Society's Williamsburg Conference. Now he's going to leave Bali on Sunday – that's this Sunday, April 6th – and go to Timor-Leste, as previously scheduled, for some bilateral meetings there. And then he will depart Dili on Monday, April 7th and will arrive in Singapore on the evening of April 7th. He'll meet with Singaporean officials on Monday evening and then – you thought I'd never get to it – on Tuesday the 8th, he will then have a meeting with Kim Kye Gwan, his counterpart, in – North Korean counterpart in the Six-Party talks. This meeting, again, is, as I said this morning, a follow-up on the discussions that were held in Geneva last month.

He's then expected to leave Singapore on the morning of Wednesday, April 9th and – and this is in addition to what I told you this morning – we now do have an additional stop for him, so he'll be going to Beijing later that day on the 9th and have discussions with Chinese officials there. I'm sure that will include a variety of topics, including some bilateral ones, but I'm sure he'll also use that as an opportunity to provide a readout of the discussions that he will have had previously with Kim Kye Gwan. And then he'll be leaving Beijing the evening of April 8th* and arriving, again, that same – that same evening back here in Washington.

So, you know, you can start notifying your correspondents in all of those locations to start stalking him at the usual hotels and places and times so that he can have an opportunity to tell you himself about how any of these conversations have gone.

QUESTION: Do you have – do you have any secret agreement between the U.S. and North Korea? You have any --

MR. CASEY: No, that's a simple answer.

Yeah.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), what are the expectations for this meeting?

MR. CASEY: Oh, I think the expectations are as I described this morning. This is going to be a follow-up on the talks held in Geneva last month. I'm sure they will cover both issues related to the declaration itself as well as the implementation of the disablement phase of talks. As Chris has said too, his discussions in Geneva also talked a bit about how we would move beyond that once the declaration is provided to dealing with what is the most difficult phase in this process, which is the actual dismantling and abandonment of North Korea's nuclear programs. So I think we expect they'll have a good conversation about those issues and further the dialogue in Geneva.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Just – sorry, as a follow-up, because Ambassador Hill, before leaving here, also he had mentioned how he would not meet with the North Koreans unless there will be a final resolution to the declaration issue. Can we expect significant progress in this meeting?

MR. CASEY: Well, I love that term, significant progress. I'm not sure what it means, but I love the term nonetheless. Look, I think that we will know, and this is something Chris has also said repeatedly, we'll know how much progress we've made when we have a full and complete declaration. Until that happens, it's pretty hard for me, or for him, or for anyone else to say, whether we're one, ten or a hundred degrees closer to achieving that goal. And ultimately, until that declaration is in, until we have a full and complete declaration, we really won't be able to give you anything, I think, of a benchmark assessment of how close we are or how far we are. And ultimately, it doesn't matter until and unless we get the declaration. I appreciate the musical accompaniment. (Laughter.)

[deletia]

* Leaving Beijing the evening of April 9th

(The briefing was concluded at 1:20 p.m.)

Israel, U.S. plan to release details on Syria attack

By Barak Ravid and Amos Harel

Last update - 16:58 06/04/2008

Israel and the United States are coordinating the release of details on the air force strike in Syria last September, which foreign reports claim targeted a nuclear installation Syria was constructing with North Korean assistance. American officials may reveal details of the strike later this month during congressional hearings.

Even though the defense establishment in Israel is opposed to any publication of details of the attack, the Prime Minister's Bureau and U.S. President George W. Bush's administration are of the opinion that it is now possible to reveal details because there is little chance of a conflagration as a result of a Syrian decision to avenge the attack.

Details of the attack are likely to be revealed by senior Bush administration officials during hearings before Congress. Advisers to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Yoram Turbowicz and Shalom Turjeman, discussed the issue last week in Washington with senior U.S. intelligence officials, and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley.

During the meetings, the two sides agreed on which details of the attack to make public and which details could have negative implications. According to foreign reports, Israel transferred to the U.S. detailed intelligence on the installation attacked, and the two sides agreed not to reveal any details without prior coordination.

The view in Washington and in Jerusalem is that publishing details of the attack will bolster Israel's deterrence and may even lead Syria to cool its close ties with Iran and North Korea.

According to the American assessments, the revelations about the attack will also bolster its hand in negotiations with North Korea on dismantling its nuclear arms.

However, the Israel defense establishment is strongly opposed to revealing any details of the attack in Syria and expressed concern that any airing of the details of the attack will result in lifting the strict censorship that was imposed in Israel on this incident.

Senior figures in the defense establishment and the Israel Defense Forces said in recent day that Israel must convince the Americans to deliver the report to Congress "in closed session."

Intelligence analysts in Israel maintain that any further release of the details on the strike will contribute to the already tense situation between Syria and Israel, which has been exacerbated in part because of Hezbollah's plans to avenge the assassination of the group's terrorist mastermind, Imad Mughniyah.

Any official release of the details of the attack and the nature of the installation may push Syria's Bashar Assad into a corner and put pressure him to respond, say intelligence officials.

The possibility of details being made public has also contributed to the mutual suspicions between the PMO and the Defense Minister's Bureau. In political circles it is now commonly accepted that the release of details of the attack may help bolster the public image of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Some politicians have offered assessments that Olmert may decide to lift the curtain on details of the attack close to the 60th anniversary of Israel's independence, in early May.

Other political sources say that the American revelations on this matter will not result in a change in Israel's censorship policy, and insist that Olmert will not discuss the subject of the attack during holiday interviews.

The hearings at the House Intelligence Committee may be held in the coming weeks. Congressmen have included in the bill on the intelligence budget that American intelligence agencies will not be given large portions of their budget unless they reveal in full the details of the strike in Syria and the nuclear cooperation between Pyongyang and Damascus.

This has led U.S. and Israeli officials to conclude that American officials will release details of the strike during the hearings.

Talks between the U.S. and North Korea are scheduled to resume tomorrow in Singapore. One of the American conditions for lifting the sanctions on Pyongyang is for it to expose its nuclear collaboration with other countries, which North Korea maintains does not exist. According to South Korean media sources, Pyongyang has agreed to provide the U.S. with information on its nuclear cooperation with Syria, on condition that Washington will not make this public. The same sources stated that the U.S. has given North Korea a list of engineers that are suspected of involvement in the construction of the installation that was targeted in Syria.

Meanwhile, readiness levels are high at Northern Command and in security for Israeli missions abroad, as well as at airlines, as concerns remain that Hezbollah will try to avenge the assassination of its terrorist mastermind, Imad Mughniyah in February.

The statement by Defense Minister Ehud Barak last week, that Israel would retaliate with a heavy hand against any attack, was made following deliberations with intelligence officials. There are concerns that an order to carry out a terrorist attack has already been issued - and Barak's tough words were meant to signal Hezbollah and its patrons, Syria and Iran, that Israel will respond to any attack.

<http://ukpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5iKTo0KDQomlq22fnXRFAGFY5J3zA>

The Press Association

Syria strike details to be released

6 hours ago [*Accessed 2008-04-08T15:15Z*]

[EXCERPT]

Israel and the US are coordinating the release of details of a mysterious Israeli air force strike in Syria, according to reports.

The Haaretz newspaper says US officials might disclose details of the Sept 6 strike later this month during congressional hearings.

The Yediot Ahronot newspaper reported that the matter would come up April 17 before the congressional Committee on Foreign Relations.

Israel concerned N. Korean nuclear know-how, material has reached Iran

By Barak Ravid

Last update - 02:38 07/04/2008

The United States and Israel seek to pressure North Korea to cease its nuclear cooperation with Iran, which is one of the motives behind their agreement to disclose details on the air-force strike in Syria last September.

According to information obtained by Washington and Jerusalem, North Korea transferred technology and nuclear materials to Iran to aid Tehran's secret nuclear arms program.

U.S. and Israeli officials agreed last week that the talks between the U.S. and North Korea, scheduled to take place in Singapore tomorrow, should be used to pressure Pyongyang to disclose its nuclear cooperation with countries in the Middle East. As a pressure tactic, U.S. officials could reveal details of North Korea's cooperation with Syria to Congress.

Foreign news sources reported that in addition to helping Syria build the nuclear facility that Israel attacked, North Korea sent engineers and various materials to the site. Israel and the U.S. fear that Pyongyang could be doing even more to boost Iran's nuclear program.

During their talks in Washington last week with high-ranking officials, Yoram Turbowicz and Shalom Turjeman, advisers to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, agreed that the details of the air strike would be released by the Americans.

Israel would continue to decline commenting on the matter, as it has done since September, and would not alter its censorship policy.

Syria claimed that the facility hit was an unused military installation and denied having a nuclear development program. North Korea also denies exporting its nuclear expertise. Iran claims that its nuclear program is for civilian purposes only.

In the past few months Olmert has met with key world leaders to discuss Syria.

The most important meeting in Olmert's "campaign" to defend the Israeli air strike and create a united international front against Syria was with Russian President Vladimir Putin. On October 10, about a month after the attack, the two leaders spoke on the phone about Syria and other issues. They agreed that due to the sensitivity of the matter, talks should be continued face to face.

On October 18, Olmert flew to Moscow for a five-hour visit. It had been announced, to much surprise, the day before. Officials in the Prime Minister's Office said at the time that the Iranian issue was the focus of the talks, and that Olmert planned to present Putin with intelligence on a number of strategic issues.

Haaretz learned that Olmert presented Putin with the problems relevant to Syria.

Olmert briefs world leaders

One week later, Olmert flew to Paris and London, where he met with President Nicolas Sarkozy and Prime Minister Gordon Brown, respectively, and filled them in on the operation. While in London, Olmert also met with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was also visiting the British capital.

After the air strike in Syria, two detachable fuel tanks from Israeli fighter planes were found in Turkish territory, near the Syrian border. Turkish news reports said this proved that Israeli aircraft had flown over Turkish airspace on their way to their target.

Turkey made a formal complaint to Israel and asked for clarifications from Jerusalem.

In his hour-long meeting with Erdogan, Olmert briefed the Turkish prime minister on the situation.

A few days later Olmert informed the cabinet that he had apologized to Erdogan for the fuel-tank incident.

"If Israeli planes indeed penetrated Turkish airspace, then it was without prior intent or any intent to infringe upon or undermine Turkish sovereignty, which we respect," Olmert told the cabinet.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1207486215610&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull>

'Report on Sept. 6 strike to show Saddam transferred WMDs to Syria'

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Apr 7, 2008 21:57

An upcoming joint US-Israel report on the September 6 IAF strike on a Syrian facility will claim that former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein transferred weapons of mass destruction to the country, Channel 2 stated Monday.

Furthermore, according to a report leaked to the TV channel, Syria has arrested 10 intelligence officials following the assassination of Hizbullah terror chief Imad Mughniyeh.

U.S. discusses compromise with North Korea-sources

By Teruaki Ueno

Mon Apr 7, 2008 9:47pm EDT

TOKYO (Reuters) - The United States and North Korea have been discussing a possible face-saving compromise in a standoff over Pyongyang's accounting of its nuclear programs, diplomatic sources said, as the two sides headed into talks in Singapore.

Under the compromise proposal, North Korea would acknowledge U.S. assertions that the secretive communist state had a clandestine program to enrich uranium for weapons and proliferated nuclear technology and material to Syria, diplomatic sources in Tokyo told Reuters.

"The compromise deal was floated when representatives from the United States and North Korea met in Geneva last month," one of the sources said.

Washington has said a major sticking point in talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear programs is the need for Pyongyang to deliver a declaration giving a complete account of its programs as called for in a February 2007 six-party nuclear deal. That account was due at the end of last year.

If the two sides accept the compromise proposal, it could come in a document separate from North Korea's "complete and correct declaration" of its nuclear ambitions, the source said.

Washington suspects North Korea of having a secret program to enrich uranium for weapons and proliferating nuclear technology, and wants those issues addressed in the declaration. North Korea has repeatedly denied the allegations.

North Korea has said it had already made the declaration and it described the U.S. suspicions as fiction.

Another diplomatic source said it was not clear whether North Korea would accept the compromise.

"The proposal is face-saving to both sides," he said. "It is particularly face-saving to North Korea because they don't have to directly admit that they had done something wrong."

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill is due to meet North Korea's Kim Kye-gwan in Singapore later on Tuesday.

The talks between Hill and Kim come at a time of heightened tension on the heavily armed Korean peninsula in recent days after the North's missile tests and threat to attack the South.

If the North makes the declaration, it stands to be removed from a U.S. terrorism blacklist and be better able to tap into finance that could boost its economy.

<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/9B7F28C5-1C60-484D-8103-29315D5A0E37.htm>

N Korea 'agrees nuclear deal'

UPDATED ON:

WEDNESDAY, **APRIL 09, 2008**

17:40 MECCA TIME, 14:40 GMT

North Korea has reached an agreement on compensation in exchange for providing full details of its nuclear programmes, Pyongyang's foreign ministry told state media.

The issue has been hindering progress in disarmament talks between North Korea and the US, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

"As a result of the talks, a consensus was reached on the US measure to make political compensation and the nuclear declaration essential for winding up the implementation of the agreement," an unidentified spokesman was quoted as saying by the Korean Central News Agency.

The deal includes North Korea's demand to be removed from a US terrorism blacklist, as well as energy aid and major diplomatic and security benefits.

Aid for weapons

In February 2007, North Korea had agreed to give up its nuclear weapons in return for aid.

Pyongyang last tested a nuclear weapon in 2006, but said it had submitted its declaration in November.

The US countered that the declaration did not account for an alleged secret uranium enrichment programme or for alleged proliferation to Syria.

The US response to talks with Pyongyang on Tuesday was less enthusiastic.

"We've definitely made progress [on a declaration] but I don't want to suggest there has been any major breakthrough," Christopher Hill, the US negotiator, said.

Hill was speaking in Beijing after discussing the nuclear issue with Kim Kye Gwan, the senior North Korean negotiator, in Singapore.

The US negotiator had been briefing other parties to the six-nation disarmament deal on the outcome of the Singapore talks.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted Kim as saying after the Tuesday meeting that differences between the two countries "have narrowed a lot".

Autumn breakthrough?

Wu Dawei, China's senior negotiator in the disarmament talks, said on Wednesday that they were experiencing ups and downs and suggested that a breakthrough could be made "around autumn".

The main sticking points are believed to be the details North Korea will reveal about any nuclear know-how or materials provided to other nations, along with allegations it had a secret uranium enrichment programme in addition to its known plutonium programme.

China is North Korea's main diplomatic ally and source of food and energy assistance.



Remarks Upon Departure From Six-Party Talks

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

U.S. Embassy

Beijing, China

April 9, 2008

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Hi. How are you? I've just come from briefing and talking about the Six-Party process with the chair of the Six-Party process, Vice Minister Wu Dawei. I've also had the occasion today to talk about the situation with my ROK counterpart, Minister Chun Young-woo. And this morning I met with my Japanese counterpart (inaudible) Saiki-san to discuss where we are.

Yesterday in Singapore, I had a long series of discussions with my DPRK counterpart, Mr. Kim Kye Gwan. I would say these were good discussions that I think allowed us to make some progress as we try to get through this difficult -- what has turned out to be difficult -- second phase.

I want to stress that we haven't yet arranged for all the factors, all the elements that need to be put together. Obviously, this is a package. We are talking about a declaration that has several elements. One of the key ones, of course, would be the amount of plutonium that the DPRK declares. But we've been able to have very good discussions on some of the other key factors that have allowed us to go forward.

Again, as is always the case in the Six-Party process, nothing is agreed unless everything is agreed. So we have to continue to work on what an overall package of elements there'll be in order to conclude phase two and then get on to the very important phase three -- where we anticipate, or we look forward to, dealing with the question of the DPRK separated plutonium and seeing what kind of overall arrangements can be made to have that third phase be the phase that fulfills the September '05 statement of principles to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

All in all, though, I would say it has been a good couple of days. I think some of the work that we were able to do in Singapore was work that was kicked off when Secretary Rice was here and we were talking to our Chinese counterparts. So we have done a lot of work with China on this. And a lot of what I talked about with Kim Kye Gwan in Singapore reflects the work we've done with the other parties, including work especially with the Japanese and the ROK.

So we have a lot of work ahead of us. I wouldn't want to suggest there is any major breakthrough. I think we will be, as the days go by, we will be announcing some efforts to try to move ahead and complete this second phase. I don't have anything to announce today, but I will be getting on a plane in a few minutes, heading back to Washington. I'll be talking about this, where we are, with Secretary Rice, and I think I have a Congressional hearing on Thursday. So the work will very much continue.

Maybe I can take a question or two?

QUESTION: Do you expect a partial declaration from the DPRK? (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think we will continue to be in close contact with the DPRK, as we are with other partners. I think people need to understand this continues to be very much a Six-Party process, and proposals we make to the DPRK need to be worked out within and by Six-Party members. So, as always, China remains a very key factor in all of this, which is why it was very important to get back here and talk to the Chinese and see where we go from here.

Obviously, if we can finalize the issue of the declaration, that will be a key moment -- because the declaration needs to be submitted to the Chinese chair. China then needs to bring the Six Parties together. We need to look at the overall declaration, make sure it is consistent with our expectations, and then we have to have to look ahead at how we are going to deal with the next phase. China is very much the key factor in this, and that's why it is very important to stay very close to China.

QUESTION: What specifics did you and Kim Kye Gwan discuss in Singapore?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we did get into some specific issues. There were detailed discussions, but I'm not sure I really want to discuss them in the press right now -- except to say they were very detailed. And in the Six-Party process, if you don't discuss details, you're bound to be tripped up by them. We do need to discuss them and make sure we have a clear understanding, and we did just that. But no, I don't want to get into those right now.

QUESTION: How close are we now to getting a declaration from the DPRK?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we've definitely made progress on it. And, again, every time I measure the time, I'm always wrong. Just check with other people who have asked me the questions about when we're going to get something done. But we've definitely made some progress on it. I think we're going to try to do some more things in the next few days in terms of trying to tee up what needs to be done for this second phase. And we'll see if we can, at that point, have a better time estimate. As I've said before, we don't have a lot of time, and that's why we really do need to put it in place.

QUESTION: Can the declaration be direct or indirect? Can it have an attachment --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: The format issue is, we've had discussions about that. We've talked about that with all the partners. I don't think we have a problem with format. I think it's a declaration process, if you will. Whether it has three pieces of paper or two pieces of paper is not a big issue for us. The issue is that it has to be complete and correct in order to make some progress.

QUESTION: How big an obstacle is North Korean-Syrian cooperation to the process?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: The issue of the DPRK's nuclear cooperation with other countries has been a major issue. That is something that we have had considerable discussions about, and we will probably continue to talk about it. But I think it's something that, together with other things, we will need to have all resolved as we get to the end of this. I would just say we talked about that and other things, and we did make progress.

MODERATOR: We have time for one more question, as long as it's a short question.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Tomo, have you ever asked a short question in your life? All right, we'll try this -- your first ever. Go ahead.

QUESTION: What do you need to tee up in the next few days – is it time or obstacles?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Time. It's time. Time and logistics. Time and logistics, they can be obstacles. But we are dealing with time and logistics.

Okay, sorry there's not more news for you, guys. But that's the way it goes in this business.

See you later.

<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/breaking/107994.html>

Israel briefed U.S. on Syria strike

Published: 04/09/2008

Israel has kept the United States informed about its mysterious airstrike in Syria last year, Ehud Olmert said.

The Israeli prime minister, who like the rest of his government has refused to provide details of the Sept. 6 bombing run that is widely assumed to have targeted a Syrian nuclear facility, said Wednesday that the Bush administration is privy.

"Issues related to this subject were presented to the U.S. government by the defense minister and myself," Olmert told reporters without elaborating.

Israeli media have reported that U.S. intelligence assessments on the airstrike could become public during an upcoming debate in the U.S. House of Representatives' foreign affairs committee.

Those who believe the Syrians were trying to develop a secret nuclear facility say Damascus may have had help from North Korea, a regime under intense U.S. scrutiny.

Some Israeli pundits have suggested that Olmert differs with his defense minister, Ehud Barak, on whether to go public on the operation. Olmert denied this.

"Everything to do with these issues was precisely formulated between myself and the defense minister," he said. "We conduct lengthy and elaborate discussions, and in the end we formulate a joint policy."



Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry on DPRK-U.S. Talks

Pyongyang, **April 9 /2008**(KCNA) -- A spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry gave the following answer to the question put by KCNA on Wednesday as regards the DPRK-U.S. talks held in Singapore:

The DPRK-U.S. talks were held in Singapore on April 8.

The talks had an in-depth discussion on issues arising in implementing the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks.

As a result of the talks a consensus was reached on the U.S. measure to make political compensation and the nuclear declaration essential for winding up the implementation of the agreement.

The recent Singapore agreement fully proved the effectiveness of the DPRK-U.S. talks. We will follow the fulfillment of the commitments of those countries participating in the six-party talks.

Israel May Reveal Details of Attack on Alleged Syrian Nuclear Program

U.S. Lawmakers Push Disclosure, Point to North Korean Proliferation

By Nathan Guttman

Thu. **Apr 10, 2008**

Washington - Israel is considering disclosing classified information about alleged nuclear ties between North Korea and Syria due to concern that Washington may downplay the issue as it pursues closer ties with Pyongyang.

Israeli sources say that Jerusalem holds information implicating North Korea in a nascent Syrian nuclear program, which was reportedly the target of an Israeli air strike this past September.

Until now, Jerusalem has maintained a policy of deliberate ambiguity regarding the attack, but Israel is reluctantly considering opening up because of Washington's steps toward rapprochement with Pyongyang. Israel officials and American lawmakers believe that disclosing information about the attack may force Washington to maintain a firm line on North Korean nuclear proliferation.

"Israel has concerns about North Korea because of its proliferation activity, but Israel doesn't want to get into a conflict over this issue or to take any action which could be viewed as opposing a policy led by Condoleezza Rice," said David Makovsky, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

To date, authoritative information about Israel's September 6, 2007, attack has been scarce. Following the air strike, the Israeli government avoided making any public statements on the incident, and even the country's famously talkative Cabinet members stayed mum on the topic.

But the international media, which is not obliged to observe Israel's military censorship laws, was full of information about the attack, including "before and after" satellite images of the targeted site. The reports provide a fairly detailed account of the attack, describing its target as a partially built nuclear site being constructed using North Korean know-how.

The issue re-emerged April 4, when Israeli media reported a dispute among policymakers in Jerusalem about providing official information regarding the attack. According to front-page reports in a number of leading Israeli newspapers, the information was expected to be revealed in Washington during an April 17 briefing held by the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

A spokeswoman for the committee, however, said this week that no hearing had been scheduled on issues relating to Syria, Israel or North Korea. A representative for the House Intelligence Committee also made clear that there were no plans to discuss the issue.

A congressional aide, speaking on condition of anonymity due to what was described as "the extreme sensitivity of the issue," told the Forward that administration officials would be giving closed-door briefings to several members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in the near future. The briefings, according to the congressional aide, will deal with Israel's attack on Syria and with North Korea's involvement in an alleged Syrian nuclear program.

Israeli officials refused to discuss the matter, citing the standing policy of not commenting on any aspect of the attack. Officials did confirm, however, that two senior advisers to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were in Washington in early April holding discussions with administration officials. According to Israeli press reports, these discussions also touched on the issue of disclosing information about the September 6 air strike.

Meanwhile, talks between the United States and North Korea reached a critical point this past week. Christopher Hill, the administration's point man for negotiations with Pyongyang, met April 8 in Singapore with his North Korean counterpart in an attempt to overcome the current impasse, which stems from Pyongyang's refusal to disclose all its nuclear activity within the country and from its proliferation of nuclear technology to other countries.

A full disclosure in writing is a condition set by Washington for removing North Korea from the list of states that sponsor terrorism, a move that would mark the beginning of North Korea being accepted back into the international community. A possible compromise being discussed is having North Korea provide only a declaration acknowledging American findings on these issues.

Republican lawmakers have insisted that the Bush administration not drop North Korea from the list of terrorism sponsors before Pyongyang gives a full account of its proliferation activity.

"Pyongyang continues to transfer missile technology to nations of concern in South Asia and the Middle East," a group of Republican lawmakers wrote in a March 16 letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "Moreover, during last year's July 4 missile launch by North Korea, the international press reported the presence of Iranian observers."

The group, led by Florida's Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who is the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a strong supporter of Israel, argued that it is premature to remove North Korea from the list because of its supplying of nuclear technology to other countries, which the letters' authors view as an "even greater threat to American security."

Lawmakers also added to this year's Intelligence Authorization Act a stipulation requiring the director of national intelligence to provide Congress with a quarterly report on the nuclear intentions of Iran and North Korea, although the legislation does allow the administration to keep the report classified and allow only committee members and staffers with security clearance to read it. Congressional sources would not say if the planned briefings by the administration are in response to this legislation.

Israel, according to press reports, is concerned mainly about alleged North Korean involvement in developing Iran's nuclear program. In the talks held by Olmert's advisers in Washington this month, the Israelis stressed the need to demand that North Korea come clean regarding its nuclear ties with Iran as part of any grand deal being negotiated by the United States, according to reports confirmed by Israeli sources in Jerusalem.

A congressional source, however, told the Forward that the need to disclose details of the Israeli attack on Syria had not been raised by either the administration or Jerusalem.

"It is not clear that it is needed in order to make the case against North Korea's proliferation record," the congressional source said.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC

April 10, 2008

[EXCERPT]

On North Korea --

Oh, yes, back there. Yes, in the back.

Is there any other informal and separate agreement between the U.S. and North Korea in Singapore meeting? If you have any, can you tell us what is the contents of informal agreement between U.S. and North Korea?

I'm not prepared to characterize the discussions beyond what I have said previously, what Chris has said previously. The Singapore meeting, in Chris's firsthand characterization, took the discussion beyond where they were in Geneva. Chris had the opportunity to have some further discussions with other members of the six-party talks, his counterparts in the six-party talks in Beijing. He's now back here in the United States.

There's work that remains to be done, and our basic position is that we are prepared to continue in that work. We are prepared, along with the other members – other four members of the six-party talks, to fulfill our obligations as North Korea fulfills its obligations, which includes dismantlement of the – dismantle – disabling of the Yongbyon facility as well as a declaration.

There was a formal agreement, an informal agreement, that there are two kind of agreement held between U.S. and North Korea (inaudible)?

Again, this is not between the U.S. and North Korea. We are engaging them in the context of the six-party talks. We are fully consulting with the other members, the other four members of those talks other than North Korea, about the declaration and the process of working with North Korea to produce a declaration that is acceptable to all the members of the six-party talks. So this is not a U.S.-North Korea issue.

There was – what was the other part – the other part to your question? Sorry.

There's an informal --

Oh, right. As to – we have said the – the form of this is – of the declaration is not necessarily important. What's important is the substance of it, whether or not it is acceptable to the other members of the six-party talks. So you know, whether it comes in one, two, three, four, five or more pieces of paper, that's not important. What's important is the substance of it.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/10/AR2008041004082.html>

U.S. Ready to Ease Sanctions on N. Korea

Pyongyang Would Have to Acknowledge Evidence About Nuclear Activities

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Friday, April 11, 2008; A15

The United States is prepared to lift two key economic sanctions against North Korea under a tentative deal reached with that country this week, which requires Pyongyang to acknowledge U.S. concerns and evidence about a range of nuclear activities, U.S. and Asian diplomats said yesterday.

The agreement also requires North Korea to finish disabling its main nuclear facility and provide a full accounting of its stockpile of plutonium. But, in a key shift, the two sides agreed to sidestep a dispute over how much detail North Korea must provide about any past uranium enrichment-related activities and its involvement in a mysterious Syrian facility bombed by Israel last September.

North Korea had balked at confirming the Bush administration's allegations, stalling for months a process designed to eliminate its nuclear programs. But after negotiations this week in Singapore and last month in Geneva, the United States and North Korea agreed that Pyongyang must "acknowledge" the allegations without precisely admitting them publicly.

That paves the way, diplomats said, for President Bush to remove North Korea from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and to exempt it from the Trading With the Enemy Act.

U.S. officials have concluded it is more important to persuade North Korea to surrender its weapons-grade plutonium -- enough for perhaps half a dozen weapons -- than for the process to collapse over the impasse, according to Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator.

"North Korea has difficulty saying things publicly," Hill said. Indeed, the still-secret text of the new agreement has elements similar to the Shanghai Communique issued by China and United States in 1972 during President Richard Nixon's historic visit, in which the two sides offered their own interpretations of key disputes.

Hill said that resolving questions about Pyongyang's interest in uranium enrichment remain important, but that plutonium poses an immediate proliferation risk.

"We are trying to focus on the plutonium as we try to resolve our suspicions on uranium enrichment," Hill said. Recalling Willie Sutton's line that he robbed banks because "that's where the money is," Hill said: "That's where the bombs are. We don't have suspicions about plutonium; we have cold, hard facts about plutonium."

North Korea acquired much of its plutonium after the 2002 collapse of a Clinton administration agreement barring operation of a plutonium-producing reactor. Bush accused North Korea of cheating on the deal, citing evidence that Pyongyang had a clandestine uranium-enrichment program. Plutonium and highly enriched uranium offer different routes to building nuclear weapons.

Some North Korea experts are skeptical Pyongyang will ever give up its recently acquired plutonium.

Diplomats say Japan is upset that North Korea may be removed from the terrorism list before questions are resolved about North Korea's abductions of Japanese citizens. In its 2004 report, the State Department said that the kidnapping issue was a factor in North Korea's inclusion on the list, but in recent months the administration has steadily unlinked the two issues.

North Korea is one of five countries on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, which makes it subject to severe U.S. export controls, particularly of dual-use technology and military equipment. Those controls prohibit much foreign aid and obligate the United States to oppose financial assistance to the country from institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Under the agreement, Pyongyang would also be freed from financial sanctions imposed by the Trading With the Enemy Act, a 1917 law that allows for a near-total economic boycott of countries at war with the United States.

Hill previously has said U.S. officials concluded that thousands of aluminum tubes acquired by North Korea in 2002 -- which prompted the intelligence finding that Pyongyang was building a large-scale uranium-enrichment program -- were not currently being used to create fissile material.

North Korea allowed U.S. diplomats to visit a missile factory that used the tubes and to carry samples home, but government scientists later discovered traces of enriched uranium on the aluminum samples, officials said.

U.S. officials said further negotiations are needed, and an Asian diplomat said those will involve the amount of plutonium that North Korea plans to declare. Last year, North Korea said that it possessed about 30 kilograms of plutonium, much less than U.S. intelligence had estimated.

"The ball is on the North Korean side," the diplomat said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "We need to have a clear explanation for the amount, and it has to be verified."

The United States is preparing about 500,000 tons of food aid to assist North Korea with a devastating grain crisis, but Hill said that is unrelated to the nuclear discussions.

US, NKorea May Break Nuclear Impasse

By ANNE GEARAN – 25 minutes ago *[Accessed 2008-04-11T22:10Z]*

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States is backing off its earlier demand for a precise inventory of North Korea's nuclear programs and past activities that had hung up potentially historic disarmament negotiations with the Communist nation.

U.S. officials say they will still get the information they need, but it will be packaged and presented in a way more acceptable to the reclusive North. Any change in the terms, however, will open the White House to criticism from the political right that the administration has gone soft.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested Friday that a deal to resolve a four-month impasse may be close, including a U.S. promise of swift action to lift economic and political penalties on the North.

"There are obligations on both sides," Rice said. "The U.S. is absolutely prepared to undertake its obligations should the North Koreans fulfill their obligations."

Washington had refused to take the North off a U.S. terrorism blacklist, a coveted goal of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, until negotiators have a "complete and correct" inventory of the North's nuclear program and past activities to spread weapons know-how to other nations.

North Korea had agreed in six-nation talks in October to provide the list and disable its facilities and its main reactor by the end of 2007. The North made unprecedented progress last year, shutting down and starting to disable the reactor in exchange for aid and diplomatic concessions.

But the North missed the Dec. 31 deadline in a dispute over how specific, and how public, the North's accounting had to be.

Now the Bush administration has decided that the exact contents of the North Korean declaration are less important than an assurance that the U.S. and other nations can check up on the North to make sure it told the truth and isn't resuming any nuclear activities.

Asked Friday about a potential agreement to resolve the impasse, Rice did not repeat her usual demand that the North produce a full and complete declaration of its nuclear programs and past.

"We are trying to get people off of this sort of 17th Century notion of expiating sins and on to the notion that the verification is the key here," a senior U.S. official said later. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal is not final.

The North would finish work to take its plutonium nuclear reactor out of service and provide a full accounting of the program it ran there, including work to produce the nuclear device the North tested in 2006. That test confirmed Pyongyang as a nuclear weapons state and intensified world efforts to bargain the North out of the weapons business.

A second, vaguer agreement would have the North "acknowledge" world worries about an alleged separate nuclear development program using uranium, and about the North's activities to spread nuclear technology or material to other nations, officials said. The North would agree to new verification programs to make sure it does not resume those suspect activities.

Previously, U.S. officials had said the North would have to detail that alleged uranium program and explain its presumed role in assisting Syria with what may have been an incipient nuclear program. Israel last year destroyed a site widely believed to have housed that program.

Officials now say they are more concerned about the plutonium program, because of its demonstrated ability to yield a nuclear weapon, and did not want the dispute to threaten the entire disarmament deal.

"We are determined to have an outcome ... that would have the North Koreans account for all of their nuclear programs ... and their activities in nuclear proliferation," Rice said.

A meeting of nuclear envoys from the six nations involved in the talks — the Koreans, China, the United States, Japan and Russia — could occur in Beijing in the next few weeks if all sides fulfill their obligations, the State department's lead negotiator with North Korea said Thursday

US must verify any North Korean declaration -Rice

Fri **Apr 11, 2008** 12:59pm EDT

(Adds quotes, background)

By Susan Cornwell

WASHINGTON, April 11 (Reuters) - The United States will have to verify whatever North Korea discloses about its nuclear programs but Washington is not yet at a point where it can do so, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Friday.

"Any document that we get, any declaration that we get, has to be verified and it has to be verifiable," Rice said at a news conference with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Such verification could not take place overnight but the United States had to be certain it had the means to do it, she said.

Six-nation talks over North Korea's nuclear program have been held up for months pending a full accounting of North Korea's nuclear activities -- a declaration that was due at the end of last year.

People familiar with the matter said this week the United States had reached a tentative agreement with North Korea on how Pyongyang would disclose its nuclear programs, a step that would trigger its removal from the U.S. list of states that sponsor terrorism and termination of other U.S. sanctions.

Rice said the United States was "still in the process of trying to determine if the North Koreans are going to fulfill their obligations" under the six-party process.

"We are determined to have an outcome ... that would have the North Koreans account for all of their nuclear programs," she said. "We are not yet at a point as to where we can make a judgment as to whether or not the North Koreans have met their obligations."

People familiar with the matter said the United States and North Korea might break the deadlock with a formula under which Washington would put forward its concerns about North Korea's suspected uranium enrichment program and nuclear proliferation -- and North Korea would then acknowledge these concerns.

This could provide a face-saving way for Pyongyang to produce the declaration of its atomic programs required by the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The declaration has been held up partly because of Pyongyang's reluctance to discuss any transfer of nuclear technology to other countries, notably Syria, as well as to account for its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment. (Editing by John O'Callaghan)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/apr/103473.htm>



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC

April 11, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: What about those reports floating around that North Korea is prepared to make some indirect declarations of its nuclear holdings and --

MR. MCCORMACK: What part of the Secretary's answer didn't you record? (Laughter.) Look, I don't really -- I don't have much to offer beyond what she has told you in that regard. She did emphasize the importance of verification and verifying any declarations that are made. There is actually a subgroup as part of the six-party talks which is charged with that task of verifying any declarations. And as she said, that we are ready to live up to our obligations once North Korea has fulfilled its obligations.

North Korea, U.S. reach secret deal to break nuclear deadlock, report says

2008/04/12 13:35 KST

훈 훈 SEOUL, April 12 (Yonhap) -- North Korea and the United States have reached a secret deal to end the impasse in the six-nation talks to dismantle the North's nuclear weapons program, a U.S. government-funded radio station reported Saturday.

훈 훈 Under the secret agreement, reached at a meeting of the top nuclear envoys of the two countries in Singapore early this week, the U.S. will make a declaration of North Korea's alleged uranium enrichment program and nuclear cooperation with Syria on behalf of Pyongyang, Radio Free Asia reported on its Web site, citing "multiple diplomatic sources" in Washington.

훈 훈 In return, the agreement calls for North Korea to "acknowledge" the U.S. concern over the two issues, which have been key sticking points at the six-nation disarmament talks, and not to "challenge the facts," the radio station said.

훈 훈 North Korea and the U.S. agreed to exchange a secret memorandum of understanding on the agreement, it said.

훈 훈 The radio station said North Korea agreed to make a complete and correct declaration of its nuclear weapons program "in the coming weeks." In a 2007 deal at the six-nation negotiations, North Korea agreed to disclose full details of its nuclear programs by the end of last year in exchange for economic aid and better ties with Washington, including its removal from the U.S. list of countries sponsoring terrorism.

훈 훈 The U.S. claims North Korea let the year-end deadline pass without any action, while North Korea puts the blame on the U.S., arguing that it fulfilled its end of the deal in November.

훈 훈 The U.S. dismisses the north's claim, arguing that its November declaration was "incomplete." Despite the deadlock, North Korea has made progress in disabling its nuclear facilities by shutting down its main nuclear reactor in Yongbyon.

훈 훈 Earlier this week, Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Christopher Hill, Washington's chief negotiator for the six-nation talks, met his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-gwan and later acknowledged that "important" progress was made in Singapore.

훈 훈 However, Hill said more time is needed for the results to materialize.

훈 훈 North Korea was more upbeat.

훈 훈 "A consensus was reached on the U.S. measure to make political compensation and the nuclear declaration essential for winding up the implementation of the agreement," North Korea's foreign ministry said in a April 9 report by the country's Korean Central News Agency.

Status of Syria strike hearing unclear

Yaakov Katz and Herb Keinon

THE JERUSALEM POST

Apr. 14, 2008

Despite an Israeli request, and amid heightened tensions with Syria, officials in Jerusalem said on Monday that it was still unclear whether US Congressional testimony on Israel's air strike against Syria last September would be held in public or behind closed doors.

The hearing, scheduled for Thursday at the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, will discuss US policy in the face of Iran's continued efforts to obtain nuclear capability.

According to the committee's current schedule, which appears on its Web site, the committee will hold an open session which will hear testimony from Daniel Glaser, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes in the Department of Treasury, and Jeffrey Feltman, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs.

The attack took place on September 6 in northeastern Syria when, according to foreign reports, a number of Israeli Air Force fighter jets infiltrated northeastern Syria and bombed a nuclear facility that was being built there with North Korean assistance. Raising the issue at the hearing is seen in Israel as part of a congressional attempt to humiliate the Bush administration and prove that North Korea lied to the US when it claimed to have abandoned its nuclear activity.

The assessment in Israel is that full disclosure of the attack in an open congressional hearing could "embarrass" Syrian President Bashar Assad and force him to respond, possibly with military force.

Assad has denied the reports that Syria was building a nuclear facility and has kept parts of the Syrian leadership in the dark regarding the true purpose of the facility that was bombed. If the details of the attack are released in public, Israel fears that Assad will come under immense pressure in Damascus to take action.

However, Israel's defense establishment believe that as long as the meeting is held behind closed doors, Assad could plausibly deny any leaks emanating from such a hearing. Either way, Israel does not plan on changing its policy of silence on the issue.

Officials in Jerusalem said Monday that there was a disagreement in Israel between those - primarily from the defense establishment - concerned that public testimony would put Syria on the spot and perhaps cause Assad to feel the need to take some kind of retaliatory measure for the IAF attack, and those who believe it was in Israel's interest to highlight in the US North Korea's nuclear involvement with Syria.

The officials said that those in the US interested in an open hearing want to show the public that while the US is engaged in nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea, the North Koreans are behind nuclear proliferation in the world's most sensitive spots.

Relations with Syria reached a high point last week amid news reports that the Syrian military was conducting military maneuvers along its border with Lebanon. Israeli defense officials said that the moves were mainly defensive and were being taken out of fear that Israel would attack Syria if it were attacked by Hizbullah in response to the February assassination of arch-terrorist Imad Mughniyeh.

A House Intelligence Committee aide said that no hearings on topics related to Israel, Syria or North Korea are listed on the public schedule. She noted that almost all intelligence committee hearings are held in closed sessions, so it would be highly unlikely that information about the Syrian incident would be revealed in a public forum. It is also possible that any administration briefing on the sensitive topic would be done selectively with intelligence committee members.

Some members of Congress have been pushing for fuller disclosure of the events surrounding September 6 primarily because they are concerned about the reports alleging that North Korea has been supplying Syria with nuclear capabilities in contravention of its disarmament commitments made as part of the Six Party talks.

These members of Congress are wary about the Six Party process continuing without having a clearer picture of North Korean activities in connection to Syria, among other issues. However, many of the members are sympathetic to Israel and understanding of the Israeli perspective that disclosing information could push Syria to retaliate, something its leader Bashar Assad has refrained from doing until now.

There is also the hesitance of the Bush administration to be factored in. The administration has strategic concerns about revealing details of the Syrian incident, and it is also in the midst of a tug of war with Congress about disclosing sensitive information on intelligence and decision-making. It also doesn't want to give Congress reason to complicate the Six Party Talks, a delicate process that has suffered many hiccups along the way.

Hilary Leila Krieger contributed to this report

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/974913.html>

Senate to hold debate on Syria-N.Korea nuke ties next week

By Amos Harel and Shmuel Rosner, Haaretz Correspondents

Last update - 02:26 15/04/2008

The American administration intends to give the Senate Intelligence Committee an account of the nuclear ties between North Korea and Syria for the first time on April 22.

Senior IDF officers have warned, however, that the release of any information containing details of the Israeli Air Force strike in Syria last September could increase tension between Israel and Syria.

The meeting is expected to be held behind closed doors at Israel's insistence, but the Americans did not promise not to brief journalists afterward.

Media reports in the United States could alter the gag order Israel has imposed on Israeli media coverage of the IAF's strike in Syria.

Washington sources on Monday told Haaretz that the administration and North Korea are making headway in their talks about what to call Pyongyang's supply of nuclear technology to Syria. North Korea is expected to give the Americans a statement that indirectly acknowledges its violation of the agreement to dismantle its nuclear power by maintaining nuclear ties with Syria.

However, North Korea will not publicly admit to any guilt in this matter and the Americans are expected to accept this. This arrangement would enable both sides to return to the agreement to dismantle the North Korean nuclear program. In this case, the administration will be interested in downplaying North Korea's ties with Syria and American officials may make do with a general survey on this issue to the Senate.

The Intelligence Committee has scheduled two hearings, on April 22 and 24. The first session is expected to be about the North Korean-Syrian issue.

Sources in Israel on Monday reiterated their position that any release, however partial, about North Korea's ties with Syria, which would include details about the installation the IAF attacked, could complicate the already tense situation between Israel and Syria.

These sources said that despite the administration's duty to report to Congress, they hoped it would be done in a most limited way so as to avoid increasing tension in the Middle East.

The affair is causing tension between Israel's prime minister and defense minister. The defense minister's aides suspect that the Prime Minister's Bureau has been covertly encouraging the Americans to release information about the attack, hoping to make political gains. The prime minister's aides deny these allegations.

<http://intelligence.senate.gov/hearings.cfm>

[Accessed 2008-04-22T15:35Z]

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080414-3.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
April 14, 2008

Press Briefing by Dana Perino
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:40 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

Q Thank you, Dana. At last meeting in Singapore between U.S. and North Korea, a tentative agreement has been made for North Korea to report complete nuclear declaration. Under what condition United States is to give North Korea some economic incentive, plus the removal of North Korea from the terrorist list? How was the President's response on that?

MS. PERINO: Well, as I have said before, there's a -- there is a package that was agreed upon in the six-party talks in regards to North Korea. What we are waiting on right now is a complete and accurate declaration. We don't have one yet, but Ambassador Chris Hill had good meetings last week. An issue regarding the state sponsor of terrorism list is a part of that package, but things happen in sequence, and so it is way premature to suggest that that's going to happen anytime soon.

Q Did he -- had made agreement with North Korean Kim Kye-gwan. The President agreed to that agreement in Singapore.

MS. PERINO: I believe so, yes.

Okay, thanks.

END 1:06 P.M. EDT

U.S. and North Korea envoys think key row cleared: sources

Wed Apr 16, 2008 8:41am EDT

By Teruaki Ueno

TOKYO (Reuters) - Negotiators from the United States and North Korea believe they have settled a thorny dispute over Washington's allegations that Pyongyang had a program to enrich uranium for weapons and proliferated nuclear technology to Syria, diplomatic sources in Tokyo said on Wednesday.

Under the face-saving deal reached by U.S. and North Korean envoys in Singapore last week, Washington would state in a document its concerns about North Korea's suspected uranium enrichment program and transfer of nuclear technology and material to Syria, a diplomatic source said.

In the same document, North Korea would "acknowledge" the U.S. assertions, the source told Reuters.

"The negotiators concerned think that the issue over uranium and Syria has been settled," a Japanese government source said. "It is hard for North Korea to admit (the U.S. assertions)," a Japanese government source said.

The deal was reached when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill held talks with North Korea's Kim Kye-gwan in Singapore on April 8, the sources said.

The first diplomatic source said it remained unclear whether top officials of the two governments would accept the compromise deal.

Uranium enrichment could provide North Korea with a second way to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons in addition to its plutonium-based program, which it used to test an atomic device in October 2006.

The Japanese government source said a huge gap remained over details of North Korea's declaration of its plutonium-based nuclear arms program, stalling six-party talks on ending North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Six-party talks involve the United States, the two Koreas, China, Japan and Russia.

Washington has said a major sticking point in talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear programs is the need for Pyongyang to deliver a "complete and correct" declaration of its programs as called for in a February 2007 six-party nuclear deal. That account was due at the end of last year.

If the North makes the declaration, it stands to be removed from a U.S. terrorism blacklist and be better able to tap into finance that could boost its economy.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Friday that the United States would have to verify whatever North Korea discloses about its nuclear programs but Washington was not yet at a point where it could do so.

Rice said the United States was "still in the process of trying to determine if the North Koreans are going to fulfill their obligations" under the six-party process.

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hq_OCivLoF2IouIBR4S8-XKgMmOg

New mechanism set to verify North Korea's nuclear program

11 hours ago [Accessed 2008-04-17T14:00Z]

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A mechanism is being set up to scrutinize any declaration provided by North Korea of its nuclear weapons program, the United States said Wednesday amid scepticism over a tentative deal between the two nations.

The "new effort" will verify the long-delayed declaration by Pyongyang under a six-nation aid-for-denuclearization deal, the State Department said.

"That's something that will be handled in the verification subgroup" of the six-party talks, department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters when asked on prospective "verification methods" for North Korea's nuclear program under the bid to end Pyongyang's atomic weapons drive.

The verification mechanism is expected to be set up under the "denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" working group, one of five groups set up under a February 2007 agreement among the six parties.

"It's a new effort. It's something that has been integrated into the talks, and I guess as a bureaucratic grouping then organized within the context of those talks," McCormack said.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had discussed the establishment of the verification subgroup with leaders of China and well as other countries, a State Department official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The announcement of the verification measure Wednesday came amid criticism of a reported prospective deal reached earlier this month between US and North Korean envoys for the hardline communist state to declare its nuclear program.

Under the deal, North Korea would provide a list of its plutonium stockpile and merely "acknowledge" concerns listed by the United States about its suspected uranium enrichment and nuclear proliferation activities, reports have said.

Washington had earlier called for a full accounting of an alleged North Korean secret uranium enrichment program and suspected proliferation of nuclear technology and material to Syria, charges denied by Pyongyang.

Although the latest deal may have broken the months-old deadlock, it has caused a great deal of scepticism among experts.

"After months of demanding that the North live up to its promise to provide a 'complete declaration of its nuclear programs,' the US is now backtracking," the Wall Street Journal said in an editorial Wednesday headlined "Six-party giveaway."

John Bolton, a former State Department non-proliferation chief, said the deal "rests on trust and not verification" and warned that Pyongyang's "escape from accountability could break down international counter-proliferation efforts."

But Rice said last week that any declaration from North Korea had to be "verified and it has to be verifiable.

"And we have to make certain that we have means to assess what the North Koreans tell us, and we have to have means to verify what the North Koreans tell us," she said.

North Korea had missed a December 31, 2007 deadline for providing a full declaration of its nuclear program and proliferation activities, delaying implementation of its denuclearization drive that Washington wants completed before President George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009.

After testing a nuclear bomb in October 2006, Pyongyang closed its key atomic plant and is now on the verge of disabling it under the six-party deal.

If North Korea completes providing the nuclear declaration, the parties could move to implement the final phase of dismantling its nuclear program and materials.

Q&A: Top U.S. diplomat on N. Korean negotiations, China and the Olympics, and American image

By Kristi Heim

Seattle Times staff reporter

Thursday, April 17, 2008 - Page updated at 09:46 PM

[EXCERPT]

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill will be the point man for the U.S. as it makes what may be a final push toward resolving one of the biggest threats to international security: a North Korean nuclear weapon. The Bush administration faces criticism from some for softening the U.S. stance against the rogue nation. But he has weathered challenges before, keeping six-party talks among the U.S., North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan and Russia moving forward.

Negotiating the agreement with North Korea has been the hardest job of his career, he said, one he's eager to put behind him. Hill was in Seattle Wednesday for several appearances, including a talk with students at the University of Washington, where he sat down for a brief interview with The Seattle Times.

Q: Has the issue of North Korea's suspected uranium enrichment and transfer to Syria been resolved?

A: We're looking to try to resolve this so-called second phase. The second phase includes giving us a declaration, and we need a declaration to cover all of these elements — Syria, uranium enrichment and especially plutonium. We made progress in Singapore, but until we get all the elements done, and we're not done yet, we're going to have some more diplomacy next week. I can't tell you whether it's resolved yet.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: We need to make sure that when the North Koreans present their declaration of their plutonium holdings, that it is complete and that we can verify that it's correct. And then there are some other things we need to ensure we have means to monitor and verify that all of these elements are done. So these verifying things are the things we're working on with the North Koreans and other parties in the six parties. I don't want to say I'm optimistic, but I certainly don't want to say I'm pessimistic right now.

What we're trying to do is get to the point where we know precisely what their fissile material holdings are, so when we know precisely whether it's 35 kilos or 45 kilos, we can then have a final phase negotiation where they will abandon or give up that fissile material. But until we get the declaration done, we can't get to that final phase.

Q: What restraints are being put on North Korea's distribution of this fissile material?

A: The good thing about fissile material is it has a signature, so if they ever sold it to somebody, and it was discovered, we would know where it came from. We don't have any indication they have ever proliferated fissile material, but that said, we don't know where it is. We know it's somewhere in North Korea. We don't know the arrangements they have for guarding it. So we have to be very focused on trying to resolve the issue of the fissile material, that is, trying to get them to do what they promised to do in September 2005, which is abandon it.

Q: Is it important to keep any momentum going before a change in the U.S. administration?

A: My sense is there's broad bipartisan support for this step-by-step negotiation we're on. To be sure, there's a lot of criticism of elements of it. Some people have been saying we're going too far too fast. But overall, there's bipartisan support. I don't think a next administration, whether it's Republican or Democrat, would really want to have this issue dropped in their laps. Everyone would like to have it resolved. Whether it can be resolved or not will depend on the North Koreans.

Q: What will you be doing next week?

A: We're in very close contact with our partners. In fact, the South Korean president is in Washington at the end of this week. We'll be having extensive discussions with the South Koreans on this. We are also in almost daily communication with the Chinese on this.

And beyond that we'll have to see. I think everyone understands that we really should try to have this wrapped up by the end of this month.

Q: Do you think it's possible to open diplomatic relations with North Korea sometime soon?

A: I think in the context of their denuclearization, that would be envisioned.

Q: What would be the time frame?

A: It depends how quickly they are willing to give up their nuclear materials. If they're willing to do it this year, we could establish relations this year.

But we won't have relations with a nuclear North Korea.

Q: How is China looking at the six-party talks?

A: China is a very active participant. It's an area we have succeeded in working with them very productively and pragmatically on an area of mutual concern. China looks at North Korea in very different ways from how we look at them. You have to recall they were a historical partner and ally. Chinese veterans associations trace their roots to the Korean War. All that said, China is very much convinced that North Korea needs to give up its nuclear ambitions. They know that if they don't, you might have a situation where other countries feel they need a nuclear program.

Q: Do they have the same urgency?

A: Chinese always have perhaps a greater sense of patience than we do, except if the subject is Taiwan. But I think we're working in sync. Many Americans think, well, why can't they just cut off the North Koreans, but that's not how they do business with a neighbor. They often use more friendly persuasion than other people feel is appropriate.

[deletia]

Kristi Heim: 206-464-2718 or kheim@seattletimes.com

<http://www.iht.com/articles/reuters/2008/04/17/africa/OUKWD-UK-ISRAEL-SYRIA-OLMERT.php>

Olmert says Israel not under Syrian nuclear threat

Reuters

Published: April 17, 2008

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Damascus does not pose a nuclear threat to Israel, making the cryptic comments in response to a question in a newspaper interview about a mysterious Israeli air strike in Syria.

Israel has given no details on the identity of the target its planes struck inside Syria on September 6. Some U.S. officials linked the raid to suspicions of secret nuclear cooperation between Syria and North Korea.

"There are things I am not willing to discuss, Olmert, asked about the air strike, said in an interview published on Thursday in Israel's Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper.

"I will only say this: To the best of my knowledge, Israelis are not under Syrian nuclear threat," Olmert said.

Damascus and Pyongyang denied any nuclear ties.

(Reporting by Avida Landau)



On-the-Record Briefing by Secretary Rice

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

April 17, 2008

(9:04 a.m. EDT)

[EXCERPTS]

SECRETARY RICE: Good morning, everyone. I came by just to take a few of your questions, but I'd like to make a few comments first on several issues.

[deletia]

It's obviously a busy week in terms of the diplomacy. The President, of course, will meet with Prime Minister Brown today and talk about the whole range of issues that we share with our British colleagues. And then tomorrow, he will meet with the new South Korean President, President Lee. Korea is a strategic ally of the United States, and we look forward to this opportunity to advance our global agenda with Korea's new leadership.

We will, of course, also discuss the Six-Party talks, and I thought I might take a second to give you my assessment of where that process stands. North Korea is disabling its Yongbyon nuclear facility and we are in the second phase of our implementation agreement to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. The outcome we and our partners require is a full account from North Korea of all its nuclear programs, including any uranium and nuclear proliferation activities.

All six parties have obligations as well, which we've agreed to undertake in parallel with North Korea's submission of a declaration, a declaration that we will verify rigorously. The steps that we are taking are measured ones, and we will continue to judge North Korea's actions and take other steps as warranted.

I want to emphasize that we are at the beginning of a very complex process, not the end -- a process that must lead to the actual removal, for the first time in history, of nuclear material from North Korea and a verifiable end to its nuclear programs. Have we made progress through the Six-Party framework? Yes. Is there still reason for caution and skepticism? Yes. Yet, the Six-Party framework has demonstrated great value. Through it, we have found common ground with China, Japan, Russia and South Korea on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and fighting proliferation. The framework is invaluable when North Korea conducted a nuclear test, allowing us to quickly respond at the United Nations. This is much preferable to the United States dealing with these issues alone. Further progress

on denuclearization will also enable us to step up our cooperation on other goals: a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula; normalization of relations; a new mechanism to cooperate on peace and security in Northeast Asia; and, of course, an opportunity to improve the lives of the North Korean people. In short, the six-party framework is a framework to elicit cooperation. It is also a framework to deal with noncooperation.

[deletia]

With that, I'm happy to take your questions.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, on North Korea. The full accounting that you're talking about, will this be a public accounting of the uranium program and the proliferation activities? And if this happens to your satisfaction, will North Korea come off the terror list in a quid pro quo in exchange for this declaration?

SECRETARY RICE: We have -- obviously, this is a diplomatic matter, and not everything in diplomacy is public. But we have no desire to hide from anyone the means by which we would account for and then verify. There will be, undoubtedly, briefings for Congress. I don't see any reason that we shouldn't have a -- that people shouldn't have a sense of what we're going to do -- I -- what we would be expecting to do. I can't tell you that every detail of every diplomatic encounter is going to be a public matter. I think that isn't the nature of diplomacy. But that there can be confidence about what the arrangements would be, I would fully expect that that would be appropriate; that there would be information so that there would be confidence about what the arrangements would be.

In terms of what the United States would do, the lifting of certain sanctions on the North Koreans, steps that could be taken if North Korea actually carries out its obligations, we're going to have to judge whether North Korea has carried out its obligations.

But I will say this: We have a long way to go in terms of all of the various statutory sanctions and multilateral and bilateral sanctions that would remain even if the United States were to take the steps that you outlined.

QUESTION: But on the terror list --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- I mean, is that a -- are we going to see them come off that terror list?

SECRETARY RICE: John, I'm going to wait until we can understand whether the North Koreans have discharged their obligations in order to -- before we begin to discuss what our obligations are.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, sure. Charlie. Do you mind?

QUESTION: Just to follow up on North Korea and on the -- meeting their obligations and the declaration. This would also include reference to proliferation activities and would mention Syria on North Korea, if that's the case?

SECRETARY RICE: As I've said, there has to be an accounting for all the nuclear programs. All the nuclear programs include not just the uranium program, the plutonium program, but also nuclear proliferation activities. And we've made that very clear, not just to the North Koreans but to other parties in the six-party talks. What the six-party framework gives you is a means by which the United States is not left alone to deal with future pledges that the North Koreans might make or representations that the North Koreans might make about ongoing proliferation activities.

Again, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea -- whenever the North undertakes these obligations, they're undertaking them in the context within the framework of the six-party talks. And I think that's very important, because I can't think of another way that one is going to get a handle on North Korean proliferation activities or deal with the pledges that they make.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Yes. Secretary Rice, you emphasize the importance for accounting with respect to North Korea. Do you insist on having this specific verification mechanism on not only plutonium, but also on uranium program and the proliferation in North Korea's final declaration?

SECRETARY RICE: The two programs are different, the uranium program and the plutonium program, in that we, obviously, and the IAEA and the international community know a good deal about the plutonium program. And so I think that the verification mechanisms for that will be one set of verification mechanisms, but there have to be means to verify what they're doing. The uranium program is a different matter, with far less knowledge, understanding about what actually happened there and what is actually there. And so it will have to have its own -- will have to have their own means of working through the questions about that program. And the six parties will have to have the -- the other parties will have to have means to work through those thoroughly. I have heard from my other colleagues in the six parties that they, too, are concerned about verification and believe that verification is going to be important.

Now, on -- one of the innovations here on proliferation is that, initially, the six parties did not deal with proliferation, the Six-Party framework did not deal with proliferation. It will now need to deal with proliferation in light of some recent concerns about North Korean activities in proliferation. So each of these problems is different. And since each of the problems is different, you have to look to means of verification that are different.

And let me just -- I think it goes without saying, but perhaps I'd better say it. Verification takes some time because these are complex programs, this is a nontransparent society, there is a history here of surprises. And so it will take some time, even past the second phase, for verification to completely play out. But my point is just because we believe obligations may have been met in the second phase, if there is evidence in -- as we're into the third phase that something was not true that was said in the second phase, you know, there is always the ability and the absolute intention to react to that.

QUESTION: A follow-up on that.

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Do you have any immediate plans to send your team to North Korea to discuss about the verification issue?

SECRETARY RICE: There will be a team that will go. I don't think we have a date yet, but we've been looking to send an expert team to continue the discussions on verification. And again, I want to emphasize this is a process, that this is not – that Chris Hill did a very good job during these recent discussions, but there is much more work to do in order to see whether North Korea is really going to meet its obligations, how over time we are going to be able to verify that those obligations have, indeed, been met.

QUESTION: Does that mean then that you would hold the terror list removal and the other things that North Korea wants out of this out until the verification is actually complete?

SECRETARY RICE: Anne, I think I said that the verification can take some time. What we need to know is that we've got appropriate means for verification. Now, phase two will need to come to an end with both sides having met its obligations. But the process doesn't come to an end at that point. And whatever is done in phase two, if it's demonstrated in phase three that somehow something was wrong in phase two, of course, the United States reserves the right to take whatever steps it needs to, even if we've declared phase two complete.

QUESTION: So just to be – just to be clear, Madame Secretary, if they provide some kind of declaration that, based on your knowledge, that you feel is complete and you have a verification mechanism that you're satisfied will be able to get you to where you think you need to be in terms of verification, then phase two would be – and their obligations under phase two --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not going to make this mechanistic. We are going to judge whether or not we think the North Koreans have discharged their obligations for phase two, and we will then decide whether it is time for the United States to carry out its obligations. But phase two is not a free-standing phase that just ends the process. There is a continuation all the way to the step that I outlined, which is denuclearization, which means nuclear programs are verifiably ended and the material is accounted for and out. So all along that process, we're going to continue to look at whether or not the verification – or whether -- to verify and continue to look at whether or not North Koreans are meeting their obligations and, indeed, whether they have, indeed, met their obligations in prior phases.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, a clarification.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is Syria an issue in proliferation and why are you – so far have been reluctant to say so specifically?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Syria is most certainly an issue in proliferation. We've had troubles and concerns about Syrian proliferation as well. But look, we have several nonproliferation questions on the

table about North Korea; we have for some time. What I'm saying to you is that these come now -- it is going to be very important that the proliferation issues also be a part of the Six-Party framework, because to our -- our definition is that that is also a nuclear program, not just what may exist on the soil of North Korea. And that is a position that is shared by the other members of the six parties.

QUESTION: And Syria is a part of (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: End of story.

QUESTION: How about Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Any country would be. If there is any concern, we have to deal with it in the six-party talks.

Okay.

QUESTION: Thanks.

SECRETARY RICE: All right. Thank you.

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Seeking To Engage In Korea

Friday, April 18, 2008; A27

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak spoke to Post reporters and editors yesterday through an interpreter. Excerpt//:

THE POST: Regarding the negotiations with North Korea: Were you saying the solution [Assistant Secretary of State] Chris Hill has come up with, the idea where North Korea says it acknowledges the U.S. concerns and evidence about uranium and the Syria connection . . . that meets your approval?

LEE: As for your question about North Korea's cooperation with Syria or North Korea's activities in the uranium enrichment program, we do not know the final results or the outcome of it. I believe that we should wait a little bit before we know for sure.

However, perhaps we can assume that North Korea did in an indirect way admit to being involved in these two activities, and if so, considering the characteristics [of the] regime, then perhaps we can consider this as an acceptance or an admission that they were involved in these activities, and then this will allow us to move on to the next level so that we can resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. . . . Another very important point is that North Korea agree not to get involved further in any proliferation activities.

N. Korea's nuclear past stays sealed

April 18, 2008

By Nicholas Kralev and Jon Ward

The Bush administration made another concession to North Korea yesterday by agreeing to keep secret part of a required declaration of the country's nuclear programs, saving Pyongyang a public embarrassment from its proliferation activities.

The decision is likely to figure in weekend talks at Camp David between President Bush and South Korea's newly elected President Lee Myung-bak, who came into office in February pledging to take a tough stand toward his northern neighbor.

"Not everything in diplomacy is public," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters in explaining the decision to reporters

For weeks, Miss Rice had insisted that North Korea publicly disclose all its past nuclear activities, including its bomb-making with plutonium, any efforts to enrich uranium and any transfers of nuclear technology to other countries.

North Korea's refusal to address those demands had stalled six-nation talks to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula for months.

Carefully choosing her language yesterday, Miss Rice promised to give the public "a sense" of what North Korea had done.

"There would be information so that there would be confidence about what the arrangements would be," she said, offering to brief Congress on the issue.

The administration had previously agreed to allow the North Koreans to address a uranium-enrichment program Washington says they developed in the 1990s, as well as nuclear-related transfers to Syria and other countries, in a document separate from the main declaration.

That main part, which is required by an October deal reached in six-nation negotiations, would focus on the North's plutonium program. Both plutonium and highly enriched uranium can be used to make atomic bombs.

The Washington Times reported in February that a secret document was being negotiated as a way for Pyongyang to save face, since it has never publicly acknowledged the uranium-enrichment program. At the time, administration officials denied that report.

At the White House yesterday, Dennis Wilder, senior director for East Asian affairs at the National Security Council, confirmed that non-plutonium issues will be addressed in a separate document prepared in "side negotiations that the United States has had with the North Koreans."

"That's a different matter, because that involves different kinds of activities, such as proliferation, and that is being handled in a different manner," he said.

Miss Rice also suggested that the North would not have to wait for its declaration to be verified before it received some of the political and economic rewards it has been promised, such as removal from the U.S. blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism.

"Verification takes some time, because these are complex programs," she said. Even if the United States were to take the North off the blacklist, "we have a long way to go in terms of all of the various statutory sanctions and multilateral and bilateral sanctions that would remain."

John R. Bolton, who was undersecretary of state for arms control and international security during Mr. Bush's first term, said the administration is "obviously in full retreat."

"I think [removal from the terror list] will happen in a few weeks, and it will be a disgrace," he said. "They think the plutonium issue is the only one that matters, and it's a potentially fatal mistake."

Both Miss Rice and Mr. Wilder insisted, however, that Washington will receive all the information it has demanded, regardless of the form in which it is submitted to China, which leads the six-party talks. The negotiations also include Japan, South Korea and Russia.

"The outcome we and our partners require is a full account from North Korea of all its nuclear programs, including any uranium and nuclear proliferation activities," Miss Rice said.

It was not clear, however, whether the separate document will be submitted at the same time as the main declaration.

A State Department official said that Sung Kim, director of the department's Korea office, will travel to Pyongyang next week to finalize the agreement with the North, which was reached in principle last week in Singapore between the two chief negotiators, Christopher Hill and Kim Kye-gwan.

North Korea has shut down and almost disabled its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon, but the goal of the six-party process is to "irreversibly" dismantle its programs. The declaration, which was due by Dec. 31, is necessary to make sure the North has scrapped everything.

The United States also wants to know what happened to any past programs. A Syrian facility targeted by an Israeli air strike in September has become a major issue for Washington because it was widely reported to be a nuclear site under construction with help from North Korea.

- Sean Lenggell contributed to this report.

Past Deals by N. Korea May Face Less Study

By HELENE COOPER

Published: April 18, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration appears to be preparing to back away from a demand that North Korea fully disclose all of its past nuclear weapons activities, in an attempt to preserve a nuclear agreement requiring it to disclose and dismantle the bulk of its nuclear weapons program.

As described by administration officials on Thursday, the step would relax a demand for North Korea to admit fully that it supplied Syria with nuclear technology. The United States would also agree to postpone its demand that North Korea provide an immediate and full accounting of its fledgling uranium program.

The new stance is intended to help complete a denuclearization deal that would focus instead on North Korea's more extensive plutonium program, which has been at the heart of its nuclear weapons development and was the source of raw material for the device it tested in October 2006.

The State Department spokesman, Sean D. McCormack, said the emerging agreement would not represent a concession. He said that even if North Korea did not fully account for its uranium efforts, the deal would allow inspectors access to all of North Korea's nuclear facilities in order to verify that it had stopped its weapons programs.

"There is nothing inevitable about this process, and we are reserving judgment about this declaration until we see it," Mr. McCormack said. "Every aspect will be subject to verification, and if we detect that they have misled or attempted to mislead, there will be diplomatic consequences."

The new approach has been endorsed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her chief North Korea negotiator, Christopher R. Hill, an assistant secretary of state, who have argued that getting the plutonium program shut down was better than getting nothing at all, an administration official said. But it is being opposed by conservatives within the administration, including aides to Vice President Dick Cheney, officials said.

"A lot of people will say this falls short of the full confession," a senior administration official said of what the new approach would demand of North Korea. "They want them to appear in Town Hall and acknowledge that they have sinned. But they weren't willing to go that far."

The administration had previously sought full disclosure of North Korea's role in the Syria program, which a senior administration official said was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in Syria last September.

Under the new approach, the United States and North Korea have settled on fudging the issue, administration officials said. North Korea will "acknowledge" that the United States is concerned about the nuclear proliferation to Syria but will not publicly admit to it. North Korea will also promise not to engage in any more nuclear proliferation, a senior administration official said.

In return, the United States would take North Korea off the list of state sponsors of terrorism and the list of countries noted in the Trading With the Enemy Act.

State Department officials, preparing for a storm of protest from conservatives who complain that such an agreement would be too soft on North Korea, hastened to say on Thursday that the United States would continue to keep a host of economic sanctions against North Korea, including prohibitions on most foreign aid and limitations on trade.

The administration officials who described the new American approach agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity, because North Korea had not yet agreed to the deal. Asked on Thursday whether the United States was scaling back its demands, Ms. Rice responded only obliquely.

“We’re going to have to judge whether North Korea has carried out its obligations,” Ms. Rice said during a news conference. “But I will say this: we have a long way to go in terms of all the various statutory sanctions and multilateral and bilateral sanctions that would remain even if the United States were to take the steps that you outlined.”

President Bush appears to be supporting Ms. Rice and Mr. Hill, to the dismay of those who say that the administration, after six years of acting tough on North Korea, is backing down. Defenders of the emerging agreement counter that it would be a mistake to continue a strategy that has yet to produce a lasting deal, and instead allowed North Korea to build up its plutonium stockpile and detonate a nuclear device in 2006.

Part of the problem for Mr. Bush is that the proposed deal, which many foreign policy experts say may be the best the United States can hope for at this point, is being judged by standards set up by Mr. Bush himself.

The White House now finds itself charting a similar course to the one taken by the Clinton administration in striking a deal with North Korea in 1994. That agreement collapsed in 2002 after the Bush White House accused North Korea of secretly continuing work on a nuclear weapon.

Under the new deal, North Korea has agreed to dismantle Yongbyon, as part of an agreement that, like the Clinton deal, envisions that North Korea would ultimately give up all of its nuclear material.

John R. Bolton, the former United States ambassador to the United Nations and the most outspoken critic of the accord now taking shape, wrote an op-ed column this week in *The Wall Street Journal* that compared Mr. Bush unfavorably with Ronald Reagan. “His policy regarding North Korea’s nuclear weapons program looks more like something out of Bill Clinton’s or Jimmy Carter’s playbook,” Mr. Bolton wrote.

The administration is sending a negotiating team next week to try to work with the North Koreans on the details of what exactly North Korea would have to disclose about its plutonium program — and how, under such an agreement.

“We can’t play ‘trust me’ with plutonium,” one senior administration official said. Nuclear experts at the State Department and other agencies are working on a way to make sure that North Korea discloses its entire plutonium program and capacity.

In addition, American officials are pressing North Korea to take steps to alleviate concerns held by Japan, which wants questions resolved about North Korea’s abductions of Japanese citizens.

The issue is scheduled to come up over the weekend when Mr. Bush meets with President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea. White House officials say they do not plan to take North Korea at its word.

“No one has let them off the hook,” said Dennis Wilder, special assistant to the president and senior director for East Asian affairs.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC

April 18, 2008

2:01 p.m. EDT

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: What came out in the Secretary's meeting with President Lee at Blair House this morning?

MR. MCCORMACK: This is a – this was a meeting in preparation for President Lee's meetings up at Camp David. And that he's going to have – I don't have a readout. They just did it one-on-one. I believe it was one-on-one. And she typically does this before meetings between President Bush and another head of state, just to prepare the ground. We did have an announcement of a deal on beef, which was most welcome. I think you saw a statement from Trade Representative Schwab. And of course, the -- President Bush and President Lee are going to talk about six-party talks, U.S.-South Korean bilateral relations, and that agenda was reflected in the discussions between the Secretary and President Lee.

QUESTION: Did the subject of the North Korean nuclear declaration and what might be required under that declaration come up?

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't know. I'm sure, given the news reporting from yesterday, that it came up. And I'll take the opportunity to reiterate what I said this morning. And that is that we have yet to see a declaration. We, the other members of the six-party talks, have yet to see a declaration from the North Koreans regarding all aspects of their nuclear activities. And we are going to withhold any judgment on this declaration until we have a chance to see it. And you're not going to see any recommendation go forward to the President of the United States from this Department until we are comfortable with this declaration, until we believe that it is acceptable.

And whatever declaration there is, as Secretary Rice pointed out yesterday, is going to be subject to robust verification. And if at any point along the way, if we actually do get to a declaration, and I'll come back to that point in a second, it's going to be subject to robust verification. And if, at any point, there's – we or anybody else in the six-party detects that the North Koreans have attempted to deceive us or attempt to provide us information which was misleading or, in any way, false, then there are going to be consequences for that.

And I want to return back to the point about this process. It is important to keep in mind that while there has been progress that has taken place within the framework of the six-party talk concerning

disabling the Yongbyon facility and some of the other discussions, there's nothing in this process that is inevitable. It is based on performance. And if North Korea, for example, doesn't perform, then the process is not going to move forward. And they are not going to receive the benefits that they might otherwise have received, if they had performed on the process, so --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) more on this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: Could you be any more specific than you were in the gaggle this morning about the dates that Sung Kim and the other -- the nuclear experts are going to meet at Pyongyang?

MR. MCCORMACK: I think they're going to -- I think they're going to meet Tuesday, Wednesday. They're leaving Sunday.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. MCCORMACK: And it takes some time to travel there and I would expect that they'll be there Tuesday, Wednesday. They'll probably have discussions that'll last a day and a half, two days.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. MCCORMACK: Mid-week, they'll be there mid-week. We'll keep you up to date if there's any change to that.

QUESTION: Are there people from the verification bureau going with them or is that (inaudible)?

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't know. I'll --we have to check on that to see.

MR. CASEY: We'll try and get you something.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, we'll try to check to see what the composition is. I expect that it's probably going to be an interagency team, because really, what you're talking about some detailed technical items here as well, especially as they would relate to a declaration and subsequent verification of the declaration.

QUESTION: Are they going to be talking about additional facilities beyond Yongbyon? Is that an issue in the declaration?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, we have yet to see what the North Koreans have put forward. They have not yet come up with their final declaration, so we'll see. If they bring up other facilities, then of course, that will be a topic of discussion.

Yeah.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/976166.html>

Rice: Syria 'most certainly an issue in nuclear proliferation'

By Shmuel Rosner and Yoav Stern, Haaretz Correspondents

Last update - 10:20 18/04/2008

[EXCERPT]

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters on Thursday [2008-04-17] that "Syria is most certainly an issue in proliferation."

Responding to reporters' questions, Rice spoke at length about the talks between the U.S. and North Korea, which also addressed the issue of North Korea's relations with Syria. The U.S. is demanding that North Korea reveal all past activity relating to nuclear proliferation, including its ties to Syria. These came to light following September's airstrike in Syria, which foreign reports have attributed to Israel.



For Immediate Release

April 19, 2008

President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Lee Myung-Bak of the Republic of Korea

Camp David

11:17 A.M. EDT

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

PRESIDENT LEE: Both of us reaffirmed once again that under no circumstances would we allow North Korea to possess nuclear weapons. Also, we agreed to work together closely within the six-party talks so that North Korea can fully and completely give up all their nuclear weapons programs as soon as possible.

Korea and the United States do not harbor any hostile intent towards North Korea. We both agreed to work together to help North Korea escape international isolation and to improve the lives of the North Korean people. President Bush supported our policy towards North Korea, including our denuclearization "opening-3000" policy, and also said that the United States will continue to dialogue -- seek ways to promote dialogue in exchange with North Korea.

[deletia]

We reaffirmed that nuclear nonproliferation and the promotion of democracy and human rights are all a vital component in making our world a better, safer place. In this regard, in order to ensure sustainable development, we agreed to work closely on the issues of climate change and energy securities, matters which are very serious and concerns us all.

[deletia]

I'm very happy with the results of today's meeting. And we will work very closely together to see the complete dismantlement of the nuclear weapons program of North Korea, and we will work closely within the six-party talks framework. And we must see the satisfactory conclusion, which will lead to helping the North Korean people lead better lives, with dignity.

Once again, Mr. President, I'm very happy to have met you, Mr. President, as well as Mrs. Laura Bush, and thank you for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation by the people of America. We will work closely together with a future-oriented mind. And I promise you I will do my very best, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, sir. Thank you. We'll do two questions a side, starting with Deb.

Q I have the same question for both of you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: I warned him that this was going to happen. (Laughter.)

Q Well, at least it's not two questions.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes, I know -- (laughter.)

Q First to President Bush, isn't scaling back demands about what North Korea has to declare giving in to a country that has repeatedly demonstrated that it can't be trusted? Former U.N. Ambassador Bolton has called it a complete collapse in the deal. And your critics are saying that you're selling out to get an agreement. Why is it not?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Look, we're going to make a judgment as to whether North Korea has met its obligations to account for its nuclear program and activities, as well as meet its obligations to disable its reactor. In other words, we'll see. The burden of proof is there. We've laid out -- they've made some promises, and we'll make a judgment as to whether they met those promises. And then we and our partners will take a look at North Korea's full declaration to determine whether or not the activities they promised they could do could be verified. And then we'll make a judgment of our own as to whether or not -- you know, about our own obligations.

You know, there's all kinds of rumors about what is happening and what's not happening. Obviously I'm not going to accept a deal that doesn't advance the interests of the region. The whole objective of the six-party talks and framework is to get them to disclose their weapons programs, is to get them to dismantle their plutonium processing, is to get them to talk about activities, nuclear activities. And we'll make a judgment as to whether or not they do that. But somehow people are precluding -- you know, jumping ahead of the game. They have yet to make a full declaration. Why don't we just wait and see what they say before people go out there and start giving their opinions about whether or not this is a good deal or a bad deal.

But one thing is for certain: The most effective way to deal with this issue is to do so with parties like China and Japan and Korea joining the United States and South Korea with a common voice. The whole object of this exercise is to convince the leader of North Korea to give up his nuclear weapons ambitions. That's the whole object.

And so we have yet to come to the stage where he has made a full declaration. And so we'll wait and see what he says, and then we'll make a decision about our obligations, depending upon whether or not we're convinced that there is a solid and full declaration, and whether or not there's a way to verify whether or not he's going to do what he says he's going to do.

PRESIDENT LEE: As for the declaration of North Korea, that is a very important process. I believe if North Korea's declaration is not satisfactory or if the verification is not satisfactory, we could probably have a temporary achievement, but in the long term, that will cause a lot more serious problems. I believe President Bush shares this thought with me.

Mr. President Bush explained just now the declaration, the verification process, has not begun. We are still waiting for North Korea to declare their full program. They should not get away with this temporary measure. The United States is not dealing with North Korea alone; there are other parties to the six-party talks, and they must all agree to North Korea's declaration. So in that regard North Korea's declaration of their nuclear weapons program should be complete and correct, and verification -- I'm not sure how long that is going to take, but North Korea must faithfully cooperate with verification process.

All the parties of the six-party talks are with one mind that the verification process must be full and complete and satisfactory. I think it's inappropriate and unconstructive for us to have too many doubts before the process even begins. The process is beginning. We should have trust in the process, and I will watch this process and cooperate fully.

Q (As translated.) I have a question for President Lee. Korea and the United States have made many achievements through the summit meeting, especially North Korean nuclear issue and the strengthening of the alliance. As for North Korean nuclear issue, Mr. President Lee suggested setting up a permanent liaison office in both Seoul and Pyongyang. What are some of the follow-up effects, if you do have any follow-up actions? And do you have any thoughts of proposing a meeting with Chairman Kim at an earlier date?

PRESIDENT LEE: The process is not something that we discussed between ourselves during the summit meeting. In fact, when I was staying in Washington, D.C., I had an interview with one of the newspapers there, and it came up. Of course it was not a sudden suggestion. I did have a meeting among my staff and related ministries, and I talked about this in detail before I came to the United States.

We have a new administration in Korea, and we haven't yet to begun dialogue with the North Koreans. Inter-Korean dialogue -- there is a need for us to have dialogue all the time. Up until now we had dialogues whenever the need arose, and then it would stop. However, dialogue should be based on genuine cooperation and sincerity. And so with this in mind, I thought that it would be helpful to set up a permanent liaison office in both Seoul and Pyongyang.

As for the summit meeting between myself and Chairman Kim, I will agree to it when the need is real. And I already said publicly that I am willing to meet with him -- not just once, but many times -- but if the meeting will yield substantial and real results. I believe only when that is possible I am ready to meet with him and have sincere dialogue, because that will help to bring about peace and stability of the Peninsula.

So basically, I do hold that thought, but I'm not suggesting to have a meeting with Chairman Kim anytime soon. If the need arises, again, I'm ready to meet with him.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Steven Lee.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President. If I could follow up a little bit on North Korea. The North Koreans agreed last year to make their disclosure. We're now in April and we've yet to see this disclosure. There are continued negotiations, a new round next week. Are you concerned that, given this record, they're not prepared to make this full disclosure, that they're stalling the process somehow? And if so, a question for both of you, how do you respond to that?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes. Of course, I mean, they may be trying to stall. One thing about a non-transparent society where there's not a lot of free press, for example, or a lot of opposition voices, it's hard to tell what's going on. Now, he has made declarations, and he's testing the relationship. He's wondering whether or not the five of us will stay unified. And the only thing I know to do is to continue pressing forward within the six-party framework.

The decision -- we've made our decision. "We," the five of us, have made our decision and that is, there's a way forward. And obviously we hope he chooses to honor his commitments in a verifiable way. But when you're dealing with a society in which it's hard to get information out of, you just have to wait and see whether they're sincere or not. Unlike our society, of course, where there's all kinds of people in the administration talking and sharing information with you -- some of it authorized, some of it's not -- it doesn't happen that way in North Korea. It's a closed society. It's a society in which the will of one person decides the course of the future.

And again, we're very hopeful. We talked about our mutual desire to keep the six-party framework in place, to deal with a lot of issues. The first one of course is with North Korea. And it's -- I can just tell you, Steven Lee, it's much more effective to have more than one voice speaking on this issue than to be the sole voice speaking on the issue. And so if there ever is going to be a breakthrough, it's through the six-party framework.

And, look, I'm hopeful. We'll see. This has been a -- I've been at this for quite a while, and there's been moments where it looks like the process is going to go very smoothly and everybody is going to honor their commitments, and then for one reason or another, there's a -- there was a setback. But the key thing is, is that we haven't abandoned the efforts to solve this problem peacefully and diplomatically.

PRESIDENT LEE: Thank you. If you correctly understand North Korea, and if you do understand North Korean society, you'll probably get a better picture why we are seeing some delay in the process at the moment. If North Korea wasn't like that, then we would have seen the resolution of this issue already. We need persistent patience, ladies and gentlemen. And we need time in order to have complete resolution of this issue.

However, it's difficult to convince North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons program, but it's not impossible. It is not impossible. I believe that. So in order to resolve this issue, I believe that the six-party talks is the most effective way and mechanism to resolve this issue, like the President mentioned. And right now we're in the stages of waiting for their declaration, and then we can move on to the verification process.

So I think it's up to you to make the atmosphere so that North Korea can faithfully abide by their promise and make the right declaration; that once North Korea does so, it is also in their interest to

make the correct decision to give a full and complete declaration. And it will also help the North Korean people improve the quality of their life, and that is the best strategic choice that they can make.

[deletia]

END 11:46 A.M. EDT

Bush: North Korea Must Declare Nuclear Programs

Published: April 19, 2008

Filed at 2:42 p.m. ET

CAMP DAVID, Maryland (Reuters) - The United States and South Korea on Saturday demanded North Korea submit its long overdue accounting of its nuclear weapons programs but offered no clues about how long they would be willing to wait for it.

Meeting for the first time at the secluded presidential retreat, President George W. Bush and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak also warned that once the declaration had been made, the information would have to be verified.

They appeared to back away from a reported proposal under which, according to sources familiar with the matter, Washington would list its concerns about the nuclear programs which Pyongyang would then acknowledge.

Some U.S. conservatives have criticized that idea as giving in to North Korea and aimed at getting a deal before Bush leaves office in early 2009.

"You know, there's all kinds of rumors about what is happening and what's not happening," Bush said at a news joint conference with Lee. "Obviously I'm not going to accept a deal that doesn't advance the interests of the region."

North Korea, which tested a nuclear device in 2006, failed to meet a December 31, 2007 deadline to reveal its nuclear weapons programs, a deal struck with the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

"So we'll wait and see what he says, and then we'll make a decision about our obligations, depending upon whether or not we're convinced that there is a solid and full declaration," Bush said.

If Pyongyang makes the statement, the United States is expected to ease some sanctions imposed under the U.S. state sponsors of terrorism list and the U.S. Trading With the Enemy Act.

STALLING?

In addition to seeking details about North Korea's nuclear programs, the United States is concerned it may have shared nuclear technology with U.S. political foes like Syria. Bush questioned why the North Korean leader was delaying.

"They may be trying to stall," Bush said. "He's testing the relationship. He's wondering whether or not the five of us will stay unified, and the only thing I know to do is to continue pressing forward within the six-party framework."

However, Bush and Lee did not say how long they were willing to wait for the information. A team of U.S. experts will be in North Korea next week to see if they can make any progress on completing the declaration.

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe declined to put a timetable for the declaration and said the administration first wanted to see what the team accomplished.

Lee, the first South Korean president invited to Camp David, also expressed concerns about North Korea's nuclear program. His predecessor, Roh Moo-hyun, sometimes frustrated U.S. efforts with his accommodating policies toward Pyongyang.

"We are still waiting for North Korea to declare their full program," he said through a translator. "They should not get away with this temporary measure."

"It's difficult to convince North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons program but it's not impossible," Lee said.

Separately, Bush and Lee agreed during their meeting to keep the current number of U.S. troops in South Korea and Bush said he would ask Congress to permit Seoul to buy the full complement of U.S. military hardware like NATO allies.

The United States has about 28,000 troops stationed in South Korea to help it defend against invasion by the communist North.

Bush also called on Congress to approve a free trade agreement with South Korea, but Democrats who control the House of Representatives and Senate have expressed concerns that it does not provide adequate access to the Korean auto market.

Congress "must reject protectionism, must not turn its back on a friend and ally like Korea, must approve the free trade agreement with Korea this year," Bush said.

(additional reporting by Tabassum Zakaria and Lisa Richwine in Washington; editing by Mohammad Zargham)

Bush defends declarations stance

April 19, 2008

By Jon Ward - CAMP DAVID, Md. — President Bush today rejected the notion that the U.S. has lowered the bar for North Korea's declaration of nuclear activity, pushing back against criticism from a former top administration official.

The North Koreans, Mr. Bush said, "have yet to make a full declaration."

"Why don't we just wait and see what they say before people go out there and start giving their opinions about whether or not this is a good deal or a bad deal?" he said, during a press conference at his Camp David retreat with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak.

Mr. Bush said that critics of his approach to Pyongyang – which include John Bolton, the president's former top counter proliferation official at the State Department – are "jumping ahead of the game."

Mr. Bolton, who was also the president's ambassador to the United Nations in 2005 and 2006, has turned on the Bush administration in the last year.

Mr. Bolton insists that Mr. Bush has allowed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to derail a hardline approach towards North Korea.

After the White House said this week that North Korea would be allowed to declare its nuclear proliferation activities in a separate declaration that would remain secret, Mr. Bolton said the administration is now "in full retreat."

Dennis Wilder, the president's top Asia adviser, insisted on Thursday that a North Korean declaration of nuclear bomb-making activities would not be "decoupled" from a declaration on passing along nuclear technology or materials to other countries.

"No one has let them off the hook with that declaration," Mr. Wilder said.

But Miss Rice said this week that she would only disclose "a sense" of what the North Koreans had revealed about past proliferation, and offered to brief Congress.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il had committed to provide a "full declaration," which the U.S. said for months included proliferation, by the end of 2007.

Mr. Bolton said in a phone interview that the key issue remains whether the U.S. will take North Korea off the state sponsors of terrorism list without verifying that they have destroyed all nuclear weapons and all bomb-making facilities.

Mr. Bush today simply said to "wait and see," and did not address the issue of separate agreements for nuclear production and nuclear proliferation.

“There's all kinds of rumors about what is happening and what's not happening. Obviously I'm not going to accept a deal that doesn't advance the interests of the region,” Mr. Bush said.

Mr. Bush indicated that he might not have been pleased with all the disclosures this week by Mr. Wilder and Miss Rice. He compared U.S. and North Korean press freedoms to make the point that in the U.S., government officials talk to the press more openly.

But when the president said that “there's all kinds of people in the administration talking and sharing information with you -- some of it authorized, some of it's not,” he looked over at the delegation of U.S. officials, which included both Miss Rice and Mr. Wilder.

Miss Rice could be seen after the press conference speaking animatedly with White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/21/AR2008042100128.html>

U.S. Team Headed to Pyongyang in Search of 'Significant Progress'

By Blaine Harden

Washington Post Foreign Service

Tuesday, April 22, 2008; A11

[EXCERPT]

SEOUL, April 21 -- For the first time since the United States eased demands on North Korea for nuclear disclosure, a U.S. delegation is headed to the communist state to try to verify the extent of its nuclear program.

Led by Sung Kim, a senior State Department expert on Korea, the interagency delegation arrived here late Monday and was scheduled to drive north to Pyongyang on Tuesday across the heavily fortified border.

"Everything is subject to verification," Kim told reporters after arriving here. He said that he hoped the visit would bring "significant progress" and that he expected detailed discussion of a much-delayed declaration North Korea has promised about its nuclear program.

That declaration, under a disclosure-for-aid deal negotiated last fall and due last Dec. 31, was to have been a "complete and correct" listing of the North's nuclear activities, from the manufacture of plutonium to details of uranium enrichment and involvement in a Syrian facility bombed last year by Israel.

Both plutonium and highly enriched uranium can be used in building nuclear weapons.

But North Korea has consistently refused to talk publicly about uranium enrichment and nuclear proliferation.

To salvage the negotiations, the United States said this month that it would be satisfied if the North would "acknowledge" evidence and concern about these matters, without a precise public admission.

In the meantime, the North -- in return for the lifting of sanctions -- would finish dismantling its principal nuclear plant and account for all the plutonium it has produced.

North Korea has said it has produced about 66 pounds of plutonium, but the U.S. government estimates it has made more. Both sides agree that significant parts of the Yongbyon reactor have already been disabled.

The delegation heading to Pyongyang on Tuesday plans to stay in North Korea for several days, a U.S. Embassy spokesman said.

[deletia]

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-norkor23apr23,0,3070215.story>

CIA to describe North Korea-Syria nuclear ties

Officials will tell Congress members this week that North Korea was helping Syria build a reactor last year when it was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike, a U.S. official says.

By Paul Richter and Greg Miller

Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

10:15 PM PDT, April 22, 2008

WASHINGTON — CIA officials will tell Congress on Thursday that North Korea had been helping Syria build a plutonium-based nuclear reactor, a U.S. official said, a disclosure that could touch off new resistance to the administration's plan to ease sanctions on Pyongyang.

The CIA officials will tell lawmakers that they believe the reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons but was destroyed before it could do so, the U.S. official said, apparently referring to a suspicious installation in Syria that was bombed last year by Israeli warplanes.

The CIA officials also will say that though U.S. officials have had concerns for years about ties between North Korea and Syria, it was not until last year that new intelligence convinced them that the suspicious facility under construction in a remote area of Syria was a nuclear reactor, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity when discussing plans for the briefing.

By holding closed, classified briefings for members of several congressional committees, the administration will break a long silence on North Korean-Syrian nuclear cooperation and on what it knows about last year's destruction of the Syrian facility. Nonetheless, it has been widely assumed for months that many in the administration considered the site a nuclear installation.

It was not clear Tuesday how recently North Korea may have been aiding Syria. But disclosure of the relationship to the committees is likely to bring criticism from conservative lawmakers who already believe that U.S. overtures to North Korea have offered the government in Pyongyang too many benefits without assurances that it will disclose the extent of its nuclear arms effort or ultimately surrender its weapons.

U.S. officials provided little explanation of why they want to brief lawmakers on the North Korean-Syrian links after declining to do so for months.

A senior Senate aide said the timing appears driven by a Bush administration desire to apprise committee members of the latest intelligence on the reactor before releasing some of the information.

"I have this strong impression the reason they want to brief the committee is they want to say something publicly," said the aide, who discussed contacts with the administration only on condition of anonymity.

The administration has briefed senior members of the House and Senate intelligence committees, a senior Senate aide said. But other lawmakers have remained in the dark. The administration has been under pressure to extend briefings to a larger circle of lawmakers.

The administration is planning to ease sanctions on North Korea as part of talks aimed at removing Pyongyang's nuclear weapons. The six nations involved in the talks, which also include China, Russia, South Korea and Japan, have been negotiating since 2003.

After a breakthrough last year in which North Korea agreed to shut down its only functioning nuclear production facility, it was rewarded with fuel oil and the release of frozen bank funds. But talks stalled after the Bush administration demanded that Pyongyang provide a full description of its past nuclear activities by a December 2007 deadline.

Shifting course, U.S. officials said two weeks ago that it would be sufficient for the North Koreans to acknowledge U.S. concerns about their nuclear activities. In return, administration officials would remove North Korea from the stigmatizing U.S. list of countries that sponsor terrorism and Pyongyang would no longer be subject to U.S. trade sanctions under the Trading with the Enemy Act, a 1917 law.

The administration shift appeared to give ground to North Korea in the negotiations, spurring fierce criticism from U.S. conservatives and debate over the broader plan to ease sanctions as a step toward dismantling Pyongyang's weapons programs.

But under the latest approach, U.S. officials will describe to the North Koreans at least some of their conclusions about Pyongyang's links with Syria. Some analysts speculated that U.S. officials may wish to avoid sharing intelligence with North Korea before they have briefed most members of Congress.

Danielle Pletka, a vice president of the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute think tank, said the congressional briefings were simply a step the administration needed to take to move forward. "This is a box-checking exercise," she said.

Gordon Johndroe, a White House spokesman, said, "The administration routinely keeps appropriate members of Congress informed of national security and intelligence matters." He declined to comment on specific sessions, however.

Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, complained in an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal in October that the administration "has thrown an unprecedented veil of secrecy around the Israeli airstrike," and that based on information he had been given "it is critical for every member of Congress to be briefed on this incident, and as soon as possible."

Some administration officials are believed to be unhappy with the latest developments in talks with North Korea. But several analysts were skeptical of speculation that the briefing might have been initiated by internal opponents who hope to set off an outcry that would scuttle any deal with Pyongyang.

"You'll have some outcry, but I doubt there are enough people on Capitol Hill even paying attention to oppose it," said Gordon Flake, who follows the issue as executive director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation and is a critic of such a pact.

He speculated that lawmakers would be reluctant to stand in the way of the deal, because that would risk criticism that they had blocked a hopeful avenue of progress on a top national security problem.

Another senior Senate aide said that although the disclosure might bring complaints, Congress would not turn against the negotiations with North Korea. The critics would not be able to come up with any better alternative, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity when discussing senators' views.

paul.richter@latimes.com

U.S. to Link North Korea to Syria

Congress to Be Told

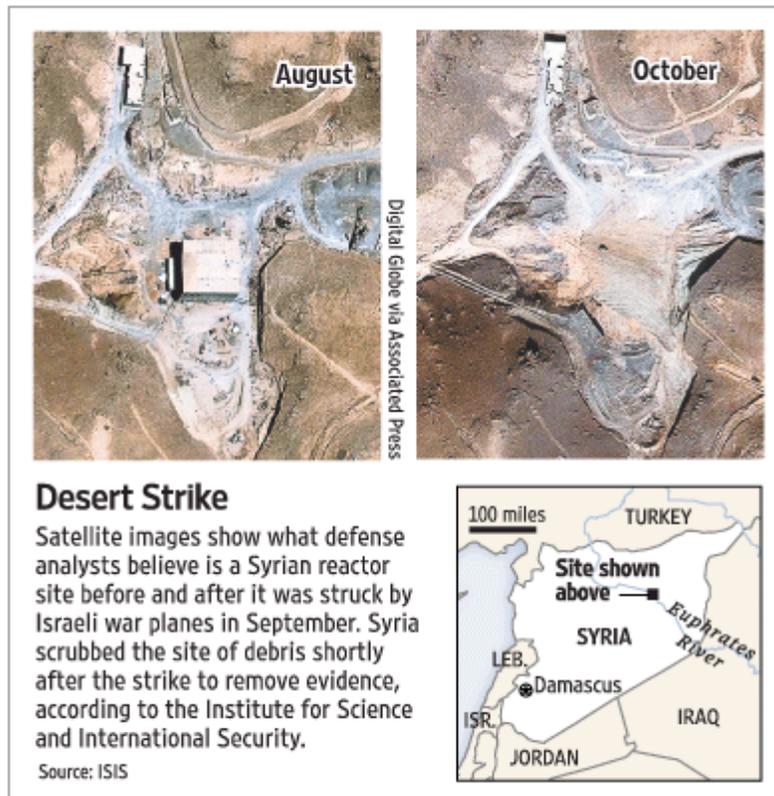
Damascus Got Help

Building a Reactor

By JAY SOLOMON

April 23, 2008; Page A7

[As of 2008-04-23T13:15Z, Google News lists this story as being posted "16 hours ago"]



WASHINGTON -- North Korea was helping Syria build a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor before Israel bombed the site last September, the Bush administration is set to tell Congress.

The new information could increase the position of hard-liners in Congress and the administration who have argued against a deal being negotiated to dismantle North Korea's nuclear-weapons program. The hard-liners say Pyongyang hasn't provided enough assurances it will dismantle its atomic arsenal in return for economic and diplomatic incentives.

Neither Israel nor the U.S. has made public information about the strike in Syria, though speculation has been widespread that the targeted site was a nascent nuclear reactor. Some Republicans have charged that the U.S. is playing down the matter to avoid hurting talks with North Korea.

This week, the Central Intelligence Agency is expected to begin briefing members of the Senate and House intelligence committees on the Israeli strike, according to congressional and administration officials. The briefings will be based in part on intelligence provided by the Israeli government, they said.

The CIA is expected to say it believes North Korea was helping Syria develop a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor similar to the Yongbyon facility North Korea built north of Pyongyang, said an official familiar with the deliberations. It also is likely to say North Korean workers were active at the Syrian site at the time of the Israeli attack.

It isn't clear what specific evidence the U.S. officials will present to support their allegations. They are likely to acknowledge uncertainty about whether the alleged Syrian reactor was designed solely to produce nuclear power for peaceful purposes or also to make fissile material for a nuclear weapon, according to the U.S. official.

Syrian officials have denied that they have sought to develop a nuclear capability of any kind and say the Bush administration is hyping the issue as a means to pursue an aggressive policy against both Iran and Syria.

"We have seen in the past that this administration doesn't require evidence, but will use false pretenses" to pursue its agenda, said Ahmed Salkini, a spokesman at the Syrian Embassy in Washington. "We hope the administration doesn't take a miscalculated step that could cause even more chaos in our region."

A spokesman for the White House's National Security Council, Gordon Johndroe, said: "The administration routinely keeps appropriate members of Congress informed of national security and intelligence matters, but I'm going to decline to comment on any specific briefings." A spokesman for the CIA declined to comment.

The Bush administration's national-security team is divided between those who want to pursue negotiations with North Korea and Iran about their nuclear ambitions and those who want to take a harder line.

The hard-liners were dealt a blow in December with the release of a National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Tehran stopped developing nuclear weapons in 2003. The White House has challenged the report, as have some in the intelligence community. By contrast, an airing of the alleged North Korea-Syria ties could put those who favor negotiations on the defensive.

In recent months, Republicans in Congress have been pushing the White House for a wider briefing on the Israeli attack. "Things seem to be coming to a head now" on North Korea, said a Republican staffer on Capitol Hill who has pushed for the release of the intelligence. "There's a sense we need to clear the decks so that we can move forward."

The U.S.-led diplomatic drive to disarm North Korea of its nuclear weapons is at a sensitive stage. U.S. officials estimate that North Korea extracted between 30 kilograms (66 pounds) and 60 kilograms (132 pounds) of plutonium from its now-shut Yongbyon reactor, although some believe the total could be higher. North Korea detonated a nuclear device in 2006.

The Bush administration has five U.S. officials working in North Korea to permanently disable the Yongbyon reactor. The dismantling is part of the first stage of a disarmament agreement the U.S. and North Korea reached last year. Under that stage, Washington and its negotiating partners have shipped heavy fuel oil to the North.

In the second stage, North Korea is supposed to give a thorough accounting of its nuclear activities at home and abroad in exchange for certain U.S. concessions, including removal from Washington's list of terrorism sponsors.

U.S. negotiators have pared initial demands that North Korea declare everything up front, say U.S. officials. State Department negotiators have hoped to persuade North Korea to acknowledge at least in private that it helped Syria's nuclear program and that, separately from the Yongbyon program, it tried to enrich uranium to create fuel for a nuclear weapon.

Hard-liners say the Syrian developments show North Korea can't be trusted. They say it is time to break off negotiations and step up pressure on North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

North Korea, too, may pull back from talks if its alleged support for Syria receives a public airing in Washington, some U.S. officials and analysts say.

"Who knows how they'll respond?" said a U.S. official working on proliferation activities. "Maybe they'll kick us out of Yongbyon?"

Israel has publicly been silent on the Syria strike, wary of stoking tensions when it is facing threats from the Islamist groups Hezbollah and Hamas.

Still, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's government consented in recent weeks to a wider airing of its intelligence surrounding the Syria strike, say officials involved in deliberations. Israel has long worried about North Korea's military supplies to Iran and Syria.

Conservative pundits in the U.S. have attacked Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the State Department's point man on North Korea, for fashioning a potential deal that is too weak. Vice President Dick Cheney's office and members of the nonproliferation bureaus at the Pentagon and State Department are particularly skeptical of the current denuclearization deal.

This week, the State Department dispatched envoy Sung Kim to Pyongyang in a bid to reach an agreement on the list of nuclear assets North Korea will agree to declare and verify as part of the disarmament process. Mr. Kim is focusing on gaining a specific accounting of the plutonium Pyongyang extracted from Yongbyon.

--Siobhan Gorman contributed to this article.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

US thinks N.Korea aided Syria on plutonium program

Wed Apr 23, 2008 2:11pm EDT

(Adds details, quotes, background)

By Arshad Mohammed

WASHINGTON, April 23 (Reuters) - The Bush administration is expected to tell U.S. lawmakers on Thursday that it believes North Korea was helping Syria build a nuclear reactor that could produce plutonium, a U.S. official said on Wednesday.

The White House has said little about the question of any North Korean nuclear assistance to Syria since Israel conducted a mysterious Sept. 6 air strike inside Syria that media reports said was aimed at a nuclear site built with Pyongyang's help.

"The sense is that the Syrians, with the help of the North Koreans, were attempting to build an undeclared facility that could indeed produce plutonium," said the official, who spoke on condition he not be named because of the sensitivity of the matter, of the congressional briefings' likely content.

The Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal reported the information in their Wednesday editions.

While the official did not explicitly tie the closed-door briefings to the Israeli strike, he hinted at this by saying "if an undeclared reactor in dangerous hands were put out of commission before it was operational, that's a good thing."

While a handful of lawmakers were briefed on the issue last year, the decision to widen the circle comes as Washington appears closer to a deal for North Korea to provide an overdue declaration of its nuclear programs.

Once the poor, Communist state has produced the declaration, the United States is expected to ease sanctions on Pyongyang that flow from its presence on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and the U.S. Trading With the Enemy Act.

Analysts believe Thursday's briefings aim to persuade members of Congress that easing the sanctions is justified.

SKEPTICISM

There is skepticism, especially among the administration's Republican allies in Congress, that relaxing the sanctions is warranted and there are concerns North Korea will not produce the "complete and correct" declaration of its nuclear programs it has promised under a multilateral agreement.

The declaration is one step toward carrying out a 2005 agreement among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States in which North Korea committed to abandon any nuclear weapons and programs.

The briefings could also open a diplomatic Pandora's box for the United States with implications for its dealings with close ally Israel as well as with Syria and North Korea, which have had poor relations with Washington.

The U.S. intelligence community is expected to give multiple briefings on Thursday to members of the congressional committees that oversee armed services, foreign affairs and intelligence matters.

The U.S. official who asked not to be named said that there was "good intelligence ... from more than one place and more than one source" on the suspected North Korean nuclear aid to Syria.

One matter of sensitivity for Israel -- which is widely believed to be the source of some of the intelligence on Syria -- is the possibility that wider disclosure could antagonize Damascus and produce a negative reaction.

Syria is regarded by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism and it has long hosted Palestinian groups that have carried out attacks on Israelis.

The briefing could also irk North Korea, which U.S. officials say is sensitive to the possible disclosure of any nuclear proliferation it may have engaged in.

However, some congressional aides have said that a briefing is a necessity if the administration is to win support for continuing the six-party process and for providing the funds needed to dismantle Pyongyang's nuclear facilities.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5ihstGufkLbMQWop6Y8uT0IfTX29w>

NKorea gave Syria nuclear help: US official

1 hour ago [*Accessed 2008-04-23T19:50Z*]

WASHINGTON (AFP) — In a move that could upset US policy towards North Korea, US intelligence is set to tell lawmakers this week that Pyongyang shared nuclear know-how with Syria, a US official said Wednesday.

The United States has concluded that the Stalinist regime's help came both before and after the destruction of a nuclear reactor being built in secret with North Korean help, said the official, who requested anonymity.

"If it had been complete, the reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons but it was destroyed before it could do so," the official said. "That's the result of solid intelligence."

The official did not specify who had knocked out the facility, but Israel carried out an airstrike inside Syrian territory in September in a move widely reported to have targeted a nuclear site.

US intelligence officials plan to brief US lawmakers from key committees on Thursday, amid deep concern in the US Congress about progress in six-country talks to dismantle North Korea's nuclear programs.

The White House declined to confirm details of the briefings, but spokeswoman Dana Perino and US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said separately that information on the issue could "soon" be made public.

Asked when the public would be told about what US intelligence believes about such collaboration, Gates told a Pentagon news conference: "Soon." He refused to elaborate.

"I think Secretary Gates said it well. 'Soon' is a good, short answer," Perino told reporters at her daily briefing amid a flurry of news reports that North Korea had aided Syria in a covert drive to obtain nuclear capability.

"I'm not going to be able to say much on it today. And I'm not confirming anything at this briefing in regards to the substance," Perino said as media outlets said the CIA would brief lawmakers starting on Thursday.

Asked whether she could give a reason for her silence, Perino replied: "No, I cannot. As you know, we've been asked questions about this since last fall. We have declined to comment, and I am not able to do so at this time."

"If you guys can just be a little bit patient and let some conversations happen on the Hill (Congress), then we will talk about it more at that time," the spokeswoman said.

Starting late Tuesday, US media outlets, citing unnamed US officials, said that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) would tell lawmakers from key committees that Israel hit a nuclear site, possibly a reactor, being constructed with North Korean help.

The news comes at a particularly sensitive time for the six-country talks aimed at stripping North Korea of its nuclear programs, months after Pyongyang was supposed to have formally "declared" the extent of its nuclear and proliferation activities.

The Wall Street Journal said the CIA was expected to confirm that Pyongyang was helping Damascus build a reactor like North Korea's Yongbyon site, and that North Korean workers were at the Syrian site at the time of the Israeli attack.

It was unclear to what degree the briefings will include evidence that Syria sought nuclear weapons, the anonymous official told the daily.

Source: Intel shows N. Korea-Syria nuclear link

From Barbara Starr

CNN Pentagon Correspondent

updated 46 minutes ago [*Accessed 2008-04-23T21:45Z*]

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- U.S. intelligence officials will tell members of Congress on Thursday that North Korea was helping Syria build a nuclear facility, according to a source familiar with internal administration discussions.

The facility in question was bombed by Israeli planes in September.

The United States and Israel have refused to comment on what the target of the strike was.

Some members of Congress have demanded to know what information the administration has about the incident.

Thursday's briefings to intelligence, foreign relations and armed services committees in both chambers of Congress are intended to show that the building hit was a North Korean-designed reactor being built with assistance from Pyongyang, the source said.

It is less clear whether North Korea had provided or was about to provide essential fuel components to Syria, according to the source.

The briefings could complicate the six-party talks at which the United States and other major world powers are trying to get North Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions. Pyongyang has resisted disclosing its proliferation activities.

The United States has softened its demand that North Korea publicly admit to having a program to develop highly enriched uranium and to having provided Syria with nuclear technology, key questions that have left the negotiations stalled for months.

Officials said the United States concluded that it is more important to get a handle on the program than to have North Korea "confess" past nuclear sins.

The original agreement in the six-party talks did not deal with proliferation, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said last week that it was important to do so "in light of some recent concerns about North Korean activities in proliferation."

"Syria is most certainly an issue in proliferation," she said, adding, "We have several nonproliferation questions on the table about North Korea."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, "The negotiations on the six-party talks and all the actions the parties take will be judged on their own merits."

He added that President Bush and Rice would make decisions based on Washington's "compelling interest" to rid North Korea of its nuclear program.

The State Department and the Pentagon have said they are not involved in Thursday's congressional briefings. A White House spokeswoman declined to comment.

In the initial days after the attack on the Syrian facility, fewer than two dozen people in the U.S. government were briefed on the intelligence surrounding the strike, and all were ordered to keep the information secret, according to a Pentagon official who asked not to be named.

The briefing notice to House members describes Thursday afternoon's topic as regarding the Middle East, a congressional source said.

The briefing might include video shot inside the Syrian facility before it was bombed, although a final decision about whether to show the video has not been made. It is believed that the video was shot by Israeli intelligence or a mole for the Israelis, the source close to the administration said.

A media briefing is also being considered, but some in the administration and Israel are concerned about provoking Syria with the disclosure.

But when Defense Secretary Robert Gates was asked Wednesday when the American public would be told about allegations of North Korea's nuclear assistance to Syria, he replied: "Soon."

Israel bombed the facility September 6, 2007, and satellite images show that little was left of it.

Since the strike, questions have arisen as to why the Israelis took the action and whether the United States supported the mission.

Syrian officials said the bombing was an Israeli raid on a building they described as an empty military warehouse.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in October that the agency had "no information about any undeclared nuclear facility in Syria and no information about ... reports" regarding an alleged facility.

A satellite photograph of the area taken in January seemed to indicate new construction on the site where the facility once stood. E-mail to a friend E-mail to a friend

CNN's Elise Labott, Deirdre Walsh, Pam Benson, Jamie McIntyre and Adam Levine contributed to this report

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4216>



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

News Transcript

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

April 23, 2008

DoD News Briefing with Secretary Gates from the Pentagon

[EXCERPT]

Q Mr. Secretary, this week key members of Congress are being briefed on what U.S. intelligence knows about North Korea's providing of nuclear-technical expertise to Syria. When, if ever, will it be appropriate for the American public to be told about what the U.S. believes was going on there?

SEC. GATES: Soon.

Q And can you say anything about it?

SEC. GATES: I think "soon" will do the job.



For Immediate Release

April 23, 2008

Press Briefing by Dana Perino
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room
12:45 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

Q Secretary Gates was asked today when the American public would be told about North Korea's nuclear assistance to Syria, and he said, "soon." Can you tell us what the administration has in mind and how you're going to roll it out?

MS. PERINO: No, I think Secretary Gates said it well. "Soon" is a good, short answer. We are going to be -- continuing to talk to members of Congress. That action will be happening soon, and as soon as we have more from there --

Q That will, or won't?

MS. PERINO: Will.

Q Has it started yet?

MS. PERINO: Well, let me decline to comment until they decide to talk to members of Congress more -- in an additional fashion, and then we can provide more. I'm not going to be able to say much on it today, and I'm not confirming anything at this briefing in regards to the substance of the question.

Q Well, he's the one who said, "soon."

MS. PERINO: And he was right. (Laughter.)

Q Okay, the next question is, how does this, whatever North Korea has been doing, how does it affect the six-party talks?

MS. PERINO: I think that -- let's let the action of "soon" happen and then we'll be able to talk more fully about it.

Roger.

Q Can you just shed a little light on why you can't talk about it, or at least --

MS. PERINO: No. You know that we've been asked questions about this since last fall. We have declined to comment, and I'm not able to do so at this time.

Q Is it because of the briefing tomorrow on the Hill, and are you just waiting until that --

MS. PERINO: It's not appropriate for me at this point, at this moment, to talk about it from here, and so I'll decline to do so until I'm allowed to.

Q Does it raise -- whatever it is -- (laughter) -- does it raise U.S. concerns even more about North Korea and Syria?

MS. PERINO: I'd love to be able to answer your question, but if I did, then it would answer the other questions that I've already said I can't answer. And so let's just -- if you guys can just be a little bit patient and let some conversations happen on the Hill, then we'll be able to talk about it more at that time.

Videotape Shows Secret Syrian Site Modeled After N. Korean Reactor

By Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, April 23, 2008; 6:02 PM

A videotape taken inside a secret Syrian facility last summer convinced both the Israeli government and the Bush administration that it was modeled after a North Korean reactor that produced plutonium for nuclear weapons, according to senior U.S. officials who said it would be shared with lawmakers tomorrow.

The videotape of the interior of the site, code named Al Kibar by the Syrians, also showed North Koreans working inside the facility, the officials said. It played a pivotal role in Israel's decision to bomb the facility last September, a move that was publicly denounced by Syria but not by Washington.

Sources familiar with its contents say the video shows the design of the Syrian reactor core is the same as the North Korean reactor at Yongbyong, including a virtually identical physical configuration and number of holes for the fuel rods. It shows "remarkable resemblances inside and out to Yongbyon," said a U.S. intelligence official. A nuclear weapons specialist called the video "very, very damning."

Nuclear weapons analysts and U.S. officials predicted that the planned disclosures to Capitol Hill by CIA director Michael V. Hayden could seriously complicate Washington's accelerating effort to improve relations with North Korea as a way to halt that country's nuclear weapons program. They come as different factions inside the administration have been battling over the merits of striking a nuclear-related deal with North Korea.

Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha today angrily denounced the U.S. and Israeli claims. "If they show a video, remember that the U.S. went to the UN Security Council and displayed evidence and images about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I hope the American people will not be as gullible this time around," he said.

U.S. officials said that Israel shared the video with the United States before the bombing on Sept. 6, after Bush administration officials expressed skepticism last spring that the site, visible by satellite since 2001, was a nuclear reactor built with North Korea's assistance.

But intelligence officials will tell members of the House and Senate intelligence and foreign relations committees that the Syrian facility was not yet fully operational and that there was no plutonium for the reactor and no indication of a fuel capability, according to U.S. officials and intelligence sources.

David Albright, president of Institute for Science and International Security and a former U.N. weapons inspector, said the absence of such evidence warrants skepticism that the reactor was part of an active weapons program. "The United States and Israel have not identified any Syrian plutonium separation facilities or nuclear weaponization facilities. The lack of any such facilities gives little confidence that the reactor is part of an active nuclear weapons program. The apparent lack of fuel, either imported or indigenously produced, also is curious and lowers confidence that Syria has a nuclear weapons program," Albright said.

U.S. intelligence officials will also tell the congressional committees that the new site Syria has rebuilt at Al Kibar is not for a reactor. "The successful engagement of North Korea in the Six Party Talks means that it was unlikely to have supplied Syria with such facilities or nuclear materials after the reactor site was destroyed," Albright said. "Indeed, there is little if any evidence that cooperation between Syria and North Korea extended beyond the date of the destruction of the reactor."

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/23/AR2008042302906.html?hpid=topnews>

N. Koreans Taped At Syrian Reactor

Video Played a Role in Israeli Raid

By Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, April 24, 2008; A01

A video taken inside a secret Syrian facility last summer convinced the Israeli government and the Bush administration that North Korea was helping to construct a reactor similar to one that produces plutonium for North Korea's nuclear arsenal, according to senior U.S. officials who said it would be shared with lawmakers today.

The officials said the video of the remote site, code-named Al Kibar by the Syrians, shows North Koreans inside. It played a pivotal role in Israel's decision to bomb the facility late at night last Sept. 6, a move that was publicly denounced by Damascus but not by Washington.

Sources familiar with the video say it also shows that the Syrian reactor core's design is the same as that of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, including a virtually identical configuration and number of holes for fuel rods. It shows "remarkable resemblances inside and out to Yongbyon," a U.S. intelligence official said. A nuclear weapons specialist called the video "very, very damning."

Nuclear weapons analysts and U.S. officials predicted that CIA Director Michael V. Hayden's planned disclosures to Capitol Hill could complicate U.S. efforts to improve relations with North Korea as a way to stop its nuclear weapons program. They come as factions inside the administration and in Congress have been battling over the merits of a nuclear-related deal with North Korea.

Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha yesterday angrily denounced the U.S. and Israeli assertions. "If they show a video, remember that the U.S. went to the U.N. Security Council and displayed evidence and images about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I hope the American people will not be as gullible this time around," he said.

U.S. officials said that Israel shared the video with the United States before the Sept. 6 bombing, after Bush administration officials expressed skepticism last spring that the facility, visible by satellite since 2001, was a nuclear reactor built with North Korea's assistance. Israel has a nuclear weapons arsenal that it has never declared.

But beginning today, intelligence officials will tell members of the House and Senate intelligence, armed services and foreign relations committees that the Syrian facility was not yet fully operational and that there was no uranium for the reactor and no indication of fuel capability, according to U.S. officials and intelligence sources.

David Albright, president of Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) and a former U.N. weapons inspector, said the absence of such evidence warrants skepticism that the reactor was part of an active weapons program.

"The United States and Israel have not identified any Syrian plutonium separation facilities or nuclear weaponization facilities," he said. "The lack of any such facilities gives little confidence that the reactor

is part of an active nuclear weapons program. The apparent lack of fuel, either imported or indigenously produced, also is curious and lowers confidence that Syria has a nuclear weapons program."

U.S. intelligence officials will also tell the lawmakers that Syria is not rebuilding a reactor at the Al Kibar site. "The successful engagement of North Korea in the six-party talks means that it was unlikely to have supplied Syria with such facilities or nuclear materials after the reactor site was destroyed," Albright said. "Indeed, there is little, if any, evidence that cooperation between Syria and North Korea extended beyond the date of the destruction of the reactor."

The timing of the congressional briefing is nonetheless awkward for the Bush administration's diplomatic initiative to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear program and permanently disable the reactor at Yongbyon. The CIA's hand was forced, officials said, because influential lawmakers had threatened to cut off funding for the U.S. diplomatic effort unless they received a full account of what the administration knew.

Also, the terms of a tentative U.S.-North Korean deal require that North Korean officials acknowledge U.S. evidence about its help with the Syrian program, and so the disclosures to Congress are meant to preempt what North Korea may eventually say.

Following talks with the South Korean president last weekend, President Bush said that it was premature to make a judgment about whether North Korea was willing to follow through with a commitment to publicly declare its nuclear-related programs, materials and facilities.

Washington and Pyongyang still differ over what should be included in that declaration, a State Department official said. Sung Kim, the State Department director of the Office of Korean Affairs, is in Pyongyang for discussions about the contents.

Syria's top envoy to Washington said the CIA briefings were meant to undermine diplomatic efforts with North Korea, not to confront Syria. Why, Moustapha said, are "they repeating the same lies and fabrications when they were planning to attack Iraq? The reason is simple: It's about North Korea, not Syria. The neoconservative elements are having the upper hand."

He added, "We do not want to plan to acquire nuclear technology as we understand the reality of this world and have seen what the U.S. did to Iraq even when it did not have a nuclear program. So we are not going to give them a pretext to attack Syria."

Before the site was bombed, the facility included a tall, boxy structure like those used to house gas-graphite reactors and was located seven miles north of the desert village of At Tibnah in the Dayr az Zawr region, 90 miles from the Iraqi border, according to photographs released by the ISIS, a nonprofit research group.

The White House and the CIA declined to comment on the briefings.

U.S. Sees N. Korean Links to Reactor

By DAVID E. SANGER

April 24, 2008

WASHINGTON — After seven months of near-total secrecy, the White House is preparing to make public on Thursday video evidence of North Koreans working at a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor just before it was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike last September.

Until now, the administration has refused to discuss the video or the attack, other than in a highly classified briefing for a few allies and crucial members of Congress.

But senior officials in Israel and the United States have said the target was a nascent nuclear reactor that had been under construction for years. Israeli and American analysts had concluded that it was loosely modeled on the reactor North Korea used to obtain the fuel for its small nuclear weapons arsenal.

Israeli jets destroyed the site on Sept. 6, and the Syrians, after issuing some protests, bulldozed the area and constructed a building on the exact footprint of the old one. They have refused to allow international nuclear inspectors to visit the location.

The timing of the administration's decision to declassify information about the Syrian project has raised widespread suspicions, especially in the State Department, that Vice President Dick Cheney and other administration hawks were hoping that releasing the information might undermine a potential deal with North Korea that would take it off an American list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"Making public the pictures is likely to inflame the North Koreans," said one senior administration official who would not speak on the record because the White House and the State Department have declared there would be no public comment until the evidence is released. "And that's just what opponents of this whole arrangement want, because they think the North Koreans will stalk off."

But another senior official said it was possible that the revelations would force the North Koreans to describe their actions in Syria more fully when they issued a long delayed declaration of their nuclear activities.

That proposed deal, negotiated by Christopher R. Hill, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs and the primary interlocutor with North Korea, has become the latest battleground in a seven-year struggle within the Bush administration over North Korea policy.

That policy has veered from efforts to squeeze North Korea in hopes that the government of Kim Jong-il will collapse, to negotiating with the country alongside Russia, China, South Korea and Japan, each of which has pursued a somewhat different approach toward the North.

Mr. Hill was put in charge of the talks more than three years ago in the hope of finding a new way to deal with the North Koreans. But support for him has wavered, and President Bush has repeatedly warned aides not to agree to anything that "makes me look weak," according to former officials who sat in on meetings with him on North Korea.

Mr. Cheney's office and other conservatives have argued that Mr. Hill's proposed deal would amount to a huge concession. In return for a minimal declaration from North Korea — an accounting of how much plutonium it has produced — it would be removed from the terrorism list and would no longer be subject to economic sanctions under the Trading With the Enemy Act.

North Korea has refused to say what, exactly, it provided to the Syrians, or what happened to an effort to start a second pathway to building arms, using uranium.

The deal would allow the North to continue to fudge on those matters, leaving unexplained the question of why it appeared to be buying uranium enrichment equipment from Pakistan. That equipment, many experts believe, was intended to help North Korea build a second path to a bomb, in case it was forced to give up its plutonium program.

In a presentation on Thursday to crucial members of Congress, and then in a presentation to reporters, American intelligence officials are expected to show images from a video, believed to have been obtained through Israeli intelligence services. The video, which Mr. Hill has shown to senior South Korean officials, shows Korean faces among the workers at the Syrian plant.

Other pictures, officials say, show what appears to be the construction of a reactor vessel inside the building that Israel later destroyed. It is unclear what the administration is willing to release. Syria's ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, did not answer messages left for him on Wednesday.

For weeks after the Israeli attack in September, neither Israeli nor American officials would talk about the attack, Israel's first on a nuclear site since the 1981 attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq.

When The New York Times published a lengthy account of the Syria attack on Oct. 14, revealing that Israeli and American analysts judged that the target was a partly constructed nuclear reactor, Mr. Bush and the White House refused to answer questions about it. Later, officials said they feared that the Syrians would retaliate against Israel if they felt publicly humiliated.

It is not clear what has changed, apart from the politics of the moment. Mr. Hill's boss, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, has not voiced strong support for Mr. Hill's effort to coax the North Koreans along, granting them rewards for steps along the way to compliance with a deal that calls, ultimately, for the country to give up its weapons.

Ms. Rice has been a strong critic of the 1994 agreement between North Korea and the Clinton administration, complaining that it was "front loaded" with rewards for the North.

That is exactly what critics say she and Mr. Hill have done in the most recent agreement. But Mr. Hill has argued in private that the Syrian episode and the uranium enrichment are side shows, and that the critical issue is stopping North Korea from producing more plutonium and giving up what it has. But his State Department colleagues say that he has been told not to defend the deal, or even explain it.

"He's feeling pretty abandoned by Rice and Bush," one of his colleagues said Wednesday. Mr. Hill did not respond to messages.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080424/FOREIGN/208004768/1001>

Syria's nuke facility was nearly completed when Israel bombed it

By Nicholas Kralev and Sara A. Carter

April 24, 2008

The Bush administration is set to tell Congress today that a nuclear facility in Syria built with North Korean help was nearly complete when Israel bombed it in September, but that Pyongyang has not provided any further nuclear assistance to the hard-line Arab nation, at least at that site, U.S. officials said.

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden and other intelligence officials are expected to brief several congressional committees in closed-door sessions, breaking the administration's silence on the issue. The facility has become a major issue in six-nation negotiations to end the North's nuclear programs.

"The belief is that the reactor was nearing completion," said one official familiar with the content of the briefings. "It would have been able to produce plutonium."

According to wire services, another U.S. official said the intelligence that will be presented to lawmakers would include "some pretty compelling before and after [aerial] pictures of the site."

The presentation is expected to include still photographs taken from videotape recorded inside the Syrian facility, the official said, adding that the intelligence is expected to show that Syria was building a nuclear reactor complex much like the North Korean nuclear reactor complex at Yongbyon.

The Yongbyon reactor has been almost disabled by U.S. specialists. Both programs were based on technology to produce plutonium — a man-made element used to make the fissile core of atomic bombs.

Administration and congressional officials spoke about the Syrian facility in the past tense. One official said it was "good that it was put out of commission," and others added that the Israeli air strike occurred before fuel "had been placed in the reactor."

Satellite photos taken before the Israeli strike show a large cubical building thought to have housed the reactor. The building is absent from photos taken afterward.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said the administration will be able to discuss the issue publicly "soon," but the official spokesmen for the main national security agencies refused to comment on the matter and only offered general statements.

"We have certain responsibilities to brief the Congress on matters of foreign policy and national security, in this case, intelligence matters," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

U.N. officials said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) could not confirm the administration's conclusions because Syria refused access to the site in question, and the IAEA authorities needed to take ground samples and conduct interviews.

The chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea, Christopher R. Hill, has said that Pyongyang insists it is not currently engaged in proliferation activities and will not be in the future.

Asked yesterday whether the North has assisted Syria's nuclear program since the Sept. 6 bombing, officials said, "Not at that site." They declined to elaborate.

The officials, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, said they based their conclusions on "very good intelligence derived from a variety of sources." They added that the Israeli government was informed about the congressional briefings.

However, Yuval Steinitz, a member of the Israeli Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said that no such information had been provided to legislators.

"This is inconsistent with the standard procedure," he said. "I'm upset with our government. It is not healthy that such a briefing is taking place in another parliament, even if it is a friendly parliament like the U.S. Congress."

Administration officials and outside analysts said that after today's briefings, members of Congress are likely to ask what North Korea's behavior means for the future of the six-party talks. Even though they disagreed on the answer to that question, they all deplored the North's assistance to Syria.

"It's a very outrageous step, but what do you do now? Throw away the whole process? That's a conundrum," a former administration official said.

Another former official, John R. Bolton, who was undersecretary of state for arms control and international security during President Bush's first term, said: "North Korea is outsourcing its nuclear weapons program. And if you want to hide your activities from inspectors in North Korea, what better place than in Syria?"

The United States has insisted that North Korea disclose any nuclear assistance it has provided to Syria, as well as other countries, in a declaration that was due Dec. 31 as part of a deal reached in the six-party talks last year.

Pyongyang, however, has refused to do so, and the administration has looked for "creative" ways to help both countries save face but move the process forward, so that Yongbyon's dismantling can at least begin before Mr. Bush leaves office in January.

- Joshua Mitnick contributed to this report from Tel Aviv and Betsy Pisik from New York.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/apr/24/us-syria-hid-n-korea-aided-nukes-plant/>

U.S.: Syria hid N. Korea-aided nukes plant

By The Washington Times

Thursday, April 24, 2008

Syria undertook extensive efforts to hide from spy satellites a nuclear reactor being built with North Korean help and then also tried to hide the bombed facility after it was destroyed by the Israelis, U.S. officials disclosed today.

Those efforts included removing all material and equipment from the site that would reveal it was a nuclear plant and then burying the reactor debris, the officials said on condition of anonymity. The Syrian nuclear reactor was built without the knowledge of the International Atomic Energy Agency and was so secret that it escaped detection by U.S. intelligence agencies during its construction.

Administration officials told The Washington Times yesterday that the plant in northern Syria, which would have produced plutonium, was nearly complete when it was bombed by Israeli warplanes Sept. 6.

Additionally, a high-level North Korean delegation of officials traveled to Syria after the raid to assist with efforts to cover up the two nations' cooperation, said senior officials who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity. The cooperation also was outlined in a videotape report made public at the briefing.

The bottom line is the reactor was put out of commission before it was loaded with fuel or became operational, said a senior U.S. official with knowledge of intelligence regarding the Israeli raid into northern Syria.

U.S. intelligence believes that North Korea assisted this effort, a U.S. official said. And that assistance occurred both prior to and after the reactor was put out of commission.

Officials said the disclosure of the intelligence is designed to force Syria to admit to the secret nuclear arms program, which was evading International Atomic Energy Agency controls.

The disclosure also seeks to pressure North Korea to abide by the six-nation talks on nuclear disarmament under which Pyongyang agreed to disclose all details of its nuclear activities, including its assistance to other nations, the officials said.

At the White House, presidential spokeswoman Dana Perino called on Syria to disclose the nuclear program.

"The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities," Mrs. Perino said.

Imad Moustapha, Syria's ambassador to the U.S., dismissed the claims as ridiculous, telling CNN that he had been called today into the State Department, where officials "told me a ridiculous story about an alleged Syria nuclear project."

Syria's ambassador to Britain, Sami al-Khiyami, told reporters, that the U.S. and other nations "just want to exert more pressure on North Korea. This is why they are coming up with this story."

CIA Director Michael V. Hayden and other intelligence officials briefed several congressional committees in closed-door sessions today, breaking the administration's silence on the issue.

The secret intelligence that had remained under wraps for seven months, a time gap that led top congressmen to criticize the Bush administration for its "veil of secrecy" and lack of trust in Congress regarding North Korea's proliferation activities.

“It’s bad management and terrible public policy to go for eight months knowing this was out there and then drop this in our laps six hours before they go to the public,” said Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the ranking Republican on the intelligence committee.

Rep. Silvestre Reyes, Texas Democrat and panel chairman, echoed those comments.

“The challenge that we are having, particularly with the administration today, is that there’s a veil of secrecy that gets in the way [of] our committee feeling comfortable that we are getting the kind of information that we are supposed to have in order to carry out oversight responsibilities,” he said.

Mr. Hoekstra warned that the administration’s delay in informing lawmakers amounts to a lack of trust that could make it harder for Congress to approve any future nuclear agreement with North Korea.

The delay has “really damaged the relationship between Congress and the administration,” Mr. Hoekstra said. “And that’s a big disappointment, but I think that’s something that we heard consistently from all of our [committee] members today.”

But other congressmen focused on the revelations themselves, saying that they prove the U.S. needs to maintain its tough stance against North Korea.

Unless we are able to confirm that North Korea is no longer in the nuclear proliferation business, the United States should not lift sanctions on the North,” said Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who also said the six-party talks should continue and that U.S. goals must remain “both shutting down Pyongyang’s nuclear programs and ensuring that North Korea does not transfer” nuclear material to others.

The Syrian reactor was identical in design to a reactor built by North Korea at its Yongbyon facility. Yongbyon is being dismantled by North Korea as part of the six-nation nuclear talks. That reactor was fueled by natural uranium to produce the plutonium now contained in North Korea’s nuclear bombs.

Until this week, the bombing raid and the nuclear cooperation has been couched in secrecy despite unofficial reports that Syria was working with North Korea on a nuclear facility.

Until this week, the Syrian nuclear program was suspected of being a covert nuclear research program based on uranium enrichment. Syria, according to a recent CIA report to Congress, was a recipient of goods provided by the Pakistani nuclear supplier network headed by A.Q. Khan, considered the father of the Islamabad’s nuclear program.

The CIA report said Syria has nuclear research centers at Dayr Al Hajar and Dubaya with the potential to be used in a weapons program.

[Sean Lenggell contributed to this report.](#)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080424-14.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
April 24, 2008

Statement by the Press Secretary

Today, administration officials have briefed select Congressional committees on an issue of great international concern. Until Sept. 6, 2007, the Syrian regime was building a covert nuclear reactor in its eastern desert capable of producing plutonium. We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities. We have good reason to believe that reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on Sept. 6 of last year, was not intended for peaceful purposes. Carefully hidden from view, the reactor was not configured for such purposes. In defiance of its international obligations, Syria did not inform the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the construction of the reactor, and, after it was destroyed, the regime moved quickly to bury evidence of its existence. This cover-up only served to reinforce our confidence that this reactor was not intended for peaceful activities.

We are briefing the IAEA on this intelligence. The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities. The Syrian regime supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon, allows the transit of some foreign fighters into Iraq, and represses its own people. If Syria wants better relations with the international community, it should put an end to these activities.

We have long been seriously concerned about North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its proliferation activities. North Korea's clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria is a dangerous manifestation of those activities. One way we have chosen to deal with this problem is through the Six Party Framework. Through this process we are working with our partners to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The United States is also committed to ensuring that North Korea does not further engage in proliferation activities. We will work with our partners to establish in the Six Party Framework a rigorous verification mechanism to ensure that such conduct and other nuclear activities have ceased.

The construction of this reactor was a dangerous and potentially destabilizing development for the region and the world. This is particularly true because it was done covertly and in violation of the very procedures designed to reassure the world of the peaceful intent of nuclear activities. This development also serves as a reminder that often the same regimes that sponsor proliferation also sponsor terrorism and foster instability, and cooperate with one another in doing so. This underscores that the

international community is right to be very concerned about the nuclear activities of Iran and the risks

those activities pose to the stability of the Middle East. To confront this challenge, the international community must take further steps, beginning with the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions dealing with Iranian nuclear activities. The United States calls upon the international community to redouble our common efforts to ending these activities and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in this critical region.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080424-9.html>



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
April 24, 2008

Press Briefing by Dana Perino

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:40 P.M. EDT

MS. PERINO: Hello, everyone. I don't have anything to start with, so we'll go straight to questions.

Q Does the information that's being released today about North Korea and Syria help or hurt the administration's argument that North Korea is going to fully disclose its nuclear activities?

MS. PERINO: As I said this morning, there are many things I'm not going to be able to comment on in today's briefing, which I know is very frustrating, not just for you but for me, too.

Q I'm not talking about the information itself, but I'm talking about --

MS. PERINO: But commenting on -- by answering that question I would be also answering the previous question. There are Hill briefings that are ongoing right now. Out of respect for that process, and for the members of Congress to be able to hear this from administration officials first, I'm going to defer to answer specific questions on that until they have a chance. But I would refer you back to what the President said on -- just last Saturday at Camp David in regards to the North Koreans and the six-party talks and North Korea's declaration.

Q When did President Bush see the videotape of what happened in Syria?

MS. PERINO: Again, I'm going to decline to comment on specifics of whatever is being said to Capitol Hill right now and what other people -- what you all might see later today.

Q Was it shown to the South Korean President?

MS. PERINO: I'm not commenting on it. You can chase me around the podium -- (laughter.)

Q One more general question, though. The administration got it wrong on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction. Why should this new information, whatever it is, be believed?

MS. PERINO: Again, Mark, I am going to -- I understand the question. I appreciate that you'd like for me to be able to answer it. I am not going to be able to answer these questions. I'm going to let the senior administration officials and intelligence officials talk to Capitol Hill. Last fall we did brief 22 members of Congress, House and Senate members, consistent with our obligations. More members are being briefed today and I'm going to let that process take place.

Q Dana, on that point, because you brought up the lawmakers, two of them who were briefed today who were among those who were briefed back in the fall came out -- Chairman Reyes and Ranking Republican Hoekstra -- and they were livid, I think to say the least. And what Hoekstra said -- and I'm quoting him -- he says, "We were used." The administration -- he said, we were told -- "We were used today by the administration, not because they felt they had to inform Congress because it was their legal obligation to do that, but because they had other agendas in mind." He says, any bond of trust between the administration and Congress has been shattered. And he says it will now be very difficult to get any agreements, in particular, anything based on the six-party talks through Congress. What do you say to that?

MS. PERINO: Obviously we would be very disappointed that he feels that way and would hope he understands our tremendous respect for members of Congress. And as I said, back in the fall we briefed 22 members of Congress, consistent with our obligations. He was one of them. There are tensions that exist between the executive branches and the legislative branches on a range of issues in regards to who should know what when. But we will continue to work with Representative Hoekstra and continue to talk with him. And he was part of the briefings this morning, and again, I'm not going to comment on anything until those briefings can be completed today.

Q He says he just doesn't feel that then, in September, eight months ago, that they got any kind of decent explanation as to why the other members of the committee shouldn't have been briefed. They asked for them to be briefed. And he said, I don't -- still don't believe we've gotten a good explanation then today for this delay. Why now?

MS. PERINO: Again, I will decline to comment. There will be more information that will hopefully answer more of these questions later today. It could be that once senior administration officials talk with Representative Hoekstra that he still won't be satisfied, and we'll have to satisfy that he got an answer that he believes is satisfactory. We'll have to accept that -- that's his opinion. But we certainly have tried to work with him and the Democrats across the board, and consistent with our obligations, briefed the appropriate members of Congress last fall.

Q Syria is saying that this is an attempt -- all it is is an attempt to put pressure on North Korea. Is the United States at this point trying to increase pressure on North Korea to comply with its nuclear declaration?

MS. PERINO: Our pressure on North Korea has been ongoing through the six-party talks, and you just heard from the President on Saturday about that. I think that by the end of the day, I think a lot of these questions will be answered for you. I'm not able to go into details here.

Bret.

Q Will one of those questions later today be why this information came out? Will we find that out later today?

MS. PERINO: I believe that you will be given more information about that later today and that -- again, will it satisfy everybody? I don't know. But let's let the briefings take place and then we can go from there.

Q What form will the information be put out later here? Is there a statement by the White House?

MS. PERINO: As I said this morning, I am working to get something that could come out from me as soon as possible. I'm having to be respectful of the congressional briefing schedule that is ongoing today, and I'm trying to push the system a little bit for not only our interest to make sure that we inform the American public, but for yours so that you get -- don't get jammed on the back-end of your day. I'm aware of deadlines and hope that we can meet them.

Q Are there other agency briefings, backgrounders or otherwise -

MS. PERINO: I'd just refer you to the intelligence community for that.

Q But you will be having a statement later today, but maybe not before 5:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m.?

MS. PERINO: I hesitate to put a time on it. I'm pushing as hard as I can. It probably will not be as early as I would like.

Q Is it tied to the conclusion of the briefings on the Hill?

MS. PERINO: I'm trying to work on that and trying to push the system a little bit. I'm not sure if I'll be successful.

Q Dana, just to be clear, Hoekstra did already get his briefing and he wasn't satisfied. So will you be reaching out again to him?

MS. PERINO: Of course, we'll just have to -- our senior officials and our staff talk with him and his staff on a regular basis.

Q Dana, in October the President said that any such proliferation activities would be a grave threat to the United States and that North Korea would face serious consequences. Does he stand by those statements?

MS. PERINO: Yes.

Q What should the consequences be then?

MS. PERINO: Well, let's let the briefings take place and the declaration take place, and we will move on from there.

Q And what's the international component to this? Have you talked to the other -- do the other six-party -- or four parties know the information that's being provided to Congress today?

MS. PERINO: This will not come as a surprise to any members of the six-party talks.

Q Okay. And I understand that the United States reached out to the IAEA today. Do you want inspectors to go into Syria to make sure that they're satisfied -- make sure that Syria is in compliance with the NPT?

MS. PERINO: I don't know who reached out, if they did. So I'm not aware of that. I don't know who it would have been. But I think when I have my statement today that you'll have later this afternoon, that that question will be at least partially answered.

White House says Syria 'must come clean' about nuclear work

By PAMELA HESS, Associated Press Writer

39 minutes ago [*Accessed 2008-04-25T01:55Z*]

WASHINGTON - The White House said Thursday that North Korea's secret work on a nuclear reactor with Syria was "a dangerous and potentially destabilizing development for the world," raising doubts about Pyongyang's intention to carry through with a promised disclosure of its nuclear activities.

Seven months after Israel bombed the reactor, the White House broke its silence and said North Korea assisted Syria's secret nuclear program and that the destroyed facility was not intended for "peaceful purposes."

Top U.S. intelligence officials who briefed reporters said they had high confidence in the judgment that North Korea had aided Syria with its nuclear program and the intention was to produce plutonium. But they claimed only low confidence for the conclusion that it was meant for weapons development, in part because there was no reprocessing facility at the site — something that would be needed to enrich nuclear material for use in a bomb.

The Bush administration's assertions could undermine six-party negotiations to try to resolve the nuclear standoff with North Korea. But a senior administration official told reporters he hoped the disclosure would instead provide leverage to officials trying to get an accurate accounting of North Korea's nuclear and proliferation activities.

The White House issued a two-page statement after lawmakers were given details about the reactor in a series of briefings on Capitol Hill that included a video presentation of intelligence information the administration contends establishes a strong link between North Korea's nuclear program and the bombed Syrian site. The briefing also included still photographs that showed a strong resemblance between specific features of the plant and one near Yongbyon in North Korea.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the revelations make it clear that any deal to eliminate North Korea's nuclear programs must also stop its proliferation activities and include vigorous verification. But he said the information in the briefings was not a cause to end the talks.

"To the contrary, it underscores the need for pursuing the talks, which remain our best chance to convince North Korea to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons and to stop proliferation," Biden said.

The White House said the International Atomic Energy Agency also was being briefed on the intelligence.

While calling North Korea's nuclear assistance to Syria a "dangerous manifestation" of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and its proliferation activities, the White House said it remained committed to the talks.

The United States became aware North Korea was helping Syria with a nuclear project in 2003, said intelligence officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity. The critical intelligence that cemented that conclusion, they said, came last year: dozens of photographs taken from ground level over a period of time, showing the construction both inside and outside the building.

The Israeli strike on Sept. 6, 2007, ripped open the structure, known as the Al Kibar reactor, and revealed even more evidence to spy satellites: reinforced concrete walls that echoed the design of the Yongbyon reactor.

After the attack, Syria tried to bury evidence of its existence and erected a new building to hide the site. The building is not believed to house a new reactor, the officials said.

"This coverup only served to reinforce our confidence that this reactor was not intended for peaceful activities," White House press secretary Dana Perino said. "The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities."

The Syrian reactor was within weeks or months of being functional when Israeli jets destroyed it, a top U.S. official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. The official said the facility was mostly completed but still needed fueling and significant testing before it could be declared operational.

"We had to assume they could throw the switch at any time," a senior intelligence official said.

No uranium, which is needed to fuel a reactor, was evident at the site, a remote area of eastern Syria along the Euphrates River. But senior U.S. intelligence officials said the reactor was similar in design to the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, which has in the past produced small amounts of plutonium, the material needed to make powerful nuclear weapons.

A senior intelligence official said the intelligence agencies believe North Korea was motivated by "cash" rather than a desire to obtain plutonium from the reactor.

Syria has maintained in the past that the site was an unused military facility, and on Thursday, its embassy denounced what it called the U.S. "campaign of false allegations." It accused the administration of trying to mislead Congress and world opinion "in order to justify the Israeli raid in September of 2007, which the current U.S. administration may have helped execute."

Senior U.S. officials said the U.S. military was not involved in the attack, and the U.S. government, although informed in advance, did not approve it.

"Israel made the decision to attack," a senior administration official said. "It did so without any so-called green light from us. None was asked for and none was given."

"It has become obvious that this maneuver on the part of this administration comes within the framework of the North Korean nuclear negotiations," the Syrian statement said.

And in an apparent reference to prewar claims by the Bush administration that Iraq had possessed weapons of mass destruction, the statement concluded: "The Syrian government hopes that the

international community and the American public, particularly, will be more cautious and aware this time around in facing such unfounded allegations."

Top members of the House Intelligence Committee who were briefed on the reactor said it posed a serious threat of spreading dangerous nuclear materials.

"This is a serious proliferation issue, both for the Middle East and the countries that may be involved in Asia," said Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich.

Hoekstra and Intelligence Committee Chairman Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, told reporters after the closed briefing that they were angry that the Bush administration had delayed informing the full committee for so long. That delay has created friction that may imperil congressional support for Bush's policies toward North Korea and Syria, Hoekstra said.

The White House also used its statement as an opportunity to denounce the nuclear activities of Iran, which it says is a threat to the stability of the Middle East. Perino said the international community must take further steps, beginning with full implementation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

While Washington was awash in condemnation of North Korea's proliferation activities, the communist regime is expressing optimism about current six-party negotiations with the United States, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan. The optimism over the talks is raising hopes of breaking the impasse that has deadlocked arms negotiations.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry said Thursday that it had discussed technical matters with the Americans for moving forward on that and other agreements from the arms talks. "The negotiations proceeded in a sincere and constructive manner and progress was made," the ministry said in a statement.

As part of that process, the North is required to submit a "declaration" detailing its programs and proliferation activity, but the talks are stalled over Pyongyang's refusal to publicly admit the Syria connection. However, officials say the North Koreans are willing to accept international "concern" about unspecified proliferation.

Associated Press writers Deb Riechmann, Barry Schweid, Matthew Lee, Anne Flaherty, Edith Lederer and Bassem Mroueh contributed to this report.

Office of the Director of National Intelligence

**Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on
Syria's Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea's Involvement**

April 24, 2008

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Hello. My name is [Senior Intelligence Official 1]. And I have the start-off role. It's been a pretty busy morning and afternoon, as you might imagine. We've been on the Hill having dialogue with our committees.

What I want to do is just frame the issue. I read the press reporting coming out here. So I'm almost at the point of saying are there any questions. But just let me say that what we're going to discuss is a nuclear reactor. It was constructed by the Syrians in the eastern desert of Syria along the Euphrates River on the east side. The Syrians constructed this reactor for the production of plutonium with the assistance of the North Koreans.

Our evidence goes back an extended period of time. We have had insights to what was going on since very late '90s, early 2000, 2001 that something was happening. Our issue was pinning it down and being more precise. We had increasing appreciation for what was happening in the 2003, 2006 timeframe. But we still couldn't quite pin it down, as will become apparent to you when we show you more of the physical evidence that you'll see in just a moment.

In the spring of last year, we were able to obtain some additional information that made it conclusive. And so, we engaged in this policy process of now that we have the evidence, what do we do about it? The evidence concluded a nuclear reactor, as I mentioned, constructed by the Syrians, started probably in 2001, completed in the summer of 2007. And it was nearing operational capability.

So from that point of departure, I am joined by [Senior Intelligence Official 2] who will provide details on the intelligence and what we knew and so on. We will show you a video of the evidence - so give you a chance to ask questions about that. And then [a Senior Administration Official], seated to my right will be available for responding to any policy questions you might have. So with that, I'll turn it over to [Senior Intelligence Official 2].

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: The format I've got, I'll talk a bit; I've got some slides that will show up behind me that shows some data. And then, we'll run the video. The video may overlap a bit with some of the information I give verbally or on the slides. Given some of this information will be your first exposure to it, we just thought that was the best way of doing it. And I think you're all aware that the video presentation, I think everyone will get a copy.

As [Senior Intelligence Official 1] said, information we acquired since 2001 has indicated cooperation between North Korean nuclear entities and high-level Syrian officials. And we went to the 2001 data - and I know this is true in your business - when you learn something, it doesn't just illuminate the future; it illuminates the past. And when we acquired information in 2001 and then were able to look backward on information that had been collected but not quite understood, it's clear to us that this cooperation between North Korean nuclear-related personalities and entities and high-level Syrian officials began probably as early as 1997, which - and now this is estimate now, all right, not court-of-law evidence - puts it into the Hafez al Assad regime in terms of the original decision to begin this cooperation.

Now, as early as 2003, we judged that the interactions probably were nuclear-related, again, because of who it was we were seeing in these interactions. But we had no details on the nature or location of the cooperative projects. We assessed the cooperation involved work at sites probably within Syria. But again, we didn't know exactly where. So we had this body of evidence, kind of - almost like a cloud of, boy, there's something going on here but we can't get a whole lot of precision about it.

We received indications in '05 that the Syrians and North Koreans were involved in a project in the Dayr az Zawr region of eastern Syria, but again, no specific information on the nature or the exact location of the work. But you can see, as evidence mounts, more confident there is cooperation, more confident it involves nuclear-related people. And now, we've got a fairly good sense as to where the center point of the cooperation might be.

Imagery searches of the region revealed a large unidentified building under construction in a remote area near the Euphrates River near a point that we call al Kibar. And there you see the photo. The first time we saw it was after this evidence - look out there - remember '05, '06 timeframe - take a look there. We identified the facility. And once again, sometimes the present illuminates not just the future but can illuminate the past. We looked back on historical imagery that found that the only high-quality imagery we had was of a building that looked pretty much like this. It was externally complete.

And it's hard to figure out looking at that building what its purpose is. And it certainly didn't have any observable, externally observable characteristics that would say, oh, yeah, you got yourself a nuclear reactor here - things like a massive electrical-supply system, massive ventilation, and most importantly a cooling system. We acquired information, though, in the spring of '07 that enabled us to conclude that this non-descript-looking building in al Wadi, near the Euphrates River in eastern Syria was indeed a covert nuclear reactor. The information included photographs of the interior and the exterior of the building located in Dayr az Zawr showing key features of the reactor.

Now, we carefully compared these photos, which are obviously handheld - and we've got a certain volume of them measured in the dozens - these handheld photos with the overhead photos. And I'm here to assure you that all the windows, doors, holes in the wall, and so on, matched up; i.e., these handheld photos are of that building we showed you in the overhead photo. And that's very important because the handheld photos reveal construction activity at the site in a period of time prior to the external completion of the building. Does that make sense?

Okay, good.

The reactor inside that building was clearly not configured to produce electricity. We saw no way and there are no power lines coming out of it, none of all the switching facilities that you would need, and frankly was less well-suited for research - I mean, obviously, we're holding up hypotheses here, right - less well-suited for research than some existing nuclear facilities that we and the Syrians know about and have been made public in Syria.

Now, we assess that North Korea has assisted Syria with this reactor because, one, it uses North Korean-type technology. The building resembles North Korea's Yongbyon plutonium power reactor. That's Yongbyon on the left. That's that non-descript building in the eastern Syrian Desert before the curtain walls and false roof were put on the top of it to hide its shape, which, without those curtain walls and false roofs seem to carry the telltale signatures similar to the facility at Yongbyon.

Internal photographs of the reactor vessel under construction shows that it's a gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor similar in technology and configuration to the Yongbyon reactor. And you can see that more clearly in this photo that compares the control rods and the refueling tube arrangements of both reactors. That's internal imagery of al Kibar on the left and Yongbyon on the right.

And just to hit a point I said earlier, you see the kind of crawlspace back there? If you have access to the wealth of photographs that we had, you can work from the crawlspace to the wall to the windows to the ventilation duct to the duct coming out the window, and now you're looking at the overhead photography of that window in the right place with the duct coming out of it. See what I'm trying to describe for you - that we are very confident that that on the left is inside that building that we showed you in the overhead imagery.

Our information also indicates involvement of nuclear-related North Koreans in a project somewhere in the area. And we also have evidence of cargo being transferred from North Korea, most likely to this reactor site in 2006. The reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air strike early in the morning of 6 September 2007 as it was nearing completion but before it had been operated and before it was charged with uranium fuel.

Shortly after the attack, the Syrians began - this is mid-September now - a massive effort to destroy the ruined reactor building and to remove all potentially incriminating nuclear-related equipment and structures. Much of the work was done at night or was hidden by tarps in an attempt to conceal it from our overhead observation.

The Syrian efforts to dismantle and destroy the building revealed features of the internal arrangements and structure that corroborated what we saw before and were consistent with the ground photos that we had obtained. If you understand what we're doing here, you have the building. There were real hard reinforced concrete things in there like the sarcophagus around the reactor and as you can see heat exchanges and so on. The Israeli strike make it inoperable; Syrians decide, okay, we've got to take it down. As you begin to blow it up, what remains - the hard, reinforced concrete structures, which are the guts of the reactor. And that's what you're seeing. This is after the Syrians had begun to dismantle what the Israelis destroyed and the telltale signs of it being a nuclear reactor become even more visible as they go about the destruction.

Now, we prepared a video presentation that summarizes our assessment of this Syrian covert reaction project and their efforts to cover up its existence. And so, although some of this will repeat what I've said, I think it's of use to us. Why don't we just let it roll. And I've got a word or two to follow. And then I think [the Senior Administration Official] has some things to say.

(Begin video segment.)

MODERATOR: Syria's covert nuclear reactor at al Kibar. This presentation describes a nuclear reactor Syria was building secretly, its destruction and Syria's subsequent efforts to cover up evidence of the reactor project.

The reactor was built in a remote area of eastern Syria near the Euphrates River. The nearest town is called al Kibar. Our information supports the following key points: Syria was building a gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would

have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. It was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.

The reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 before it was loaded with nuclear fuel or operated. We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted the Syrian's covert nuclear activities both before and after the reactor was destroyed. Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.

Features of the facility and its location indicate Syria attempted to maintain its secrecy. Syria moved quickly to cover up its covert nuclear activities by demolishing and burying the reactor building and by removing incriminating equipment. These actions probably were intended to forestall identification of reactor debris by international inspectors and are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear intentions.

We have detailed information showing that the al Kibar facility was a nuclear reactor. A three-dimensional computer model of the facility has been created using features and dimensions through photographs of the facility. This diagram shows key features of a gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor, the type built at al Kibar. We have photographs showing some of these important reactor components under construction including vertical tubes in the top of the reactor for control rods and for refueling, a reinforced-concrete steel-lined reactor vessel, and the water-supply systems use heat exchangers to remove heat from the carbon-dioxide coolant.

The main feature of the reactor hall, shown here in the center of the building, was the top of the reactor vessel. The pattern of holes on the floor were the ends of vertical tubes used for control rods and refueling of the reactor, a key feature of gas-cooled reactors. We judge other features of the building, such as heavily sealed reinforced-concrete rooms for heat exchangers and a spent fuel holding pool also are consistent with typical gas-cooled reactors.

This photograph shows the top of the reactor vessel in the reactor hall before concrete was poured around the vertical control rod and refueling tubes. Note the similar arrangement of vertical tube openings in the top of the Syrian reactor on the left and North Korea's Yongbyon plutonium production reactor on the right. We assess the Syrian reactor was similar in size and capacity to this North Korean reactor. Only North Korea has built such gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactors in the past 35 years.

This photograph shows the steel liner for the reinforced-concrete reactor vessel before it was installed. The network of small pipes on the outside of the liner is for cooling water to protect the concrete against the reactor's intense heat and radiation. The animated model shows how this component was positioned in the reactor vessel. This photograph and view of the computer model shows the concrete reactor vessel under construction. The photograph shows the steel liner in place within the vessel.

Satellite imagery, together with ground photographs of the facility under construction, showed features of the cooling water-supply system. A key feature was pipes running up a canyon to supply water from the Euphrates River to an underground storage tank at the reactor site. The site lacked key features of alternative facilities such as fuel storage and turbines for an oil-fired power plant or pipes from the site for irrigation or water treatment. The water would have been pumped from the tank through heat exchangers in the reactor building and the hot water would return to the river by a separate pipeline.

When the pipeline and pump house were externally completed in early August 2007, no further observable construction was necessary before the reactor could begin operations. We assess that the reactor could have been complete and that start of operations could have begun at any time although additional weeks to months of testing were likely.

We have information spanning more than a decade that indicates sustained nuclear cooperation between Syria and North Korea. We obtained this photograph, for example, showing the head of North Korea's nuclear reactor fuel manufacturing plant in Yongbyon. Seen also at the Six-Party talks in the photograph on the right, together is Syria with the head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission.

Other examples of cooperation include senior North Koreans from the Yongbyon nuclear complex made multiple visits to Syria before construction of the al Kibar reactor began in 2001. In 2002, North Korean officials were procuring equipment for an undisclosed site in Syria. North Korea, that same year, sought a gas-cooled reactor component we believe was intended for the Syrian site. A North Korean nuclear organization and Syrian officials involved in the covert nuclear program reportedly were involved in a cargo transfer from North Korea to probably al Kibar in 2006.

North Korean nuclear officials were located in the region of the reactor both early and late in 2007. Our information shows that North Korean advisors also probably assisted with damage-assessment inference after the reactor was destroyed. A high-level North Korean delegation traveled to Syria shortly after the reactor was destroyed and met with officials associated with Syria's covert nuclear program. The reactor building was irreparably damaged early in the morning of September 6th, 2007, before it became operational, causing a collapse of the central reactor hall and surrounding light walls and roof structures.

Damascus, including Syrian President Assad has specifically and forcefully denied that a nuclear facility was destroyed or that it has any undeclared nuclear facilities. Syria has gone to extraordinary lengths to conceal the existence and nature of the al Kibar reactor both during its construction and after it was destroyed. These photographs show how a light roof and thin curtain walls were added after the main reactor hall was completed. They alter the building's outline, which otherwise resembles the profile of North Korea's plutonium-production reactor at Yongbyon seen in the photograph on the left.

This photograph shows how much the building's appearance changed after the curtain walls and roof were added. The reactor building was located in a remote area of the Syrian Desert and was built in a canyon which concealed it from view. Further measures including earthen wall or mound that has been in place to block the view of the reactor from the bottom of the canyon. The concealment afforded by the reactor site's terrain and by the building modifications suggest Syrian attempts to maintain the secrecy of the facility.

Immediately after the building was destroyed, the Syrians began taking additional measures to limit potential observation of the reactor and their activities including covering the exposed reactor vessel with tarpaulins; erecting structures to prevent satellite observation of their activities; and opening holes in the building, probably to remove heavy reactor-related equipment.

Syria destroyed the remainder of the reactor building with a massive controlled demolition on October 10th, 2007, as part of an ongoing effort to remove all evidence of the reactor's existence. Demolition of the building, however, revealed key nuclear-related interior structures that remain because they were made of heavily reinforced concrete. These corresponded in configuration and location to key gas-

cooled reactor features of our photography-based computer model, including the concrete reactor vessel, the shielded heat-exchanger rooms, and the probably spent fuel storage pool area.

Syria continued to demolish the building and remove equipment and by late October covered the excavation for the reactor building and remaining debris with earth. Syria subsequently erected a light metal-framework building over the site of the destroyed reactor and began preparing a pipeline to connect the site's water-pumping system to a water-treatment plant a few kilometers away, most likely an attempt to further cover up the nuclear nature of the al Kibar site. We do not know the function of the new building, but we assess it is not nuclear related and primarily is intended to discourage excavation of any remaining reactor debris.

In conclusion, our information shows that Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. It was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research. The reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 before it was loaded with nuclear fuel or operated. We are convinced based on a variety of information that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities both before and after the reactor was destroyed. Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.

Features of the facility and its location indicate Syria attempted to maintain its secrecy. Syria moved quickly to cover up its covert nuclear activities by demolishing and varying the reactor building and by removing incriminating equipment. These actions probably were intended to forestall identification of reactor debris by international inspectors and are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear intentions.

(End video segment.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just like to make a couple of points - one of the questions you may have is why are we making this disclosure now and why not before. Our first concern was to prevent conflict and perhaps an even broader confrontation in the Middle East region. We were concerned that if knowledge of the existence and then destruction of the reactor became public and was confirmed by sources that the information would spread quickly and Syria would feel great pressure to retaliate. And, obviously, that would have been a threat to Israel and risked the possibility of a broader regional confrontation which we hoped to avoid. As time has passed, our assessment is that that risk has receded. We have an obligation to keep Congress informed with matters such as this. We had briefed 22 members of Congress in positions of leadership and chairs and ranking members of key committees last September and October. We wanted and Congress wanted us to brief more widely within Congress. We also felt that we could - and we also felt that we could use public disclosure to advance a number of policy objectives. So the calculation was the risks of greater discussion and disclosure had declined and were now acceptable and that, for a number of reasons, timing was good now to advance some policy objectives

We are at the point in the - for example, first let me take North Korea. We are at the point in the Six-Party talks where we believe going public will strengthen our negotiators as they try to get an accurate accounting of North Korea's nuclear programs. We believe and hope that it will encourage North Korea to acknowledge its proliferation activity, but also to provide a more complete and accurate disclosure of their plutonium activities and their enrichment activities as well.

With respect to Iran, the Syrian episode reminds us of the ability of states to obtain nuclear capability covertly and how destabilizing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East would be. And obviously everyone is concerned about that with respect to Iran, and we hope that disclosure will underscore that the international community needs to rededicate itself to ending Iran's nuclear enrichment activities, and needs to take further steps to ensure that Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons. And countries can start by the full implementation of the U.N. Security Council resolutions already dealing with Iranian nuclear activities, which are not being implemented as aggressively and fully as they should.

Finally, with respect to Syria, at the present time there are major initiatives underway to advance the cause of freedom and peace in the Middle East: There are talks between Israelis and Palestinians; there is progress in building a stable and democratic Iraq; there are efforts in Lebanon to consolidate its sovereignty after a long period of foreign occupation. Actions by the Syrian regime threaten progress along each of these tracks. Disclosure of Syria's nuclear activities, we hope, will help us in convincing other nations to join us in pressuring Syria to change its policies.

One of the things that I'm sure also people are wondering is whether there was any discussion between us and the Israelis about policy options and how to respond to these facts. We did discuss policy options with Israel. Israel considered a Syrian nuclear capability to be an existential threat to the state of Israel. After these discussions, at the end of the day Israel made its own decision to take action. It did so without any green light from us - so-called 'green light' from us; none was asked for, none was given.

We understand the Israeli action. We believe this clandestine reactor was a threat to regional peace and security, and we have stated before that we cannot allow the world's most dangerous regimes to acquire the world's most dangerous weapons.

Thank you.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Okay, are you going to moderate for us? Go ahead.

Q: I - just some detail on the North Korean involvement - and you showed that one photograph in the video presentation. The question is where was that taken and when was it taken? And are there any other photographic - other photos or video of North Koreans actually at the site of the reactor?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: No. First of all, the video you've seen is the video we have, okay? The photo is undated and we are certain that the photo was taken in Syria. You saw the license plates on the vehicle behind the two individuals were Syrian license plates.

Was there a third piece here?

Q: Yeah. Is there any other - are there any other - I mean, so there is no other photographic evidence or video that shows North Koreans at the facility?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: There are some - there's none more compelling than what we showed you.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: There are also some things that you're going to ask questions about - sources - and so we're not going to be able to answer those. There's a rich level of information here that we - we can't discuss the sources or methods, and that's what we're going to try to work around to let you see what we can show you, which we have showed you, and we just won't comment on specificity about we knew this point or that point or when.

Q: I just have a follow-up. The information I had earlier today is that at least one of the images - it may have been this particular image - was North Korean nuclear scientist Chon Chibu, who was linked directly to Yongbyon.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: That's him.

Q: That's him? And then my other question is a very basic question. This video presentation I would assume was put together by the CIA or -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: [Senior Intelligence Official 1] asked us, when this all started breaking about a year ago, really picked up pace, to marshal the resources of the entire community. So what you've seen here was constructed here, that's right.

Q: And this was shown on the Hill today.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Yes.

Q: [Senior Intelligence Official 2], it has been awhile - Syria kind of committed to trying to counterbalance the Israeli nuclear program several years ago and started working on that, and Syria has been a crossroad for all types of unsavory activity for many years, so are you fairly certain that this is the only type of activity going on there - was the only type of activity going on there?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: In terms of the nuclear program? Clearly, it's something we'll continue to keep a full-court press on, all right? Let me say that. But with the destruction of this facility, this is - I'll use the word "achievement;" I don't have time to think of a better one - in terms of ending that kind of behavior. There is cooperation that continues, however, between North Korea and the Syrians with regard to the Syrian missile program, and we see that same kind of cooperation between North Korea and Iran.

Q: A quick follow-on: Would the U.S. have considered any kind of activity had the Israelis not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We obviously were looking very closely at options, and we had looked at some approaches that involved a mix of diplomacy and the threat of military force with the goal of trying to ensure that the reactor was either dismantled or permanently disabled, and therefore never became operational.

We looked at those options. There were, as I mentioned to you, conversations with the Israelis. Israel felt that this reactor posed such an existential threat that a different approach was required. And as a sovereign country, Israel had to make its own evaluation of the threat and the immediacy of the threat, and what actions it should take. And it did so.

Q: You said in your briefing that the only apparent purpose of this reactor was to use plutonium not for power but apparently for weapons purposes.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: It lacked the -

Q: Can you give us an assessment and tell us what kind of information you might have about the existence - if it does exist and if you have the information - of a Syrian nuclear weapons design program? And secondly, can you tell us whether these pictures from inside the building are at different stages or are they all at one particular point in time?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: The pictures inside of the building are over a period of time, okay? And I really don't have anything more to add with regard to a Syrian weapons program.

Q: Two questions along those same lines. While there is similarity with the Yongbyon plant, there is no reprocessor, which of course is right next to the Yongbyon plant - at least that you've showed us today.

It's unclear from your presentation how they would have obtained the fuel which have been the process, I would guess, if you - you would have seen. And you note the similarity with the North Korean reactor and said no reactor like that had been made in some time, but this is a Calder Hall reactor whose design has been sort of out there for a long while, so could they have obtained the technology as opposed to needing help from individuals?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: The body of evidence that we have over a period that spans a decade gives us very high confidence that, A, this is a nuclear reactor; B, that there was long-term, detailed cooperation between the North Koreans and the Syrians in terms of nuclear cooperation; and if anything, the actions since the strike that we have been able to detect reinforce our belief that North Koreans were actually involved - not just in kind of a theoretical or a broad-based nuclear cooperative effort with the Syrians, but were cooperating at this site.

Q: And the reprocessor and the fuel?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: There is no reprocessing facility in the region of al Kibar.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: I might add something that would helpful here. These are lessons learned that are - that came out of previous experience about how to put more rigor into our process. So there's a difference between evidence and an assessment. And when we examined this information, and what [Senior Intelligence Official 2] alluded to, let me just reinforce: very sensitive; everybody wants to know; everybody wants to have a part of the decision. So the decision was taken by the President to restrict access significantly. So we made this CIA-centric to restrict those who were aware and it worked.

The entire community participated. The entire community contributed. And you know who is in the community. You know we take pictures; you know we listen, and so on. So I'll just leave it at that. We had very rich, rich information. So when we worked through the data, in large part what you saw here, we concluded with high confidence it is a nuclear reactor of the design that was described for plutonium. We had, at that time, medium confidence that the North Koreans were and are participating.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: At the reactor, not in generalized nuclear cooperation.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: To go with the question you're asking - weapons - we said, we believe it. There's no other reason for it. But our confidence level that it's weapons is low at this point. We believe it, but it's low based on the physical evidence.

Q: Even at the time of the destruction of the reactor?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Even at the time. So now, what that asks is, in a nuclear program, it's complex. There are a series of steps and stages. So was that something evidence that would be uncovered at a point in time? And I'll just leave it right there as to where it is at the moment, other than to say we have reasonable confidence that we have - that the Israelis have destroyed a capability. And we are monitoring everything to see if there's anything subsequent to that.

Q: Do we have any reason to believe that the Syrians now have or are building a reprocessing capability?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Just let me leave it with what I described.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: And as you say, this makes no sense without that.

Q: This does make no sense without that. And that's my hardest part with the evidence that you've shown. And I think it's interesting that you have a low-confidence level that they -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: But be very specific about what I'm saying is - if you are going to make a clinical judgment that the evidence supports all the way through, you have to have the clinical evidence in hand.

Q: Did you tell the Israelis you have low confidence it was for weapons?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: No, you need to understand. I'm sorry to dwell on the point. This is very, very important.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: This is very important.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We told our President four things: This is a reactor; the North Koreans and the Syrians are cooperating on nuclear activities; the North Koreans and Syrians are cooperating on the construction of this reactor; and this reactor - its purpose - is to create fuel for a nuclear weapons program. Those are the things we concluded.

Now, when you look at the body of evidence of those four sentences and begin to sort out how much of that is based on an overwhelming body of evidence as opposed to a more limited body of evidence and therefore more reliant on assessment, the fact that it was a nuclear reactor - absolutely high confidence; the fact of Syrian-Korean nuclear cooperation spanning a decade at an intense level, high confidence. At the time of the strike, fact of North Korean-Syrian cooperation in the building of that reactor, medium confidence that then got higher because of events, some of which we have alluded to in the briefing, okay. The fact that that material was going to be used for a weapons program - we believe that to be true, but because we did not have, as [Senior Intelligence Official 1] points out, additional clinical evidence of other activities, we could only give it a low confidence level. But you need to - and I think you understand what I'm trying to say. That's not more or less sure; it's just that it's a way of communicating that for which you have a large body of evidence and that for which you may not.

Q: Where is that confidence level now?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: In terms of -

Q: On the last one - you said a low confidence level that this was for weapons or has that changed in the aftermath of -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: No. No, that has not changed. However - however - actually, David, we haven't addressed it, but I would suggest to you that the Syrian behavior after the strike - keeping it secret, destroying it, not allowing the IAEA - if anything, it certainly doesn't weaken that there were nefarious purposes for the reactor.

Q: Three questions. Did the United States military aid in any way this Israeli strike through reconnaissance or through targeting help? Did the U.S. obtain these photos or were they from another country's intelligence agency? And what is the intention of North Korea's cooperation here? Is it cash-motivated? Are they looking to get plutonium themselves for their own reprocessing?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: What was one?

Q: One was did the U.S. military aid in any way the ISR with targeting or some other -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Let me talk a little bit obliquely here, okay. There is a rich intelligence exchange with a body of partners around the world that included an exchange on this information here. There is difference between a rich exchange of intelligence and providing information that would actually enable the targeting and strike of this kind of target.

Q: So you shared information. You didn't give them targeting information.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We were in A, not B on this. The second one?

Q: And the second one is did the U.S. intelligence agencies obtain these photos or did they come through another nation's intelligence?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: I'm only free to say that we acquired the photos, and we have - and I tried to communicate to you under whatever guise we acquired them the confidence level we have in them.

Q: And North Korean intentions? Cash?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Cash.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: It's cash.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Cash.

Q: So they weren't going to be taking this -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We don't -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: We examined -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We examined that. We examined that hypothesis. This just wasn't -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Probably not.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: - you know, a reactor in Syria for Syria, that it may be outsourcing. And our judgment based on the overwhelming body of evidence is it was A, not B. That it was in Syria for Syria.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: I'm sorry. Yeah, you're right. [The Senior Administration Official] is correcting me. Option A was in Syria for North Korea; option B was in Syria for Syria. We think it was in Syria for Syria, although we examined both options and held it up to the light with the available evidence.

Q: How much money is it in for North Korea?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Not at liberty to say.

Q: I believe a Calder Hall reactor is fueled with naturally occurring uranium. Is there such deposits in Syria? Have you looked to see whether or not the Syrians were actually mining their own uranium, and if so, again, have you located that site? And if not, where were they going to get the uranium from?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: [Senior Intelligence Official 3], is there anything that you know that we can share?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 3: No, sir.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Okay.

Q: Can I just ask to be clear what you mean - when you're talking about low confidence present how that compares to, in the talking points here that you lay out, the nearing operational capability? Can you just walk me through what exactly that means?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: That's right. Sure.

Q: And was that weeks and possibly months, as some officials have suggested?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: It is weeks and possibly months, and we were at high confidence that - well, to put it another way, anything we could see about this reactor we had already seen in terms of getting it ready to throw the switch. And once they breached the wall down there in the Euphrates and filled the cooling pond and gave those pumps access to the water, as far as things we could see externally, this thing was good to go, and therefore we had to assume they could throw the switch at any time, although we know they did not know throw the switch prior to the strike. And I'm sorry, the other question?

Q: So I'm trying understand, then, okay, so they were nearing operational capability but then can you compare what that means -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Okay, I got it.

Q: - the low confidence. I want to be clear on that.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Yeah. Again, this is a bit arcane, and I'm trying to be very precise with our language here, okay. We were certain, okay, this was a reactor and that it was going to produce plutonium. We saw no other logical use for that plutonium based upon - no other use for the reactor other than creating plutonium. And then our judgment was that the Syrians would only have done this - with the great expense and perhaps political risk involved - for a weapons program, although we had not yet detected the detailed and constituent elements of such a weapons program. That is - and therefore, we said, we believe, Mr. President, that is what this is for.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: It may be -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: But the body of evidence on which we're basing that is more limited than some of the other things we're telling you.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: It may be useful, too, to separate it in pieces. Go to the question that was asked about natural uranium. You can take natural uranium, get access to it, build a plant like this, and cause a reactor to operate, which would produce plutonium. So natural uranium in one place, a reactor to produce plutonium, and now you have to reprocess it to turn it into the kinds of material that would be used for weapon - so what we're describing to you with regard to our confidence level, plus with the regard to the reactor in the middle piece.

Q: And then what have the North Koreans said to you? Have they denied any of this? Have they admitted any of this? And for you [Senior Administration Official], what then do you do moving forward with the Six-Party talks. You suggested this will strengthen your hand, your negotiators. But what are the North Koreans telling you privately about all of this? Are they going to come forward and admit anything? And what do you think - what effect will it have on the Six-Party talks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We'll have to see. We would of course like it if they would publicly admit this program and the truth of what has been laid out here. We hope as a minimum that they will not try to deny it. We hope that the fact that we have had such detailed understanding of this activity, which they tried so - that this - of this activity, which obviously they and Syria very much tried to hide, will convince them that there is no point in trying to cover up not only proliferation activity but enrichment activity and plutonium activity, and it will therefore incentivize them to make the kind of full accounting of their various activities and programs that they have undertaken to do. We will obviously have to see.

One of the reasons we think now is a good time to do this is because of those ongoing conversations - those conversations on their declaration, as you know, are ongoing. And we will hope this will give North Korea an incentive to do a full accounting and will strengthen our hands of our negotiators in insisting on it.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Can I just make a comment on Iran because I know that's eventually - if we stayed long enough, you're eventually going to get there. And I think it's useful to talk about nuclear weapons and Iran in this context because this all is potentially interrelated.

There are a couple of ways to get to nuclear weapons. One, we're describing how North Korea did it. The path that Iran is choosing to pursue is different. You enrich natural uranium to some level. If you're going to enrich it to the point that you run a nuclear power plant, you're about at the 3.8, 3.9 level. That is what they claim they are doing.

The difference between fissile material - this nuclear grade or weapons grade versus running a plant is you just keep spinning it until it gets to be 90 percent highly enriched uranium. When we did our NIE, what we announced in our unclassified key judgments, that the Iranians had a secret program, secret program to produce highly enriched uranium, and they had a program designed to - working on the design of a nuclear device; meaning, think of it as an implosion device that would result in a nuclear warhead.

When we published our NIE, we had not planned to make unclassified key judgments available to the public; therefore we wrote our estimate for a very sophisticated audience believing or understanding that they understood that in the program, it's basically three large pieces: There is pursuit of fissile material; there is a delivery system - ballistic missiles or some other; and then there is weapons design. The only thing that the Iranians halted that we had awareness of was design of the warhead. They continue with ballistic missiles and they continue with fissile material pursuit. It was a secret program that they halted. They have never admitted that. So one of our concerns is, is there a connection with North Korea? If there is, we don't know it. But is there something going on there that resembles this program that we we're talking about in Syrian in Iran.

That is a very large concern of ours, a major problem that we're attempting to address. But our unfortunate choice of words in our NIE caused you all in the press to misrepresent what we were trying to explain. Three parts of the program; they halted one narrow piece of it, which was a secret program - weapons-head design. They continue with fissile material; they continue with ballistic missile systems for delivery. So we don't know where it is at the moment.

Q: No Iran-North Korea connection?

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: None.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: On nuclear issues.

Q: On nuclear issues.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: Robust connection on -

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: Other places, yes.

SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: - missile issues.

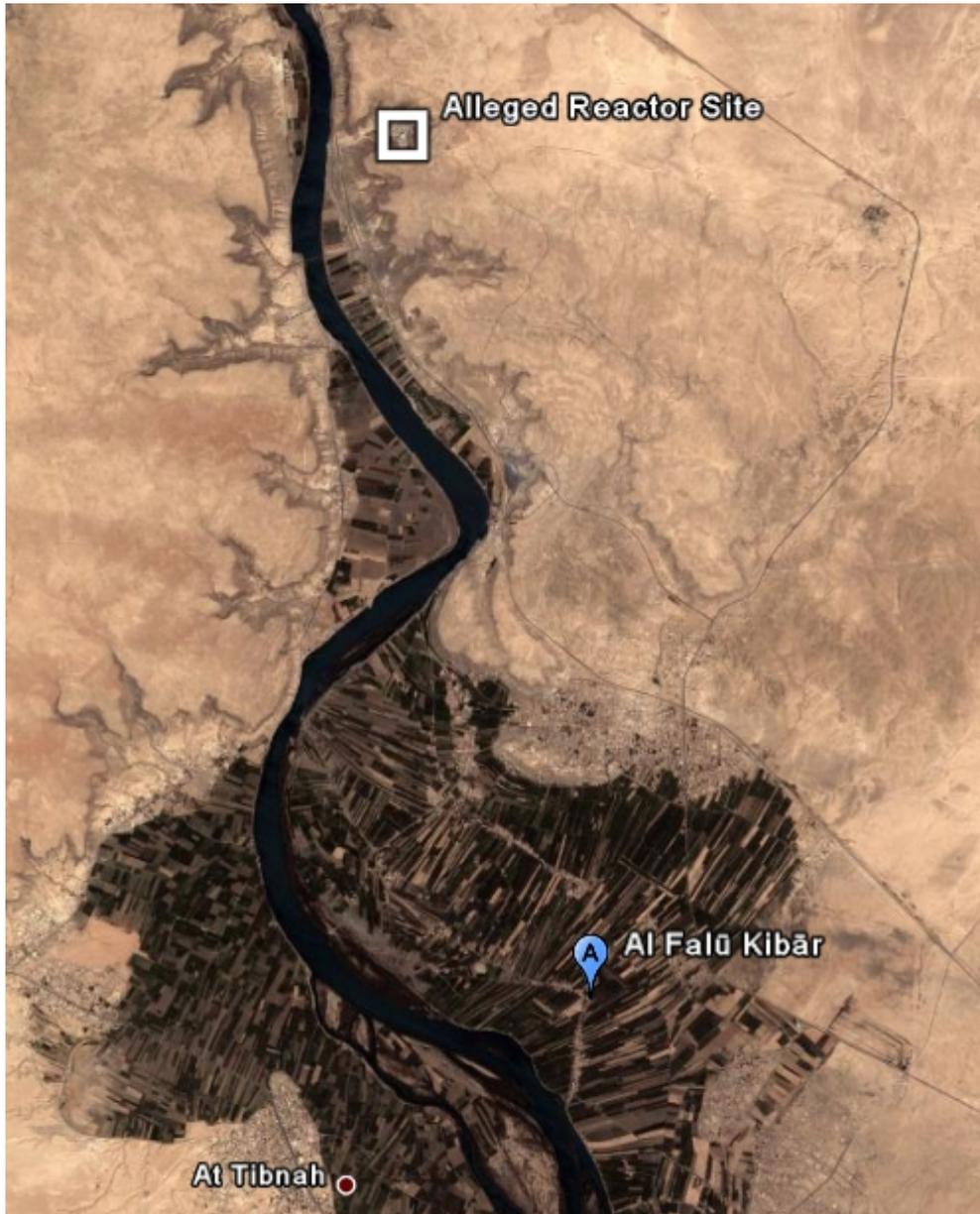
Q: Just to follow up on the Six-Party talks. The assumption now or what is being said is that the negotiators are really focusing on plutonium equation and the ATU, and the Syrian assistance is kind of being pushed down the road a little bit. Does this briefing and this information that is coming out now shift that equation? Is that no longer what the White House wants?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, we have said that North Korea needs to do a full accounting of its plutonium activities, its enrichment activities and its proliferation activities. And that's

what we are pursuing now. In addition, one of the things that this has done - and I think we'll encourage - is to supplement, in some sense, the Six-Party framework by building in a capacity to verify the disclosures that North Korea is hopefully going to make so that if, down the road, there is evidence that

suggests that disclosures are inaccurate or not full and complete that there will be a verification mechanism available in the framework of the Six-Party talks to pursue that issue. So we think we have constructed a framework in the Six-Party talks for dealing with this issue. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody, for coming.



[Sourcebook Note: The facility name used in the 24 April intelligence briefing, “al Kibar”, apparently derives from Al Falu Kibar, a small village some nine kilometers south. It is unclear that “al Kibar” is the Syrian designation of the facility, as it is common practice in the US intelligence community to assign facility names on the basis of nearby towns (e.g., “Tyuratam”).]



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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CIA Director Hayden Announces Findings on Covert Syrian Reactor

Statement to Employees by Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, General Mike Hayden Announcing Findings on Covert Syrian Reactor

April 24, 2008

At our town hall meeting in January, I praised the outstanding work of our officers in tackling a very sensitive counterproliferation issue, one that I could not identify at the time because it was highly compartmented. As of today, some aspects have been declassified and will be publicly released this afternoon, so I can share with you the highlights of this extraordinary story.

Last spring, we acquired information confirming that a building in eastern Syria was a covert nuclear reactor using North Korean technology. We had suspected the two nations were cooperating on nuclear technology as early as 2001, and although imagery had revealed the existence of the building, it lacked features associated with a nuclear installation. The new information included photographs of the interior and exterior that offered our first unambiguous indication that the building was a nuclear reactor. Moreover, the reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons, was not configured to produce electricity, and was ill-suited for research.

On the morning of 6 September 2007, the reactor was destroyed as it was nearing completion, but before it had been operated or charged with uranium fuel. Syrian efforts to dismantle the ruined building and remove every trace of the incriminating equipment—largely conducted at night or under tarpaulins for concealment—further underscored Damascus's less than benign intent for the facility. A video presentation summarizes our analysis of the Syrian reactor project and North Korean involvement in greater detail.

Our team effort on the Al Kibar reactor is a case study in rigorous analytic tradecraft, skillful human and technical collection, and close collaboration with our Community colleagues and liaison partners. Our officers put in long hours on this issue for many months, and their hard work paid off by directly advancing our nation's security and that of our allies. To everyone who contributed to this success, my congratulations on a job well done.

US envoy Hill says NKorea, Syria not cooperating now

Apr 24, 2008

TOKYO (AFP) — US chief nuclear negotiator Christopher Hill said North Korea and Syria were no longer cooperating in nuclear work despite the US administration's allegations of help on a secret reactor.

President George W. Bush's administration went public Thursday with video they said showed that a nuclear reactor in Syria built with North Korea for military purposes was nearing completion when Israel destroyed it in September.

The US accusations came a day after North Korea sounded upbeat after a long stalemate in implementing a six-nation deal negotiated by Hill on ending the communist state's nuclear drive.

Hill, speaking Thursday [2008-04-24] in New Haven, Connecticut, suggested that such North Korean activities with Syria were in the past.

"It is the judgement of the United States that there is not an ongoing cooperation with Syria in this area," Hill told reporters in footage broadcast Friday on Japanese television.

"We will deal with this issue as we do with many other issues in the six parties," Hill said.

US lawmakers after being briefed on the administration's allegations said that developments could wreck the six-nation deal, hailed last year as a breakthrough by the Bush administration.

US media have suggested the timing of the Syria allegations could be an effort by conservatives within the Bush administration unhappy with Hill to bring down the deal which they see as too weak.

The six-party deal reached last year would grant North Korea energy aid and major diplomatic and security benefits in return for full denuclearisation.

But the talks have been stalled over the requirement that the North declare all its nuclear activities by the end of 2007. The North said it delivered the documentation last November but the US said it was incomplete.

Hill, in talks over the deal with his North Korean counterpart earlier this month in Singapore, reportedly offered to allow Pyongyang to keep private its reply to certain US allegations, including over cooperation with Syria, while publicly responding on other areas.

The six-party talks group the two Koreas, the US, Russia, Japan and China.

Japan has been the most critical member of the six-nation talks and has refused any funding due to a feud over North Korea's past kidnappings of Japanese civilians.

Japan has strongly opposed US offers to take North Korea off a list of state sponsors of terrorism in exchange for progress in the six-nation deal.

Hill said there was no connection between the delisting issue and the allegations of cooperation with Syria.

"The criteria for the delisting is quite a separate matter," Hill said.

US memo: Israel bombed Syrian reactor

Cable leaked to WikiLeaks website, but yet to be published, is first and detailed confirmation of attack on Syrian nuclear facility. Document, revealed by Yedioth Ahronoth, was sent by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to US representatives worldwide

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A confidential cable sent on **April 25, 2008** by then-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to State Department representatives worldwide states that "On September 6, 2007, Israel destroyed a nuclear reactor Syria was clandestinely constructing, we judge with North Korean assistance.."

This cable is included in documents leaked to the WikiLeaks website and revealed Friday by Yedioth Ahronoth's Ronen Bergman before its official publication on the website.

The document is in fact a first official and detailed confirmation of the attack, starting with the intelligence collected before the strike, the cooperation between Israel and the United States, the troubling and harsh conclusions shared by both countries, the Israeli government's decision to bomb Syria and the fear that President Bashar Assad would launch a war in response.

"We have delayed sharing this information with you, because our first concern was to prevent conflict," Rice explained.

The first part of the memo details unprecedented information. "I want to inform you that the purpose of that Israeli mission was to destroy a clandestine nuclear reactor that Syria was constructing in its eastern desert near a place we call al-Kibar," the secretary of state wrote.

"The Israeli mission was successful - the reactor was damaged beyond repair. Syria has completed efforts to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there, constructing a new building on the old site.

"We believe - based on strong evidence - that North Korea assisted Syria with the reactor... We have now decided that the time has come to share more information on this issue," Rice wrote.

'Syria had something to hide'

Rice elaborates on the intelligence information that preceded the attack. "Our intelligence experts are confident that the facility the Israelis targeted was in fact a nuclear reactor of the same type North Korea built indigenously at its Yongbyon nuclear facility," she wrote.

"The US intelligence community conducted an intensive, months-long effort to confirm and corroborate the information Israel provided us on the reactor and to gather more details from our own sources and methods"

The secretary of state added that the intelligence information was solid. "We have good reason to believe this reactor was not intended for peaceful purposes," she wrote. "First, we assess this reactor was configured to produce plutonium: it was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.

"Second, Second, Syria went to great pains to keep this secret by taking very careful steps to conceal the true nature of the site. Third, by maintaining secrecy and not declaring the site to the IAEA and providing design information, as Syria's NPT-mandated IAEA safeguards agreement requires, Syria undermined the very purpose of IAEA safeguards - to provide the international community with the necessary assurance/verification that the reactor was part of a peaceful program"

Rice concluded by saying that "Syria's concealment and lies about what happened for months now after the Israeli air strike is compelling proof that it has something to hide. In fact, after the attack on the site, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there. If there were nothing to hide, Syria presumably would have invited IAEA inspectors, other experts, and the news media to the site to prove that."

Bush Administration Releases Images to Bolster Its Claims About Syrian Reactor

By DAVID E. SANGER

April 25, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration released detailed photographic images on Thursday to support its assertion that the building in Syria that Israel destroyed in an airstrike last year was a nuclear reactor constructed with years of help from North Korea.

The administration said it withheld the pictures for seven months out of fear that Syria could retaliate against Israel and start a broader war in the Middle East.

The photographs taken inside the reactor before it was destroyed in an air raid on Sept. 6 clearly show the rods that control the heat in a nuclear reactor, one of many close engineering similarities to a reactor halfway around the world where North Korea produced the fuel for its nuclear arsenal.

While the photographs were not dated, some taken on the ground seemed to go back to before 2002.

But after a full day of briefing members of Congress, two senior intelligence officials acknowledged that the evidence had left them with no more than “low confidence” that Syria was preparing to build a nuclear weapon. They said that there was no sign that Syria had built an operation to convert the spent fuel from the plant into weapons-grade plutonium, but that they had told President Bush last year that they could think of no other explanation for the reactor.

Among the photographs shown to members of Congress and reporters on Thursday was one of the manager of North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear plant with the director of Syria’s nuclear agency. A car in the background has Syrian license plates.

When asked about North Korea’s motivation for the project, one of the senior intelligence officials said simply, “Cash.” He refused to say how much.

The revelation of the plant’s existence is not new; The New York Times reported in mid-October that Israel had brought the United States evidence that the Syrian building was a partly constructed reactor. But no more than a handful of lawmakers had ever been briefed on the attack.

A senior administration official, briefing reporters with the help of the two senior intelligence officials, said for the first time that the White House had extensive discussions with Israel before the airstrike in September. The official said the White House had raised the possibility of confronting Syria with a demand that it dismantle the reactor or face the possibility of an attack.

But that idea apparently never gained traction with the Israelis or some in the administration, and in the end, the official said, Israel cited satellite evidence to declare that the Syrian reactor constituted “an existential threat” to Israel because it might soon be ready for operation. The senior administration official, who was a central player in Mr. Bush’s deliberations, added that Israel’s attack proceeded “without a green light from us.”

“None was asked for, none was given,” the official added.

While one of the senior intelligence officials said that the United States agreed that Syria was “good to go” in turning on the reactor, it would have been years before it could have produced weapons fuel.

It is unclear how the Syrians planned to get the uranium they needed. Once they got it, the reactor would have had to run for roughly 18 months before the fuel was “cooked.” And then to turn it into weapons-grade plutonium, it would require reprocessing, presumably outside the country unless Syria found a way to build its own plant.

The announcement on Thursday closes one chapter of a secretive intelligence and military operation and opens several others that will play out over the remainder of the Bush presidency.

The crucial question now is how the North Koreans will react. Some officials said that they hoped the announcement would embarrass the North into admitting to nuclear proliferation activities, while others said it could prompt the North to walk away from the negotiating table — and collapse the deal Mr. Bush was hoping to reach by the end of his presidency. In return for North Korea’s declaration of all its nuclear activities, the United States would lift sanctions and begin to negotiate the North Koreans’ reward for turning over their fuel and weapons.

The announcement also raises the possibility of new tensions with Syria, as the White House on Thursday accused the Syrian government of a “cover-up” consistent with a government that “supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon” and allows militants to enter Iraq.

Last year, Mr. Bush ordered that knowledge of the Syrian project be limited to a few crucial officials, and he put the C.I.A. in charge of marshaling the assets of other intelligence agencies.

Still, the Americans were somewhat blindsided. By their own account, they suspected that North Korea and Syria were at work together in Syria, but only identified the plant at Al Kibar, named for the nearest town, after they received photos of the interior of the plant last spring from Israel, American and Israeli officials said last year.

Only selected pictures were released by the intelligence agencies on Thursday, including a video that combined still photos and drawings, and had a voice-over that gave the presentation the feel of a cold-war-era newsreel about the Korean War. In fact, it was intended in part, officials said, to try to draw that war — in which the United States and North Korea never signed a peace treaty — to a close.

But inside the administration, the battle over whether to try to strike a deal with North Korea or keep it under sanctions in hopes of setting off the collapse of its government continues into the last months of Mr. Bush’s term. Representative Peter Hoekstra, a Republican from Michigan, expressed annoyance on Thursday that the administration waited seven months to brief Congress.

“I think many people believe that we were used today by the administration,” he said.

At the C.I.A., Gen. Michael V. Hayden, the agency’s director, told employees on Thursday that they should “take heart because our team effort on the Al Kibar reactor is a case study in rigorous analytic tradecraft, skillful human and technical collection, and close collaboration.”

But even this victory, some experts note, raises questions about the agency’s focus. The reactor was built within 100 miles of the Iraqi border yet never identified even though the administration was searching for any form of such arms programs in Iraq.

Moreover, even some senior officials of the administration acknowledge that they are likely to leave Mr. Bush's successor with a North Korea with roughly 10 nuclear weapons or fuel for weapons, up from the one or two weapons it had when Mr. Bush took office in 2001.

"I'd say the score is Kim Jong-il eight, and Bush zero," said Graham Allison, a Harvard professor and author of "Nuclear Terrorism," who was in Washington on Thursday to testify about Iran's nuclear program. "And if you can build a reactor in Syria without being detected for eight years, how hard can it be to sell a little plutonium to Osama bin Laden?"

White House revises N. Korea nuke deal

By Nicholas Kralev

April 25, 2008

The Bush administration is renegotiating a tentative deal with North Korea on a declaration of its nuclear activities to include better verification provisions, after the agreement upset some on Capitol Hill and even in the administration, officials said yesterday.

After insisting for months that Pyongyang disclose any nuclear exports, as well as a secret uranium-enrichment program from the 1990s, the administration agreed two weeks ago to write what it knows about those activities and have the North "acknowledge" the U.S. concerns.

"That was a major change, and many people were caught by surprise," one congressional official said.

In an attempt to address concerns about the shift on the declaration, the administration now emphasizes the importance of verification of the North's secret activities.

Congressional support for any deal with Pyongyang is crucial because it is likely to require legislative approval, and U.S. taxpayers' money will be needed to dismantle the North's nuclear programs.

In a letter to President Bush on Wednesday, 14 Republican senators expressed "concern about the present course of action on North Korea's nuclear program being pursued" by the administration.

Although they did not mention the April 7 Singapore talks between chief U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Kye-gwan, the senators said that the current state of negotiations sends the wrong message to Iran and other "rogue regimes."

The administration told Congress in intelligence briefings yesterday that a nuclear facility in Syria flattened by an Israeli air strike in September was built with Pyongyang's help.

"From all appearances, Kim Jong-il believes that the United States will take whatever deal we can get, allowing him to dictate the time, place, manner and content of the fulfillment of his promises," the senators said.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Times, was signed by Sens. John Ensign of Nevada and Jon Kyl of Arizona, among others.

Because Congress has not yet been briefed on the Singapore agreement, officials declined to discuss it publicly. But in their private remarks, some said that, even though it seems peculiar, it is worth considering.

"What's important is to achieve removal of North Korea's plutonium program," a congressional source said. "That might require some sacrifices."

The Bush administration says that, even though Washington will write the document, it is seeking full access to any sites that might be linked to those activities, so it can verify the North Korean claim that they are not ongoing.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took pains last week in a briefing to reporters to stress that, if the United States discovered that it had been "misled" by the North, any benefits it has received in the meantime would be taken away.

Miss Rice suggested that one of those benefits — removal from the U.S. blacklist of state-sponsors of terrorism — would not have to wait until all verification is completed.

She sent the director of the State Department's Korea desk, Sung Kim, to Pyongyang this week to fine-tune the Singapore agreement and make sure that the final result of the declaration does not suffer from the fact that the United States will write the part on proliferation and uranium-enrichment.

North Korea has promised to produce the main part of the declaration dealing with its plutonium program. The main facility of that program at Yongbyon has been almost disabled by U.S. experts.

In the next phase of the North's denuclearization, Yongbyon must be dismantled, again with a large U.S. role in the process. The administration, however, is barred from using taxpayers' money by a 1994 law known as the Glenn amendment, sponsored by then-Sen. John Glenn.

"Congress should swiftly enact legislation allowing the president to waive the Glenn amendment restrictions that will otherwise prevent the United States from carrying out future nuclear dismantlement operations in North Korea or verifying North Korean compliance," Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said yesterday.

UN Censures Us and Israel Over Syria Nuclear Row

Guardian News & Media 2008

Published: 4/25/2008

[EXCERPTS]

The UN's nuclear chief today criticized the US for the delay in publishing what Washington claims is proof that a Syrian nuclear reactor was built with help from North Korea.

[deletia]

Today, Syria accused the US of complicity in the Israeli bombing raid which destroyed the site. "The US administration was apparently party to the execution of the September raid by Israeli warplanes on eastern Syria," a statement said.

The White House said Israel had consulted the Pentagon before launching the strike, but that it did not give a "green light" to the air raid.

[deletia]

The White House added that the regime moved quickly to bury evidence of *[the reactor's]* existence, covering over the wreckage and constructing a new building on the site. US officials said the Bush administration was putting the information out in order to clear the decks before doing a deal with North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program.

[deletia]

One official said the Syrian plant was within weeks or months of being operational. "This thing was good to go," he said. Congress was told that the reactor was designed to produce a small amount of plutonium, which can be used to build a nuclear bomb.

[deletia]

A US official who had seen the video said: "We cannot move forward [on a deal with North Korea] unless you acknowledge we are doing this with our eyes wide open. And we are going ahead with our eyes wide open."

The Syrian government yesterday denied it had been building a nuclear reactor with North Korean help. Syria's ambassador to Britain, Sami al-Khiyami, described the video as ridiculous: "Unfortunately the scenario of taking and retaking pictures looks like what happened before the Iraq war, when the US administration was trying to convince the world that Iraq had nuclear weapons."

[deletia]



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
April 25, 2008

12:39 p.m. EDT

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Can you talk about the Syria-North Korea issue and the briefing that took place yesterday?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, no, not at all. (Laughter.) Sorry, not going to do it.

QUESTION: Part of the briefing was that there was a senior North Korean official that was involved in the six-party talks that was in Syria.

MR. MCCORMACK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Do you have any more information about when this picture was taken? Because it looks to me as if the person that was in Syria, perhaps, was a lot younger and maybe wasn't the senior official that's involved in the six-party talks when he was actually in Syria, so --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, I don't, Elise, sorry. In terms of the intelligence materials and the intelligence assessments, I'm going to have to point you to my colleagues in the intelligence community. I know that they have distributed some materials to the media yesterday and there were some background briefings. I'm just going to have to refer you either to those materials or to them for any additional follow-up questions you might have.

QUESTION: Okay. It just seems that, like, some of the -- and I'm not even talking about the kind of reactor itself and the photos --

MR. MCCORMACK: No, no. I know the one you're talking about.

QUESTION: It does seem that you're making a link between cooperation with Syria and North Korea, some of it which, you know, started at a level -- like, some of the evidence just seems to be kind of a little bit old. And I was wondering if -- if there's a concern on the part of the Administration that by bringing all this evidence out into the open, that you're opening yourselves up to the same type of criticism about the strength of the evidence that you faced after the presentation of Secretary Powell to the UN, that, like, people are going to start, you know, picking it apart and, you know, obviously, this

Administration has, you know, a reputation for, you know, not the strongest intelligence in the world. So if you -- (laughter) -- I'm being diplomatic.

MR. MCCORMACK: Is that the intelligence community or our IQs?

QUESTION: Well, maybe the IQs of the intelligence community.

MR. MCCORMACK: I see.

QUESTION: But if you could talk to your confidence that the international community may have about this.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Look, Elise, I can only point to the assessment of the intelligence community about this information. You know, they can -- they have presented a very compelling case in terms of the reactor and who was responsible for building it. You can look at the pictures and the similarities between Yongbyon and the facility on the ground in Syria. They've also detailed a number of other links. And they're quite confident in their analysis based on the materials that they have. I don't think they would have agreed to provide these materials and provide this assessment in public, never mind providing it also to friends and allies and others around the world, if they weren't confident in their assessment.

QUESTION: But just a quick follow-up. But you do understand that the intelligence community around the world and, you know, governments and perhaps the IAEA might take your intelligence with a grain of salt this time.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, look, in terms of the IAEA, we briefed them yesterday. There was a team of officials from Washington who traveled to Vienna to brief officials below the level of Secretary General ElBaradei regarding the intelligence, what the -- some of the raw materials as well as their analysis of the situation. We believe that it is a case that merits investigation and follow-up by the IAEA. Ultimately that will be their decision whether or not they do follow up with Syria and try to conduct an investigation to determine more facts on the ground. But, you know, beyond that, you know, the intelligence community is really -- they can speak to their case. They can speak to their confidence in the levels -- their confidence levels in their analysis, based on the materials that they have. And from what I have seen and what I have read, what I have been briefed on, they are confident of their assessment.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up briefly?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah.

QUESTION: Sean, we have asked many times that -- can you trust North Korea and Iran as far as their nuclear program is concerned, that answer was yes, and we are working on that. Now, can you have some links as far as this outcome is concerned from A.Q. Khan and China, as far as helping North Korea and then going to -- spreading other countries?

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't have any information in that regard, Goyal. And I -- just to correct what you stated at the top there, the whole reason why you have a verification regime is to possibly get to the

state at which there is mutual trust among the parties in the six-party talks. That is something that is earned. It is something that is developed over time. Right now, we're working on the verification part.

QUESTION: Do you still believe and trust in six-party talks?

MR. MCCORMACK: We believe in the six-party talks, Goyal, yeah. We believe in the mechanism. We believe in the process. And as I've said before, we believe that it can lead to the goal that everybody shares, and that is a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and, ultimately, a better situation for the Korean people. But again, it's a process that is based on performance in this mechanism. We believe it's a strong mechanism. But it is also a mechanism, if there is not performance, that can deal with noncooperation.

QUESTION: Sean?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: Going back to Elise's point for a second.

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure.

QUESTION: I think that there is some concern that certainly the Syrians are going to be – have already and will this afternoon and will for the near future say, you know, this is – don't be gullible, America, or the world.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Uh-huh.

QUESTION: You know, they were wrong the last time they made a public presentation. And, arguably, the last public presentation that was made was actually more public than this. You know, you had the Secretary of State go up to the UN before the Security Council and make a compelling case. He said at the time – he since retracted that, saying that. And in this case, you have a situation where there's no official who has put their name to anything, except for that statement from the White House, which doesn't contain any of the evidence. That evidence is out there with no official's name attached to it, only as a video. Are you less confident in this information than you were in the information on Iraq, because no one is willing to put – no one is willing to go on the record and say – and make these allegations or present this intelligence?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Of course, people are going to try to draw these analogies. They aren't analogous situations. Look, you know, I don't think – I am not a person that is steeped in all of the raw materials and the analysis here, so it's – I really can't do their analysis justice.

QUESTION: Well, why not?

MR. MCCORMACK: And – but you're --

QUESTION: In 2003, it was the Secretary of State sitting at the UN Security Council –

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- live, on worldwide television --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, sitting directly behind him.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Yeah.

QUESTION: And now you've got two or three guys over in wherever speaking on background, presenting what some might say is, you know, similar -- a similar case, similar evidence to what was presented in public before the UN.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Matt, I just -- you know, I really don't think, in any way, the situations are analogous back in 2003 and the present in terms of the circumstances and the policies and the history leading up to all of this.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. MCCORMACK: Look, like I said, the intelligence community has said that they stand by their analysis and they have tried to be open in terms of releasing some of the materials and talking about it, albeit on background. But again, I would encourage people who have questions about this to put it directly to the experts on this. I certainly couldn't do the case justice here, as I am not (inaudible).

QUESTION: Well, I guess -- no, no, I'm not trying to get you --

MR. MCCORMACK: No.

QUESTION: -- to repeat it on --

MR. MCCORMACK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- on camera or, you know, with your name attached to it.

MR. MCCORMACK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: What I'm trying to figure out is why was there a decision -- why doesn't anyone -- or why was the decision made not to have anyone attach their name, their reputation to this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Matt, you can -- as for the form --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR. MCCORMACK: In terms of the form in which the information was presented, I think you can talk to the intelligence community about that.

Okay, Param.

QUESTION: Sean, the question that's being asked after the revelation is -- very obvious question is whether the United States has raised this with North Korea and what was the response?

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Certainly, over the past several months, this issue has been raised with North Korea. It has been in the context of the six-party talks and it has also been an issue that has been discussed. And the information, in some form, has been discussed among all the members of the six-party talks. And we believe, actually, that has been very constructive and helpful to the process of the six-party talks and, in fact, the mechanism of the six-party talks, because it has put verification really at the top of the list of the things that the six-party mechanism is trying to accomplish. You can have declarations, you can have actions, but those things need to be verified.

And this information has strengthened that case to the point where you have China that is now going to be chairing a group within the six-party mechanism on issues related to verification. And I would expect that, should the process move forward, that that is going to be an essential component of the six-party process. And also, it has had the effect of putting nonproliferation really front and center in this process.

When we talk now about the denuclearized Korean Peninsula, we talk about plutonium, we talk about highly enriched uranium, we also talk about nonproliferation as an equal component. And that is, in our view, a very significant development. It has always been part of the process, but really, the prominence of it within the six parties has been raised. And that has been a positive aspect, I think, that has come out of this.

QUESTION: And just a quick follow-up.

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure.

QUESTION: So what is the response to the North Koreans on this? I mean, this is very important because you have brought the case --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: -- across the globe. And people are interested in the sense that you're having a dialogue with North Korea.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, the six parties -- well, the other five parties of the six parties, I'm sorry -- yeah.

QUESTION: I mean -- I mean, you have meet -- met North Korea on the sidelines and --

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure. No, yeah, exactly, but it is important and significant that it is in that context of the six parties because we, again, don't believe and continue to believe that bilateral dialogue will really not get us to where we want to go. It is really the six-party mechanism that has allowed us to get to the point where we have now, which is significant, and that will allow us ultimately to achieve the goals we all want, again, if North Korea chooses to perform.

QUESTION: But what is the response by the North Koreans when you --

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, look, you know, again, I'm not going to share every exchange within the context of those discussions, but I would leave it to them and that they're fully capable of responding in public. I have not thus far seen any response from them in public.

QUESTION: Sean?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah.

QUESTION: Sean, you said the issue has been raised with the North Koreans.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: But has this video presentation specifically been shown to --

MR. MCCORMACK: Information has been shared with them. I can't speak to whether the video that was prepared by the intelligence committee itself was shared with them. But certainly, enough information was shared so that they understood that we knew exactly what had happened.

QUESTION: You said this morning that they had some awareness that something would be made public.

MR. MCCORMACK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Can you elaborate on that? Can you say to what extent they knew what the nature of the activities would be --

MR. MCCORMACK: No, we didn't --

QUESTION: -- or when you told them or how you told them?

MR. MCCORMACK: We didn't brief them in details about our plans, but they were aware that, in some form or fashion, this issue was going to be surfaced publicly.

QUESTION: But when did you tell them?

MR. MCCORMACK: I don't have a specific date for you, but over the past months.

QUESTION: And was this used as a leverage point in the negotiations?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I mean, just go back to what I said. I believe that, you know, if -- looking back on the process over the past several months, that this -- we have made effective use of this information in the context of the six parties. But again, you know, we will see, based on North Korea's behavior, whether or not this process move forwards. It gets down to their performance.

Yeah.

QUESTION: What is the next step now on a practical level in the six-party talks? What is going to be happening next? And can you say more about China's role in terms of verification?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, in terms of verification, that's something that will, I would expect, evolve over time. The next steps practically are the five parties waiting for North Korea to provide a declaration. I suppose it shouldn't be a foregone conclusion that they will provide one. We all hope and expect that they will. Once they do, well, that'll be handed over to the Chinese as chair of the six-party

process. Once that's handed over, it'll be examined, analyzed, judged. And if it does account for all aspects of their nuclear program, then the Secretary of State and this building will have to make a recommendation to the President whether or not the process moves forward. The President will have to decide. And if it does move forward, then that declaration, of course, would be subject to verification and they would also have to carry out their outstanding obligations with respect to disabling Yongbyon. And then the other parties would be, I believe at that point, prepared to fulfill their obligations.

QUESTION: I mean, in the past, this process of getting them to provide the declaration has involved trips by Chris Hill, meetings, and so forth. Is there anything like that planned?

MR. MCCORMACK: Not at the moment. Sung Kim is expected to be back this afternoon in Washington and he will brief people back here as to what he heard from the North Koreans. And you know, perhaps, at that point, we may have some further characterization of his discussions. I'm sure it won't be very elaborate. Perhaps we'll have some further characterization of what he heard when he was in Pyongyang, and then it really gets to North Korea and what they choose to do.

QUESTION: Sean, outside of the IAEA, were the other six -- were the six parties briefed separately, individually, as a group, on yesterday's --

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, I can see if I can share with you a bit more the variety of briefings that took place through diplomatic channels over the past couple of days. But the other, what, four parties, I guess you can say, over the period of months, and I don't have specific dates for you, were briefed in some form on the information that we have.

QUESTION: The other four? Don't you mean the other five?

MR. MCCORMACK: China --

QUESTION: Maybe not as full as the other -- as the four got, but --

MR. MCCORMACK: China and South Korea, Japan and Russia.

QUESTION: So they --

MR. MCCORMACK: They received the briefing. And also the North Koreans were presented with this information as well.

QUESTION: So did --

MR. MCCORMACK: This took place over, I believe it was late last year.

QUESTION: So none of this would -- none of what came out yesterday would have been a surprise to any of the --

MR. MCCORMACK: I can't -- again, I can't speak to exactly what materials were presented to the other members of the six-party talks or to other friends and allies or friends and allies that were briefed around the world. But the substance and basically the bottom-line conclusion was -- shouldn't have come to the -- a surprise -- shouldn't have come as a surprise to any of the six-party members.

Yeah. Well, Samir -- Samir, you have one on this?

QUESTION: Yes.

QUESTION: Can I have a follow-up? I'm sorry.

MR. MCCORMACK: Kirit, yeah.

QUESTION: If you don't mind, one more.

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure.

QUESTION: Following up on that real quick, at what point did you tell the Israelis you were going to make a public rollout of this information?

MR. MCCORMACK: Like I said, we briefed a number of friends and allies around the world over the past several days or over the past period of time -- past months.

QUESTION: And did that include the Israelis?

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, I don't have the full list in front of me.

QUESTION: And the second question that I had, and I apologize if you answered it before I came in. I missed the first couple of questions. Does the State Department believe that now that this information is actually, in fact, public, it will complicate your efforts in the six-party talks to get a declaration from the North Koreans?

MR. MCCORMACK: We'll see. It shouldn't. I don't believe that it should. But that ultimately is a question that should be directed at the North Koreans. And you know, I can't tell you whether or not they are seeking a pretext to not fulfill their obligations or they fully intend to. We'll see. The proof of that will be in their actions and we'll be watching to see what they do in the coming days and weeks.

QUESTION: To put it another way, do you think this will help get a declaration from the North Koreans?

MR. MCCORMACK: Kirit, we'll see. You know, again, it's very difficult to determine what goes into the -- what calculations go into their decision making, Kirit. It's a very closed -- very closed process. We'll see.

QUESTION: But, I mean, you must have been (inaudible) with the idea, hopefully, that this would actually help the process, right?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I think I just talked about that, the ways in which we believe it has helped the process. And certainly, at a minimum, it has laid down a very clear line in terms of a declaration, what is required in terms of their proliferation activities. So I think they understand very clearly the bar that they need to get over on that part of the declaration.

Yeah.

QUESTION: The Syrian Ambassador was seen visiting the State Department. Did you present him a briefing about the evidence?

MR. MCCORMACK: There was a discussion here at the State Department. Jeff Feltman spoke with the Syrian Ambassador here yesterday.

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Tags: knnp, dprk, sy, iaea, parm, prel

Subject: syria's clandestine nuclear program

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 3.

summary

¶2. (SBU) On September 6, 2007, <> [*Sourcebook comment: Appears to be redacted; probably "Israel"*] destroyed a nuclear reactor Syria was clandestinely constructing, we judge with North Korean assistance. The reactor site was in Syria's eastern desert region in a location called al-Kibar. On April 24, Executive Branch officials briefed Congress and the press on evidence that lead the USG to conclude that the Syrian facility at al-Kibar was a nuclear reactor being constructed clandestinely, and therefore in violation of Syria's NPT-required safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The briefing described the basis for concluding North Korean assistance and why the reactor would have been ill-suited for any purpose other than plutonium production for a nuclear weapons program. The briefings also included information on the U.S. policy approach following the discovery of the facility and the Israeli air strike.

action request

¶3. (U) Posts should draw from the background information in para 4 to respond to host government inquiries on this issue and for press inquiries as background information only. The points in the White House press statement in para 5 can be used in full to address press inquiries on the record.

¶4. (sbu) begin text of background information:

Introduction

- You will recall reports that the Israeli air force conducted a mission over Syria on September 6, 2007.

- I want to inform you that the purpose of that Israeli mission was to destroy a clandestine nuclear reactor that Syria was constructing in its eastern desert near a place we call al-Kibar.

- The Israeli mission was successful - the reactor was damaged beyond repair. Syria has completed efforts to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there, constructing a new building on the old site.

- We have delayed sharing this information with you, because our first concern was to prevent conflict.

- We believe - based on strong evidence - that North Korea assisted Syria with the reactor at al-Kibar.

- We are working with the North Koreans in the framework of the Six-Party Talks to focus on North Korea's role in this proliferation activity, including as called for in the October 3, 2007, agreement, and to provide additional explanations as necessary.

- We have now decided that the time has come to share more information on this issue.

Intelligence

- Our intelligence experts are confident that the facility the Israelis targeted was in fact a nuclear reactor of the same type North Korea built indigenously at its Yongbyon nuclear facility. The U.S. intelligence community conducted an intensive, months-long effort to confirm and corroborate the information Israel provided us on the reactor and to gather more details from our own sources and methods.

- We have good reason to believe this reactor was not intended for peaceful purposes.

- First, we assess this reactor was configured to produce plutonium: it was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.

- Second, Syria went to great pains to keep this secret by taking very careful steps to conceal the true nature of the site.

- Third, by maintaining secrecy and not declaring the site to the IAEA and providing design information, as Syria's NPT-mandated IAEA safeguards agreement requires, Syria undermined the very purpose of IAEA safeguards - to provide the international community with the necessary assurance/ verification that the reactor was part of a peaceful program.

- Finally, Syria's concealment and lies about what happened for months now after the Israeli air strike is compelling proof that it has something to hide. In fact, after the attack on the site, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there. If there were nothing to hide, Syria presumably would have invited IAEA inspectors, other experts, and the news media to the site to prove that.

Violations of international obligations

- Article III of the NPT requires Syria to maintain comprehensive safeguards over all of its nuclear activities. Syria's IAEA Safeguards Agreement requires Syria to make early declaration of any new nuclear facilities. Specifically, Syria is legally obligated to inform the IAEA of such new facilities at the time a decision is taken to build them. Syria, however, failed to make such a declaration to the IAEA, or to provide design information and access during the reactor's construction intended to allow the IAEA to verify that design information.

- If North Korea provided technical training, advice, services or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of nuclear-related items subject to UN Security Council resolution 1718 to the Syrian Government after the effective date of that resolution (October 14, 2006), this would constitute a violation of the resolution by both North Korea and Syria. Paragraph 8(b) of the resolution requires all member states to prohibit the procurement from North Korea of nuclear related items contained in S/2006/814 (which encompasses the control list of the Nuclear Suppliers Group).

Policy deliberations

- The existence of this reactor was dangerous and destabilizing for the region, and we judged that it could have been only weeks away from becoming operational at the time it was destroyed by the Israeli air force.

- Specifically, we assessed that once the pumphouse and pipe system were complete in early August, the reactor could begin operation at any time. Once operations began, certainly a military option would have been much more problematic with radioactive material present.

- We have long had indications of Syrian covert nuclear-related interaction with North Korea, and identified the al-Kibar facility in the fall of 2006 as an enigmatic site. In Spring 2007, we acquired information that enabled us to conclude that the Al-Kibar facility was a reactor.

- Information was brought to our attention at that time by Israeli officials who had conclusive intelligence that a reactor was being constructed at that site.

- The Israeli reports were confirmed by our own independent intelligence and analysis and were consistent with less definitive information we already possessed.

- At the same time, we conducted our own intensive internal policy deliberations regarding what to do about this disturbing and destabilizing development.

- We discussed policy options with the Israelis, but in the end Israel made its own decision to destroy the reactor. This decision was made by Israel alone - they did not seek our consent. Nonetheless, we understand Israel's decision.

- <> [*Sourcebook comment: Appears to be redacted; probably "Israel"*] saw this reactor, and what Syria may have intended to do with it, as an existential threat that required it to act to defend itself.

The way forward with Syria

- Syria's secret construction of this nuclear reactor is the latest in a series of unacceptable actions by the Asad regime.

- Syria is a state that supports terrorism, destabilizes Lebanon, and is the largest conduit for foreign fighters and suicide bombers entering Iraq to kill Iraqis, Americans, and Coalition forces.

- The Syrian Government supports terrorist groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizballah, and others, including by playing host to leaders of some of these groups.

- Syria is a proliferator in every sense - of terrorism, of instability to its neighbors, including Lebanon, and now as a recipient and developer of dangerous nuclear technology.

- The Syrian regime, in going down this path, has shown a disregard for the security of the region and of its own people.

- We call upon the Syrian regime to reveal the full extent of its nuclear activities, as it is required to do under the NPT and its safeguards agreement, and verify that its covert nuclear-related activities have stopped.

- For better relations with the international community, in addition to full disclosure and cooperation regarding its covert nuclear program, Syria needs to end support for insurgents and foreign fighters in Iraq, support for Palestinian terrorists, and interference in Lebanon. If willing to do so, Syria can expect to be welcomed by the international community.

The way forward -- six-party talks

- In September 2007, the U.S. began raising its concerns with North Korea about nuclear cooperation with Syria. We have also raised this matter with the other participants in the Six-Party Talks.

- We have made our concerns known to North Korea in a frank and comprehensive way. The North Koreans have acknowledged our concerns.

- The North Koreans have stated that there is no ongoing nuclear cooperation with any foreign country in violation of applicable domestic and international laws and treaties, and that there will be no such cooperation in the future.
- North Korea has agreed to cooperate on verification activities in line with its past commitments on non-proliferation, including as stated in the October 3, 2007, agreement, and to provide additional explanations as necessary.
- We have been following Syrian/North Korean interactions since the destruction of the reactor, and we have not seen the same level of interaction as we did before the reactor's destruction, however we cannot be certain all cooperation has ceased.
- We continue to be on alert for signs of any nuclear cooperation, and any renewed activities.
- We remain attuned to potential North Korean relationships worldwide, especially given North Korea's continued proliferation of missiles and other weapons. We plan to follow up on North Korea's agreement to cooperate on verification and to provide further explanations as necessary.
- We are working with the Chinese to establish such a mechanism within the Six Party framework to address proliferation concerns.

Conclusion

- We cannot allow the world's most dangerous weapons to fall into the hands of the world's most dangerous regimes. This is the policy we have applied with respect to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, and it is the policy that we continue to pursue. We are concerned by the cooperation between regimes that sponsor proliferation, especially when those same regimes also sponsor terrorism and foster instability.
- A Syrian nuclear weapons capability would have been a catastrophic development for the Middle East and the world. It could spark a nuclear arms race in the region, and could escalate already high tensions with unpredictable and dire consequences.
- The international community must come together to put a stop to dangerous behavior such as this. There is a consensus among nations that proliferation cannot be tolerated. This episode reminds us of the dangers of proliferation and that we must rededicate ourselves and act cooperatively to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

End text of background information.

¶5. (u) begin text of press statement:

Today, administration officials have briefed select Congressional committees on an issue of great international concern. Until Sept. 6, 2007, the Syrian regime was building a covert nuclear reactor in its eastern

desert capable of producing plutonium. We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities. We have good reason to believe that reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on Sept. 6 of last year, was not intended for peaceful purposes. Carefully hidden from view, the reactor was not configured for such purposes. In defiance of its international obligations, Syria did not inform the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the construction of the reactor, and, after it was destroyed, the regime moved quickly to bury evidence of its existence. This cover-up only served to reinforce our confidence that this reactor was not intended for peaceful activities.

We are briefing the IAEA on this intelligence. The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities. The Syrian regime supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon, allows the transit of some foreign fighters into Iraq, and represses its own people. If Syria wants better relations with the international community, it should put an end to these activities.

We have long been seriously concerned about North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its proliferation activities. North Korea's clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria is a dangerous manifestation of those activities. One way we have chosen to deal with this problem is through the Six Party Framework. Through this process we are working with our partners to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The United States is also committed to ensuring that North Korea does not further engage in proliferation activities. We will work with our partners to establish in the Six Party Framework a rigorous verification mechanism to ensure that such conduct and other nuclear activities have ceased.

The construction of this reactor was a dangerous and potentially destabilizing development for the region and the world. This is particularly true because it was done covertly and in violation of the very procedures designed to reassure the world of the peaceful intent of nuclear activities. This development also serves as a reminder that often the same regimes that sponsor proliferation also sponsor terrorism and foster instability, and cooperate with one another in doing so. This underscores that the international community is right to be very concerned about the nuclear activities of Iran and the risks those activities pose to the stability of the Middle East. To confront this challenge, the international community must take further steps, beginning with the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions dealing with Iranian nuclear activities. The United States calls upon the international community to redouble our common efforts to ending these activities and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in this critical region.

End text of press statement.

¶6. (U) Posts are requested to report any substantive reactions as soon as possible.

¶7. (U) Minimize considered.

Rice



IAEA Press Releases

Press Release 2008/06

Statement by IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei

25 April 2008 | The IAEA Secretariat was provided with information by the United States on 24 April claiming that the installation destroyed by Israel in Syria last September was a nuclear reactor. According to this information, the reactor was not yet operational and no nuclear material had been introduced into it.

The Agency will treat this information with the seriousness it deserves and will investigate the veracity of the information. Syria has an obligation under its safeguards agreement with the IAEA to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the Agency.

The Director General deplores the fact that this information was not provided to the Agency in a timely manner, in accordance with the Agency's responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to enable it to verify its veracity and establish the facts. Under the NPT, the Agency has a responsibility to verify any proliferation allegations in a non-nuclear weapon State party to the NPT and to report its findings to the IAEA Board of Governors and the Security Council, as required.

In light of the above, the Director General views the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the non-proliferation regime.

Accusing N. Korea May Stall Nuclear Pact

Both Nations Cite Progress, but Allegations About Aid to Syria Chill Lawmakers

By Glenn Kessler and Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writers

Saturday, April 26, 2008; A12

The Bush administration gambled this week that its detailed accounting of North Korean assistance to a Syrian nuclear program would help pave the way for a nuclear disarmament agreement with Pyongyang, but the allegations so angered Republican lawmakers that support for a deal may be seriously weakened.

To signal displeasure, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) placed a hold on an ambassadorial nomination of a former aide to the chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea, Christopher R. Hill. "People are very mad, very angry" about the prospect of an agreement with "a regime that has repeatedly demonstrated that its word is indistinguishable from a lie," said an aide to a key Republican lawmaker.

Despite the fresh accusations of North Korean wrongdoing, U.S. and North Korean officials said this week they were making progress on key aspects of the disarmament deal, which requires North Korea to declare how much plutonium it has made for its nuclear arsenal and to turn over thousands of documents concerning the inner workings of the Yongbyon nuclear facility.

A U.S. negotiator returned yesterday from three days of talks in North Korea aimed at meeting goals set by President Bush, national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, officials said. Hill told reporters yesterday that the discussions were "lengthy" and "productive," echoing a statement by North Korea that "the negotiations proceeded in a sincere and constructive manner, and progress was made there."

But criticism of the administration's handling of the matter did not come only from Capitol Hill. Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, yesterday said the United States should not have waited so long before disclosing what it suspected about North Korea's assistance to Syria.

ElBaradei also reiterated his criticism of Israel for its "unilateral use of force" in a Sept. 6 bombing raid that destroyed the nuclear reactor Syria was allegedly building with North Korea's help, saying it prevented the agency from verifying whether undeclared nuclear activity had been taking place at the site.

Administration officials said yesterday that before the Israeli bombing, Rice and a majority of other senior officials had supported using information about the two countries' secret collaboration to squeeze Damascus diplomatically, with the aim of stopping its interference in Lebanon and halting the passage of insurgents through Syria into Iraq.

U.S. officials told Israel that it would benefit if Washington were able to get Syria to stop all its "nefarious activity," one official said. But Israel decided that Syria's Al Kibar facility was "an existential threat" and needed to be destroyed before reactor fuel could be loaded or processed, the official said.

Another official said the Israelis, having seen the long, inconclusive negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programs, had little interest in a solution involving the United Nations and the atomic energy agency. An Israeli official declined to comment on the U.S.-Israeli discussions.

"We looked at the possibility of talking to [the Syrians] on the diplomatic track," a senior administration official said yesterday, "using this to say, 'You need to comply with your international obligations, stop aiding foreign fighters going into Iraq, stop disrupting the situation in Lebanon, stop supporting Hezbollah and Hamas, stop repressing your own people, and stop this nuclear activity.' And telling them we would look at military options but we wanted to take the diplomatic track first. But all of our political discussions became moot when Israel acted."

Officials said they received their strongest evidence of a North Korean-Syrian connection a year ago, primarily from Israel, at about the time the North Koreans had inked a deal with the United States and its negotiating partners to proceed with dismantlement. Since then, U.S. negotiators had demanded and received North Korea's promise to acknowledge U.S. information about collaboration with Syria.

Key lawmakers nonetheless made it clear that unless the intelligence about Syria was described to them in detail, they would block funding for the deal and oppose a key waiver of a law preventing U.S. aid to a country that detonates a nuclear weapon.

Officials said the timing of the administration's disclosure was also influenced by a provision of the U.S. law governing state sponsors of terrorism, a list that has long included North Korea. Under the proposed nuclear disarmament deal, Washington has agreed to remove North Korea from the list, but the law requires that it first demonstrate that North Korea has not assisted another country on the list for at least six months. The intelligence presented this week indicated that North Korea helped Syria in removing equipment from the site through early October, meaning the six-month window only recently closed.

IAEA officials are not optimistic about the prospects for their own investigation into the Syrian facility. "It'll be very difficult to get to the truth," said a diplomat close to the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency. "If you give the IAEA information in a timely manner, as soon as you have it, and the verification body can credibly go in there and investigate on the ground, then you may someday know the truth. The way this was done, we have only their word and photographs."

North Korea, in its negotiations with U.S. officials, was told about key aspects of the U.S. intelligence on the Syrian site and had been warned that a public presentation would be forthcoming. But the State Department did not brief Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha until Thursday, in a session described as "cold and correct but not angry" by a senior State Department official.

At a news conference yesterday, Moustapha said the U.S. claims have no credibility at home or abroad. "This administration has a proven record of falsifying and fabricating stories about WMDs. They have done this before, they have done this yesterday, and they will continue to do this in the future," he said.

The facility was an vacant military building at the time of the Israeli airstrike and was not a secret from anyone, he said. "Every commercial satellite service available on Earth was able to provide photos of this so-called secret Syrian site for the past five, six years. I think something is very absurd and preposterous in the whole story."

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALEqM5gwu1N6NdbI7MThXmiNHyFH-ZMHygD9093COG0>

IAEA's ElBaradei criticizes US for holding back information

By GEORGE JAHN

1 day ago [Accessed 2008-04-27T13:00Z]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog chastised the United States on Friday [2008-04-25] for withholding information on what Washington says was a nuclear reactor being built secretly in Syria with help from North Korea.

International Atomic Energy Agency director general, Mohamed ElBaradei, also criticized Israel for bombing the alleged nuclear facility site seven months ago.

ElBaradei issued a strongly worded statement that reflected his anger about being kept out of the loop about Washington's investigation of the site and the alleged North Korean assistance.

The IAEA said ElBaradei was not told about the information until Thursday, the day U.S. officials briefed Congress about the evidence, which they say includes dozens of photographs taken from ground level and footage of the interior of the building gathered by spy satellites after the Israeli strike in September.

"The director general deplors the fact that this information was not provided to the agency in a timely manner, in accordance with the agency's responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to enable it to verify its veracity and establish the facts," said a statement from the IAEA.

In Washington, the State Department brushed aside ElBaradei's complaint.

"The fact of the matter now is this is an issue that is worthy of investigation putting aside these questions of timing," spokesman Sean McCormack said.

The IAEA's mission includes trying to keep nuclear proliferation in check, and it depends on member states for information to carry out that task.

ElBaradei and the Bush administration have clashed before. In the runup to the Iraq war, he challenged U.S. claims that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. In 2005, Washington made a failed attempt to prevent ElBaradei's re-election.

The IAEA promised Friday to follow up on the U.S. intelligence, saying it would "treat this information with the seriousness it deserves and will investigate the veracity of the information."

ElBaradei also criticized Israel's airstrike of the site. Israel has maintained total silence on the issue since the Sept. 6 bombing.

"The director general views the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the non-proliferation regime," the statement said.

The IAEA did not directly criticize North Korea or Syria, but said "Syria has an obligation ... to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the Agency."

Syria denies that it was building a nuclear reactor and insists the site bombed by Israel was an unused military facility.

Syria's U.N. Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari pledged Friday to cooperate with the IAEA and suggested that "the main target of the American CIA allegations against Syria is to justify the Israeli attack against the Syrian side."

"We should be very careful and cautious with regard to all these kind of allegations. Anybody could fabricate anything these days," Ja'afari added.

Top U.S. intelligence officials who briefed reporters in Washington on Thursday said they had high confidence in the judgment that North Korea had aided Syria with its nuclear program and the intention was to produce plutonium. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

However, they said there was no reprocessing facility at the site — something that would be needed to extract plutonium from spent reactor fuel for use in a bomb. That gives little confidence that the facility was meant for weapons development, they said.

John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said ElBaradei's criticism was "entirely unwarranted" and defended Israel's decision to strike the Syrian site.

"The IAEA was and remains unable to deal with regimes like Syria," he told the AP. "Israel did what was necessary to defend itself, and the U.S. had no obligation to brief the IAEA in such a matter."

Associated Press writers Pamela Hess and Matthew Lee in Washington and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed to this report.

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352553,00.html>

State Department Tells U.N. to Stop Complaining and Start Investigating Syria's Secret Nuclear Reactor Project

Friday, April 25, 2008

VIENNA, Austria — The State Department had a pointed response Friday for the U.N.'s criticism that the U.S. did not come forward with information about Syria's clandestine nuclear reactor program: Get over it and start investigating.

"We would expect and hope that the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) would investigate this matter," spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. "The fact of the matter now is this is an issue that is worthy of investigation putting aside these questions of timing."

McCormack was responding to IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei's complaint that the U.S. did not give his organization intelligence information sooner on what Washington says was a nuclear reactor in Syria being built secretly by North Korea.

ElBaradei's also chastised Israel for bombing the site seven months ago, in a statement whose strong language reflected anger at being kept out of the picture for so long.

The White House broke its silence about the issue on Thursday, just hours after top U.S. legislators — members of the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee — were briefed on the alleged reactor. U.S. intelligence officials said evidence included dozens of photographs taken from ground level as well as footage of the interior of the building taken by spy satellites after the Israeli strike.

The IAEA's mission includes trying to keep nuclear proliferation in check, and it depends on member states for information in trying to carry out that task. The agency is investigating allegations that Iran tried to make nuclear weapons, and it is using not only its own research but intelligence provided by the U.S. and other members of the 35-nation IAEA board.

"The director general deplores the fact that this information was not provided to the agency in a timely manner, in accordance with the agency's responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to enable it to verify its veracity and establish the facts," said an IAEA statement, issued a day after ElBaradei was briefed.

Additionally, "the director general views the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the nonproliferation regime," it said.

Promising a follow-up, the statement said the IAEA "will treat this information with the seriousness it deserves and will investigate the veracity of the information," adding: "Syria has an obligation ... to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the Agency."

John Rood, the U.S. undersecretary of state for arms control, briefed ElBaradei by telephone. Additionally, a senior U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, said a U.S. intelligence team was in Vienna to brief IAEA representatives.

A senior diplomat linked to the IAEA said ElBaradei had already let his displeasure be known to Rood, during the U.S. official's phone call, over the delay between the time the information became available

to the U.S. and when he was informed of it. U.S. Congressional Intelligence Committee members also expressed anger Thursday over the seven-month time lapse before their committee was briefed.

In Washington, the State Department brushed aside elBaradei's complaint.

"The fact now is that the IAEA is being briefed, they are being provided the information and we believe that this is certainly an issue that merits close scrutiny and investigation by the IAEA," McCormack said.

"The fact of Syria having a nuclear reactor that is in violation of their NPT obligations in our estimation is something worthy of investigation by the IAEA," McCormack said, referring to the Nonproliferation Treaty. "And, certainly the Syrians as a member of the treaty should grant access to the IAEA to the site."

John Bolton, who has served as U.S. ambassador and before that held Rood's job at a time the U.S. was considering trying to push ElBaradei out from his position, said the IAEA's chief criticism is "entirely unwarranted."

"The IAEA was and remains unable to deal with regimes like Syria," he said in an e-mail to the AP. "Israel did what was necessary to defend itself, and the U.S. had no obligation to brief the IAEA in such a matter."

While U.S. undersecretary of state for arms control several years ago, Bolton was a chief ElBaradei critic at a time Washington was lobbying for ElBaradei's replacement because of his differences with the U.S. administration over how much of a nuclear threat Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq posed.

ElBaradei did not criticize Syria and North Korea. And U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he lacked "concrete information" on the issue. But the U.N. chief told reporters while on a visit to Vienna that "as a matter of principle, this proliferation of weapons of mass destruction ... is a serious source of great concern"

"(The) international community must work hard to prevent such proliferation," he said.

Repeating its previous stance, Syria denied the allegations Thursday.

But in Seoul, Kim Sook, South Korea's top nuclear envoy, said the allegations of nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria were credible and urged Pyongyang to fulfill a promise to declare all its atomic programs.

"We share the concern expressed by the U.S. government about the North Korean nuclear weapons program and nuclear proliferation activities," Kim told The AP in a telephone interview Friday.

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The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Syrian envoy says CIA fabricated evidence

By PAMELA HESS

1 day ago [Accessed 2008-04-27T13:35Z]

WASHINGTON (AP) — Syria's ambassador to the United States said Friday that the CIA fabricated pictures allegedly taken inside a secret Syrian nuclear reactor and predicted that in the coming weeks the U.S. story about the site would "implode from within."

"The photos presented to me yesterday were ludicrous, laughable," Ambassador Imad Moustapha told reporters at his Washington residence.

However, he refused to say what the building in the remote eastern desert of Syria was used for before Israeli jets bombed it in September 2007.

Senior U.S. intelligence officials said Thursday they believe it was a secret nuclear reactor meant to produce plutonium, which can be used to make high-yield nuclear weapons. They alleged that North Korea aided in the design, construction and outfitting of the building.

Syria bulldozed the building's ruins a month after it was bombed and constructed a new, larger building in its place, leaving little or no evidence of what had been on the site.

Moustapha would not explain the purpose of the new building. But he said the lack of military checkpoints, air defenses or barbed wire fences around either building should show that it was not a sensitive facility.

So far, Syria has not allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect the area.

Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari, pledged on Friday to cooperate with the IAEA and suggested that "the main target of the American CIA allegations against Syria is to justify the Israeli attack against the Syrian side."

In a message to employees, CIA Director Michael Hayden praised the agency's "outstanding" work, calling it "a case study in rigorous analytic tradecraft, skillful human and technical collection."

But some outside nuclear experts were questioning some of the CIA's analysis, though not disputing its conclusions.

David Albright, president of the nonprofit Institute for Science and International Security, analyzed commercial satellite imagery of the bombed facility last fall and surmised then it was a nuclear reactor. He questioned the intelligence agencies' conclusion that the reactor was within months or weeks of completion.

"It's not clear-cut it was ready to turn on," Albright said.

He also took issue with the Bush administration's assertion that the reactor was solely intended to support a nuclear weapons program. Officials said Thursday the reactor was ill-suited for electrical generation — it lacked distribution wires or substations — and did not bear the hallmarks of a research

reactor. They concluded the plutonium was therefore meant for weapons but acknowledged they had no direct evidence of that.

Almost all reactors produce plutonium, even those dedicated to peaceful purposes, Albright said.

"Civilian uses are possible and cannot be dismissed out of hand," he said. "I think the CIA and the White House have not shown that the only possibility for this reactor is that it was to make plutonium for nuclear weapons."

"It very well could be true," he said, "but it is far less than ironclad, absent other information."

According to the CIA, the Syrian reactor was modeled on a small North Korean reactor built at Yongbyon. That facility produced a small amount of plutonium for nuclear weapons. Albright said that facility was also a research effort to determine if the North Koreans could scale up the model to produce electricity efficiently.

Siegfried Hecker, the co-director for Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, said the evidence strongly suggests Syria's intention was to produce plutonium. He agreed with the assessment that the plant was not well-suited for generating electricity.

"On the other hand, it was the best path to bomb-grade plutonium," he said. "That was most likely the primary purpose of this facility."

One piece of evidence that casts doubt on Syrian intentions to produce plutonium for weapons was the absence of a reprocessing facility, necessary to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

But Anthony Cordesman, a military expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that may not have been a serious impediment. Syria could quickly build such a reprocessing capability, he said.

Cordesman also said the CIA undercut its case against Syria by not explaining how a plutonium-producing reactor would fit into Syria's "long history" of suspicious activities that suggest it is trying to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Doubts cast over US data on Syrian nuclear reactor

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Daniel Dombey, Financial Times

Published: **April 27, 2008**, 00:45

Washington: When US officials on Thursday rolled out evidence to support allegations that North Korea had helped Syria construct a nuclear reactor, they said the intelligence community had "low" confidence that the purpose of the reactor was to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Some experts are questioning the strength of the intelligence included in the high-profile presentations that were made to more than 200 members of Congress on Saturday and later to the media.

"The end result has been far more speculation about the meaning and credibility of US reporting than should have been the case," said Anthony Cordesman at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"Once again, the US intelligence community has created an unnecessary mess by rushing out a half-complete product, and failing to put the information in releases in proper context." Meanwhile, a nuclear physicist close to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) cast doubt yesterday on the veracity of US intelligence.

"When you look at the [US intelligence services] pictures, they show only raw construction," an expert close to the IAEA said.

"It was just the shell of a site, and the walls did not look like the ones needed for a plutonium reactor."

Walls of a plutonium reactor "need a lot of piping, there was nothing like that on the pictures", he added.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/27/AR2008042700748.html>

Assad says facility Israel bombed not nuclear: paper

Sunday, April 27, 2008; 9:52 AM

DUBAI (Reuters) - The Syrian site Israel bombed in September was not part of a nuclear weapons program, but was a military facility under construction, President Bashar al-Assad said in remarks published on Sunday.

Last week, Washington released intelligence alleging Syria had built a nuclear reactor with North Korean help before an Israeli air strike destroyed the facility on September 6.

"Is it logical? A nuclear site did not have protection with surface to air defenses? A nuclear site within the footprint of satellites in the middle of Syria in an open area in the desert?" Assad asked Qatar's al-Watan newspaper in an interview conducted before the U.S. accusations were made.

At that stage, he was commenting on media reports that said the target was a nuclear site. "The truth is that the raid was at a military site under construction," Assad said in the interview. "We are against mass destruction weapons for Israel, Iran or others."

Assad said it was illogical for Syria to seek a nuclear bomb. "Where would we use it? On Israel it would kill the Palestinians. I do not see this as logical."

Speaking after the U.S. accusations, Syria's ambassador to the United States dismissed as "a fantasy" the U.S. allegations.

Assad said he did not know why Israel, officially at war with Syria since the 1973 Middle East conflict, bombed the site.

"Why did they raid it, we do not know what data they had, but they know and they see through satellites; they have raided an incomplete site that did not have any personnel or anything. It was empty," he added.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Asked about Syria's response, Assad said: "Retaliation does not mean a missile for a missile, a bomb for a bomb or a bullet for a bullet ... They (Israelis) understand what we mean. We do not say that we will retaliate, i.e. we will bomb."

"You have to ask a different question; had Syria not been harming Israeli policy would Israel have carried out an operation of this sort? The truth is that we have the means to respond, but in our own way."

"We understand Israel wants to provoke Syria and possibly to drag Syria into war while we do not seek war. We have been clear about this point. We have other means and we do not necessarily have to declare them."

Assad refused to answer a question about reports that Syria was seeking to acquire Russian missiles.

"If there was a door open, even if it was small, for peace you should not seek war but you should seek to defend yourself. Now are you prepared or not, psychologically we are always ready and constantly prepare ourselves, but in terms of results no one knows results until the battle itself."

Watan ran part of the interview on Thursday in which he said Damascus was ready to negotiate with Israel through Turkey to "find common ground" for peace, but any direct talks must wait until a new U.S. president is elected.

Syria says it received word from Turkey that Israel was willing to give back the occupied Golan Heights in full in return for peace with the Arab state -- a key issue that led decade-long negotiations to falter in 2000.

(Reporting by Summer Said; writing by Inal Ersan)

US Lawmakers Criticize Bush Administration Over Intelligence on Syria

By Michael Bowman

Washington

27 April 2008

U.S. legislators of both political parties are criticizing the Bush administration for only recently disclosing intelligence it possessed about an alleged secret Syrian nuclear reactor that Israel bombed last year. From Washington, VOA's Michael Bowman reports.

Last week, senior U.S. intelligence officials revealed that they have long believed that the facility targeted by Israel was a Syrian reactor designed to produce plutonium that had been constructed with the assistance of North Korea. The revelation took many in Washington and beyond by surprise, and is causing deep concern among Republican and Democratic members of Congress.

A key ally of President Bush on Capitol Hill, the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, Representative Peter Hoekstra, says last week's briefing by U.S. intelligence officials left him with more questions than answers. Hoekstra voiced his concerns about the Syrian facility on CNN's Late Edition program.

"How close was this to being operational? Who funded this for Syria? How close was the North Korean-Syrian cooperation? And where else might North Korea have been involved in proliferation," he asked.

Hoekstra said, had the Bush administration revealed what it knew about the Syrian facility sooner, his committee and other entities could have probed the matter and possibly arrived at answers before now.

Hoekstra's words were echoed by a Democratic member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Senator Dianne Feinstein said, not only should the Bush administration have been more forthcoming about the intelligence it possessed on the Syrian facility, the intelligence should have been presented to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"I think it should have gone immediately to the IAEA," she said. "That is why the IAEA is there [to investigate]. And by not sharing information immediately, what we do is destroy their verification potential as an independent outside agency."

Feinstein added that she was puzzled by the timing of the Bush administration's release of intelligence on Syria, coming seven months after Israel bombed the suspected nuclear facility.

In briefings with the news media, U.S. intelligence officials said the delay in disclosure was motivated by a desire to prevent confrontation and conflict in the Middle East. They said they feared Syria would feel greater pressure to retaliate against Israel for the bombing if U.S. intelligence about the facility had been made public.

Syria has steadfastly denied U.S. allegations about the purpose of the facility.

U.S. intelligence has come under greater scrutiny at home and abroad with many questioning the reliability and accuracy of the information America gathers on its adversaries since the lead-up to the 2003 the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

At the time, the Bush administration alleged Iraq was actively pursuing weapons of mass destruction. To date, little if any proof has come to light in Iraq that supports the administration's contention, which served as a primary justification for ousting Saddam Hussein.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2008/04/27/us_slow_in_voicing_syria_intelligence_lawmakers/

U.S. slow in voicing Syria intelligence: lawmakers

April 27, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Bush administration has made a strong case that Syria built a nuclear reactor with North Korean help but should not have waited until months after Israel destroyed the suspected facility to share its intelligence with Congress, two U.S. lawmakers said on Sunday.

Rep. Pete Hoekstra, the top Republican on the House intelligence committee, said military and security officials presented "compelling information" to lawmakers last week about the suspected nuclear site in Syria, which was struck by Israeli warplanes on September 6.

But Hoekstra said the briefing left serious questions unanswered, including whether North Korea was supporting proliferation efforts elsewhere.

"If we would have gotten this information seven months ago to the full intelligence committee, we could have spent the last seven months going through and peeling back the onion," the Michigan lawmaker said on CNN's "Late Edition" show.

The administration's depiction of the Syrian facility, which officials said was "nearing operational capability" before Israel's airstrike, comes as Washington hopes for a breakthrough in efforts to end to Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Yet Hoekstra suggested the administration's secrecy on the Syria affair could jeopardize support for any deal U.S. President George W. Bush may bring to Congress on North Korea.

"The administration has handled this very badly," he said.

The White House initially tried to keep the strike a secret in hopes of avoiding Syrian retaliation.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat who sits on the Senate intelligence committee, also said the administration's intelligence was convincing.

But she said the timing of the revelation was "very suspect" and criticized the administration for failing to go immediately to the United Nations' nuclear agency.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, has promised to look into whether Syria secretly built an atomic reactor.

"By not sharing information immediately, what we do is destroy their verification potential as an independent, outside agency," Feinstein said.

"If this had been dealt with in an open way at the time ... the North Korean talks perhaps could have been more successful, and Syria might have been put in a place where an accommodation with Israel is more appropriate," she said. "Right now, it can well blow up the situation."

Israeli officials said on Sunday they would be open to a high-level meeting with Syria, brokered by Turkey, that might open the door to renewed peace negotiations.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-intel28apr28,1,968447.story?track=rss>

Timing of North Korea revelations questioned

A key Republican says evidence alleging North Korea's link to a site in Syria is a bid to gain leverage in nuclear talks.

By Nicole Gaouette

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

April 28, 2008

WASHINGTON — A senior Republican congressman assailed the Bush administration Sunday for the timing and nature of its charges that North Korea helped Syria build a secret nuclear weapons facility.

Administration officials went before the Senate and House intelligence panels last week carrying satellite imagery and photos that they said linked North Korea with the desert structure that Israel destroyed in an airstrike last year.

"The administration has handled this very badly" and "has a credibility problem," Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said on CNN's "Late Edition."

The allegations come as negotiations continue between the United States and other countries and North Korea over the dismantling of the Pyongyang government's nuclear program.

In exchange for North Korea abandoning its nuclear weapons program, the Bush administration has offered to ease sanctions on the isolated country and remove it from a list of states that sponsor terrorism -- steps that conservative lawmakers see as unacceptable concessions.

Hoekstra said he believed that the administration's revelations were an attempt to gain leverage in the talks, but that the strategy might backfire with Congress, particularly among those conservatives.

"I think the administration believes it will help them get to a deal with North Korea," he said.

"The timing of it, what information they released, what information they did not release and who they released it to, is going to make it more difficult for them to reach an agreement that will be supported by Congress and supported by the American people," Hoekstra said.

Both Hoekstra and Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said on the CNN program that based on the administration's presentation, they had little doubt the Syrian facility was related to nuclear production.

Some photos appeared to show rods that control heat in a nuclear reactor and buildings that bear strong structural and engineering similarities to North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor.

"This is compelling information," Hoekstra said.

In remarks published Sunday, Syrian President Bashar Assad dismissed the allegations that the site known as Al Kibar was involved in nuclear activities.

"Is it logical?" Assad told a Qatari newspaper, insisting that Al Kibar had been a nonnuclear military

site. Assad reportedly gave the interview before the administration's April 24 presentation to Congress and was responding to media reports that the site may have housed a reactor.

"A nuclear site did not have protection with surface-to-air missiles? A nuclear site within the footprint of satellites in the middle of Syria in an open area in the desert?" Assad said.

Feinstein said the administration's information raised questions about North Korea's potential proliferation activities in other parts of the world.

She suggested that North Korea may have been the target of the administration's information campaign, and that the administration may also have been "one way or another influencing an agreement with Syria and Israel."

Hoekstra and Feinstein also criticized the White House for not sharing more information with Congress in general and the intelligence committees in particular, a recurring complaint against the Bush administration.

Despite lawmakers' repeated requests for briefings, the administration has said almost nothing about the Israeli airstrike, which took place Sept. 6, 2007.

Feinstein said she learned of the North Korean link for the first time when the administration sent CIA Director Michael V. Hayden, Director of National Intelligence J. Michael McConnell and White House national security advisor Stephen Hadley to brief Congress last week.

Lawmakers are wary because the Bush White House has been tightfisted with information, Feinstein said. When the administration does share intelligence, such as the Syrian satellite imagery and photos, she said, "it makes us very suspicious as to why are they doing it right now."

Alluding to the administration's incorrect prewar claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, Hoekstra said the White House needs to build trust.

"The administration has a credibility problem. And if they're going to deal with this credibility problem, the way to deal with it is to be more open, especially with members of Congress," he said.

nicole.gaouette@latimes.com

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042800240.html>

N.Koreans may have died in Israel raid in Syria: NHK

Reuters

Monday, April 28, 2008; 3:23 AM

TOKYO (Reuters) - Ten North Koreans helping build a suspected nuclear reactor in Syria may have died in an Israeli air raid last September, Japanese public broadcaster NHK said on Monday, citing South Korean intelligence officials.

The report follows the release of photographs by the United States last week of what it said was a Syrian nuclear reactor capable of producing plutonium built with North Korean help.

Israel destroyed the suspected reactor in a September 6 air strike.

NHK said the dead included officials of the North Korea's communist party unit that exports weapons and military technology and members of the North Korean military unit which made nuclear facilities in the country.

Two or three North Koreans survived the air strike but it is not clear what happened to them afterwards, NHK reported.

Syria has denied the U.S. charge as "a fantasy."

Pyongyang has been reluctant to discuss any transfer of nuclear technology to other countries, notably Syria, as well as to account for its suspected pursuit of uranium enrichment.

(Reporting by Yoko Kubota)

Hayden: Syrian site could have produced fuel for 2 weapons

By PAMELA HESS

The Associated Press

Monday, April 28, 2008; 11:00 PM

WASHINGTON -- CIA Director Michael Hayden said Monday that the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September would have produced enough plutonium for one or two bombs within a year of becoming operational.

U.S. intelligence and administration officials publicly disclosed last week their assessment that Syria was building a covert nuclear reactor with North Korean assistance. They said it was modeled on the shuttered North Korean reactor at Yongbyon, which produced a small amount of plutonium. The Syrian site, they said, was within weeks or months of being operational.

"In the course of a year after they got full up they would have produced enough plutonium for one or two weapons," Hayden told reporters after a speech at Georgetown University.

Almost all reactors produce plutonium, even those dedicated to peaceful purposes, according to David Albright, president of the nonprofit Institute for Science and International Security. Albright analyzed commercial satellite imagery of the bombed facility last fall and surmised then it was a nuclear reactor.

Neither the United States nor Israel told the International Atomic Energy Agency about the Syrian site until last week, about a year after they obtained what they considered to be decisive intelligence: dozens of photographs from a handheld camera that showed both the interior and exterior of the mysterious compound in Syria's eastern desert.

From the CIA's perspective, that intelligence was not the United States' to share with the U.N. nuclear watchdog, Hayden said.

"We've made it clear we did not have complete control over the totality of the information because obviously it was the result of a team effort," he said. "One has to respect the origin of the information in terms of how it is used."

The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency chastised the United States on Friday for withholding information on the alleged Syrian reactor. One of the IAEA's missions is to try to prevent nuclear proliferation, and it depends on member states for information.

A senior administration official told reporters last week that the United States kept the information secret after the Israeli strike because it feared revealing it might provoke Syria to strike back at Israel.

Alleged Syria-North Korea Nuclear Cooperation Raises Questions

By Gary Thomas

Washington

28 April 2008

U.S. intelligence officials last week outlined details of what they said was North Korean nuclear assistance to Syria. Syria has denied U.S. allegations that it was running a covert nuclear weapons program or that it was getting help from Pyongyang. As VOA correspondent Gary Thomas reports, the timing of the revelations has raised questions about the motivation for their release.

Alleged North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria is not exactly fresh news. After a secret Israeli air strike destroyed a facility in Syria last September, Andrew Semmel, the top State Department official for nonproliferation, said publicly that the United States was concerned about nuclear activity in Syria and suggested Damascus was getting help from Pyongyang. When speaking to reporters off the record other officials were even more specific.

US officials said this Syrian nuclear reactor built with North Korean help, which was hit by Israeli strike

However, intelligence officials only briefed members of Congress in detail about it last week. And, in a surprising move for the usually secret intelligence community, they also briefed selected members of the media.

Semmel, now retired, says he is puzzled that it took so long to reveal the information since Congress has been pressing for details of Syria's activity since the Israeli raid.

"Congress has been pressing the administration, and others have been, too, to come clean on this or to come out some more with a little bit more information. And at this point in time maybe the feeling was, 'maybe' is the key word here, maybe the feeling was that somehow or another the intelligence community and others could not keep the lid on it any more, so they wanted to go out, I'm putting a positive spin on this, by the way, so there would be no major distortions of what actually happened, he said."

Semmel, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation Policy, says the message of the revelations could have been targeted at one or several countries.

"The calculation may very well have been that there are multiple positives to this, message to Iran, message certainly to Syria, message to North Korea, et cetera. What puzzles me is why we waited until now to even inform the International Atomic Energy Agency. It seems to me that if we wanted the I.A.E.A. to play a positive role as a neutral monitor of the situation that we would have shared that information with them, perhaps discreetly, much earlier," said Simmel.

The I.A.E.A., which is the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency, was only briefed by U.S. officials last week. Semmel says that when he raised with policymakers the idea of notifying the I.A.E.A., he was rebuffed.

"This was so tightly held that one didn't know whether in fact we were or not sharing that with the I.A.E.A. Some of us even at my fairly senior level raised the question in our limited circle. And

basically there was no response, this is not for discussion. It was really a bizarre policy issue," he added.

Murhaf Jouejati, a Syrian-born specialist on Middle East affairs at the U.S. National Defense University, says the revelations could be aimed at getting leverage with North Korea in the six-party talks over its own nuclear program. He also thinks that they might be aimed at undercutting any potential deal between Israel and Syria over Israel's holding of the Golan Heights.

"There is a history, of course, of apparently the Bush Administration not wanting Israel to engage with the Syrians, wanting to isolate the Syrians totally. And on the other hand, again, those elements in the administration have for a long time apparently not wanted North Korea to get off as easily, they say, as this on their nuclear activities. And so both really make sense to me. Which one has more weight, I'm not really sure. They are both very plausible," he said.

Jouejati also says that while Syria possesses some chemical and biological weapons capability, it has neither the money nor the infrastructure for a costly nuclear venture.

Syrian reactor capacity was 1-2 weapons/year: CIA

By Randall Mikkelsen

Reuters

Monday, April 28, 2008; 9:06 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A suspected Syrian reactor bombed by Israel had the capacity to produce enough nuclear material to fuel one to two weapons a year, CIA Director Michael Hayden said on Monday.

Hayden said the plutonium reactor was within weeks or months of completion when it was destroyed in an air strike last September 6, and within a year of entering operation it could have produced enough material for at least one weapon.

"In the course of a year after they got full up, they would have produced enough plutonium for one or two weapons," Hayden told reporters after a speech.

The reactor was of a "similar size and technology" to North Korea's Yongbyon reactor, Hayden said, disputing speculation it was smaller than the Korean facility.

"We would estimate that the production rate there would be about the same as Yongbyon, which is about enough plutonium for one or two weapons per year," he said.

Hayden's comments were the first statement on the suspected reactor's capacity, and his first public remarks since the United States released photos of what it said was a secret nuclear reactor built with North Korean aid.

Syria has denied the U.S. charges and accused Washington of involvement in the air attack by Israel, which is believed to have the only nuclear arsenal in the Middle East.

A diplomat close to the U.N. nuclear watchdog and outside analysts have said the U.S. disclosure did not amount to proof of an illicit arms program because there was no sign of a reprocessing plant needed to convert spent fuel from the plant into bomb-grade plutonium.

The United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency has also criticized the United States for waiting until this month to share its intelligence. The delay complicates the IAEA's effort to confirm whether the facility was a plutonium reactor.

'TEAM EFFORT'

Hayden said the United States lacked the liberty earlier to pass on the intelligence, which he said was acquired in a "team effort." ABC News reported in October that Israel had obtained pictures of the Syrian complex from an apparent mole and showed them to the CIA.

"We did not have complete control of the totality of the information," Hayden said. U.S. officials have declined to identify sources of the intelligence.

Asked whether Washington had eventually gotten approval to pass on the intelligence, Hayden said, "One would never share the intelligence without consultation with that nation, as a general principle."

A senior Bush administration official said at a briefing last week the intelligence was disclosed this month in part to pressure North Korea in disarmament talks to fully acknowledge its nuclear and proliferation activities, and to widen the circle of U.S. lawmakers briefed on the issue.

Congressional support is key to President George W. Bush's goal of making progress toward ending North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Senior intelligence officials said at the briefing they told Bush the Syrian facility was a plutonium reactor built with North Korean cooperation and intended to fuel a nuclear weapons program.

They acknowledged their confidence level was relatively low over its purpose as a weapons facility, due to limited evidence.

The officials said there was no reprocessing facility in the area of the destroyed reactor, but declined to further discuss their views of any Syrian reprocessing capability.

(Editing by Peter Cooney)



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
April 29, 2008

Press Conference by the President
Rose Garden

10:31 A.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

Q Mr. President, thank you, sir. Previously when asked about Israel's September bombing of the Syrian facility, you refused aggressively to discuss it. Then suddenly last week, your administration released classified photos and details of that bombing, intelligence officials claiming that it showed that this facility was a North Korean-designed nuclear facility being actually built with the help of Pyongyang. Why the turnaround, sir? What did you hope that that would accomplish? And what do you say to lawmakers of both parties on Capitol Hill who are quite concerned that indeed if this was what this facility was, that it took some eight months for you to inform them, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Let me correct the record. We briefed 22 members of Congress on what I'm about to tell you. First, we were concerned that an early disclosure would increase the risk of a confrontation in the Middle East or retaliation in the Middle East. As I mentioned to you early on, we did notify 22 members of Congress, key committee chairmen. And I was -- I'm mindful that there was going to be this kind of reaction, and of course, we wanted to include more members of Congress at a time when we felt the risk of retaliation or confrontation in the Middle East was reduced, and so that moment came upon us, and then extended the briefings.

We also wanted to advance certain policy objectives through the disclosures, and one would be to the North Koreans, to make it abundantly clear that we may know more about you than you think, and therefore, it's essential that you have a complete disclosure on not only your plutonium activities, but proliferation, as well as enrichment activities.

And then we have an interest in sending a message to Iran, and the world for that matter, about just how destabilizing a -- nuclear proliferation would be in the Middle East, and that it's essential that we work together to enforce U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at getting Iran to stop their enrichment programs. In other words, one of the things that this example shows is that these programs can exist and people don't know about them -- because the Syrians simply didn't declare the program; they had a hidden program.

And finally, we wanted to make it clear to Syria -- and the world -- that their intransigence in dealing with helping us in Iraq, or destabilizing Lebanon, or dealing with Hamas -- which is a destabilizing force in our efforts to have a Palestinian state coexist peacefully with Israel -- that those efforts are -- gives us a chance to remind the world that we need to work together to deal with those issues. So that's why we made the decision we made.

Bush: Revealing Reactor Was Meant to Pressure N. Korea

By Michael Abramowitz

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, April 30, 2008; A15

President Bush said yesterday that his administration's disclosure of secret information last week about suspected North Korean assistance for a Syrian nuclear reactor was designed to pressure Pyongyang to come clean on its nuclear activities.

At a Rose Garden news conference, Bush also said he wanted to send a message to Iran to cooperate with international efforts to limit proliferation, and to Syria to help stabilize Iraq and Lebanon.

"One of the things that this example shows is that these programs can exist and people don't know about them," Bush told reporters. He added that "the Syrians simply didn't declare the program; they had a hidden program."

Bush and other senior administration officials were silent for nearly eight months about Israel's destruction last September of a building that U.S. intelligence officials said last week was a nuclear reactor, built with North Korea's assistance. Syria has denied it was building a reactor.

The discovery of North Korean ties to the facility has complicated U.S. efforts to get the country to give up nuclear weapons. Under a deal involving Pyongyang, Washington and other parties to the talks, North Korea is supposed to provide an inventory of its nuclear program, but it has yet to do so.

Bush said the disclosures last week should make it "abundantly clear" to North Korea that "we may know more about you than you think, and therefore it's essential that you have a complete disclosure on not only your plutonium activities, but proliferation, as well as enrichment activities."

In recent negotiations, the administration has pulled back on its demand for full disclosure, requesting that North Korea only acknowledge U.S. concerns and evidence on proliferation and uranium enrichment.

Bush avoided criticism of former president Jimmy Carter's recent talks with Hamas, the radical Palestinian group classified by the U.S. government as a terrorist entity. The United States refuses to engage with Hamas, which Bush said is "undermining peace."

"They're the ones whose foreign policy objective is the destruction of Israel," he said. "They're the ones who are trying to create enough violence to stop the advance of the two-party state solution."

CIA's Hayden: Syria was on verge of becoming nuclear power

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

WASHINGTON — The U.S. intelligence community, in an about-face from an assessment of less than a year ago, has concluded that Syria was close to becoming a nuclear power.

"In the course of a year after they got full up they would have produced enough plutonium for one or two weapons," CIA director Michael Hayden said.

The new assessment was that Syria was weeks away from operating a North Korean-built plutonium production plant near the Turkish border. That facility, the intelligence community assessed, could have produced up to two bombs in the first year of operation.

On April 28, Hayden said the Syrian reactor could have begun producing sufficient amounts of plutonium for an atomic weapon. Speaking to reporters after an address at Georgetown University, the CIA director said information of the North Korean-designed nuclear reactor came from Israel and could not be shared with the IAEA until mid-April.

"We've made it clear we did not have complete control over the totality of the information because obviously it was the result of a team effort, Hayden said. "One has to respect the origin of the information in terms of how it is used."

Officials acknowledged that the U.S. assessment marked a near reversal of that in July 2007 when Israel provided aerial photographs of the plant and a video of the North Korean scientists inside. At the time, the officials said, the CIA and State Department said the North Korean facility — destroyed by the Israel Air Force in September 2007 — was years away from being completed and even tested.

"Much of the revision of the CIA assessment came after the Israeli bombing when evidence of nuclear material was found," an official said. "We also learned a lot from the Syrian refusal to the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit the site."

Officials acknowledged that the State Department, particularly Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sought to play down the Israeli evidence. They said Ms. Rice and her aides recruited CIA analysts who asserted that the Syrian facility, termed Al Kibar, was not designed for an atomic bomb.

Ms. Rice and Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill were said to have argued that any determination of a North Korean nuclear facility in Syria would torpedo U.S.-led negotiations for Pyongyang to dismantle its nuclear weapons program. Officials said Israel did not report any uranium shipments to Al Kibar.

The U.S. intelligence community eventually agreed with the Israeli assessment of a North Korean nuclear program in Syria. Officials said Hayden agreed with analysts who determined that Pyongyang violated its February 2007 pledge to halt nuclear proliferation. The intelligence community suspected that North Korea had been helping Syria's nuclear program since 2001.

By June 2007, officials said, the CIA received information from Israel that North Korea was building a suspected nuclear reactor. Officials said the Israeli aerial and ground-based photographs overcame doubts that stemmed from satellite images of the facility.

At that point, Hayden said, the U.S. intelligence community dismissed arguments that the reactor could be meant for energy production. He said the Israeli photographs also showed that the building was a nuclear reactor.

"Our team effort on the Al Kibar reactor is a case study in rigorous analytic tradecraft, skillful human and technical collection, and close collaboration with our community colleagues and liaison partners," Hayden said on April 24. Our officers put in long hours on this issue for many months, and their hard work paid off by directly advancing our nation's security and that of our allies."

SYRIA AND NORTH KOREA CONSPIRE TO BUILD NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Text From the Congressional Record

Poe, Ted [R-TX]
Special Orders

Begin 2008-04-30 20:12:58
End 20:18:28
Length 00:05:30

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, North Korea and Syria were working together with Pakistan rogue scientist Abdul Khan to build a nuclear reactor in Syria, capable of producing plutonium for two nuclear weapons within a year of when it was destroyed by Israeli jets in September of 2007.

Israel, by the way, has not confirmed or denied the air strikes. But Israel acted in self-defense and self-interest because of the fact that Israel is so close to Syria.

Mr. Speaker, here is a map of the area. We have Syria and, of course, we have Israel and Iraq and then, of course, Iran on the other side. And here is the location in Eastern Syria where the nuclear facility was being built, with the aid of the North Koreans. From that location, in Alkibar facility, it is only 450 miles to Tel Aviv, where the majority of the Israelis live.

[Time: 20:15]

This whole area, of course, is in somewhat of a turmoil because of the fact you have Syria and the rogue dictator in Iran working together with the North Koreans to facilitate the development of nuclear weapons for all three countries.

The CIA has reported recently that North Korea is building Syria a reactor similar to the one that they have in North Korea. And North Korea then helped the Syrians cover up the results of the bombing after the reactor was destroyed.

Here are four photographs that the CIA has released and declassified just this week. Over on the top corner here is a photograph of North Korea's nuclear reactor that is capable of producing plutonium. You will see right next to it Syria's nuclear reactor as it was being built. It was built with the same floor plan, the same design as the North Korean facility that is in North Korea. This photograph was taken of Syria's reactor shortly before it was blown up.

Here is an aerial photograph of Syria's reactor, and you can see, Mr. Speaker, it's camouflaged to the extent that it looks just like a boxed building just in the eastern part of Syria with nothing anywhere close to it. And after Israeli jets came in and bombed the facility, this photograph on the bottom corner shows the results of the Syrian reactor after it was bombed by the Israeli jets.

And what is interesting, after the Israeli jets came in and bombed this facility, the North Koreans and the Syrians started working together very quickly to destroy what was left of this facility and bury it in

the desert and then put in its place another facility, a building that looks just like this one but obviously, based on intelligence, is just a shell and not really used for any purpose whatsoever.

The purpose, of course, to build the second building was to let the world know that they didn't have anything in this area, but of course, we know that they buried all of their equipment and all of their nuclear devices or equipment, I should say, in the desert underneath the bombing that was done by the Israeli pilots.

So it's important for us to be aware of the contact and the working of North Korea with Syria. It is not a recent development. North Korea started working with Syria to build this facility in 2001, and they have continued to work with them until they started actually building this facility that would be capable of producing plutonium and at least to be able to build two nuclear weapons within a year.

North Korea is a nuclear threat and appears to help any nation with evil intentions, and the whole world needs to know about it. The countries of Iran, North Korea, and now Syria need to be known to all the world that they are nations with hearts that are fatally built on mischief and with malice aforethought. They build nuclear facilities with no redeemable, peaceful intentions. The normal, peaceful countries of our planet, especially those in the Middle East, cannot allow these three nations to have nuclear nonsense continue. They are on a path of destruction for at least somebody else, other than themselves, if their intentions are not stopped.

As for the nameless Israeli bomber pilots who flew these missions to destroy this nuclear facility capable of later being able to build nuclear weapons, they are thanked for their job well done, and the world needs to be aware that North Korea, Syria, and Iran seem to continue to work together to thwart world peace by building facilities that are capable of destruction for other countries, especially their neighbors.

And that's just the way it is.

END



For Immediate Release

May 1, 2008

Press Briefing by Tony Fratto
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:40 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

MR. FRATTO: Good afternoon, everyone. I actually have nothing to lead off with, so we can go straight to questions. Terry, you ready?

Q The President said this week at the news conference that he wanted to make -- that one of the reasons you disclosed the North Korean program in Syria last week was to make them know that we know more than they think we might. Has there been any response from North Korea? Has there been any communication since the -- last week's disclosure?

MR. FRATTO: I'm not aware of a specific response from the North Koreans. But it's clear, as the President talked about, we want to make sure that we're transparent in this and what we're seeing with respect to proliferation activities, and that the world can see what we knew. We made it clear in our briefings to the Congress, and that's the best way to proceed on this.

Now, we've had our State Department officials who were recently in North Korea, and they continue their communications in the context of the six-party talks, and they're progressing. And we just counsel some patience, and wait to see what we get back from the North Koreans, in terms of their declaration, that it be complete and accurate. And so we're working with them on that.

Q How long is the United States willing to wait?

MR. FRATTO: I don't think it's something that you can put a time frame on. Sooner is better than later, and that's what our negotiators are working towards.

Yes, Helen.

Q When did it reach this magnificent decision for transparency when it waited eight months, or seven months to reveal it?

MR. FRATTO: Those were decisions that were made by the intelligence community and our senior officials here. And we respect the concerns of Congress, that we heard from Congress, and they thought this was the best way to proceed. And the President made the decision on that.

Q You don't call this a devotion to transparency, do you?

MR. FRATTO: I think in this case it was important to be transparent, and that's a decision we made, Helen.

Q And not to put pressure on Korea and so forth?

MR. FRATTO: I think we were clear in how -- in what the context was of that.

[EXCERPT]

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OSC Analysis: DPRK-Syria Bilateral Contacts, 2005-2007

FEA20080506659592 - OSC Feature - North Korea – OSC Analysis 02 May 08

[KPNKLDLDR, KPNKECO, KPNKNUC, KPNKMIL, KPNKST Corrected version: spelling, several minor corrections made.]

A review of available North Korean and Syrian print and online media in the period 2005-2007 has yielded the names of dozens of DPRK and Syrian officials involved in military, scientific, trade, and other aspects of bilateral relations. The media contain no clear references to collaboration regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD), although allegations have surfaced over the years in third-country media. Indeed, media reports from 2005 through 2007 include fewer references to bilateral military and scientific contacts than in preceding years. Nevertheless, reported contacts of a high-ranking official of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (MPAF) with Syrian diplomats, the visit to Pyongyang of a senior Syrian security officer, and certain collaborative projects in economics and trade may have some undeclared military significance. This is the fourth such review of bilateral relations. Three previous reports on officials involved in bilateral relations from 1992 through 2004, as well as five photographic reports for the same period, are available at www.opensource.gov.

No Media Pointers to WMD

No obvious indications of covert military cooperation surfaced in the highly-censored media of North Korea or Syria in this period. The visit of Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) Chairman Choe Thae Bok (Ch'oe T'ae-pok) to Syria in October 2007, coming only weeks after the Israeli air strike of 6 September against an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor site, is a case in point. Third-country media speculated on a connection between the visit and the bombing, but DPRK media never went beyond simply denouncing Israel for violating Syrian airspace and dropping "bombs in the desert in the northeastern area before fleeing" (KCNA, 11 September 2007); Pyongyang central media made no comments on allegations connecting Choe's visit to the raid.

A review of television images showing DPRK officials accompanying Choe in one meeting showed a uniformed military official, suggesting that Choe may have brought an officer from Pyongyang to discuss matters relating to the stricken Syrian site. However, a review of photographs in Syrian media unearthed a 2005 photograph apparently showing the same officer at a reception of the DPRK Embassy in Damascus, suggesting that the man was simply the military attaché, Colonel Mun Yong Nam, not a member of Choe's visiting entourage. As a member of the embassy's country team, Colonel Mun's presence may have been normal for any high-level delegation visiting Damascus, rather than evidence that Choe had come to Syria on account of the Israeli air strike.

Fewer Military, S&T Contacts

Overall, DPRK and Syrian media coverage of bilateral affairs during 2005-2007 included fewer reports of contacts in such areas of interest as military affairs and science and technology than in years past. No military delegation on either side visited the other, unlike some past years. There were no reported visits of Syrian officials to the Korea Computer Center (KCC) or of Korean officials touring Syria's Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC), in

contrast to previous periods; both KCC and SSRC are alleged in third-country media of having military links.

Military, Security, Science, Economic Contacts of Interest

Nevertheless, the period 2005-2007 includes some contacts of interest in military and security affairs, science and technology, and economic cooperation.

- o Syrian Interior Vice Minister Ibrahim Musli led a ministry delegation to Pyongyang in December 2006 and signed a cooperation agreement there. DPRK media reported no details of his agenda but noted that People's Security Vice Minister Sin Il-nam hosted the visit and signed the agreement for the DPRK side. Sin, a career officer of the Korean People's Army, has also served as a Cabinet vice premier and chairman of the Capital Construction Committee, according to the ROK National Intelligence Service (www.nis.go.kr). He has reportedly been the "closest confidant" of Chang So'ng-t'aek, Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law (*Monthly Chosun*, 1 July 2004). While in Pyongyang, Musli toured sites frequented by foreign visitors, such as the captured USS Pueblo, but he also visited the College of Politics under the Ministry of People's Security. The unusual stop may point to Syrian security officers training in North Korea.
- o People's Armed Forces Vice Minister Kim Sang-ik attended receptions at the Syrian Embassy on 5 February and 18 April 2005 in honor of the respective birthdays of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. In July 2003, Vice Minister Kim had attended a Syrian Embassy reception marking the anniversary of North Korea's "victory" in the Korean war.
- o In May 2007, *Rodong Sinmun* published a KCNA article that reported the signing of an accord for scientific cooperation between the presidents of Kim Il Sung University and the University of Damascus. The Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) omitted to report any details of the agreement, or even the place and day of its signing. The report came one year after a Syrian newspaper reported the DPRK ambassador expressed to the Syrian minister for higher education a particular desire for cooperation between the two universities.

Syria: U.S. nuclear reactor allegations aim to create Mideast crisis

By The Associated Press

Last update - 05:04 03/05/2008

GENEVA - Damascus on Friday [2008-05-02] accused the current U.S. administration of fabricating a report allegedly proving Syria had built a nuclear reactor in a plot to destabilize the region.

"U.S. allegations about the reactor were manufactured in order to create further crisis in the Middle East," Syrian Ambassador Faysal al-Hamoui told a conference on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in Geneva.

Earlier Friday the United States submitted a paper to the conference saying the treaty's biggest problem was noncompliance by countries like Syria and Iran which it said were seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

The United States also cited North Korea's nuclear weapons program and said reports its nuclear cooperation with other countries warranted serious vigilance.

"North Korea's clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria ... is a dangerous manifestation," the U.S. paper said.

North Korea assisted Syria's covert work in building a nuclear reactor capable of producing plutonium and not intended for peaceful purposes, it said.

The U.S. paper made no mention of allegations that the reactor was destroyed in an Israel Air Force bombing raid in September.

Al-Hamoui said the allegations made by the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush were part of a disinformation campaign.

"We call upon member states to exercise caution and not to follow as other people have followed the vein of an administration which can only be described as madness," he told the meeting of the 190 countries signed on to the treaty.

Al-Hamoui said Australia and France lack credibility for referring to the U.S. allegations and for failing to mention Israel's own nuclear arsenal.

He said French Ambassador Jean-Francois Dobelle had twice referred to the U.S. allegations.

"France played a major and pivotal role in building the Israeli nuclear program and continues to supply Israel with nuclear technology, which is a clear infringement of the NPT," al-Hamoui said.

"We call on Syria to come clean about its past and current nuclear activities," said Dobelle, who also urged the International Atomic Energy Agency to launch a thorough investigation of the Syrian program.

Australian Ambassador Caroline Millar told the conference that the U.S. information about Syria is very disturbing.

"Syria has an obligation under its safeguards agreement with the IAEA to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facilities," she said.

Diplomats say IAEA chief urging more US flexibility on Iran

By GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press Writer

May 6, 2008 – 7:09pm

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) - The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency urged Washington on Tuesday to show more sensitivity in dealing with Iran if it hopes to see Tehran make concessions on its nuclear program, diplomats said.

The diplomats, speaking to The Associated Press after a meeting between IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei and Undersecretary of State John Rood, said the American diplomat made no commitments, but promised to take ElBaradei's concerns back to his superiors.

Rood, the top U.S. official on nuclear nonproliferation, declined to go into details of his discussions with ElBaradei beyond confirming that Iran and Syria were among the topics of the meeting.

But one diplomat, who agreed to discuss the substance of the confidential meeting only on condition of anonymity, said ElBaradei urged the U.S. to broaden its approach to Iran to address Tehran's economic and security concerns in exchange for nuclear concessions.

The diplomat also said Syria still has not given IAEA inspectors permission to examine the site of an alleged nuclear reactor destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September — something Rood said Damascus needed to do.

"Obviously Syria has a lot of explaining to do," Rood said. Asked why the U.S. withheld until recently intelligence that could have helped the IAEA press its case with Syria, he said a "concern about the potential for a military conflict" prompted Washington to keep mum at first.

He was apparently alluding to post-airstrike tensions between Israel and Syria.

[deletia]

U.S. Wants Syria to Admit Atomic Work, Won't Demand Inspections

By Jonathan Tirone

(Bloomberg)

May 7 [2008]

U.S. diplomats want Syria to acknowledge it has a nuclear program, though they've stopped short of demanding United Nations inspections of a site where an alleged reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air strike.

"It's only very recently that we have disclosed this information," U.S. Undersecretary of State John Rood said late yesterday, referring to an April 24 report to Congress in which intelligence officials said Israel bombed a Syrian reactor that was being built with North Korean help.

"We will be watching closely to see Syria's level of cooperation with the IAEA."

While the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-member board of governors has the authority to compel Syria to accept inspections by passing a binding resolution, as they have done with Iran, Rood said at a briefing in Vienna that it's "premature" to discuss giving the United Nations nuclear investigators that power. The U.S. wants Syria to voluntarily invite the IAEA to look at the bombed facility, he said.

U.S. diplomats didn't share intelligence with UN inspectors about the alleged atomic plant in Syria because they feared such a revelation may have sparked a regional war, he said.

"We did not want to take a risk of increasing the threat of a wider conflict," Rood said.

"Once the fear of a wider conflict had receded somewhat, we felt more at liberty to talk about this issue."

Syria's ambassador to the U.S., Imad Moustapha, described the allegations that the site was a nuclear plant as "silly" and accused the Bush administration of "fabricating" the report, according to an April 24 CNN interview.

U.S., IAEA Rift

The IAEA "deplored" the U.S. decision to withhold information on the Syria facility, Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei said in an April 25 statement. Rood met with ElBaradei yesterday in an attempt to heal the rift and reinforce U.S. support for the Vienna-based agency, whose inspectors enforce the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"We would like the IAEA to follow up to determine the extent of the Syrian activities," said Rood, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst who was promoted to undersecretary in September.

"The Syrians have a lot of explaining to do, given the covert nature of this facility."

U.S. intelligence, which suspected Syria of a covert nuclear program in the 1990s, was certain that the government in Damascus, with North Korean help, was building a secret facility during the first quarter

of 2007, according to Congressional testimony given last month. An Israeli air strike destroyed the reactor on Sept. 6. Until the April 24 presentation to Congress, U.S. officials had been silent on Syria's allegation that Israeli warplanes carried out a raid on its territory. Israeli and North Korean officials have declined to discuss the matter.

The IAEA's dilemma with Syria's Al Kibar nuclear site

By Fiona Simpson

6 May 2008

Although Israel's September 2007 raid on what it believed to be the Al Kibar nuclear site in Syria has often been compared to its 1981 raid on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq, the aura of secrecy surrounding the Syria raid stands in stark contrast to the extensive public explanations offered by Israel 27 years ago. Further details about the Syria raid have recently been provided, but they didn't come from Israel. Instead, senior U.S. intelligence officials presented them to Congress and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in late April--nearly eight months after the raid.

In a February Bulletin web-edition piece entitled "IAEA Special Inspections After Israel's Raid on Syria," I argued that while the IAEA had the authority to invoke special inspections in regards to Syrian activities at Al Kibar, it probably would have never done so given the lack of concrete evidence. Instead, in bilateral discussions, the IAEA asked Syria for access to the site; a request that was evidently refused.

Since then, at an April 24 briefing, senior U.S. intelligence officials brought more substantial evidence forward, identifying the raid's target as "a nuclear reactor . . . constructed by the Syrians . . . for the production of plutonium with the assistance of the North Koreans." They also asserted the presence of North Korean nationals at the reactor, apparently documented in photographs. The briefing stated that the first evidence of such activity was discovered in the late 1990s, with reactor construction estimated to have begun in 2001. In spring 2007, intelligence officials received more information about the site, including interior and exterior photographs. They maintained that this information revealed the construction of a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor similar to the reactor at Yongbyon in North Korea. But they acknowledged that they didn't know how the reactor was going to be fuelled and that there weren't any indications that a reprocessing facility existed or was being built--a necessity to extract plutonium from the spent fuel rods removed from the reactor. As a result, they noted that their confidence level was "low" that the activities at Al Kibar were those of a nuclear weapons program.

The timing of the briefing has been the source of much speculation. While some, President George W. Bush included, have said the delay was to ensure that Syria wasn't unnecessarily antagonized, others believe it's a tactic by the Bush administration to affect ongoing negotiations with North Korea. More likely, the administration caved to increasing pressure from Congress to brief it before Congress needed to approve removing sanctions on North Korea. Bush has also claimed that the disclosure of intelligence was intended to send a "message" to Iran. (See "Bush Defends Syria Reactor Claim.")

International reaction

There's speculation that Israel wasn't in favor of the briefing, as from the outset, it worried that too much public attention might bait Syria into retaliation. (See "Israelis Upset U.S. Divulged Strike Details" and "North Korea and Syria: Oh, What A Tangled Web They Weave.") Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office turned down requests for comment, referring the media to statements he made a week earlier, when he noted, "The Syrians know what our position is, and we know what their expectations are."

Unsurprisingly, for its part, Syria has vehemently denied the charges that Al Kibar was nuclear-related, claiming the target was a vacant military building that wasn't even protected. Like Israel, North Korea has remained quiet on the matter.

The IAEA, which was briefed on the same day as Congress, spoke out sharply against the United States and Israel. It noted in a press release, "The director general deplores the fact that this information was not provided to the agency in a timely manner . . . [He] views the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the nonproliferation regime." The press release reaffirmed that Syria had an obligation to inform the IAEA prior to the construction of such a facility and that the agency intended to investigate the information provided to it. But the bulk of the official reaction was devoted to a reiteration of IAEA safeguard responsibilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the agency's displeasure with the United States and Israel over the raid and the silence that followed.

This displeasure links back to the question of special inspections. As noted above, the lack of evidence upon which to proceed effectively kept the IAEA from exercising its authority. But had the evidence been provided to the agency in the absence of a strike against Syria, it would have been under serious internal and external pressure to call for a special inspection of the site. If the IAEA failed to do so, the agency would have been risking its credibility and inviting questions about the usefulness of the special inspections provision and the circumstances needed to invoke it. How this might have then played out in the IAEA Board of Governors if Syria refused to grant the inspections is difficult to say. Also difficult to assess is how the IAEA might have proceeded had the evidence been immediately provided, but with the added complication of the strike.

Possible outcomes

During the briefing, U.S. intelligence officials stated that Al Kibar was "not yet part of an active weapons program." Although such a statement lends itself to misinterpretation, the use of the word "yet" assumes that the simplest explanation for an undeclared Syrian nuclear reactor is probably the correct explanation--i.e., that it was eventually intended for proliferation purposes. Nonetheless, the questions raised by the lack of a reprocessing facility, as well as the questions regarding how, when, and by whom such a reactor was to be fuelled, remain unanswered. (See "Syria Update III: New Information about the Al Kibar Reactor Site.")

Within the context of denuclearizing North Korea, renewed discussion over Syria and its links to North Korea doesn't appear to have put either the Six-Party Talks or work toward dismantling the North Korean nuclear program in any more jeopardy than would have resulted from simply failing to answer congressional questions about the raid. Although North Korea missed the December 31 deadline to provide a complete inventory of its nuclear program, the administration, which had originally insisted that North Korea detail its enrichment activities as well as reprocessing activities, was moving toward an alternative that would allow North Korea simply to acknowledge U.S. concerns about these activities and alleged nuclear cooperation with other parties. And despite the recent briefing, which deepened the hostility of some in Congress toward the administration's policy on North Korea, the House Foreign Affairs Committee approved a bill that would allow funds to be used toward North Korea's denuclearization. But the bill requires the president to demonstrate that Pyongyang isn't providing proliferation-sensitive nuclear technology to Syria or Iran before removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

As part of its own investigation, the IAEA indicated that it will submit a new request to Syria to visit the site. (See "IAEA to Look Into Syria Reactor Claim.") This decision has been welcomed by several countries at the 2008 NPT Preparatory Committee, which is currently underway in Geneva.

In the raid's aftermath, Syria refused IAEA access to Al Kibar, but Damascus has now reversed that position, claiming it has "nothing to hide." In a sense, this is true; the original site has been bulldozed and new construction has started. Therefore, because of the time that has elapsed between the raid and the availability of the evidence, it seems unlikely that any on-the-ground investigations will be able to provide conclusive proof of the allegations and evidence provided at the April 24 briefing--particularly so given that no nuclear material had been introduced to the site, ruling out the utility of certain safeguards techniques (environmental sampling, for instance) that would detect the presence of such material. Indeed, the absence of nuclear material at Al Kibar seems to be one of the few things that all the parties involved agree upon.



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
May 7, 2008

Notice: Continuation of the National Emergency Blocking Property of Certain Persons and Prohibiting the Export of Certain Goods to Syria

On May 11, 2004, pursuant to my authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701-1706) and the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (Public Law 108-175), I issued Executive Order 13338, in which I declared a national emergency with respect to the actions of the Government of Syria. To deal with this national emergency, Executive Order 13338 authorized the blocking of property of certain persons and prohibited the exportation or re-exportation of certain goods to Syria. On April 25, 2006, and February 13, 2008, I issued Executive Order 13399 and Executive Order 13460, respectively, to take additional steps with respect to this national emergency.

I took these actions to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by the actions of the Government of Syria in supporting terrorism, maintaining its then-existing occupation of Lebanon, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile programs including the recent revelation of illicit nuclear cooperation with North Korea, and undermining U.S. and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.

Because the actions and policies of the Government of Syria continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the national emergency declared on May 11, 2004, and the measures adopted on that date and on April 25, 2006, in Executive Order 13399, and on February 13, 2008, in Executive Order 13460, to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond May 11, 2008. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency authorizing the blocking of property of certain persons and prohibiting the exportation or re-exportation of certain goods to Syria.

This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress.

GEORGE W. BUSH
THE WHITE HOUSE,
May 7, 2008.

IAEA chief hopes for clarity on Syria facility soon

Wed May 7, 2008 9:44pm IST

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said on Wednesday he hoped his agency would be able to shed light in the next few weeks on whether a Syrian facility bombed by Israel last year was an undeclared atomic reactor.

The United States released intelligence last month that it said showed Syria built a reactor with North Korean help before Israeli warplanes destroyed it last September. Damascus has denied the accusations.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said the IAEA was in contact with Syria to verify the U.S. intelligence and recalled Damascus's obligation to report any nuclear activities to the agency.

"I hope that in the next few weeks we will be able to shed some light on the nature of the facility that was destroyed," he told reporters after talks with EU officials in Brussels.

"Syria has an obligation to notify the agency if they are, if they were, building any nuclear reactors," he said. Damascus has not granted U.N. inspectors access to the area despite several requests since September, diplomats say.

The U.S. material included photos and other information the CIA said showed the facility's potential for nuclear weapons purposes.

Syria has said the information was forged, comparing it with U.S. reports of mass destruction weapons hidden in Iraq which were never found after U.S.-led forces toppled Saddam Hussein.

Damascus has instead accused Washington of involvement in the air attack by Israel, a staunch U.S. ally widely believed to have the Middle East's only nuclear arsenal.

Syria has repeatedly sparred with the United States and Western allies over the matter at a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review meeting under way in Geneva.

The IAEA and others have criticised the United States for waiting until last month to share its intelligence, and analysts have raised questions over whether the U.S. material amounted to proof of any undeclared arms programme.

Diplomats close to the IAEA say it will be much harder to uncover evidence now than it would have been before the attack.

‘Abduction issue not a prerequisite to removing N. Korea from list of state sponsors of terrorism’

[Interview] Alexander R. Vershbow, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea

This year, The Hankyoreh is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a series of articles and interviews in the print edition of the paper to commemorate the publication of its first issue on May 15, 1988. As a special addition to our online edition, Jang Jungsoo, The Hankyoreh’s the executive editor and the former editor of this website, met with Alexander R. Vershbow, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, on **May 7 [2008]** in the ambassador’s office in Seoul.

[EXCERPT]

Q. Question on North Korea. The 6 Party Talks are at an important crossroads. But, as the U.S. mentions the possible cooperation between North Korea and Syria, there is a concern that the 6 Party Talks may get tangled with Middle East issues.

A. **Several months ago, at a private meeting with the North Koreans, the U.S. said that we were aware of North Korea's assistance in the construction of a nuclear facility in Syria. Since then, North Korea has said they acknowledge our concern, reaffirming that they will not be involved in transferring nuclear materials, technology and know-how to a third country in the future, in accordance with the existing agreement in the 6 Party Talks. Therefore, this issue is already being addressed within the framework of the 6 Party Talks, and we are now making efforts to build a comprehensive verification mechanism that can address plutonium issues as well as this issue.**



Remarks After Breakfast With Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Yu Myung-hwan

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

Grand Hyatt

Seoul, South Korea

May 8, 2008

8:40 a.m.

QUESTION: Sir, how was your discussion this morning with the Minister?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Very good, a chance to discuss a range of issues of bilateral interest; of course, the United States and South Korea are strategic allies, we have a very close relationship, and obviously this was an opportunity for me to come and pay my respects after the formation of a new government here.

QUESTION: Could you share some of the things that were discussed on the North Korea nuclear issue since you have a team of officials visiting today?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well just to say that, that process is on-going and the United States and South Korea, I think, share an interest in common in encouraging the process of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and as a result we both have a great interest in the progress of these Six Party Talks. As you say, there is work going on as we speak.

QUESTION: Have you heard from North Korea about your evidence, the evidence you've laid out on the Syria connection?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well this is an issue of concern to us and it is an issue that has been discussed in our diplomatic exchanges with North Korea. It's another reason why we attach so much importance to a thorough and accurate declaration on the part of North Korea with respect to their nuclear facilities and programs.

QUESTION: So there have been discussions with North Korea?

(sorry the Secretary has to go)

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Yeah, okay. Thanks a lot. Nice to see you.



North Korea and Iran: An Administration Perspective

Patricia McNerney, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, International Security and Nonproliferation
Remarks at National Defense University Symposium

Washington, DC

May 8, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

I've been asked to discuss U.S. nonproliferation policy with regard to the two proliferators of greatest current concern -- Iran and North Korea.

Our work is not yet complete in either case. Iran, in particular, is proving resistant to the ultimate objective of the dual-track approach adopted by the P5+1. Its hallmarks have been pressure applied by the UNSC in three successive Chapter VII sanctions resolutions and the package of incentives originally offered Iran on 1 June 2006. In the case of North Korea, we continue to pursue diplomatic negotiations through the Six-Party Talks, a process that has produced some concrete results, including the shutdown and on-going disablement of three core facilities at the Yongbyon Nuclear Complex such that, once all disablement activities are completed, it is estimated that it will take North Korea upwards of one year or more to re-establish operations there.

D.P.R.K.

Let me take a moment to address the issue North Korea-Syria nuclear cooperation - a matter that was briefed to the Congress on April 24. We have long been seriously concerned about the D.P.R.K.'s proliferation activities, and North Korea's clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria is a dangerous manifestation of those activities. The United States believes, based on strong evidence that North Korea assisted with the construction of a reactor at Al-Kibar in Syria. We have good reason to believe that the reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on September 6 of last year, was not intended for peaceful purposes.

We have chosen to address this problem through the Six Party Framework. In September 2007, the United States began raising its concerns with North Korea about nuclear cooperation with Syria. We have made our concerns known to North Korea in a frank and comprehensive way, and the North Koreans have acknowledged our concerns. The North Koreans have stated that there is no ongoing nuclear cooperation with any foreign country, and that there will be no such cooperation in the future.

We have been following Syrian-North Korean interactions since the destruction of the reactor, and we have not seen the same level of interaction as we did before the reactor's destruction; however, we

cannot be certain all cooperation has ceased. We continue to be on alert for signs of any nuclear cooperation, and any renewed activities. We remain attuned to potential North Korean relationships worldwide, especially given North Korea's continued proliferation of missiles and other weapons.

Through the Six-Party framework, we are working to address North Korea's proliferation activities, which is integral to achieving the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and ending the threat posed by a nuclear North Korea. We will work with our partners to establish in the Six Party Framework a rigorous verification mechanism to ensure that such conduct and other nuclear activities have ceased. We remain confident that the Six-Party process is the best mechanism to address the danger to the United States and the international community posed by the D.P.R.K.'s nuclear programs. Following completion of the Second Phase, we hope to move quickly into a final phase, which will be aimed at abandonment of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, dismantlement of all North Korea's nuclear facilities, capture of all fissile material the D.P.R.K. has produced, and a comprehensive verification of North Korea's denuclearization.

Released on May 9, 2008



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
May 8, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

QUESTION: On North Korea, can you comment on the Wall Street Journal report that North Korea's going to hand over this week to the U.S. boxes of documents, including Yongbyon facility's operation history?

And also, do you have any updates on the U.S. team that's in North Korea to discuss food aid to North Korea?

MR. MCCORMACK: Food aid -- the food aid team has left. They are --

QUESTION: Any updates --

MR. MCCORMACK: Their discussions -- they were inconclusive, I guess you could say. They went there to take a look at whether or not conditions had changed sufficiently so that we could, in good conscience, in good faith, provide food aid and know that it was going to get to people who need it. So at this point, those discussions are inconclusive. I don't know that they've had a chance to brief back people here in Washington, so I can't give you a more full description. But essentially, they go out there and look at, is there a need and can we effectively get food aid to people who need it. That's been an issue not only for us, but others in the international humanitarian assistance community.

In terms of Sung Kim, I expect that he's probably going to be coming back over -- into South Korea tomorrow. And I expect that he is going to bring with him -- I know that he is going to bring with him a significant number of documents related to North Korea's plutonium program. And we'll have an opportunity over the coming days -- days and weeks to assess the significance of these documents. It is a large number. I can't provide you an exact number right now. We have to take a -- you know, really go through it very carefully. And with respect to these -- you know, with respect to the documents and how they may play in the declaration process, you know, our top three priorities are going to be verification, verification, verification.

So this is part of a process that is unfolding. We will see, perhaps, North Korea providing a declaration to China, who is the chair of the six-party talks, and these documents will play a role in that process. But again, it is going to be a verification process that plays out over a period of time.

QUESTION: The documents, including the operation facility?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I'm not going to try to characterize them any more than to say that they relate to their plutonium program, because we haven't had a chance to get a detailed look at the documents.

[deletia]

Anything else on North Korea?

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. MCCORMACK: Okay.

QUESTION: What prompted the North Koreans to hand over this stack of documents? Was there -- was this in response to a request the U.S. had made or --

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, this is part of what we have been working -- we, on behalf of the six-party talks, have been working with them on. And again, it's part of the declaration process that speaks to the verification aspect of it.

Yeah.

QUESTION: On Iran -- do you have more on North Korea?

MR. MCCORMACK: You have North Korea? North Korea.

QUESTION: Yeah, I was just wondering, did you get any initial reaction from Sung Kim about the documents? Was it everything that he was hoping to get? And also, did -- when he went there, was there anything else on his agenda besides picking up these documents or was it -- was that basically --

MR. MCCORMACK: This was the main -- this -- the documents were the main reason he was going. And it's difficult to make an assessment of whether or not this is the full extent of what the North Koreans said that they were going to turn over. At this point, I don't have reason to question that. But again, let us take the time to look through the documents carefully, analyze them, and at that -- after we have done that, we'll be able to determine their full significance.

[deletia]

QUESTION: I see. And the second question: There is some speculation in the media in the Middle East about the meeting when Deputy Assistant Secretary Feltman invited the Ambassador of Syria --

MR. MCCORMACK: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and there's some rumors, you know. Do you have any guidance or any readout on what happened on 20 -- on that meeting which took place on the 24th of April?

MR. MCCORMACK: Oh, this is the one to inform him that we were going to be talking about --

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. MCCORMACK: -- their reactor or their former reactor? (Laughter.) The -- it was about a 15-minute meeting, Samir. It was really focused on that topic.

Yeah.

QUESTION: One more on North Korea. The assessment of the documents that Sung Kim received, will the U.S. primarily be doing the assessment or will the other four parties also receive the documents?

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, good question. Certainly, our folks are going to be doing an assessment and we are obviously going to be consulting very closely with the other members of the talks about this and sharing the information. I'll try to get you more on sort of the technical aspects of how people are going to -- how an evaluation of the documents is going to unfold.

QUESTION: And are there any additional stops to Sung Kim's trip?

MR. MCCORMACK: No. He'll be coming back here.

QUESTION: Yeah, and just to follow up on that, in terms of the declaration itself, I mean, not all of the parties are nuclear states with the kind of nuclear expertise that the United States has or Russia has, for instance. So how do you -- have you decided, like, on a mechanism for weighing the declaration? Because all five parties have to be happy with it, but not all five parties are equally, kind of --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Well, these are all highly developed economies with a great deal of technical expertise on issues related to nuclear technology, certainly with South Korea and in Japan, that's in civilian uses. So I think everybody brings something to the table and some level of expertise that they can apply in making their own judgments about this. But certainly, there's going to be a lot of discussion among the members of the six-party talks about the declaration once it's received. I have to emphasize, we haven't received, or the Chinese have not yet received, that declaration.

Powers Say Atom Control Treaty At Risk, Cite Iran

May 9, 2008 Filed at 5:51 a.m. ET

[EXCERPTS]

GENEVA (Reuters) - The five major nuclear-armed powers said on Friday the Non-Proliferation Treaty was under threat and cited Iran's uranium enrichment campaign in a rare joint call for action to shore up the NPT.

North Korea's nuclear test blast in 2006, Iran's pursuit of potentially bomb-capable enrichment and new allegations Syria covertly tried to build an atomic reactor with North Korean help spotlight mounting challenges to the treaty, analysts say.

"The proliferation of nuclear weapons constitutes a threat to international peace and security," the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France said in a joint address on the final day of a two-week meeting of 106 NPT member nations.

The five said they stood squarely behind a revised packet of economic incentives which they, along with Germany, plan to present to Iran soon to shelve its enrichment program.

They urged North Korea, which bolted from the NPT in 2003, to carry out a now-stalled six-party accord to disarm.

SYRIA ADDED TO NPT CONTROVERSY

Syria, like Iran repeatedly assailed by Washington and some allies at the meeting, was omitted from the powers' statement, apparently due to reservations of some about U.S. intelligence purporting to show Damascus was close to completing a secret reactor before Israeli warplanes destroyed it last September.

Syria has rejected the findings as "forged" but is now under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigation.

North Korea Gives U.S. Files on Plutonium Efforts

By HELENE COOPER

May 9, 2008

WASHINGTON — North Korea has turned over to the United States 18,000 pages of documents related to its plutonium program dating from 1990, in an effort to resolve remaining differences in a pending agreement meant to begin the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Bush administration officials said Thursday.

The documents contain information about North Korea's three major campaigns to reprocess plutonium for nuclear weapons, in 1990, 2003 and 2005, a senior official said. The official, like some others who agreed to discuss the documents, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of diplomatic considerations.

But the documents do not include information on two other areas about which North Korea has promised to be forthcoming — a uranium program that some officials in the Bush administration regard as another track toward weapons development, and North Korea's involvement in the proliferation of nuclear material.

State Department officials have nevertheless described the move on Thursday as an important step, saying they hope it will help to resolve a dispute over how much plutonium North Korea holds. Administration officials have not said how much plutonium North Korea has admitted to possessing, but they have criticized as incomplete a preliminary declaration it made last December.

The documents, which fill seven boxes, "will help shed light on why they have a lower figure," said an administration official who insisted on anonymity. He said one reason could be that North Korea has more nuclear waste than expected, which could have led to lower plutonium production than the United States had estimated.

Officials in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, gave the documents to Sung Kim, the director of the State Department's Korea office, on Thursday, and he was poring over them in his hotel before bringing them back to the United States this weekend, State Department officials said. They said that several other American diplomats would accompany Mr. Kim and the documents on a commercial flight back to Washington so they could transport the boxes as carry-on luggage. Transporting them as checked baggage would be too risky, the officials said. The acquisition of the documents is the latest step in the Bush administration's effort to complete a nuclear pact with North Korea before it leaves office in January. The nuclear deal has come under fire from some conservatives, in and out of the administration, who contend that North Korea cannot be trusted to end its nuclear program.

On Wednesday, The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, which has opposed the pact, said Christopher R. Hill, the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs, had "made a mockery of the interagency process." It said he had been bypassing other Bush officials and, instead, "handpicking experts to work at Yongbyon," where North Korea is dismantling its nuclear reactor.

Mr. Hill has the backing of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and they have kept President Bush's support for a pact that many foreign policy experts say is the administration's best chance at a tangible

foreign policy accomplishment — beginning the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula — in its remaining months.

The administration has focused its efforts on getting North Korea to disclose fully information about its plutonium cache, which represents what most experts say is the bulk of its nuclear program.

In return for the information it seeks on plutonium, the administration has relaxed a demand for North Korea to admit that it supplied Syria with nuclear technology. The United States has also indicated that it will postpone a demand that North Korea provide an immediate and full accounting of its fledgling uranium program.

North Korea's plutonium program was the source of raw material for the device it tested in October 2006.

Sean I. McCormack, the State Department spokesman, said that officials would take time to review the documents to determine whether North Korea's declaration about its plutonium program is satisfactory. He said that any final agreement would include a strict verification process for all North Korean nuclear activities.

"Our top three priorities are going to be verification, verification, verification," Mr. McCormack said.

US awaits 'complete' NKorea report: Negroponte

39 minutes ago [*Accessed 2008-05-09T14:05Z*]

TOKYO (AFP) — The United States is still awaiting a complete report from North Korea on its nuclear activities, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said Friday [2008-05-09], after the communist state handed over documents.

"We still await more complete results and a more complete report as to exactly what happened," Negroponte told reporters after briefing Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura on developments.

US nuclear expert Sung Kim was leaving North Korea on Friday with papers which will be used to help verify an eventual declaration from North Korea on its past nuclear activities, the US State Department said.

"I know he's bringing back some records that have to do with the nuclear production programmes of North Korea," Negroponte said.

But he was cautious over the papers after North Korea in December missed a key deadline in a six-nation deal to make a declaration on all nuclear material, including stockpiled plutonium which could be used for bomb-making.

"This is part of the ongoing process connected with the six-party talks and leading hopefully to the full denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," he said.

"So I would say this was a step in a process but it's an ongoing process," he added.

The North, which staged a plutonium-based nuclear test in October 2006, is disabling its plutonium-producing reactor and other plants under a deal reached in February 2007 with the United States, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

In return for total denuclearisation, the North would receive energy aid, a lifting of US sanctions, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Washington and a formal peace treaty.

In addition to the declared plutonium operation, Washington said the declaration must clear up suspicions about alleged secret uranium enrichment and about suspected proliferation to Syria.

The North denies both activities. Under a reported deal, it will merely "acknowledge" US concerns about the two issues in a confidential separate document to Washington.

Purchases Linked N. Korean to Syria

Pyongyang Company Funneled Reactor Parts to Damascus, Intelligence Officials Say

By Robin Wright and Joby Warrick

Washington Post Staff Writers

Sunday, May 11, 2008; A18

When North Korean businessman Ho Jin Yun first caught the attention of German customs police in 2002, he was on a continental buying spree with a shopping list that seemed as random as it was long.

Yun, police discovered, had been crisscrossing Central Europe, amassing a bafflingly diverse collection of materials and high-tech gadgets: gas masks, electric timers, steel pipes, vacuum pumps, transformers and aluminum tubes cut to precise dimensions.

Most of these wares Yun had shipped to his company's offices in China and North Korea. But some of the goods, U.S. and European officials now say, were evidently intended for a secret project in Syria: a nuclear reactor that would be built with North Korean help, allegedly to produce plutonium for eventual use in nuclear weapons.

According to U.S. officials, European intelligence officials and diplomats, Yun's firm -- Namchongang Trading, known as NCG -- provided the critical link between Pyongyang and Damascus, acquiring key materials from vendors in China and probably from Europe, and secretly transferring them to a desert construction site near the Syrian town of Al Kibar.

It was the company's suspicious buying habits -- and the branch office it opened in Damascus -- that inadvertently contributed to the alleged reactor's discovery and later destruction in a Sept. 6 Israeli bombing raid, U.S. officials say. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Michael Mullen declined in an interview to say whether Washington helped with the raid, but he strongly endorsed it.

"The reactor which was being built was not very far from being operational and needed to be hit," Mullen said.

Alerted to NCG's suspect purchases in Europe, Western spy agencies were able to track the movement of NCG employees and purchases to Syria in 2003, where the outlines of the reactor scheme eventually became apparent. The site was closely scrutinized by Western intelligence officials for months before it was destroyed by Israel. During that period, U.S. officials collected aerial images and acquired interior photos that showed apparent reactor components.

Syria has maintained that the facility was always nonnuclear, but U.S. officials say that as the government cleared the site of debris after the bombing, some telltale reactor components that had been deliberately hidden became visible.

"We judged that these interactions were probably nuclear-related . . . because of who it was we were seeing in those interactions," a senior U.S. intelligence official said at a briefing in Washington last week about the Syrian-North Korean venture. "We assessed the cooperation involved work sites probably within Syria. But again, we didn't know exactly where."

Attempts to contact Yun and other NCG officials by phone and e-mail were unsuccessful.

Syria acknowledges "a working relationship" with North Korea, but Syrian Embassy spokesman Ahmed Salkini said it does not defy any international law. "If this company conducts business with Syria, the terms of transactions would abide by, and would be within, the legal framework of the international community," he said, adding that the embassy has not heard of NCG.

U.S. officials say the Pyongyang-based NCG used an office in Beijing as a base for procuring materials and as a distribution center for items that could not be legally routed through North Korea because of trade sanctions.

A spokesperson at the Chinese Embassy denied any knowledge of the company and its activities.

"I am not aware of anything about the North Korean company mentioned. . . . China is steadfastly opposed to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and its deliveries, and it has been faithfully honoring its international obligations and responsibilities," Wang Baodong said in an e-mailed statement.

Proliferation experts say NCG used many methods to conceal the intended use of the items it was acquiring.

NCG has acted "as a trading agent or middleman, buying items through Chinese trading companies or directly from foreign companies," said David Albright, president of the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security and an expert on the international black market for nuclear technology.

Because of its branch office in China, NCG can buy equipment from suppliers throughout the world, even in Europe and possibly in the United States, particularly if the companies have subsidiaries in China, Albright said. Moreover, export controls in China are poorly implemented and simple to evade.

Other North Korean companies with offices outside the country have bought militarily sensitive equipment from commercial vendors, including parts for making ballistic missiles, nuclear bombs and other advanced weapons, U.S. officials say. Over the years, they have bought metals used in uranium enrichment and chemical precursors for highly lethal nerve agents, the officials said.

"North Korea often works through these trading companies, which facilitate business deals and other activities overseas that earn foreign exchange for the government and especially for the top leadership. They have been very active in the past in facilitating missile sales in countries like Syria and Iran," said Larry Nicksch, an expert on Asia at the Congressional Research Service.

A U.S. counterproliferation official said in an interview that North Korea typically uses "one, two or more layers" of front companies so it can plausibly deny knowledge of actual intended use. "Sometimes they can fool the supplier by saying the goods are intended for another country altogether. North Korea does this very well," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because U.S. investigations remain classified.

Over the past decade, NCG's activities have been the target of investigations spanning two continents. Its attempt to purchase hundreds of high-strength tubes from European businesses attracted the

attention of the German government in 2003. The tubes were made of a highly specialized type of aluminum used in making centrifuges for uranium enrichment, but Yun, the NCG businessman, told German companies that they were destined for an aircraft factory in China, according to court documents.

Eventually, Yun -- who earlier served as the head of North Korea's United Nations delegation in Vienna, the home of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency -- struck a deal with a Bavarian company to obtain 22 tons of British-made tubes. They were placed on an Asia-bound ship in April 2003 and made it as far as the Suez Canal before German authorities ordered the cargo seized.

A subsequent investigation by nuclear weapons experts, including several at the International Atomic Energy Agency, concluded that the tubes were not suited for aircraft. The Chinese company named by NCG as the intended user denied ordering such tubes, U.S. and European investigators said.

In court documents and interviews, German officials alleged that NCG had operated as a front company for years and had sought to buy a wide range of sensitive equipment from European firms, including oscilloscopes and other electronic gear used in making and testing nuclear detonators.

Neither Yun nor NCG was charged with wrongdoing in Germany, but the owner of the company that sold the tubes was sentenced to four years in prison for his role in the sale.

The discovery of a series of attempted purchases prompted the CIA to predict that North Korea could have an operational uranium enrichment facility by 2005. But no such facility has ever been identified, and North Korea insists the tubes were meant for other programs, including missile production. North Korea has allowed U.S. officials to take smelted aluminum it purchased from other countries back to the United States for analysis.

U.N. Resolution 1718 stipulates that all member states must "prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer" to North Korea "through their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, and whether or not originating in their territories" any material or technology that would contribute to a nuclear weapons program.

White House and State Department officials have declined to comment on whether the Bush administration is trying to get China to act against NCG.

"We have nothing to add beyond what has already been said about North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria," said State Department press officer Gonzalo Gallegos. "As the White House said last week, the United States is . . . committed to ensuring that North Korea does not further engage in proliferation activities."

Staff writer Glenn Kessler contributed to this report.

Experience With Syria Exemplifies Challenge That Detection Presents

By Joby Warrick

Washington Post Staff Writer

Monday, May 12, 2008; A16

Syria went to extraordinary lengths to conceal its undeclared construction of a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor from spies in the sky and on the ground in recent years, according to a draft report by independent nuclear experts briefed by Bush administration officials.

The effectiveness of the camouflage effort raises new doubts about the prospects for certain detection of future clandestine nuclear weapons-related activities, the Institute for Science and International Security concluded in its report on the Syrian facility. "This case serves as a sobering reminder of the difficulty of identifying secret nuclear activities," the report said.

U.S. intelligence officials last month released images of the Syrian facility before it was bombed by Israel last September and bulldozed by the Syrian government once the raid became public. U.S. and Israeli officials have said the facility was a nearly completed nuclear reactor built with North Korean help and fitted with a false roof and walls that altered its shape when viewed from above.

According to the ISIS report to be released this week, the fake roof was just the start. Syrian engineers went to "astonishing lengths" to hide cooling and ventilation systems, power lines and other features that normally are telltale signs of a nuclear reactor, authors David Albright and Paul Brannan wrote.

For example, the main building appears small and shallow from the air, but it was evidently built over large underground chambers -- tens of meters in depth -- that were large enough to house the nuclear reactor, as well as a reserve water-storage tank and pools for spent fuel rods, the report said.

An extensive network of electrical lines appears to have been buried in trenches. Traditional water-cooling towers were replaced with an elaborate underground system that discharged into the Euphrates River. And, instead of using smokestack-like ventilation towers prominent at many reactor sites, the ventilation system appears to have been built along the walls of the building, with louver openings not visible from the air, the authors contended.

The ISIS report noted that early skepticism that Syria was building a reactor there was based partly on the observable absence of revealing features. "The current domestic and international capabilities to detect nuclear facilities and activities are not adequate to prevent more surprises in the future," the report warned.

Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector, said his conclusions were based not only on photographs of the Syrian site but also on interviews with government officials who closely monitored the facility while it was under construction.

Syria has repeatedly denied that the Al Kibar facility was a reactor. Its ambassador, Imad Moustapha, at a April 25 news conference in Washington described the allegations as "absurd, preposterous stories." "This administration has a proven record of falsifying and fabricating stories about weapons of mass destruction," he said.

On Wednesday, International Atomic Energy Agency director general Mohammed Elbaradei said his organization should be able to report in coming weeks whether the facility was an undeclared nuclear reactor.

Staff writer Robin Wright contributed to this report.

[Sourcebook note: the ISIS report is available at http://www.isis-online.org/publications/syria/SyriaReactorReport_12May2008.pdf Materials from the report are reproduced in Appendix B of this sourcebook.]



Briefing on Latest Developments in the Six-Party Talks

Sung Kim, Director of the Office of Korean Affairs

Washington, DC

May 13, 2008

(10:30 a.m. EDT)

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

MR. KIM: Thanks, Tom. Good morning. As you know, I just came back yesterday from my second trip to North Korea in two weeks. We brought back, as you can see, documents from North Korea. These are operating and production records for the 5-megawatt reactor and the reprocessing plant in Yongbyon. They number 18,822 pages, 314 volumes. We believe these documents will provide an important first step in verifying the North Korea's -- the DPRK's declaration.

Our team of experts now have these documents and will be undertaking a comprehensive review of the contents. I might just, for prop's sake, this is an example of a volume of operating records. These documents are in Korean, so it will actually take some time to translate all of the documents. But we have a team of experts working on these documents and, hopefully, we'll be able to conduct at least a preliminary review of the documents in a few weeks.

In addition to receiving the documents, we had very detailed, substantive discussions with DPRK interlocutors from the Foreign Ministry as well as the General Department of Atomic Energy on all aspects of their declaration. As you know, the declaration will be submitted to the Chinese because China chairs the process, but we were able to discuss some reference materials that would form the basis for the declaration. I think those discussions were productive, and we look forward to continuing the exchange with them through the New York channel.

[deletia]

QUESTION: I mean, were there any more discussions while you were up there on the Syrian reactor issue? Because I think this was your first trip there since the intelligence was made public and I'm just curious if there was any more feedback or recognition from the North Koreans that they had played a role in developing it, or are they still outright denying this? Because I assume this was something you raised.

MR. KIM: We actually didn't discuss that issue during my trip.

QUESTION: You said that you talked a lot about the declaration and aspects of the declaration while you were in North Korea. Do you now feel that the declaration is on track and that, within the next few weeks, that you will have a declaration from North Korea?

MR. KIM: Our delegation's sense was that the reference materials that would form the basis for the declaration appears quite comprehensive, quite full. But it's really – I think it's too early to tell whether it would be ready anytime soon. I think we will continue our discussions with the North Koreans through the New York channel and we'll, of course, continue to consult with our six-party partners.

QUESTION: If these – if this is part of a verification process, what precisely will they be putting into the declaration in regards to the plutonium program? I mean, isn't this – would they – are they considering this to be part of their declaration? Not just the verification phase, not for – just for verification purposes, but actually, they're saying, this is what we're doing? And are they considering this their declaration on plutonium?

And secondly, what is going to be the next step for the U.S.?

MR. KIM: I don't believe this – they consider this to be the declaration itself. I think they will be submitting a separate document to the Chinese that would, I think, be their declaration. I think these documents are important supporting documents for the declaration, but not the declaration itself.

QUESTION: Can I just ask -- you said in – that the U.S. thought that what the North Koreans came out with at the end of last year was inadequate. And it's my understanding it's inadequate because they didn't address things like uranium enrichment and proliferation, but also because you thought the number was too low. To what – can you tell us why you thought what they said in the end of last year was inadequate and whether this goes any way in terms of meeting those shortcomings, in terms of the background information and possible reasons why the number was so low, for example, with (inaudible) waste?

MR. KIM: Yeah. I think it's probably inappropriate for me to go into details of the declaration and what is likely to be the declaration at this stage. I can tell you that the reference materials that we saw late last year did not have many of the details that is now included in their latest set of reference material.

QUESTION: And was that a large reason why it was inadequate?

MR. KIM: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Is that a large reason why it wasn't good enough?

MR. KIM: Yeah. I mean, we would like to see a complete, credible declaration.

[deletia]

<http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP192908>



May 14, 2008

No. 1929

Syrian Ambassador to U.S. Slams Bush Administration over Syrian Nuclear Plant Allegations: 'Sometimes It Amazes Me That My Enemy Is So Naïve, Superficial, and Stupid'

The following are excerpts from an interview with Syrian Ambassador to the U.S. 'Imad Mustafa, which aired on Al-Jazeera TV on May 5, 2008.

To view this clip, visit <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1763.htm> .

"This [U.S.] Administration is Characterized By A Great Deal Of Recklessness, In Addition to its Capabilities for Fabricating and Lying"

Imad Mustafa: "Even though this story [about a Syrian nuclear reactor] is ridiculous, we do not take it lightly. This [U.S.] administration is characterized by a great deal of recklessness, in addition to its capabilities for fabricating and lying, and of causing the utmost damage to other nations, as well as to the American nation itself. This is not propaganda. This is the reality in which the American people is living right now. Therefore, we do not take this story lightly.

"We believe that this story comes in a certain context. This story, as presented by the American administration, is another link in a continuous chain of actions, which the U.S. administration has been taking against Syria for at least four years.

"There are two very significant differences between then and now. When the U.S administration made its false claims in the past - even though some people doubted the claims about Iraqi WMDs - the American political establishment as a whole accepted the administration's account, in order to wage the war against Iraq. Both Democrats and Republicans, who form the U.S. political establishment, are very upset today because they have realized that the U.S. administration lied to them and dragged them into a war, which has turned into a muddy quagmire of blood and destruction - blood and destruction in Iraq, and a lot of blood and huge damage in the U.S.

"This war has destroyed Iraq, but it also wounded the national pride of the U.S. There was damage on both sides, even if not to the same extent. The difference is that from the moment the U.S. administration presented its fabricated story about the Syrian nuclear reactor, in both houses of Congress and in both the Republican and Democratic parties there has been great discontent." [...]

"The Administration Thought... It Could Once Again Increase the Tempo of the Drumbeat of War by Unleashing a New Nuclear Crisis In Our Region"

"The current U.S. government is very upset about losing the momentum for waging a war or aggression against Iran, because political public opinion in the U.S. does not support such a war. The administration thought - this is my analysis, but I can't swear to it - that it could once again increase the tempo of the drumbeat of war by unleashing a new nuclear crisis in our region all of a sudden, and then lumping together all of us - the countries of the 'Axis of Evil,' the rogue states."

"Sometimes It Amazes Me That My Enemy is So Naïve, Superficial, and Stupid... The American Media, Legislative, Political, and Intelligence Establishment Has Already Begun to Pound Away At This Account "

"Therefore, it presented the American people with a story according to which there is a great danger in that region, because evil rogue states like Syria and Iran are arming themselves with nuclear weapons, while the good, democratic, and angelic state of Israel is in terrible danger, and we have to do something in order to save Israel from the evil of those rogue states. This reckless hotheadedness of theirs... Sometimes it amazes me that my enemy is so naïve, superficial, and stupid. They did not plan it very well.

"We in Syria are expecting this new story to collapse as a result of two types of blows - internal and external blows. The American media, legislative, political, and intelligence establishment has already begun to pound away at this account, and the blows will only increase.

"You will be able to check what I am telling you very soon. Voices are beginning to be heard. They are still few, but they are constantly increasing, and they doubt this account very clearly. But there are also external blows. Over the past three days, I noticed dozens of articles published by nuclear technology experts from various countries, from Western Europe and the U.S., who analyzed and explained why this story is stupid and ridiculous, and they showed that scientifically and technologically, this account is completely unreliable."



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

**The Illicit Nuclear Pursuits of Iran and Syria:
Implications for the European Union**

Remarks by Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte

**U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency
and the United Nations in Vienna**

INCIPE

Madrid, Spain

May 20, 2008

[EXCERPT]

When the IAEA Board meets in two weeks, we will consider the nuclear activities of Iran and Syria, two IAEA members who have violated their IAEA obligations.

These are dangerous regimes on dangerous pursuits.

- Both are state sponsors of terrorism.
- Both undermine regional peace and stability.
- Both have pursued nuclear capabilities that make no civil sense but that can produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.
- Both had outside assistance, Syria from a known violator of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Iran from an international smuggling network for nuclear weapons technology.
- Both pursued these capabilities covertly and illicitly, successfully hiding them from IAEA inspectors until exposed by others.
- Both remain actively engaged in covering up the full extent of their activities, refusing to implement the IAEA's Additional Protocol to provide added transparency.

This explosive situation poses serious risks to the security of Spain and the United States, and of the European Union and NATO. Iran's nuclear pursuits remain the most dangerous. But Syria's clandestine activities show how a determined regime can still flout the IAEA. Each underscores the risks of nuclear proliferation in one of the world's most dangerous regions.

We must confront these risks together, for our close cooperation is essential to protect our collective security.

Syria's Covert Nuclear Activities

Syria's covert nuclear activities were exposed publicly only last month. On April 24, we briefed your government and other governments around the world about the nuclear reactor that Syria was building in its eastern desert near Al Kibar.

This reactor was damaged beyond repair by a military strike last September.

We believe, based on strong evidence, that North Korea assisted Syria with this reactor. Indeed, our intelligence experts are confident that the Syrian reactor near Al Kibar was the same type of reactor that North Korea built at its Yongbyon nuclear facility. The Yongbyon reactor produced the plutonium used in North Korea's nuclear weapons and is now being disabled as a result of the Six-Party Talks.

We have good reason to believe that Syria's reactor at Al Kibar, like North Korea's reactor at Yongbyon, was not intended for peaceful purposes.

- First, we assess the Syrian reactor was configured to produce plutonium. It had no capability to generate electricity and was ill-suited for peaceful research.
- Second, Syria went to great pains to keep the facility secret. It located the reactor in a remote area and built earthen berms to hide it from observation and fake walls to disguise its configuration.
- Third, Syria failed to declare the reactor to the IAEA as required under its Safeguards Agreement. After it was destroyed in September, Syria falsely claimed that it was not a reactor but a military warehouse.
- Fourth, Syria went to great lengths to cover up its activities after the reactor was destroyed. While refusing IAEA requests to visit the site, its engineers hauled away incriminating equipment, buried what remained of the reactor, and built a large structure over the top.

When we briefed governments on Syria's covert activities, we also briefed the IAEA. The IAEA's Director General, Mohammed ElBaradei, vowed to treat this information with the seriousness it deserves and to mount an investigation. He noted that Syria is obliged, by Code 3.1 under its Safeguards Agreement, to report the planning and construction of any new nuclear facility to the IAEA.

We support the IAEA's investigation of Syria's violation of this IAEA requirement and call on Damascus to provide full cooperation. Syria's construction of this covert reactor was a dangerous and potentially destabilizing development for the region and the world. The Syrian regime must come clean about its illicit nuclear activities and give the IAEA the necessary information and access to assure the world that they have stopped.

It is time for disclosure, not continuing deception. And it is time for Syria to sign and implement the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which would help Agency inspectors verify that Syria's continued nuclear activities are exclusively peaceful.

[deletia]



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte

U.S. Mission to the IAEA

Remarks to the Press on IAEA Investigations of Clandestine Nuclear Activities by Iran and Syria

May 21, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

The United States strongly supports peaceful use of nuclear technology in conformity with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). But let me mention two countries that have violated their NPT commitments, Iran and Syria. The clandestine nuclear activities of both countries are under investigation by the IAEA, and one will be on the agenda of our Board meeting in two weeks.

[deletia]

Syria

Also extremely disturbing is that Syria built a reactor in secret and in violation of its Safeguards Agreement.

It was not a typical power or research reactor. It was a reactor built with extraordinary measures to conceal it and with the help of North Korea, a known NPT violator. It bore striking similarities to North Korea's Yongbyon reactor, which produced plutonium for North Korea's nuclear weapons and is now being disabled.

Syrian authorities have a lot of explaining to do. They must allow IAEA inspectors to visit the site and ensure there are no other undeclared activities.

Maybe now we understand why Syria has refused to sign the Additional Protocol. Certainly now we understand why they must sign it.

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1406789.php/

Syria reactor site raises concerns ahead of IAEA meet (Extra)

May 21, 2008, 17:58 GMT

Vienna - As Israel and Syria engaged in indirect peace talks, diplomats in Vienna on Wednesday expressed their concern over Syria's lack of cooperation into the probe of its alleged reactor destroyed by Israel.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is still trying to get access to Syria's al-Kibar site, where Israel in September bombed what it said was a secret nuclear reactor Syria built with support of North Korea.

Attempts by the IAEA to persuade Syria to allow inspections remained without success, diplomats said.

'Syrian authorities have a lot of explaining to do. They must allow IAEA inspectors to visit the site and ensure there are no other undeclared activities,' US Ambassador Gregory Schulte said.

According to US intelligence released in late April, the reactor could have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons, making Syria the latest in a number of countries like North Korea, Libya or Iran who violated their obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Iran always maintained that its nuclear programme, kept secret for almost two decades, was solely peaceful. After Israel's bomb raid, Syria said the al-Kibar site had conventional military uses.

Syria was unlikely to be an agenda item at the IAEA's June board of governors meeting, as the IAEA to date had little to report, diplomats said, but said there were internal discussions of how to proceed in the matter.

Several members were however expected to raise the issue and press for a more thorough investigation during the meeting, starting on June 2.

At the time of the US intelligence release on Syria's alleged reactor work on April 24, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei sharply criticised the United States for leaving the IAEA in the dark by not sharing intelligence with the UN nuclear watchdog earlier.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1211288139806&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Analysis: An attempt to break the Iranian-Syrian alliance

By YAAKOV KATZ

May 21, 2008 22:59 | Updated May 22, 2008 6:55

[EXCERPT]

Also of concern are the news reports that emerged on Wednesday [2008-05-21], according to which inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were denied access to two facilities in Syria suspected of being connected to the nuclear reactor that Israel bombed and destroyed along the Euphrates River in September. The nature of the facilities has not been exposed, but it leaves open the possibility that Syria may still have operational components of its destroyed nuclear program.

110TH CONGRESS } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES { REPORT
2d Session } { 110-665

INTELLIGENCE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR
2009

MAY 21, 2008.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. REYES, from the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

together with

MINORITY VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 5959]

[deletia]

Issues regarding Committee notification of Syria's nuclear program

In April 2008, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) briefed the Committee on the construction of a covert nuclear facility in Syria and its subsequent destruction in September 2007.

Over the course of the preceding eight months, the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member had requested that the President brief the full membership of the Committee about these developments, which significantly impact U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East and North Korea.

Just hours before a highly-orchestrated public roll-out of the previously classified intelligence, the President finally sent briefers to the Committee. The delay was inexcusable and violated the National Security Act of 1947, which requires that the executive branch keep Congress "fully and currently informed" of all intelligence activities. Congress should be briefed on the threats to the United States in a timely manner, not simply when it is politically expedient.

The world is more dangerous today than at any time since 9/11. There are serious challenges to U.S. national and international security that require the Administration and Congress to work together.

The Administration's clear disdain for the legitimate oversight role of Congress makes it difficult for Congress to do its part in meeting these challenges and keeping America secure.

[deletia]

Syria hesitant to grant IAEA access: diplomats

By Karin Strohecker

Fri May 23, 2008 1:05pm EDT

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - Syria has yet to accept a request from the U.N. nuclear watchdog to visit a site where Washington says Damascus covertly built an atomic reactor, and has demanded more details about the proposed trip, diplomats said.

The head of the U.N. body, the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on May 7 that he hoped to be able to shed light "in the next few weeks" on whether a Syrian facility, bombed by Israel last year, was an undeclared nuclear reactor.

[deletia]

At the start of May, the IAEA wrote to Syria asking to see the targeted area. Syrian atomic energy chief Ibrahim Othman visited Vienna on May 9 for talks with the agency's chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, diplomats familiar with the matter said.

Those talks did not produce any agreement on the timing and nature of a trip by senior inspectors, they added.

One diplomat said on condition of anonymity that the agency had received a letter from Damascus earlier this week asking for more details on the proposed visit. The agency has replied and is now waiting for a further response, the diplomat added.

"NOTHING TO HIDE"

Syria's U.N. envoy said in late April that Damascus would cooperate with the IAEA inquiry and had "nothing to hide."

[deletia]

Gregory Schulte, the U.S. envoy to the IAEA, reiterated on Wednesday [2008-05-21] the facility at the site was not a typical power or research reactor.

"Syrian authorities have a lot of explaining to do," Schulte told journalists. "They must allow IAEA inspectors to visit the site and ensure there are no other undeclared activities."

(Additional reporting by Mark Heinrich, editing by Mark Trevelyan)



Fact Sheet
Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation
Washington, DC
May 26, 2008

The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)

[EXCERPT]

What is the value of the PSI?

The PSI provides committed states with a framework for coordinating counterproliferation activities to thwart proliferators' increasingly sophisticated tactics. In recent years, we have seen the emergence of black-market operatives who, for the right price, are willing to use their knowledge, access to materials, and personal connections to provide WMD-related goods and services to terrorists and countries of proliferation concern. Five years ago, the world became aware that an international black market network, headed by Dr. A.Q. Khan, had for many years been supplying clandestine nuclear weapons programs. Seizure of the cargo ship BBC China exposed the network and ultimately led to Libya's decision to end its nuclear and missile programs. Most recently, the discovery of Syria's covert nuclear reactor—believed not to be for peaceful purposes--demonstrated that proliferators are capable of pursuing their dangerous objectives even as the world is watching. And today, Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear technology and missile systems that could deliver WMD in direct violation of the UN Security Council.

<http://christiannewswire.com/news/503976737.html>

Statement by the President

Contact: White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 202-456-2580

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo., May 28 [2008]/Christian Newswire

The following text a statement the President of the United States of America:

Members of the international community are gathered in Washington, D.C., today on the fifth anniversary of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Since former Polish President Kwasniewski and I first announced the initiative on May 31, 2003, in Krakow, Poland, PSI partner nations have been taking cooperative action to stop the proliferation trade and to deny terrorists, rogue states, and their supplier networks access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), their delivery systems, and related materials.

Five years ago, the world became aware that an international black market network, headed by A.Q. Khan, had for many years supplied a clandestine nuclear weapons program in Libya. Recently, the discovery of Syria's covert nuclear reactor demonstrated that proliferators are capable of pursuing dangerous objectives even as the world becomes more vigilant. And today, in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, Iran continues to enrich uranium and develop missile systems that could eventually deliver WMD. These proliferation activities undermine peace and security and remind us of the continued need for cooperative action.

The PSI has responded to this challenge and achieved a solid record of success. Beginning in 2003 with only 11 states, the PSI has grown to more than 90 nations from every region of the world committed to conduct interdictions and deter those engaged in this dangerous trade. As a result of the collaborative efforts and training it sponsors, PSI is an increasingly effective tool to carry out real-world WMD-related interdictions, from shutting down front companies, to disrupting financial networks, prosecuting proliferators, and stopping shipments of sensitive materials from reaching their intended destination.

I commend all PSI partners for the work they have undertaken and pledge continued U.S. leadership and support for the effort. I urge all responsible nations to join this global initiative to end WMD proliferation.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080528-3.html>



Remarks by National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley at the Proliferation Security Initiative Fifth Anniversary Senior Level Meeting

Washington Hilton Hotel
Washington, D.C.
For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
May 28, 2008
10:07 A.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

In today's world, more states have pursued or are pursuing the capacity to develop and deploy the full range of weapons of mass destruction. Since the end of the Cold War, we have seen Libya develop an illegal nuclear program, North Korea conduct a nuclear weapons test, Iran enrich uranium, and Syria come close to completing a nuclear reactor that could have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons.

CIA watching for al-Qaida 'succession crisis'

By PAMELA HESS – 12 hours ago [Accessed 2008-05-28T13:30Z]

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is making "a big and continual push" to capture or kill al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, but his demise won't end the organization's menace, CIA Director Michael Hayden said Tuesday [2008-05-27] in an Associated Press interview.

[deletia]

On other topics, Hayden said:

[deletia]

- Even without Israeli intelligence, the CIA would have known by last July that a building in Syria's western desert was meant to be a secret nuclear reactor when a pipe system from the Euphrates River to the building was constructed.

"That was a powerful cooling system going to a building with no visible heat source," Hayden said. Israeli jets destroyed the building in August 2007, although Syria has denied it was a nuclear facility.

North Korea's arms trade — helping Syria build a nuclear reactor, or selling missile technology to Iran — is motivated by cash. "It's a starved economy, with very, very few sources of foreign exchange," he said. "This is one of the ones where they can actually turn a profit."

Search Is Urged for Syrian Nuclear Sites

U.S. Presses U.N. on 3 Alleged Facilities

By Joby Warrick and Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writers

Thursday, May 29, 2008; A14

The Bush administration is pressing U.N. inspectors to broaden their search for possible secret nuclear facilities in Syria, hinting that Damascus's nuclear program might be bigger than the single alleged reactor destroyed by Israeli warplanes last year.

At least three sites have been identified by U.S. officials and passed along to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is negotiating with Syria for permission to conduct inspections in the country, according to U.S. government officials and Western diplomats. U.S. officials want to know if the suspect sites may have been support facilities for the alleged Al Kibar reactor destroyed in an Israeli air raid Sept. 6, the sources said.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog, which has been seeking access to the Al Kibar site since shortly after the bombing, has acknowledged receiving requests to expand the scope of its inspections, but provided no details.

U.S. government officials declined to describe the specific sites that have drawn interest, or to discuss how they were identified. However, the United States and other Western governments have long been interested in identifying possible locations for a facility in Syria that might have supplied nuclear fuel rods for a Syrian reactor. Although the Al Kibar site was described as nearly operational at the time of the Sept. 6 bombing, it had no clear source of the uranium fuel necessary for operation, according to U.S. intelligence officials and diplomats familiar with the site.

Syria, which has denied having a nuclear weapons program, has not yet responded to IAEA requests for a firm date for inspections.

U.S. intelligence officials contend that the Al Kibar facility was built with North Korean assistance, to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. CIA Director Michael V. Hayden said in an interview that the intelligence community's insight into Syria's nuclear ambitions has deepened since the Israeli raid.

"Do not assume that Al Kibar exhausted our knowledge of Syrian efforts with regard to nuclear weapons," Hayden said. "I am very comfortable -- certainly with Al Kibar and what was there, and what the intent was. It was the highest confidence level. And nothing since the attack last September has changed our mind. In fact, events since the attack give us even greater confidence as to what it was."

He predicted that Syria would "almost certainly attempt to delay and deceive" the IAEA. But he added: "We know what they did."

The absence of a clear fuel source for the reactor -- as well as a fuel-reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium -- has baffled experts who have studied the Syrian project. "It's like having a car but not

enough gas to run it," said David Albright, a former U.N. nuclear inspector in Iraq and the president of the Institute for Science and International Security.

But weapons experts also noted that Western intelligence has had a mixed record on the reliability of leads provided to U.N. inspectors. "U.S. intelligence has had a serious credibility problem on weapons of mass destruction for a decade," said John Pike of GlobalSecurity.org, adding that "they have been known to be right on occasions."

Weapons experts also noted that IAEA inspectors face a difficult task in assessing claims about Syria's program. After the Sept. 6 bombing, Syria bulldozed the ruins of the Al Kibar facility and erected a new building on the same spot. "I think by now they've had enough time to cover their trail," Pike said.

In recent weeks, the Bush administration has increased diplomatic pressure on Syria. Yesterday, national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley said Syria was caught last year trying to procure equipment that could have been used to test ballistic missile components.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/29/AR2008052903703.html>

Official defends US monitoring of Syrian site

By FOSTER KLUG

The Associated Press

Thursday, May 29, 2008; 9:22 PM

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON -- A senior intelligence official on Thursday defended U.S. efforts to monitor an alleged Syrian nuclear facility that the U.S. says was built with North Korean help.

Joseph DeTrani, the national intelligence director's mission manager for North Korea, said U.S. intelligence had been watching the reactor very closely and for a number of years.

"This was not a failure," he told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. "Action was taken when it was going operational, and they are now out of business."

[Sourcebook note: The above remarks were made in a discussion between minutes 29 and 32 in the video http://media.csis.org/csistv/?080529_dialogue]

PREVIEW: IAEA meet to focus on Iran's lack of transparency

May 31, 2008, 5:08 GMT

[EXCERPTS]

Vienna - A tough IAEA report detailing Iran's unwillingness to clear up allegations of past nuclear weapons work will be at the centre of the UN nuclear organisation's Board of Governors meeting starting on Monday.

[deletia]

Besides Iran, the board will also discuss the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor that was bombed by Israel in 2007. Syria denies that it was building an undeclared nuclear facility.

But the board will not formally demand that Syria admit IAEA inspectors until Director General ElBaradei has reported about his attempts to be granted access to the alleged site, diplomats said.

In the Driver's Seat

Condoleezza Rice and the jettisoning of the Bush Doctrine.

by Stephen F. Hayes

06/02/2008, Volume 013, Issue 36 [Accessed 2008-05-31]

[EXCERPTS]

In April 2007, the director of national intelligence called the ranking members of congressional intelligence and foreign affairs committees in for a meeting. They were not told what was on the agenda--a fact that suggested it was serious. It was.

Despite strong warnings from the United States in the past, the North Koreans had provided assistance to Syria in its efforts to build a nuclear reactor. Information was sketchy, but the facility looked to be modeled after the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and construction appeared to be in advanced stages. There was no question that the North Koreans were at least sharing nuclear technology with the Syrians. The congressional leaders were told to keep the information "close hold" and forbidden from sharing it with their colleagues on the intelligence and foreign affairs committees. They agreed, and over the course of the summer attended additional briefings.

Bush administration officials were divided about what, if anything, to do in response. The Israelis communicated a strong inclination to take out the Syrian facility that heightened the disagreements on Bush's national security team. Rice was concerned about the diplomatic consequences of approving a preemptive strike. Cheney, who once signed a photograph to Israeli general David Ivri thanking him for taking out Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981, favored it.

On September 6, 2007, Israeli jets bombed the Syrian facility. The initial news reports were maddeningly vague and very few people understood what had happened and why. Inside the U.S. government, the debate intensified. The congressional leaders who had been briefed on the program wanted to learn more about the strikes and wanted to be able to share what they knew with their colleagues. Bush administration officials, however, continued to insist that the information be restricted to the small group that had been previously briefed.

In internal deliberations, Hill and Rice, concerned that public disclosure of North Korea's involvement could derail the six-party talks, argued for keeping the information secret. Stephen Hadley, Rice's former deputy and current national security adviser, broke the news to the lawmakers.

[deletia]

And Pete Hoekstra, the vice chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, still has lots of questions. "If they're proliferating to Syria, who else? Where else could there be a North Korea-designed reactor that we don't know about? What else might North Korea be doing?"



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

U.S. Statement on DPRK, June 4, 2008

IAEA Board of Governors Meeting, June 2-6, 2008

Agenda Item 7 (b)

Report by the Director General on Monitoring and Verification in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

U.S. Statement

[EXCERPT]

Mr. Chairman,

We continue to make progress toward the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party Talks, though there is still much to be done. The DPRK is continuing to disable the three core facilities at Yongbyon, but we are still waiting for the DPRK to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs, materials, and facilities, including uranium enrichment and proliferation, which was due on December 31, 2007. With regard to proliferation, we have made our concerns about North Korea's nuclear cooperation with Syria known to the DPRK in a frank and comprehensive way. The DPRK has acknowledged our concerns, and agreed to cooperate on verification activities in line with its past commitments on non-proliferation. We continue to urge the DPRK to provide its declaration as soon as possible to the Chinese, as chair of the Six-Party Talks.

[deletia]



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

IAEA Board of Governors Meeting

June 2-6, 2008

Agenda Item 11 – Any Other Business

Syria

U.S. Statement

[2008-06-05]

Mr. Chairman,

On April 24, the United States provided information to the Secretariat regarding an undeclared nuclear reactor Syria was constructing in its eastern desert near a place we call Al-Kibar. We are confident this facility was in fact a nuclear reactor of the same type North Korea built indigenously at its Yongbyon nuclear facility – a graphite-moderated, gas-cooled reactor. This type of reactor is suitable for production of plutonium, which was apparently the reactor's intended purpose since it was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.

As the DG reminded us on Monday, Syria failed to declare to the IAEA that it was constructing a nuclear reactor, even though construction of the facility began six years ago. Instead, Syria took measures to conceal its activities, such as altering the exterior of the reactor building to disguise its similarity to the Yongbyon facility. Syria is legally obligated under its safeguards agreement to notify the IAEA of new nuclear facilities at the time a decision is taken to build them. Therefore by not declaring the site to the IAEA, Syria not only violated its safeguards agreement but also undermined the very purpose of IAEA safeguards – to provide the international community with the necessary assurance that the reactor was part of a peaceful program.

After the reactor was destroyed in September of last year, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what existed at Al-Kibar. Despite a request by the Director General, Syria did not allow inspectors to visit the site last fall. We now know, and have provided evidence to members of the Board, that on October 10, 2007, Syria conducted a controlled demolition of the reactor debris and promptly began removing equipment and debris from the site. Much of the work took place at night or under the cover of tarpaulins. By December, Syria had constructed a large building where the reactor once stood.

Syria's obfuscations and concealment efforts raise many troubling questions. If it were intended for a civil nuclear energy program, why not declare the reactor to the IAEA and place it under IAEA Safeguards as it was obligated to do? And, why go to such lengths to cover up its clandestine activities? What does Syria have to hide?

Mr. Chairman,

The Director General has informed us that the Secretariat has undertaken an investigation to determine the true nature of the facility. The United States strongly supports this investigation and calls on Syria to cooperate with the IAEA's investigation and to provide assurances there are no other undeclared nuclear activities. We expect that Syria will cooperate proactively during the Agency's visit later this month, providing access to individuals, documents and locations relevant to the IAEA inspection.

The existence of undisclosed nuclear facilities in Syria further underlines the limitations of the Agency in a country with a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement but without the Additional Protocol. We have seen this before and in response have developed the Additional Protocol in order to give the inspectors the tools they need to provide us, the Member States, with the assurances we require that a country's declaration is not only correct, but is also complete, and its nuclear program is therefore exclusively for peaceful purposes. We call on Syria, and all states that have not yet done so, to sign and implement the Additional Protocol.

The United States asks that all Board members join us in seeking clarification of these suspect activities. We understand that the Secretariat will keep the Board apprised of its investigation and look forward to a report of its findings prior to the September Board.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte

Remarks to the Press

during the IAEA Board of Governors

June 5, 2008

The IAEA Board of Governors just concluded its deliberations. During the course of the last three and a half days we talked about the clandestine nuclear activities of two countries, Syria and Iran.

Iran provided no substantive answers to the troubling questions that the IAEA has posed to its authorities. A broad majority of the Board members called for Iran to cooperate with the Agency and to abide by the UN Security Council resolutions.

We hope that the leadership in Tehran will listen to this call from the Board of Governors and carry out their obligation to cooperate with this very important Agency.

On Syria we discussed alarming information – that Syria was working on a clandestine program to build a covert nuclear reactor.

Board members welcomed the forthcoming visit of the IAEA inspectors to Syria. Twenty Board members, when you include those associated with the EU, made it very clear that they expect that Syria will cooperate with the IAEA in these investigations.

We look forward to the report by the DG on Syria's clandestine nuclear activities and anticipate that this will be on the agenda of the Board when it meets in September.

<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2008/ebsp2008n005.html>



Statements of the Director General

2 June 2008 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of Safeguards in the Syrian Arab Republic

In April of this year, the Agency was provided with information claiming that an installation destroyed by Israel in Syria last September was a nuclear reactor. According to this information, the reactor was not yet operational and no nuclear material had been introduced into it.

It is deeply regrettable that information concerning this installation was not provided to the Agency in a timely manner and that force was resorted to unilaterally before the Agency was given an opportunity to establish the facts, in accordance with its responsibilities under the NPT and Syria's Safeguards Agreement. I should like to remind everybody that NPT States Parties have unanimously reaffirmed that the Agency is the competent authority responsible for verifying and assuring, in accordance with its Statute and the Agency's safeguards system, compliance by States with their safeguards agreements.

Nonetheless, I should emphasize that Syria, like all States with comprehensive safeguards agreements, has an obligation to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the Agency. We are therefore treating this information with the seriousness it deserves and have been in discussions with the Syrian authorities since this information was provided to the Agency with a view to arranging a visit to Syria at an early date to verify, to the extent possible at this stage, the veracity of the information available to the Agency. It has now been agreed that an Agency team will visit Syria during the period 22-24 June. I look forward to Syria's full cooperation in this matter.



<http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/world/international-syria-nuclear-iaea.html>

U.N. Nuclear Inquiry Planned in Syria

Published: June 2, 2008

Filed at 6:28 a.m. ET

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA, June 2 (Reuters) - A U.N. nuclear watchdog team will visit Syria on June 22-24 to pursue an investigation into U.S. intelligence alleging that Damascus secretly built an atomic reactor, the agency's chief said on Monday.

[deletia]

He did not say whether Syria, which had not responded for months to IAEA requests for access needed for the inquiry, would allow inspectors to examine the al-Kibar site bombed by Israel in the country's remote northeast desert.

A Western diplomat said the Vienna-based U.N. watchdog, which also has a long-running investigation into Iran's shadowy nuclear programme, wanted to inspect not just al-Kibar but two other sites with possible nuclear links.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gwu1N6NdbI7MThXmiNHyFH-ZMHygD91217KG1>

Syria to allow probe of alleged nuclear site

By GEORGE JAHN

8 minutes ago [*Accessed 2008-06-02T15:44Z*]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Syria will allow in U.N. inspectors to probe allegations that the country was building a nuclear reactor at a remote site destroyed in an Israeli airstrike, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday.

IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei did not say whether his inspectors would be granted access to the site during the planned June 22-24 visit. But a senior diplomat familiar with the details of the planned visit said agency personnel had been told they could visit the facility. The diplomat also said agency experts were also interested in two other locations with possible undeclared nuclear facilities.

The diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, told The Associated Press that agency experts will be asking for information on the possible existence of two plutonium reprocessing facilities.

Syrian officials in Damascus did not immediately return phone calls seeking comment.

Syria would need plutonium reprocessing capabilities if it were — as the U.S. and Israel charge — trying to build produce material for the fissile core of nuclear weapons.

Another diplomat familiar with the IAEA trip plans said there were three other possible nuclear sites about which the IAEA was seeking information.

A third diplomat briefed on the IAEA plans for the trip said the agency had been informed about the possible additional sites by the U.S. That diplomat said the IAEA had not seen the U.S. intelligence itself.

The Syrians have already been informed about the additional suspicions, said the third diplomat.

US urges Syria to cooperate with IAEA

36 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-06-02T15:55Z]

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States Monday urged Syria "to cooperate fully" with UN nuclear inspectors when they visit Damascus to probe allegations that it was secretly building a military nuclear reactor.

"As a member of the IAEA Board of Governors, we would of course encourage them not only to let the inspectors in but to cooperate fully with the inspectors," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

The alleged nuclear site was bombed and destroyed in an Israeli air strike in September last year. Earlier this year US intelligence unveiled photographs taken inside the reactor said to show construction of the shield for the reactor core, and control rods and refueling ports.

The head of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei announced Monday that inspectors would visit Syria from June 22-24.

McCormack urged Syria to allow the UN team "to do their job in a way that they need to do it in order to produce an authoritative report."

"Let's hope that the Syrian efforts have not been too effective in covering up what it is that they were trying to cover up: their nuclear facility, the reactor underground," he added, asked about apparent Syrian efforts to clean up the site after the strike.

"But there were people surely who worked on that reactor, who had intimate knowledge and can provide the IAEA important information," he added.

"Let's hope that those people not only are made available to the IAEA but are entirely forthcoming to IAEA requests."

Syria to allow UN probe of alleged nuclear site

By GEORGE JAHN

1 hour ago [Accessed 2008-06-02T22:10Z]

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Syria will allow in U.N. inspectors to probe allegations that a remote building destroyed in an Israeli airstrike was a nuclear reactor built secretly with North Korean help, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday.

The invitation signaled the start of an international fact check of U.S. and Israeli assertions that Damascus had tried to build a plutonium-producing facility under the radar of the international community. It could turn into a wider probe of possible secret Syrian nuclear sites.

Syria has denied wrongdoing, asserting the attack destroyed a non-nuclear military building. Syrian officials in Damascus did not immediately return phone calls seeking comment on Monday.

IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei did not say whether inspectors would be granted access to the site during the planned June 22-24 visit, but a senior diplomat with knowledge of the planned inquiry said they would be able to visit the facility.

While steering clear of a judgment of what was hit in remarks to the agency's 35-nation board of governors, ElBaradei noted Damascus "has an obligation to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the agency."

Diplomats told The Associated Press that during the visit, agency officials will also ask for information on the alleged existence of at least two and possible three undeclared such facilities. The diplomats, who demanded anonymity because of the sensitivity of their information, indicated they had their knowledge either from the U.S. or from IAEA officials.

One of them said the IAEA was following up on a U.S. intelligence-based tip of alleged unreported facilities to process any nuclear material. The diplomat emphasized the IAEA had not seen the intelligence itself.

Plutonium reprocessing capabilities would be required if the U.S. and Israel are correct in their claims that Syria was trying to build the reactor leveled in Syria's eastern desert in September to gain the material needed to create the fissile core of nuclear weapons.

But a nuclear expert outside the U.S. government indicated that at least one of the facilities was suspected of processing uranium — which, like plutonium can be used for fuel or reworked into fissile warhead material. He said the IAEA asked Syria several weeks ago for access to four sites — the bombed facility and three military sites that were identified by U.S. intelligence.

Two of the military sites are operational and one is under construction, the expert said, speaking on condition of anonymity because his information came from private discussions. U.S. intelligence has linked one of the three sites, at least loosely, to fabricating nuclear reactor fuel from uranium, he said.

Of the four diplomats who spoke to the AP, two said the Vienna-based IAEA was looking for two undeclared nuclear sites. The others spoke of three. The Syrians have been informed about the suspicions, said one of the diplomats.

Neither the U.S. nor Israel told the IAEA about the bombed site at Al Kibar until late April, about a year after they obtained what they considered decisive intelligence: dozens of photographs from a handheld camera of the inside and outside of the compound.

The U.S. says the Israelis flattened the alleged reactor as it was close to startup.

Since then, Syria had not reacted to repeated agency requests for a visit to check out the allegations. Satellite photos appear to show construction crews using the interval to erect another structure over the site — a move that heightened suspicions of a possible cover-up.

Pressure on Syria to respond positively mounted with the approach of the latest meeting of the IAEA board that opened Monday.

One of the diplomats, who is familiar with the communications between Syrian and agency officials, said that Damascus apparently waited until the weekend to issue an invitation.

In announcing the Syrian visit to the board, ElBaradei repeated his criticism of Israel and the U.S., taking Washington to task for waiting so long to brief him on its suspicions, and Jerusalem for its airstrike.

Diplomats have recently suggested that the Americans may have waited even longer, telling the AP that Washington may have had indications of Syrian plans more than five years ago. They demanded anonymity because their information was confidential.

"It is deeply regrettable that information concerning this installation was not provided to the agency in a timely manner and that force was resorted to unilaterally before the agency was given an opportunity to establish the facts," ElBaradei said.

His comments to the closed meeting were made available to reporters.

[deletia]

Associated Press Writer Pamela Hess contributed to this report from Washington.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/03/AR2008060300734.html>

Syria says wants nuclear energy under Arab umbrella

Tuesday, June 3, 2008; 7:57 AM

DUBAI (Reuters) - Syria is not seeking nuclear weapons but wants to have access to atomic energy for peaceful purposes through a collective Arab project, President Bashar al-Assad said in remarks published on Tuesday.

The Dubai-based Gulf News also quoted Assad as saying that the United States should have sought an investigation of a Syrian facility suspected of housing a secret nuclear plant before it was destroyed in an Israeli air raid last September.

"Acquiring nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is an international trend that all countries are rightfully pursuing. In Syria, we want this to be done within an Arab context, which was discussed and agreed during the Arab Summit in Riyadh," he said during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

Gulf Arabs have announced their own plans to develop nuclear energy for civilian purposes following a 2007 Arab summit that called on Arabs to develop atomic power.

U.S. intelligence officials in April said they believed Syria had built the suspected reactor with the assistance of North Korea, which later also helped in cleaning up the site after the Israeli strike.

Syria has denied having any undeclared nuclear program. It has one old research reactor subject to monitoring by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.

"If anyone had a secret dossier on nuclear facilities in Syria with a Korean role, as they claim, then why did they wait for seven months before destroying a normal military facility by the Israeli raid?" Assad said. "Why did they not resort to the UN nuclear energy organization to carry out an inspection?"

The IAEA director, Mohamed ElBaradei, said on Monday a team from the U.N. nuclear watchdog will visit Syria June 22-24 to pursue an investigation into the suspected reactor site.

The United States urged Syria to cooperate with U.N. inspectors and to allow Syrian officials to be interviewed.

ElBaradei did not say whether Syria, which had not responded for months to IAEA requests for access, would allow U.N. investigators to examine the al-Kibar site in northeastern Syria.

But a senior diplomat close to the Vienna-based IAEA said a team led by its inspections director Olli Heinonen expected to go to al-Kabir and would seek information on, or access to, three other sites with a possible nuclear link.

He suggested the point in checking other sites was to look for indications of facilities to process nuclear material -- based on the unverified U.S. intelligence -- since there was no evidence of a plutonium fuel source next to the alleged reactor site.

Heinonen's delegation will bring equipment designed to detect nuclear activity, the senior diplomat added.

(Reporting by Inal Ersan in Damascus and Mark Heinrich in Vienna; Editing by Sami Aboudi)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/02/AR2008060200531.html>

Syria to Meet With Weapons Inspectors About Site Bombed by Israel

By Robin Wright

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, June 3, 2008; A10

Nine months after Israel bombed an alleged Syrian nuclear site, the government of President Bashar al-Assad has agreed to hold talks in Damascus with the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency about the remote desert compound, the International Atomic Energy Agency announced yesterday, ending a long deadlock over access to the location.

Syria will allow international access to the al-Kibar site on the Euphrates River, but has turned down the IAEA's request to go to at least three other facilities that U.S. intelligence says may be connected to a reactor and a clandestine nuclear weapons program, said Western diplomats familiar with the talks, which are scheduled for June 22-24. The other sites include possible reprocessing facilities, which are essential for production of fissile material.

"They will only go to the bombed site," said a diplomat close to the IAEA. "They did request to go to other places. It's the first visit. There will be other visits, to be sure, and you take one step at a time."

Syria's envoy to Washington criticized the Bush administration for allegations about additional sites.

"Why should they be going anywhere else? It's an endless story," said Ambassador Imad Moustapha. "Whenever Israel wants inspectors to go visit Syria, it only has to claim it's a nuclear site. Every analyst knows it's not a nuclear site. We're not going to become slaves to the whimsical desires of this administration and Israel. When the truth is known, this administration will be ashamed."

Diplomats in Vienna said the breakthrough appears in large part tied to the first photographic evidence of the alleged nuclear site, revealed in April during Bush administration briefings to the IAEA, Congress and the news media. "It was difficult for the IAEA to request access before it had been given any information, and only recently this information came out from the U.S.," said a diplomat in Vienna close to the IAEA. "The IAEA had earlier told Syria it would be in its interest to show this site, but it had no real grounds until recently."

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei criticized the United States and Israel yesterday for a "deeply regrettable" delay in providing intelligence, and for Israel's use of force before the IAEA had an opportunity to "establish the facts."

Weapons proliferation experts question whether the brief visit will be sufficient to address the volume of issues surrounding the alleged site, which Israel attacked in a late-night airstrike on Sept. 6 but still refuses to discuss publicly. Subsequent satellite images indicate that Syria leveled what was left on the site and rebuilt a new facility that it says is for military use.

The IAEA inspectors "probably won't get much done," said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security and a former U.N. weapons inspector.

"They'll want to use ground-penetrating radar to look for evidence of certain particles associated with

this kind of reactor," he said. "They'll look at water pipes from the river. But it's not something you do in a couple hours. They will have to work it out with Syria, because it's not like Iraq, where [U.N. inspectors] showed up and could demand to see things. Syria has to agree to it. It could be that they just look around and have talks about what happens next."

The Bush administration called on Damascus to allow the IAEA inspection team to have access to all sites and any people who may have worked on the reactor, which Washington says was not configured to provide electricity.

U.N. Nuclear Inspectors to Visit Syria

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

Published: June 3, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

Syria will let nuclear inspectors visit the site of a suspected reactor that Israeli warplanes bombed last September, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday. The visit, to a desolate spot on the Euphrates River some 90 miles north of the Iraqi border, is to take place June 22 to 24.

[deletia]

The press secretary at the Syrian Embassy in Washington declined to comment specifically on the inspection visit, and other Syrian officials also did not comment. But Ahmed Salkini, the press secretary, said in a statement that Syria had always had a good working relationship with the atomic agency “and we intend to keep it that way.”

He added: “This fabricated story by the U.S. administration will deconstruct from within and without. We are working on different fronts, and with different parties, to ensure that this fabrication is exposed to the world, and this administration embarrassed, once again.”

In Vienna, a senior official close to the atomic agency, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under normal diplomatic rules, said Olli J. Heinonen, the head of the agency’s inspection arm, would lead a team to Syria. Three or four inspectors would be involved, the official said, and would bring equipment meant to check for nuclear activity.

Dr. ElBaradei, in a statement to his agency’s board of governors, noted that Syria “has an obligation to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the agency.” He said the inquiry would proceed “to the extent possible at this stage” — a reference, it seemed, to possible challenges stemming from the site’s rehabilitation.

David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington and a former United Nations weapons inspector, said three days at the site would be sufficient for only a preliminary appraisal by the atomic agency.

“They have to investigate the whole fuel cycle,” he said, a reference to everything from the mining of uranium, to the making of reactor fuel, to the extraction of plutonium from spent fuel that could be used to make an atom bomb. “It’s going to take months.”

At the Euphrates site, Mr. Albright said, the agency’s inspectors should look for evidence like special piping, old foundations and chemical traces of graphite, a basic reactor building material.

“If the Syrians think that a quick visit and some interviews” will clear up the nuclear suspicions, he said, “they’re sadly mistaken.”

The senior official in Vienna said the atomic agency’s inspectors were interested in two or three additional sites that American intelligence agencies had identified as suspicious, but suggested that this first visit would focus exclusively on the supposed reactor site.

The photographs released by the United States, taken inside the site before its destruction, clearly show what appear to be rows of nuclear control rods — one of many similarities to a reactor halfway around the globe where North Korea made fuel for its nuclear arms.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-gates4-2008jun04,0,6364038.story>

Nuclear proliferation talks with North Korea to continue, Gates says

By Peter Spiegel

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

8:19 AM PDT, **June 3, 2008**

[EXCERPT]

SEOUL — Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said today that despite intelligence allegedly showing that North Korea aided Syria in developing a nuclear facility, the United States would continue six-party talks with the communist regime over its nuclear program.

Gates called North Korea a "serious adversary," but **he said he knew of no evidence that it was sharing nuclear capabilities with other countries besides Syria** and that the talks were the best way to confront the regime on proliferation issues.

"I think that we are dealing with the consequences of the proliferation effort we saw in Syria in the six-party talks, and I think that is the appropriate vehicle for that," Gates said.

[deletia]

peter.spiegel@latimes.com

Diplomats: 3 suspect Syrian nuke sites off limits

By GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press Writer

Tuesday June 3 2008

VIENNA, Austria (AP) - Syria has told fellow Arab countries that it will not permit an International Atomic Energy Agency probe to extend beyond a site bombed by Israel, despite agency interest in three other suspect locations, diplomats told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The agency's main focus during its planned June 22-24 visit to Syria is a building in the country's remote eastern desert that was destroyed by Israeli jets in September.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei announced Monday that Damascus has agreed to an agency check of U.S. assertions that target was a plutonium-producing reactor that was near completion, and thus at the stage where it could generate the fissile material for nuclear arms.

The U.N. agency is also interested in following up on information that Syria may have three other undeclared atomic facilities. Diplomats and a nuclear expert told the AP on Monday that at least one of the sites may have equipment that can reprocess nuclear material into the fissile core of warheads.

One of the diplomats said the IAEA was following up on a U.S. intelligence-based tip but emphasized the IAEA had not seen the intelligence itself. The nuclear expert said two of the military sites were operational and one was under construction. He and the diplomats asked for anonymity because their information was confidential.

On Tuesday, a senior diplomat familiar with the planned IAEA trip to Syria told the AP that expectations were Syria would gradually warm to the idea of giving agency experts access to those three sites, as well as the bombed Al Kibar facility.

But two other diplomats briefed on the Syrian stance said outside a meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board that a senior official from Damascus had ruled that out during a meeting with chief delegates of the 10 Arab nations accredited to the IAEA.

The diplomats said Syrian atomic energy chief Ibrahim Othman told the Arab delegates his country could not open secret military sites to outside perusal as long as Syria and Israel remained technically in a state of war.

After fighting three wars and clashing in Lebanon, Israel and Syria are bitter enemies whose last round of peace talks collapsed eight years ago. Both countries recently confirmed that they are holding peace talks through Turkish mediators.

The diplomats also said Othman expressed fear that too much openness on Syria's part would lead to years of relentless international perusal of the kind Iran's nuclear program is now undergoing, despite Tehran's assertions its aims are purely peaceful.

After-hours calls to the Syrian Mission to the IAEA in Vienna for comment went unanswered.

Syrian President Bashar Assad denied once again that his country has a secret nuclear program in interviews appearing Tuesday in United Arab Emirates newspapers.

Neither the U.S. nor Israel told the IAEA about the bombed site until late April, about a year after they obtained what they considered decisive intelligence: dozens of photographs from a handheld camera of the inside and outside of the compound.

Since then, Syria had not reacted to repeated agency requests for a visit to check out the allegations.

Satellite photos appear to show construction crews using the interval to erect another structure over the site - a move that heightened suspicions of a possible cover-up.

Pressure on Syria to respond positively mounted with the approach of the latest meeting of the IAEA board that opened Monday.

In announcing the Syrian visit to the board, ElBaradei repeated his criticism of Israel and the U.S., taking Washington to task for waiting so long to brief him on its suspicions, and Jerusalem for the airstrike.

Israel has never officially confirmed September's air strike on the Al Kibar site, though it has not disputed the foreign reports, or U.S. government comments, on the incident.

Syrian nuclear issue looms large at IAEA meet

19 hours ago [Accessed 2008-06-04T13:50Z]

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN's atomic watchdog, already mired in a marathon investigation into Iran's nuclear programme, is set to embark on what could prove an equally contentious probe of allegations of a secret nuclear reactor in Syria.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei announced Monday that a team of inspectors would travel to Syria later this month in the wake of US intelligence reports that a building bombed by Israel last September was a covert nuclear installation built for military purposes.

According to one western diplomat here, it is still too early to predict how the Syrian issue will pan out.

"We'll know a lot more come September, by which time the inspectors will have visited Syria," the diplomat said Tuesday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Western diplomats say Syria has been stonewalling on the issue for months, so the announcement that Damascus has agreed to a visit from IAEA inspectors marks an important development.

The IAEA could not confirm that its team would be allowed to inspect the bombed building itself in al-Kabir -- a remote site in the Syrian desert -- but diplomats close to the Vienna-based watchdog said the agency had made access a pre-condition for the visit.

In April, the United States turned over intelligence alleging the building was an undeclared nuclear reactor, close to completion, but not yet supplied with the necessary nuclear material.

Damascus has dismissed the accusations as "ridiculous", and Syria's official press lashed out at Washington and Israel on Tuesday.

"The American and Israeli claims are false. Instead, Israel should be called on to submit its own nuclear installations to international inspection so at least we know how many nuclear weapons it possesses," Syria's official Ath-Thawra newspaper said in an editorial.

Israel is widely believed to be the only nuclear armed power in the Middle East but has a policy of neither confirming nor denying its arsenal and is not a signatory to the NPT.

ElBaradei said the IAEA was treating the information seriously and expected Syria's "full cooperation".

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/04/AR2008060400768.html>

U.S. tells Syria not to restrict U.N. nuclear probe

By Mark Heinrich

Reuters

Wednesday, June 4, 2008; 7:55 AM

VIENNA (Reuters) - The United States on Wednesday demanded Syria give free rein to U.N. nuclear investigators after diplomats said Damascus would bar access to some sites Washington believes are linked to a secret atomic reactor.

[deletia]

Informed diplomats said Syria would let inspectors examine the al-Kibar site in its northeast desert, but not go to three other locations believed to house facilities or equipment for producing plutonium from fuel from the reactor.

That prompted Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, to demand that Syria not hinder agency investigators in any way.

"The United States welcomes the announcement that the IAEA will visit Syria and stands ready to support a rigorous IAEA investigation into Syria's clandestine nuclear activities," Schulte said in a statement sent to Reuters.

"It is imperative that Syria fully cooperate with the IAEA and in no way hinder the investigation either by further delaying an inspection or by refusing the IAEA unfettered access to any site requested by the IAEA," he said.

Syria, which has said the bombed site was a disused military building and that it has no clandestine nuclear program, has not confirmed publicly the IAEA visit.

RESTRICTED VISIT

But a senior Syrian official told an Arab League meeting outside an IAEA governors' conference in Vienna on Tuesday that the IAEA trip would go ahead and inspectors would get access to the al-Kibar site, diplomats in the meeting said.

Syrian Atomic Energy Agency chief Ibrahim Othman told them, however, that Damascus would not permit checks of other sites Washington had urged inspectors to examine as possible places for processing nuclear material, diplomats said.

They said the position of Syria, which is in a state of war with Israel, was that the other sites were off-limits military installations essential to national security and irrelevant to the IAEA because they had no nuclear connection.

Diplomats: Syria won't let IAEA visit 3 suspected nuclear sites

By The Associated Press

Last update - 12:59 04/06/2008

Syria has told fellow Arab countries that it will not permit an International Atomic Energy Agency probe to extend beyond a site bombed by Israel, despite agency interest in three other suspect locations, diplomats told The Associated Press Tuesday.

The agency's main focus on its planned June 22-24 visit to Syria is a building in the country's remote eastern desert that was destroyed in September by Israeli jets.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei announced Monday that Syria had agreed to an agency check of U.S. assertions that the target was a plutonium-producing reactor that was near completion, and thus at the stage where it could generate the fissile material for nuclear arms.

But the agency is also interested in following up on information that Syria may have three other undeclared atomic facilities. Diplomats and a nuclear expert told the AP Monday that at least one of the sites may have equipment that can reprocess nuclear material into the fissile core of warheads.

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One of the diplomats said the IAEA was following up on a U.S. intelligence-based tip but emphasized the agency had not seen the intelligence itself. The nuclear expert said two of the military sites were operational and one was under construction. He and the diplomats asked for anonymity because their information was confidential.

On Tuesday, a senior diplomat familiar with the planned IAEA Syria trip told the AP that expectations were that Syria would gradually warm to the idea of giving agency experts access to those three sites, as well as the bombed Al Kibar facility.

But two other diplomats briefed on the Syrian stance said outside a meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board that a senior official from Damascus ruled that out during a meeting with chief delegates of the 10 Arab nations accredited to the IAEA.

The diplomats said Syrian atomic energy chief Ibrahim Othman told the Arab delegates that his country could not open secret military sites to outside perusal as long as Syria and Israel remained technically in a state of war.

After fighting three wars and clashing in Lebanon, Israel and Syria are bitter enemies whose last round of peace talks collapsed eight years ago. Both countries recently confirmed that they are holding peace talks through Turkish mediators.

As well, they said, Othman expressed fear that too much openness on Syria's part would encourage the U.S. to push for years of relentless international scrutiny of the kind Iran's nuclear program is now undergoing, despite Tehran's assertions its aims are purely peaceful.

After-hours calls to the Syrian Mission to the IAEA in Vienna for comment went unanswered.

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The invitation signaled the start of an international fact check of U.S. and Israeli assertions that Damascus had tried to build a plutonium-producing facility under the radar of the international community.

Syrian President Bashar Assad denied once again that his country has a secret nuclear program in interviews appearing Tuesday in United Arab Emirates newspapers.

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<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hBQxbWJ27HOAbcq1per2aDqLzVZA>

IAEA debates Iran nuclear dossier

1 hour ago [Accessed 2008-06-04T15:45Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AFP) — European countries urged Iran Wednesday to furnish all outstanding information on its disputed nuclear programme to the UN atomic watchdog to end a long-running impasse.

[deletia]

While the debate about Iran has dominated the board meeting this week, another equally contentious issue has also been looming large -- allegations that Syria had built a clandestine nuclear reactor until it was bombed by Israeli airplanes last September.

IAEA chief ElBaradei announced on Monday that a team of UN inspectors will travel to Syria June 22-24.

The US ambassador to the IAEA, Gregory Schulte, said it was "imperative that Syria fully cooperate with the IAEA and in no way hinder the investigation either by further delaying an inspection or by refusing the IAEA unfettered access to any site requested by the IAEA."

A diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that Syria had informed other Arab League countries on the sidelines of the IAEA meeting that Damascus had agreed to let the experts inspect the bombed building itself in Al-Kabir -- a remote site in the Syrian desert.

But no other sites had been specified, the diplomat said, despite US media reports claiming the IAEA was also keen to visit two or three other suspect locations.

[deletia]

Syria Addresses IAEA Board On Nuclear Allegations

By: iStockAnalyst Thursday, June 05, 2008 9:02 AM

VIENNA (AFP)--Syria addressed the board of the U.N.'s atomic watchdog at a meeting here Thursday, amid allegations that Damascus had been building a clandestine nuclear facility until the building was bombed by Israeli airplanes last September.

The contents of the Syrian delegation's speech to the closed-door session of International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-member board wasn't made available to the media.

But the allegations were the final item of the agenda on the last day of the four-day meeting, the IAEA confirmed.

A diplomat told AFP that Syria had informed other Arab League countries on the sidelines of the board meeting that Damascus had indeed agreed to let the experts inspect the remote Al-Kibar site in the Syrian desert.

But no other locations had been specified, the diplomat said.

The Syrian delegation told the entire IAEA board the same thing, another diplomat who attended the meeting Thursday, said.

"He basically said that there are no other sites related to this military installation that was bombed," the diplomat said.

The watchdog already announced earlier this week that it would send a team of experts to Damascus later this month to investigate allegations that a building at Al-Kibar had been a covert nuclear reactor built with North Korea's help.

The reactor at Al-Kibar was allegedly close to becoming operational, but was destroyed in the Israeli air attack.

The IAEA has refused to divulge any information about the trip, aside from the date, June 22-24.

U.S. media reports have said Damascus would only allow inspectors to visit the remote site in the Syrian desert at Al-Kibar, and not two or three other suspect sites that the IAEA was interested in.

In April, the U.S. turned over intelligence alleging the building at Al-Kibar was an undeclared nuclear reactor, close to completion, but not yet supplied with the necessary nuclear material.

Damascus has dismissed the accusations as "ridiculous".

However, it wiped the destroyed site clean of rubble late last year and erected a new building where the destroyed one had stood, making any possible investigation by the IAEA more difficult.

The U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, Gregory Schulte, told the IAEA board on Thursday that "Syria's obfuscation and concealment efforts raise many troubling questions."

The U.S. "calls on Syria to cooperate with the IAEA's investigation and to provide assurances there are no other undeclared nuclear activities," Schulte said, according to a copy of his speech obtained by AFP.

"We expect that Syria will cooperate proactively during the agency's visit later this month, providing access to individuals, documents and locations relevant to the IAEA inspection," he said.

The Slovenian representative to the IAEA, Bojan Bertonec, whose country holds the E.U. presidency, said the E.U. was "deeply concerned by the information pointing to a possible undeclared nuclear facility in Syria."

"The E.U. calls on Syria to cooperate fully with the agency, provide the necessary information and give all the access requested by the IAEA," Bertonec said.

The Syrian issue is likely to be a separate full item at the IAEA's next board meeting in September.

Syria tells IAEA it will comply with reactor probe

By Mark Heinrich

Thu Jun 5, 2008 2:47pm BST

VIENNA, June 5 (Reuters) - Syria told U.N. nuclear watchdog governors on Thursday it would cooperate with an inquiry into U.S. intelligence alleging it secretly built an atomic reactor with North Korean help, diplomats said.

The United States and Europe called on Syria to let U.N. investigators go wherever and check whatever they wanted after Damascus signalled it would, however, bar access to other sites Washington believes could have been nuclear-related.

It was the first exchange on the Syrian nuclear issue by the governing board of the International Atomic Energy Agency, ahead of a IAEA inspector mission to Syria from June 22 to 24.

Damascus has denied any clandestine nuclear activity. The United States says the reactor was designed to yield plutonium for bombs.

Syria, a U.S. adversary and ally of Iran whose secretive uranium enrichment programme has been under IAEA investigation since 2003, has made no public comment on the inspector mission but confirmed its acquiescence to the closed governors' meeting.

Ibrahim Othman, Syria's atomic energy agency director, said inspectors could visit the remote desert site where Washington says the reactor was close to completion before it was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in September.

"He said Syria had displayed transparency by agreeing to let inspectors visit al-Kibar (bombed site) and had raised no obstacles so far," one diplomat there told Reuters.

"He said they would leave it up to agency experts to discover the truth, namely that the United States fabricated this evidence and such claims, if pressed, would endanger peace and security in the Middle East," he said.

"The gist from (Othman) was that Syria would cooperate with the IAEA," said a diplomat close to the agency.

Syria has said Israel's target was a disused military building. Nuclear analysts say satellite imagery since the bombing show the site was bulldozed and swept clean, possibly to purge any traces of nuclear activity.

RESTRICTIONS ON INSPECTOR MOVEMENTS

Diplomats said earlier that Syria had rejected IAEA interest in three other locations Washington believes harboured facilities for producing plutonium from fuel generated by the reactor.

They said the stance of Syria, which is in a technical state of war with Israel, was that the other sites were military installations crucial to national security and off limits to the the IAEA because they had no nuclear connection.

That spurred the United States and European allies to demand that Syria not handicap the agency investigation in any way.

"The EU is deeply concerned by information pointing to a possible undeclared nuclear facility in Syria," the European Union said in a speech delivered by chairman Slovenia.

"We call on Syria to cooperate fully..., provide the necessary information and give all the access requested."

Summarising Washington's suspicions, U.S. Ambassador Gregory Schulte accused Syria of camouflaging the reactor for years and "going to great lengths" after the bombing to remove debris, usually at night "under the cover of tarpaulins".

"Syria's obfuscations and concealment efforts raise many troubling questions," he said.

"If it were intended for a civil nuclear energy programme, why not declare the reactor to the IAEA... as Syria was obligated to do? What does Syria have to hide?"

Schulte called for "pro-active" Syrian cooperation with the investigation and said the IAEA governors expected a report on findings before their next regular meeting in September.

A Western security source said Syria was "very afraid of intrusive inspections" because this could expose vestiges of nuclear work and therefore was likely to prevent inspectors from performing certain environmental tests at al-Kibar.

"It is clear we are heading towards a long stonewalling process, as in Iran," he told Reuters.

U.S. intelligence given to the IAEA in April included before-and-after aerial photographs of the alleged reactor and detailed interior images of what it said were key components.

Syria has one old research reactor under IAEA monitoring. (Editing by Robert Woodward)

A THREAT TO GLOBAL PEACE

UN's ElBaradei Speaks of 'Historic Turning Point' in Nuclear Policies

06/07/2008

Mohamed ElBaradei, the United Nations' chief nuclear inspector, believes there is a growing threat to global peace through the build-up of nuclear arms and the increasing penchant of countries to bomb suspected nuclear facilities. "With unilateral military actions, countries are undermining international agreements, and we are at a historic turning point," ElBaradei told SPIEGEL, referring to the recent Israel bombardment of Syria's Al Kibar complex in September and the threat made by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz to attack Iran if the country "continues with its program to develop a nuclear bomb."

Nobel Peace Prize winner Elbaradei also attacks Tehran's leadership in the interview. "The readiness on Iran's side to cooperate leaves a lot to be desired," he said. "We have pressing questions." Iran's leadership, he said, is sending "a message to the entire world: We can build a bomb in relatively short time." But the general director of the International Atomic Energy Agency also said he expected "absolute transparency" from Syria. During in inspection trip from June 22-24, he said an IAEA delegation would demand visits to a number of locations that may have delivered components to the destroyed facility.

The full interview will be published on SPIEGEL ONLINE on Tuesday [2008-06-10].

Late U.S. Tipoff Hurts U.N. Syria Probe: ElBaradei

By REUTERS

June 9, 2008

Filed at 8:16 a.m. ET

[EXCERPT]

BERLIN (Reuters) - U.N. inspectors set to examine a Syrian site for signs of a secret nuclear reactor project may find little in part because of tardy intelligence-sharing by Washington, their chief said in remarks published on Monday.

But Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he still expected "absolute transparency" from Syria and the IAEA would insist on access to other sites which might be linked to the alleged reactor.

The IAEA began an investigation after receiving U.S. intelligence material in April, seven months after the purported reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air strike and seven years after Washington said the project began.

Syria denies the allegations. Satellite pictures taken since the bombing show the site was bulldozed and swept clean in a possible cover-up, according to nuclear analysts. Damascus has also rebuffed IAEA requests for wider access, diplomats say.

"We will do whatever is in our power to clarify (what the Syrians did)," ElBaradei told Germany's Der Spiegel magazine, referring to the June 22-24 investigative mission to be led by his deputy in charge of nuclear safeguards.

"I take these accusations very seriously. I demanded that our inspectors be able to establish a picture on the spot ... But it is questionable whether we will still find anything today, assuming something was ever there," he said.

"UNACCEPTABLE"

ElBaradei said no one had passed on suspicious information to the IAEA until well after the Israeli bombing "even though, as we now know, there was some already a year beforehand.

"Pictures of the plant and its destruction were first made available to us at the same time as to the U.S. Congress. That is unacceptable. I protested over this in the sharpest way."

Still, he said, "I expect absolute transparency from Damascus, also when it comes to other places where its components could have been delivered. If concerns remain, we will note these in our report."

Analysts say Washington chose not to release intelligence earlier because of the risk this might prompt Syria to retaliate against Israel, igniting a new Middle East war.

Damascus says Israel's target was a disused military building, whereas the United States says it was a camouflaged reactor designed to yield plutonium for atomic bombs.

<http://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/105775.htm>



Conference on Global Perspectives of the Proliferation Landscape: An Assessment of Tools and Policy Problems

Patricia A. McNerney, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, International Security and Nonproliferation

Remarks at the Naval Postgraduate School

Monterey, California

June 10, 2008

[EXCERPT]

Unfortunately, though, more states are pursuing the capacity to develop and deploy the full range of weapons of mass destruction. We have seen North Korea conduct a nuclear weapons test and sell ballistic missiles to whomever will pay. We have seen Iran work to develop the capability to enrich uranium even as it develops advanced ballistic missiles and engaged in nuclear weapons development activities. We have seen Syria come close to completing a nuclear reactor that could have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons, and serve as the transfer point for arming Hezbollah with rockets used to attack Israel and destabilize Lebanon.

INTERVIEW WITH IAEA BOSS MOHAMED ELBARADEI

'If We Fail, Humanity's Survival Will Be on the Line'

Interview conducted by Georg Mascolo and Erich Follath.

06/11/2008 04:11 PM

[Sourcebook note: The interview was apparently conducted on or about 2008-06-06]

[EXCERPT]

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei talks to SPIEGEL about Israel's propensity for unilateral action against countries like Syria, the US's tendency to keep the IAEA in the dark and the threat of nuclear terrorism.

SPIEGEL: Mr. ElBaradei, last September Israeli bombers destroyed a Syrian compound in which plutonium was allegedly being produced for nuclear weapons. Now we could even see an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. Is this a trend in the Middle East -- attack instead of negotiate?

ElBaradei: I hope not. Of course, the use of force can only be legitimized by the United Nations. Unilateral military actions undermine the international system of agreements. We are standing at a historic turning point.

SPIEGEL: What did you find out about the strike in Syria?

ElBaradei: Too little, and it came too late. We learned of the Israeli operation from the television news. No one shared information or any suspicions with us, suspicions that, as I now know, already existed a year before the attack. The images of the factory and its destruction were also not made available to us until recently, concurrently with their being provided to the US Congress. This is unacceptable, and I protested sharply against it. The Syrians deny that it was a nuclear facility.

SPIEGEL: You believe the government in Damascus, which is closely aligned militarily with Pyongyang? You don't see the similarities to the design of the Yongbyon reactor in North Korea?

ElBaradei: I take the accusations very seriously. If there had been anything nuclear there, the Syrians would have been obliged to inform us, of course. I asked for an explanation and demanded that our inspectors be allowed to gain their own impressions on site. Damascus has now agreed to that. The inspection trip will take place from June 22-24, and will be led by my deputy, Olli Heinonen. But it is doubtful that we will find anything there now -- assuming there was anything there in the first place.

SPIEGEL: The Syrians supposedly covered up the suspicious al-Kibar complex with concrete and cleaned it up. Under these circumstances, can you even absolve Damascus of all guilt?

ElBaradei: We will do everything within our power to clear things up...

SPIEGEL: ...take soil samples, perform groundwater analyses...

ElBaradei: ...whatever our experts recommend. I expect complete transparency from Damascus, and that also applies to places other than the destroyed complex, to which these components could have been taken. If we still have concerns, we will document them in our report.

SPIEGEL: Israel -- itself a nuclear power that refuses to submit to inspections -- has taken matters into its own hands in the case of Syria. And in the United States, the UN inspectors aren't exactly highly regarded. During his visit to Washington last week, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert threatened to use "all possible means" to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. Has diplomacy already failed?

ElBaradei: Of course, we could toss out everything in the way of collective security systems that we have built up since World War II and say: Let's go back to the Middle Ages and pull out our clubs. This is a decision that must depend upon the international community of nations. I am horrified by how little protest the military action in Syria has triggered.

SPIEGEL: Not even in the Arab world.

ElBaradei: It's a deafening silence. I especially regret having to say this, but the Arab world is now in a more disastrous state than ever before. There is no longer any solidarity, a common goal or regional cooperation -- just mistrust everywhere. Incompetently and corruptly governed, many countries in the Middle East are lurching from one crisis to the next, creating breeding grounds for extremism and terrorism. But the real challenge is to wipe out the roots of violence -- lack of opportunity and bitter poverty.

'India can bring balance to Middle East peace process'

Siddharth Varadaraja

Thursday, Jun 12, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

At 42, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria is the youngest head of state in West Asia and also one of its most influential. On the eve of his visit to India, he spoke exclusively to The Hindu about Syria's relations with Israel and Lebanon, U.S. allegations about a clandestine nuclear programme and his hopes of India playing a more important role in bringing peace to the region.

[The Hindu] What is the Israeli compulsion to talk peace with you at this time?

[al Assad] The Israelis used to think that with time they are going to be stronger and any opposition to their policies will be weaker, but actually what happened was the opposite. Now, the Israelis learned that without peace they cannot live safely and Israel cannot be safe. I think this is true especially after the war on Lebanon and because of the result of that war inside the Israeli society; this is the main incentive for the Israelis to move toward peace.

[The Hindu] You are talking peace barely months after Israel bombed your territory at al-Kibar in September, claiming they targeted a secret nuclear facility. Did you raise this with them?

[al Assad] No. Of course, we have not met with them because it is an indirect negotiation. But the question is why did they announce [the bombing] seven months after the [event]? Why did they not announce it at that time in order to send a delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to see what is happening? Let me put it this way: they said there was a [nuclear] facility that they bombed and now they have the evidence. How could they not have had this evidence seven months ago? Why do they have the evidence today? Because after seven months you can say that Syria built that facility and now it is demolished and they have rebuilt it in a different way. While if they gave this alleged evidence at that time, their story would not have been proved genuine or credible.

[The Hindu] So what was the nature of that facility?

[al Assad] It is a military facility and it is not usual to announce what the content of a military facility is. But it is not nuclear. How could it be nuclear? Where is the radiation? Where is the protection for this facility? How can you build such a facility under the daily watch of satellites?

[The Hindu] Why did the Israelis bomb it?

[al Assad] Because they were suspicious about its content and could not know. I cannot answer on their behalf; you should ask them. I think they had wrong information; they were trapped. How could they explain to the Israelis and the rest of the world why they bombed it? This is where they created a story of a nuclear facility.

[The Hindu] So the photographic and video evidence indicating this was a plutonium-producing reactor made with North Korean help is fabricated?

[al Assad] 100 per cent fabricated.

[The Hindu] One of the reasons the world got suspicious is that Syria quickly cleaned up the site. What was the need for that? You could have been proactive even in September to invite the international community to see what the Israelis did.

[al Assad] They did not say in the beginning that it was a nuclear site. Second, it was attacked; you don't keep [a destroyed facility] as it is. So a few days after the attack, we started rebuilding the site. It is normal to remove the debris.

[The Hindu] You've invited the IAEA to visit the site. The U.S. has said al-Kibar is not enough and the inspectors should be allowed to visit other sites.

[al Assad] Syria has an agreement with the IAEA and every procedure implemented here should be according to this treaty. You cannot just come and visit any place according to intelligence information because everyday they may come to the IAEA and say, 'We have this information'. So, it is a never-ending problem... Actually, the Americans did not bring any convincing evidence [to the IAEA] about [the bombed facility] being a suspicious place but we said we have an interest in bringing the Agency to this site. Talking about other sites is not within the purview of the agreement. We have to be very precise; it is not a political but technical issue. We have a Nuclear Commission that has an agreement with [the IAEA] and they work within this agreement.

Interview with President of Syria - Full Text

Complete transcript of interview with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria to Siddharth Varadarajan of The Hindu at the Presidential Office, Damascus, **June 8, 2008.**

[EXCERPT]

Q: What do you think is the Israeli compulsion to talk peace with you at this time? It seems that the Americans themselves are not very happy with what Israel is doing. What do you think is motivating Israel to take this step right now?

A: The Israelis used to think that with time they are going to be stronger and any opposition to their policies will be weaker, but actually what happened was the opposite. Now, the Israelis learned that without peace they cannot live safely and Israel cannot be safe. I think this is true especially after the war on Lebanon and because of the result of that war inside the Israeli society; this is the main incentive for the Israelis to move toward peace. This is our analysis.

Q: As an outside observer, it seems strange that you can be talking peace with Israel a few months after Israel bombed your territory at al-Kibar, claiming they targeted a secret nuclear facility. Is this one of the issues you raised with them – that how could they have bombed your territory?

A: No we did not. Of course, we have not met with them because it is an indirect negotiation. But, the question here is why did they announce it seven months after the bombing? Why did they not announce it at that time in order to send a delegation from the IAEA to see what is happening? Let us put it this way: they said there was a facility and they bombed this facility and now they have the evidence. How could we not have this evidence seven months ago? Why do they have the evidence today? Because after seven months you could say that Syria built that facility and now it is demolished and they rebuild it in a different way; this is their excuse. While if they gave this alleged evidence at that time, their story would not have been proved genuine or credible. So, this is their ploy, and we did not raise this issue, and we said that time that this is an evidence for us that the Israelis are not serious about peace. That is why we talked about indirect not direct negotiations. It is like probing the intention of the Israeli side; are they serious in giving back the Golan Heights to Syria or is it just a tactic or maneuver for internal Israeli politics. **That is why we did not raise the issue and we did not have the chance anyway to meet with them. But we raised it with the IAEA.**

Q: So what was the nature of that facility?

A: It is a military facility, and I announced this, but what the content of that facility is, you do not usually announce a military content. **But it is not nuclear; how could it be nuclear, where are the radiations, where are the protections of this facility? How can you build such a facility under the daily watch of satellites? We know that. So it is not nuclear but completely a different issue.**

Q: Why did the Israelis bomb it?

A: I think because they did not know about it; they were suspicious about its content and they could not know. I cannot answer on their behalf; you should ask them. I think they had wrong information; they were entrapped. How they should explain to the Israelis and the rest of the world why they bombed it?

This is where they created this story of a nuclear facility. At the beginning they said that this is a site where they can bring armaments to Hizbollah, but how? It is in the middle of Syria and you have Turkey in the north and Iraq in the east. How can you bring the armaments to Hizbollah? From Turkey, or from Iraq where the Americans operate? This is not logical. Then they said that this is where the Turks used this site, but later; I think a month ago, they said it is nuclear. So, it was clear that they did not have any evidence that it is a nuclear site; they created this evidence through manipulation on the computer that this is a copy of the North Korean plants.

Q: So, this so-called photographic evidence and video evidence which indicated that this was a plutonium producing plant made with North Korean help – all of this is fabricated?

A: Yes it was fabricated 100%. Of course, they talked about photos of Koreans in Syria, but we have normal relations with North Korea; we receive them formally and publicly, and I receive them and other levels in the government. I received North Korean officials, scientists and whatever. So, this is not true.

Q: One of the reasons why the world got a little bit suspicious about this issue is that the Syrians moved quickly to clean up the site. What was the need for that? I mean you should have actually been proactive even in September last year to invite the international community to see the Israeli aggression, for example. Why did you keep quiet for so long and why was this site cleaned up?

A: First of all, they did not say at the beginning it was a nuclear site and there were few weeks. Second, it was attacked by missiles; you do not keep it as it is, so we rebuilt it. We did that right away; after the attack by few days, we started rebuilding the site. So, it is something normal to remove the debris and have another site.

Q: So the facility was rebuilt basically? What about the debris?

A: May be in a different or the same site; it is a military issue and we do not usually announce what it is. May be it is different building for another purpose.

Q: I know you invited IAEA to visit the site. Now the US has said that that site is not enough and they should be allowed to visit other sites. Why would the Americans make that demand and what is your response to that?

A: We have an agreement between Syria and the Agency and every procedure implemented in Syria should be according to this treaty. According to this treaty, you cannot just come and visit any place according to intelligence information; you cannot. Because every day they may come to the Agency and say we have this information. So, it is a never-ending problem. So, we usually come with certain evidence to see the suspicious place. Actually, they did not come because it is a suspicious place; they did not bring any convincing evidence, I mean the Americans, but we said that we have an interest to bring the Agency to come to this site, but talking about other sites is not within the purview of the agreement. So, we have to be very precise; it is not political but technical issue. And we have a nuclear board or commission that has an agreement with them and they work within this agreement.

Q: So, do you think that the US is trying to create an atmosphere of suspicion against Syria?

A: Yes, because this is the image of this administration; everybody in the world still remembers what happened in Iraq when they had all that evidence, but then it was proved that everything was fabricated; even Colin Powell confessed in an interview that he was not truthful, and we all know the same, and most of the countries know about the problem between Syria and the US, and they always try to find traps for Syria. This is reality.

Q: One of the speculations is that this Israeli attack was linked to judging their own preparedness for an attack on Iran? Have you heard this story?

A: Yes, but nobody can tell what is the real intention of that attack.

McCormack vs. Hayes, and more

06/23/2008, Volume 013, Issue 39 [Accessed 2008-06-15T16:00Z]

RICE'S LEADERSHIP

[EXCERPT]

I [Sean McCormack] WANT TO CORRECT several major factual errors in Stephen F. Hayes's June 2 piece on Secretary Rice's role in formulating and executing foreign policy in President Bush's second term ("In the Driver's Seat"). I'll limit my comments to areas where Hayes's facts about key moments strayed from the record; I'll leave differences over historical interpretation and philosophy for another day.

[deletia]

On the North Korean-Syrian nuclear reactor, Hayes argues that we stayed silent to protect the Six Party Talks. In fact, we stayed silent in order to prevent a regional war in the Middle East. Far from wanting to conceal from the world information about the facility, Secretary Rice favored public disclosure of information concerning the reactor prior to its destruction. Immediately after the reactor was destroyed, Secretary Rice was part of a consensus among the National Security Council principals that the U.S. government not discuss in public what we knew about the reactor for fear of sparking a regional conflict in the Middle East. It was only after all agreed that public discussion of what we knew would not begin a war in the Middle East that the president gave the green light to public discussion of the matter.

[deletia]

SEAN MCCORMACK
Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C.

STEPHEN F. HAYES RESPONDS: Sean McCormack complains about "several major factual errors" and cites three. None of his examples withstands scrutiny. Let's take them in order.

[EXCERPT]

On the Syrian-Korean nuclear reactor, officials inside the administration and on Capitol Hill understood that the cause of the delay was the Six Party Talks. Not only did Bush administration officials tell me that Secretary Rice and Chris Hill wanted to keep the information secret to save the Six Party Talks, two of the congressional leaders who had been briefed on the issue made the same claim in public. In a May 1 op-ed in the Washington Times, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Peter Hoekstra questioned the national security rationale that they were given by the Bush administration, writing that the delay was "unfortunately influenced by the desire of some within the administration to create a 'legacy' of denuclearizing North Korea before the end of President Bush's term."



U.S. Policy Toward Asia

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Address at the Heritage Foundation

Washington, DC

June 18, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

Verifying an agreement with North Korea will be a serious challenge. This is the most secretive and opaque regime in the entire world. Consequently, our intelligence is far from perfect or complete. We therefore need to be very clear about what we know and what we do not know about North Korea's programs and activities and, as importantly, we need to know what we must still learn. We know, for instance, that North Korea has had an active plutonium program for many years. We know it has produced enough fissile material for several nuclear devices, one of which has already been tested. We know that North Korea has proliferated nuclear technology to Syria. But we do not know the full extent of North Korea's proliferation activities. We also know that North Korea has pursued a uranium enrichment program, but we do not know its full extent or exactly what this effort has yielded.

[deletia]

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Is there an agreement between North Korea and the other five parties on what is entailed in a complete and correct declaration, for example, number of weapons, UEP proliferation; and secondly, is there an agreement on what phase three entails, whether the dismantlement of the nuclear weapons is included in that? Recent comments by a former U.S. official who returned from North Korea suggest North Korea may have a different understanding of phase three. Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Well, let me get first to phase three. North Korea has an understanding that it signed on to that the abandonment of all of its weapons and weapons programs is the endpoint for this agreement. Not the abandonment of some of them, not showing us what they've done in the past, but the abandonment, dismantlement. That is very clear.

Now, I've read and I've heard people say, well, they don't have any intention to do that. Well, if they have no intention to do that, then we will not move forward in phase three. That's why this is in phases.

Now, the parties have only begun to discuss how phase three will unfold, what the obligations of the five will be to North Korea if it indeed begins to and then is prepared to complete the verifiable elimination of its nuclear programs. But those are discussions that will begin very shortly.

As to phase two, which is to end with the declaration and disablement, the parties are in agreement that the declaration must address the North Korean programs and facilities and that it must provide the means to know whether that declaration is complete and accurate. Obviously, we're not going to take the word of the North Koreans that what they say on the piece of paper is a full representation of what they have. We will make a judgment as to whether or not we think, in accordance with what we know, it is, but we have to go and we have to verify...

<http://www.jta.org/cgi-bin/iowa/breaking/109097.html>

ElBaradei doubts Syrians had nukes

Published: 06/18/2008

The U.N. nuclear watchdog voiced doubt as to whether Syria could have operated a secret atomic reactor.

"We have no evidence that Syria has the human resources that would allow it to carry out a large nuclear program. We do not see Syria having nuclear fuel," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamad ElBaradei told Al-Arabiya television Tuesday [2008-06-17].

The remarks came as the IAEA prepares to inspect next week a site in northern Syria which was bombed by Israeli warplanes in September. The Bush administration has said the target was a North Korean-designed reactor, something denied by Damascus. Israel has not given details on the raid.

The Egyptian-born ElBaradei, who has criticized Israel for the attack and the United States for not being more forthcoming with its intelligence assessments, said the only evidence the IAEA currently has indicating a possible secret nuclear program in Syria is satellite photographs of the bombed site.

Syrian bulldozers ploughed up the area soon after the sortie in an apparent cover-up. Damascus has refused the IAEA permission to inspect three other suspect Syrian sites.

Une filière nucléaire secrète nord-coréenne en Syrie

VIENNE, ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

Natalie Nougayrède

LE MONDE | 18.06.08 | 11h41 • Mis à jour le 18.06.08 | 12h37

Que se tramait-il à Al-Kibar? Détruit le 6 septembre 2007 par un raid de l'aviation israélienne, ce site au milieu du désert, dans l'est de la Syrie, doit être pour la première fois visité, du 22 au 24 juin, par des inspecteurs de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). Ayant la forme d'un bâtiment cubique de 21 mètres de haut, il abritait, selon une présentation faite le 24 avril par les agences de renseignement américaines, un réacteur nucléaire clandestin construit selon le modèle du réacteur nord-coréen de Yongbyon.

D'après nos informations, l'AIEA détient des données, provenant de plusieurs sources non américaines, qui appuient cette analyse.

Certaines de ces informations sont des photographies satellite fournies par différents pays. D'autres sont tirées des investigations que l'AIEA a effectuées par le passé sur les activités nucléaires de la Corée du Nord. D'autres encore viennent des recherches menées par l'AIEA sur les réseaux clandestins d'acquisition d'équipements nucléaires dans le monde.

Après la Libye et l'Iran, la Syrie, dont le président Bachar Al-Assad est invité à Paris en juillet, est le troisième cas de prolifération au Proche et au Moyen-Orient.

Le dossier Al-Kibar – qui s'annonce comme l'une des grandes énigmes nucléaires de ces dernières années – survient à un moment particulièrement délicat dans les enjeux diplomatiques au Proche-Orient. La Syrie est engagée dans des pourparlers indirects avec Israël. Son président, Bachar Al-Assad, a récemment envoyé des signaux aux Occidentaux suggérant qu'il cherche à rompre son isolement international.

Le cas syrien a une particularité : alors que la Libye et l'Iran s'étaient adressés, pour leurs fournitures secrètes en technologie nucléaire, au réseau clandestin du Pakistanais Abdul Qadeer (A.Q.) Khan (le "père" de la bombe atomique pakistanaise), c'est à la Corée du Nord que la Syrie a fait appel pour se doter clandestinement de ses équipements. L'enquête de l'AIEA sur la Syrie pose ainsi la question de l'existence d'un "marché noir" nord-coréen du nucléaire. Le périmètre exact de la coopération nord-coréenne avec la Syrie et la possibilité que d'autres pays aient pu bénéficier de ce genre d'assistance fournie par Pyongyang sont au centre des inquiétudes.

Deux questions centrales vont occuper les inspecteurs de l'AIEA : d'où le combustible pour le réacteur d'Al-Kibar était-il censé venir? Et y a-t-il en Syrie une installation secrète de retraitement du combustible usé? Le retraitement est une technologie qui permet de produire du plutonium utilisable dans la fabrication d'une arme nucléaire. C'est par cette méthode que les Nord-Coréens se sont dotés de l'arme atomique qu'ils ont testée en 2006.

L'enquête sera d'autant plus compliquée que les puissantes bombes israéliennes qui se sont abattues sur le site d'Al-Kibar ont laissé une montagne de débris que les Syriens ont, par la suite, partiellement évacués. Un nouveau bâtiment a été construit à cet endroit, rendant difficile tout travail d'excavation. L'AIEA pourrait, dans un premier temps, prélever des échantillons dans le sol, à la recherche de traces de graphite semblable à celui utilisé dans le réacteur de Yongbyon.

Les liens entre la Syrie et la Corée du Nord sont intenses depuis des années. Le régime nord-coréen a joué un rôle central dans l'acquisition par la Syrie de missiles balistiques. Or les méandres du trafic du nucléaire suivent souvent ceux de la prolifération en matière balistique, observent des experts.

Une photographie diffusée par la CIA en avril montre le chef de l'Agence syrienne de l'énergie atomique, Ibrahim Othman, aux côtés d'un des responsables du programme nucléaire nord-coréen, Chon Chibu. Le cliché aurait été pris en Syrie. Selon nos informations, Chon Chibu – avec lequel l'AIEA a été en contact dans les années 1990 – a subitement disparu de Corée du Nord à cette époque. L'une des hypothèses retenues aujourd'hui est qu'il a pu travailler en Syrie, aux côtés d'autres ingénieurs nucléaires et techniciens nord-coréens.

La construction d'Al-Kibar, sur les rives de l'Euphrate, a commencé vers 2001. Elle semble avoir été décidée par Hafez Al-Assad, le père et prédécesseur de l'actuel président syrien. Pour tenter de se doter d'une filière nucléaire, la Syrie s'était adressée, dans les années 1990, à des groupes en Russie, et aussi en Chine. Ces tentatives n'ont pas abouti. De l'aveu même de Damas, le Pakistanais A. Q.Khan s'est rendu en Syrie à la même époque, mais l'offre qu'il formula fut rejetée.

C'est par la suite seulement que la Syrie s'est tournée vers la Corée du Nord. Les motivations de cette dernière auraient été de deux ordres : d'une part l'attrait du gain financier lié à la vente d'un réacteur nucléaire; d'autre part, la perspective d'accroître sa marge de manœuvre au moment où l'accord de 1994 passé avec les Etats-Unis – dans lequel Pyongyang renonçait à son programme nucléaire militaire en échange d'aides – semblait vaciller.

Alors qu'Israël a observé un grand silence sur les circonstances et les raisons de la frappe aérienne de septembre 2007, la Syrie a varié dans ses déclarations au fil du temps. Elle a d'abord affirmé que des avions israéliens avaient lâché, au-dessus du désert, des munitions qui avaient explosé. Puis reconnu qu'Al-Kibar avait bel et bien été bombardé, mais qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une simple installation militaire. Fin avril, elle qualifiait de "ridicules" les données présentées par le renseignement américain.

Mais lors de la réunion du Conseil des gouverneurs de l'AIEA à Vienne, début juin, le représentant syrien, Ibrahim Othman, s'est gardé de dire qu'Al-Kibar n'était pas un site nucléaire. Cette omission a beaucoup attiré l'attention des diplomates occidentaux et des experts de l'Agence, qui pensent que Damas se ménage une position de repli au cas où de nouveaux indices de travaux nucléaires seraient découverts.

M.Othman a dit espérer que l'AIEA travaillerait "sans préjugés", assurant qu'il n'y aurait pas d'entraves à sa mission. Toutefois, selon des diplomates, l'AIEA n'a pas été autorisée à se rendre sur trois autres sites, en Syrie, qui éveillent des soupçons. Al-Kibar a été soigneusement dissimulé par la Syrie pendant des années. Une partie importante de l'installation était souterraine. Un toit et des murs de camouflage avaient été dressés, lui conférant un aspect cubique qui le banalisait. Les révélations sur Al-Kibar placent la Syrie en violation de ses obligations au regard du traité de non-prolifération nucléaire (TNP) qu'elle a ratifié en 1969, et des textes qui s'y rattachent : tout début de construction d'un site nucléaire civil doit en effet être déclaré à l'AIEA.

L'AIEA est elle-même placée dans une position délicate car l'affaire Al-Kibar peut être perçue comme une nouvelle illustration – après les cas libyen et iranien – d'une incapacité de l'Agence à détecter à temps des programmes nucléaires clandestins dans le monde. Signe des tensions que ce dossier suscite,

le directeur de l'AIEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, a vivement protesté contre le bombardement israélien et contre la lenteur de la transmission de certains renseignements à l'Agence. Il a aussi déclaré, mardi 17 juin, que la Syrie n'avait pas "les ressources humaines qui lui permettraient de mener un programme nucléaire d'envergure".



IAEA Has Evidence of North Korean Connection to Syria 's Secret Reactor

Report by Natalie Nougayrede: "Disclosures about Secret North Korean Nuclear Connection in Syria"
"LeMonde.fr

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Vienna -- What was being planned at Al-Kibar? Destroyed by an Israeli aviation raid on 6 September 2007, this facility in the middle of the desert, in eastern Syria, is due to be visited for the first time 22-24 June by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA.) In the form of a 21 m-high cubic building, it housed, according to a presentation made by US intelligence agencies 24 April, a clandestine nuclear reactor modeled on the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon.

According to our information, the IAEA has intelligence from various non-US sources that supports this analysis. Some of this information consists of satellite photographs supplied by various countries. Some is taken from investigations that the IAEA conducted in the past into North Korea's nuclear activities. And some comes from research conducted by the IAEA into clandestine networks for the purchase of nuclear equipment around the world.

After Libya and Iran, Syria, whose president, Bashir al-Asad, has been invited to Paris in July, is the third instance of proliferation in the Near and Middle East.

The Al-Kibar dossier -- which promises to be one of the major enigmas of recent years -- is emerging at a particularly delicate moment in the diplomatic interplay in the Near East. Syria is involved in indirect talks with Israel. Its president, Bashir al-Asad, has recently sent signals to the West suggesting that he is trying to break out of his international isolation.

The difference with Syria is that, whereas Libya and Iran turned to the clandestine network organized by Pakistan's Abdul Qadeer (AQ) Khan (the "father" of the Pakistani nuclear bomb) for their secret supplies of nuclear technology, Syria turned to North Korea secretly to acquire its equipment. The IAEA investigation into Syria thus raises the question of the existence of a North Korean nuclear "black market." The exact extent of North Korea's cooperation with Syria and the possibility that other countries may have benefited from this kind of assistance provided by Pyongyang are the focus of concerns.

Two crucial questions will occupy the IAEA inspectors: where was the fuel for the Al-Kibar reactor supposed to come from? And is there a secret facility in Syria for reprocessing spent fuel? Reprocessing is a technology that makes it possible to produce plutonium that can be used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. This is how the North Koreans acquired the nuclear weapon that they tested in 2006.

The investigation will be all the more complicated inasmuch as the powerful Israeli bombs that fell on the Al-Kibar facility left a mountain of rubble that the Syrians have subsequently partially removed. A new building has been erected on the site, making any excavation work difficult. The IAEA could initially take soil samples, in the search for traces of graphite similar to those used at the Yongbyon reactor.

There have been intensive links between Syria and North Korea for years. The North Korean regime performed a crucial role in Syria's acquisition of ballistic missiles. But the twisting paths of nuclear trafficking often follow those of proliferation of ballistic equipment, experts point out.

A photograph published by the CIA in April shows the head of the Syrian atomic energy agency, Ibrahim Othman, flanked by one of the heads of North Korea's nuclear program, Chon Chibu. The photograph was apparently taken in Syria. According to our information, Chon Chibu -- with whom the IAEA was in contact in the 1990s -- suddenly disappeared from North Korea at that time. One of the hypotheses being considered now is that he could have been working in Syria, alongside other North Korean nuclear engineers and technicians.

The construction at Al-Kibar, on the banks of the Euphrates, began in around 2001. It was apparently decided on by Hafiz al-Asad, the father and predecessor of the current Syrian president. In order to try to acquire a nuclear system of its own Syria turned, in the 1990s, to groups in Russia, and also China. These attempts were not successful. As Damascus itself admits, Pakistan's AQ Khan visited Syria at the same time, but the offer that he made was rejected.

It was only later that Syria turned to North Korea. The latter's motives were of two kinds -- on the one hand, the attraction of financial gain linked to the sale of a nuclear reactor; and on the other hand the prospect of increasing its leeway at a time when the 1994 agreement with the United States -- under whose terms Pyongyang relinquished its military nuclear program in exchange for aid -- seemed unsteady.

Whereas Israel has been completely silent about the circumstances of, and the reasons for, the September 2007 aerial strike, Syria has varied its statements over time. First, it said that Israeli aircraft dropped munitions that exploded above the desert. It then admitted that Al-Kibar had indeed been bombarded, but that it was simply a military facility. At the end of April, it described the information presented by US intelligence as "ridiculous."

But at the meeting of the IAEA Board in Vienna at the beginning of June, the Syrian representative, Ibrahim Othman, omitted to say that Al-Kibar was not a nuclear facility. This omission greatly attracted the attention of Western diplomats and Agency experts, who believe that Damascus is fostering a fallback position in case further evidence of nuclear work should be discovered.

Mr Othman says that he hopes that the IAEA will work "without preconceptions," adding that there are no obstacles to its mission. However, according to diplomats, the IAEA has not been authorized to visit three other sites in Syria that are raising suspicions. Al-Kibar was carefully concealed by Syria for years. A large part of the facility was underground. A camouflaged roof and walls were constructed, giving it a cubic form that made it less noticeable. The revelations about Al-Kabar mean that Syria has violated its obligations under the terms of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which it ratified in 1969, and associated documents: any start to the construction of a civilian nuclear facility must indeed be declared to the IAEA.

The IAEA is itself put in a delicate position, because the Al-Kibar affair could be perceived as a further admission -- following the Libyan and Iranian cases -- of the Agency's inability promptly to detect secret nuclear programs around the world. One sign of the tensions that the issue is generating was IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei's sharp protest at the Israeli bombardment and the slowness in conveying certain information to the Agency. He also declared Tuesday 17 June that Syria did not have "the human resources that would enable it to conduct a major nuclear program."

(Description of Source: Paris LeMonde.fr in French -- Website of Le Monde, leading center-left daily;
URL: <http://www.lemonde.fr>)

U.N. atom watchdog faces tough search mission in Syria

Thu Jun 19, 2008 5:00am EDT

By Mark Heinrich

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. inspectors go to Syria on Sunday to probe allegations of covert nuclear work at a site where Israeli warplanes destroyed a desert complex at the heart of Western suspicions.

But ferreting out the truth may be hard nine months after the attack.

The International Atomic Energy Agency added Syria to its proliferation watch list in April after the United States passed on intelligence imagery said to show a nascent reactor that could have yielded plutonium for atom bombs.

Washington said Syria, an ally of Iran whose shadowy uranium enrichment program has been under IAEA investigation for five years, almost completed the plant with North Korean know-how.

Satellite pictures show the site was razed after the Israeli bombing in a possible cover-up, nuclear analysts say.

But the IAEA's chief says there is no evidence Syria had the skills or fuel to run a major nuclear complex, and that a U.S. failure to alert inspectors before Israel's air strike last year would make it hard to verify what the target actually was.

"We will do everything in our power to clear things up. I take these accusations very seriously," Mohamed ElBaradei, referring to the June 22-24 mission headed by his deputy, said in a German media interview on June 7.

"But it is doubtful that we will find anything there now, assuming there was anything there in the first place."

Follow-up IAEA missions will be necessary to get to the bottom of the mystery, Western diplomats say.

Washington took issue with ElBaradei's suggestion Syria, whose only declared nuclear facility is an old research reactor under IAEA monitoring, looked unable to develop atomic power.

"The reality here is that there's some pretty strong evidence out there about what Syria was doing...It's important that the IAEA be allowed to fully investigate that facility and any other one that they might find of interest to them," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said on Tuesday.

Syria has denied concealing anything from the U.N. nuclear watchdog in possible violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Damascus has said the U.S. photos were fabricated or doctored and that Israel's target in remote northeast Syria near the Iraq border was a military building under construction.

LIMITED COOPERATION?

Syria told a meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation governing board in Vienna two weeks ago it would cooperate with the inquiry and grant access to the al-Kibar site struck by Israeli warplanes.

Satellite photographs taken since then show the area was bulldozed and cleansed of the remains, with a new building erected there, independent U.S. nuclear analysts say.

Arab diplomats at the IAEA meeting briefed separately by Syria said it refused agency requests to examine three other sites on national security grounds, asserting these were conventional military bases only and off-limits.

Other diplomats said IAEA wanted to check these places for a possible source of fuel for the alleged reactor, or relevant equipment, as none was found in U.S. pictures of al-Kibar.

The IAEA team will be led by Olli Heinonen, head of its global inspectorate, and include two nuclear technology experts familiar with Syria, diplomats said. They were set to have a range of talks in Damascus around a day trip to al-Kibar.

"The delegation will want Syria to explain what was at the (bombed) site. If Syria still says it was no reactor, they will want information to substantiate that. There is a plan to take samples on the spot," said a senior diplomat close to the IAEA.

"They will explain why the agency wants to see other sites. That doesn't have to happen (on this trip). If the IAEA doesn't get acceptable answers now, inspectors can go back next month and try again, and so on. This will be a process."

ElBaradei has demanded "absolute transparency" from Syria.

"Don't expect much from this trip, given Syria's extensive efforts to remove incriminating evidence and the restrictions they will put on where the IAEA can go," said Mark Fitzpatrick at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"But the IAEA in the past has found things that the hosts didn't expect, as in North Korea... So it's possible Syria will be surprised. If the IAEA doesn't find anything (this time), it shouldn't be taken as any exoneration of Syria."

(Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/213812,inspectors-to-ask-for-more-access-during-iaea-probe-of.html>

Posted : Fri, 20 Jun 2008 10:46:01 GMT

Author : DPA

Category : Middle East (World)

Middle East World News | Home

Vienna - As inspectors from the UN nuclear watchdog prepare to travel to Syria for the first time Sunday to investigate whether the country was building an undeclared nuclear reactor, diplomats say that Damascus has yet to agree to all the inspectors' demands. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief inspector Ollie Heinonen and two of his specialists plan to go to Syria from Sunday to Tuesday to investigate whether the al-Kibar site that was bombed by Israel last year was indeed a reactor geared towards producing plutonium.

IAEA inspectors will take samples at the site that could reveal whether there was any nuclear material at al-Kibar, diplomats say.

In addition, samples could show whether any graphite, a material used in reactor cores, was present at the location.

Syria maintains that there was no nuclear facility, but only a military site.

The IAEA hopes to see the rubble that was taken away from the site, a Western diplomat told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa, but details of what the inspectors will be allowed to do still have to be worked out between the IAEA team and Syrian officials.

"There is still going to be negotiating when they get there, which is not very encouraging," the diplomat said.

In April, the IAEA received US documents and photographs indicating that the site was a reactor being built with the help of North Korea.

"According to this information, the reactor was not yet operational and no nuclear material had been introduced into it," IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei said in early June.

Since the Israeli air raid in September 2007, Syria has razed the site, satellite images show.

Although only the al-Kibar visit is confirmed, the inspectors are expected to press for access to other sites that may have been related to a nascent Syrian nuclear programme, two diplomats said.

At the beginning of this month, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said in press remarks that his country would cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog.

Under its agreements with the IAEA, Damascus is obliged to report nuclear projects to the Vienna-based agency as early as the planning stage.

There was no clear evidence Syria had the fuel or the human resources to operate a large-scale nuclear facility, ElBaradei said in an interview with the Dubai-based al-Arabiya television station on Tuesday.

The head of the IAEA said his organization had only pictures of a site in Syria bombed by Israel last year that resembles a nuclear facility.

He has repeatedly criticized the US and Israel for not involving his agency before the bombing.

"He doesn't think there is 100 per cent credible assurance it is a reactor," an official close to the IAEA said.

Images released to the public by the US government include detailed ground-level photographs of the of the al-Kibar site, closely resembling the inside of the North Korean Yongbyon reactor.

The IAEA did not expect definitive answers from this first visit, sources close to the agency said. "This is really the beginning of a process: no-one knows how long it will take," one source said.

It depended on whether Syria would allow further inspections, and on whether the findings of the first visit would show the need for more investigations, he said.

UN nuclear chief tells Arab TB he hopes Syria will show transparency during inspectors' visit

2008-06-20 23:50:08 -

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog chief urged Syria on Friday to show «transparency» and cooperate with inspectors from the world agency due to visit the Mideast country this weekend.

The visit will be the start of an international fact check of U.S. and Israeli assertions that Damascus had tried to build a plutonium-producing facility under the radar of the international community.

Mohamed ElBaradei, who heads the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, told the pan-Arab Al-Arabiya Television that he hoped Syria will let IAEA inspectors visit «all locations» they are interested in.

Syria said earlier this month it won't allow IAEA to probe beyond a site bombed by Israel last September, despite IAEA's expressed eagerness to visit three other suspect locations.

«We will go (to Syria) with open eyes and we will observe the facts ... All I ask of Syria is to show absolute transparency and help» the IAEA probe, ElBaradei said in the interview, aired late Friday.

«I hope that Syria will take us to all the locations,» where allegedly there could be other reactors, ElBaradei added.

His remarks reflected IAEA hopes that Syria could still warm to giving IAEA access to the three other sites. The main focus on the agency's June 22-24 visit is the Al Kibar facility _ a building in the country's remote eastern desert that was destroyed in September by Israeli jets.

Syria in early June agreed to an IAEA check of U.S. assertions that the target was a plutonium-producing reactor, nearly complete and thus at the stage where it could generate the fissile material for nuclear arms.

Neither the U.S. nor Israel told the IAEA about the bombing until late April, about a year after they obtained what they considered decisive intelligence: dozens of photographs from a handheld camera of the inside and outside of the compound.

The satellite photos appeared to show construction crews using the interval to erect another structure over the site _ a move that heightened suspicions of a possible cover-up.

ElBaradei again rebuked Israel for the bombing, condemning its «use of solo military force» and for not sharing its information with the IAEA.

«Before (Israel's) hitting Syria ... we could have had the time to go to Syria to investigate and learn of any covert Syrian reactor,» ElBaradei said.

ElBaradei stressed that he had told the Syrians that, «if they, as they claim, don't have any covert nuclear program, they have to practice absolute transparency.» But he also cautioned that the probe of

the bombed site will be «very difficult because the body (of evidence) is gone, that reactor has been destroyed.

In the interview, part of which was aired earlier this week, ElBaradei also said that his agency doesn't have evidence Syria possesses the fuel or technical know-how for a large-scale nuclear plant.

«We have no evidence that Syria has the human resources that enable it to initiate a large-scale nuclear program,» he said. «We did not see nuclear fuel in Syria that facilitates it to operate this reactor; we don't have any information telling us that it (Syria) has nuclear fuel.

But he did point out that Syria has a nuclear system that is similar to North Korea's. Of the three other sites IAEA is interested in, at least one is thought to possibly contain equipment that can reprocess nuclear material into the fissile core of warheads.

Syrian President Bashar Assad has repeatedly denied that his country has a secret nuclear program.

Israel has never officially confirmed September's air strike on Al Kibar, though it has not disputed the foreign reports, or U.S. government comments, on the incident.

Syria, NKorea helped Iran develop nuclear programme: German report

by Staff Writers

Berlin (AFP)

June 21, 2008

Damascus and Pyongyang helped Iran to develop its nuclear programme through the construction of a suspected nuclear site in Syria that Israel destroyed last September, Der Spiegel reported.

But the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is considering withdrawing his support for the Iranian programme, added the German newsweekly in its next edition out Monday, quoting German secret service reports.

According to those intelligence reports, it said, a joint plan by Syria, North Korea and Iran for a nuclear reactor for military use was to have been developed at the Al-Kibar site in the east of Syria.

The site -- to be inspected next week by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) -- was destroyed by Israeli warplanes with Washington's support. Syria denied it has military purposes.

The reports cited by Der Spiegel claimed that North Korea was to help Iranian scientists to advance their nuclear programme, and that Al-Kibar was to have been used as a temporary site for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb until it was able to do so on its own territory.

The plan was discussed during a visit by Iranian President Mamhoud Ahmadinejad to Syria in 2006, according to the magazine.

The three countries also cooperated in the production of chemical weapons, said Der Spiegel, quoting the same source. At the time of an explosion at a chemical site in July 2007, 15 Syrian soldiers, 12 Iranian engineers and three North Koreans were among the victims.

Ten months after the destruction of the Al-Kibar site, on the basis of allegations that a nuclear reactor was being built there with the aid of North Korea, the IAEA said it was sending experts to Syria to investigate.

Documents and detailed photographs supplied in April by Washington to the IAEA backed up the suspicions, but Syria rejected the allegations describing them as "ridiculous."

Iran and Syria, both parties to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, signed a memorandum of cooperation at the end of May on the two countries' "independence and territorial integrity."

The alliance between the two neighbours, which goes back to the 1979 Iranian revolution, was strengthened in 2006 with the signing of an agreement on military cooperation.

SYRIA TURNING TOWARD THE WEST?

Assad's Risky Nuclear Game

06/23/2008

Syria and Iran may be better friends than many thought. Reports indicate that the two might have been cooperating on nuclear weapons research. Now, though, Damascus may be rethinking those ties and looking for friends in the West.

Things are taking a dramatic turn in Syria these days, just as a team of United Nations nuclear weapons inspectors arrives to probe allegations that Damascus is hiding secret atomic activities. And as information emerges that Syria may have been cooperating with both Iran and North Korea on the development of nuclear weapons.

Yet even as pressure increases on Damascus, many Western leaders see a chance that Syrian President Bashar Assad may sever contacts with Iran. Indeed, some say that Assad's decision could determine whether or not a new war in the Middle East could be on the horizon.

Assad, as a result, is being courted as never before. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier is pursuing talks with the Syrian leader. French President Nicolas Sarkozy has invited him to Paris and even the usually critical Bush Administration would like to improve contacts. Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has made it clear that he wants to intensify peace talks with Damascus, and is no longer refusing to discuss the issue of the Golan Heights, seized by Israel during the six-day war in 1967.

The background to this surprising flurry of diplomatic activity is the fact that, according to intelligence reports, Syria has been working alongside North Korea for years to support Iran in the development of a military nuclear program. However, there are strong indications that Assad is now rethinking this policy.

According to intelligence reports seen by SPIEGEL, the Syrian facility at Al Kibar that Israeli jets bombed last September was the site of a secret military project. The report states that North Korean, Syrian and Iranian scientists were working side by side to build a reactor to produce weapons-grade plutonium. Sources say that the Iranians were using the facility as a "reserve site" and had intended sending the material back to Tehran. While the Iranians had made great progress in the development of uranium, it is alleged that they required the help of the North Korean experts when it came to plutonium technology.

Iran, Syria and North Korea are also alleged to have cooperated on the production of chemical weapons. Indeed, in July 2007 an explosion near the Syrian city of Aleppo killed 15 Syrian military officials as well as dozens of Iranian rocket scientists and, according to information obtained by SPIEGEL, three North Koreans. According to Jane's Defence Weekly, the accident released quantities of mustard gas and the nerve agent Sarin.

Meanwhile weapons inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) arrived in Syria on Sunday to investigate whether the bombed site at Al Kibar was in fact a nuclear facility, something Damascus has vehemently denied. Although the inspectors face strict limits on where they can go, the fact that Syria is allowing the inspectors in at all is a sign of something of a thaw between Damascus and the West.

Assad's attitude seems to have become far more conciliatory. As well as allowing in the IAEA team, he has used his contacts with Hamas to persuade the Palestinian militant group to call a six-month cease-fire with Israel in Gaza. And he has used his influence to rein in Hezbollah militants in Lebanon. The fact that he has said he would consider opening an embassy in Beirut is also a significant sign that Syria is at last recognizing Lebanese sovereignty after years of treating the neighboring state as little more than a province.

Assad's moves are now being rewarded, with the West welcoming anything that would further isolate Tehran. Sarkozy has invited the Syrian leader to visit Paris for Bastille Day, when Israel's Prime Minister Olmert will also be in attendance. The French president has one precondition: He has demanded that "Syria break as much as possible with Iran in its quest to develop a nuclear weapon."

Will Syrian site mystery be solved?

By Paul Reynolds

World affairs correspondent, BBC News website

07:53 GMT, Monday, 23 June 2008 08:53 UK

UN nuclear weapons inspectors have started a mission to Syria where they are trying to solve the mystery of the building attacked by the Israelis last September and which, according to the CIA, was a nuclear reactor under construction.

However, since the structure has since been completely demolished, the evidence might be elusive.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, said: "It is doubtful we will find anything there now, assuming there was anything in the first place."

Mr ElBaradei has also cast doubt on Syria's ability to construct and run such a complex nuclear process.

"We have no evidence that Syria has the human resources that would allow it to carry out a large nuclear programme," he told al-Arabiya television.

He has also said that "no nuclear material" had been introduced at the site. So it is highly unlikely that there will be signs of any radioactivity there.

"Don't expect too much from this trip," said Mark Fitzpatrick, nuclear expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. "But the IAEA has in the past found things that the hosts didn't expect, as in North Korea, so it's possible Syria will be surprised."

Relying on Syria

The inspectors do have photos provided by the Americans. These allegedly show the inside of the building and the suspected reactor. But a lot will also depend on what the Syrians say.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- * 6 Sept 2007: Israel bombs site in Syria
- * 1 Oct: Syria's President Assad tells BBC site was military
- * 24 Oct: New satellite images show site now bulldozed clear
- * 24 April 2008: US claims Syrian site was nuclear reactor
- * 22 June: IAEA due to visit Syria to investigate

Led by the IAEA chief inspector Olli Heinonen, the inspectors arrive in Syria on Sunday and will stay until Tuesday.

They could ask to see the architect's drawings for the building, and ask to question the architect and the construction engineers. They could ask to see rubble from the building, and take samples, especially from any surviving parts of the suspected nuclear reactor.

They will in any case ask the Syrians what the building was for, if it was not, as the Bush administration claimed, "a covert nuclear reactor in its eastern desert capable of producing plutonium". Plutonium can be used to construct a nuclear bomb.

"We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities. We have good reason to believe that reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on 6 September of last year, was not intended for peaceful purposes," the White House said in April this year.

Syrian denials

Syria has said that the site, at al-Kibar, was a military building under construction and was not a nuclear facility.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has said that Syria does not have a nuclear weapons programme.

Syria is a member of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which bars it from making nuclear weapons.

"The IAEA has in the past found things that the hosts didn't expect... so it's possible Syria will be surprised "

Mark Fitzpatrick
IISS

A test of Syrian co-operation will be whether the inspectors gain access to three other sites. Syria has reportedly told other Arab countries that these are military bases not connected with the suspect site at al-Kibar.

One site is said by diplomatic sources, who spoke to the Associated Press news agency, to be suspected of having "equipment that can reprocess nuclear material into the fissile core of warheads".

Wider worries

Behind the IAEA visit, there is the wider issue of what to do if a country is suspected of trying to develop nuclear weapons secretly. The IAEA is furious that it was not alerted by Israel or the United States about evidence concerning the al-Kibar site before it was bombed. The IAEA thinks it could have established what was going on there.

The IAEA is anxious to preserve its leading role in the investigation of possible violations of the NPT.

The Americans are doubtful that the IAEA can do the job properly. It took US and British intelligence operations to get Libya to admit to secret nuclear activities and abandon them in 2003.

[deletia]

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/06/20080623-6.html>



For Immediate Release

June 23, 2008

Press Briefing by Dana Perino
James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

12:43 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

Q Dana, is the United States preparing to remove North Korea from the terrorism list?

MS. PERINO: Well, we'll -- what we've been waiting for is for North Korea to issue to the Chinese, as the chairman of the six-party talks, its complete and accurate and verifiable declaration. And there is word that they would try to do that by Thursday. This is a deadline that the North Koreans themselves have put out there. We'll see if they decide to do that. And from there, as you can see from the agreements that we've had, there is action for action.

But the key is we want a denuclearized North Korea, but part of getting there is getting this declaration. Before any other actions are taken, that declaration has to be reviewed and considered verifiable.

Q Do you have any reason to believe that they won't do it on -- by Thursday, as they --

MS. PERINO: Only based on past experience, that deadlines have been kicked down the road before. But I couldn't say either way whether or not they'll meet this one. We hope that they do, but when they do and if they do, it has to be one that is correct and verifiable.

Laurent.

Q To follow up on that, will you consider any declaration acceptable if it does not address the issue of North Korean cooperation on nuclear --

MS. PERINO: Well, I'll refer you to the State Department on that. Obviously, Secretary Rice spoke at length about this last week, and what we know is that there was cooperation between the two. And so we all know that, and we made it clear that we would let the whole world know that, so the world is operating from the same perspective. So we'll see what the declaration says, but the bottom line is, all of us know it.

Q But again, will this -- any declaration be acceptable if this issue is not addressed?

MS. PERINO: What we want to see is a correct declaration and one that is verifiable, but I'm not going to prejudge it before we see it.

U.N. nuclear team inspect bombed site in Syria

By Karin Strohecker

Reuters

Monday, June 23, 2008; 1:24 PM

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. nuclear inspectors on Monday examined an alleged nuclear site in Syria that the United States says housed a secretly built reactor nearing completion when it was bombed by Israel nine months ago, a diplomat said.

Syria denies it has any covert nuclear weapons program and says the Israelis hit an ordinary military structure being built at al-Kibar, in the northeastern desert.

Neither Syria nor the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has issued any information about the visit of the inspectors since they arrived in Damascus on Sunday.

"The visit (to the alleged nuclear site) is today," said a senior diplomat in Europe familiar with the IAEA.

The diplomat later told Reuters the inspectors had reached the site and examined it.

The source gave no further details but diplomats said earlier they were expecting to spend the day at al-Kibar.

The team led by Olli Heinonen, head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog's global inspectorate, was also due to hold talks with Syrian officials before returning to Vienna on Wednesday.

Syria's silence on the visit, which it agreed with the IAEA on June 5, indicates how sensitive the issue is for President Bashar al-Assad, who has yet to retaliate for the Israeli raid.

The IAEA put Syria on its proliferation watch list in April after receiving intelligence photographs from the United States said to show a reactor that could have yielded plutonium, a nuclear bomb fuel.

Washington said Syria, an ally of Iran whose own nuclear program has been under IAEA investigation since 2003, had almost completed the plant with North Korean help. Pyongyang evaded IAEA checks and test-exploded a nuclear device in 2006.

Syrian officials have accused the United States of fabricating evidence in collusion with Israel, believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed power.

U.S. nuclear analysts say satellite images since the Israeli strike show the bombed site had been razed and a new building erected there, perhaps to cleanse traces of nuclear activity.

Syria has resisted IAEA requests to visit three other sites to check for facilities that would be necessary for the alleged reactor but which are missing from the U.S. images of al-Kibar, diplomats in Vienna say. Damascus describes the three sites as conventional military bases irrelevant to the IAEA inquiry.

Damascus has denied concealing anything from the IAEA in possible violation of its Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei has condemned the Israeli raid and criticized the United States for failing to share its intelligence material on Syria with his agency much earlier.

But he has dampened expectations that the IAEA will find conclusive evidence so long after the September 6 bombing.

"It is doubtful that we will find anything there now, assuming there was anything there in the first place."

ElBaradei said last week there was no evidence that Syria, whose only declared nuclear facility is an antiquated research reactor subject to IAEA monitoring, had the skills or fuel to run a major nuclear complex. Washington disputes this.

(Additional reporting by Mark Heinrich in London; Writing by Alistair Lyon; Editing by Giles Elgood)

Syria keeps silent over UN nuclear inspectors

Arab Times, Kuwait

10 hours ago [Accessed 2008-06-24T17:00Z]

DAMASCUS (Agencies): Syria kept silent on Monday [2008-06-23] about a visit by UN nuclear officials to inspect a mysterious site bombed by Israel last year, with no official announcements a day after the team's arrival. There was no acknowledgement in the state-owned media that the inspectors were even in the country to investigate US allegations that the Al-Kibar site in the northeastern desert was a nuclear reactor nearing completion. Just one privately owned daily, Al-Watan – like all Syrian media close to the government – made any mention of the inspection mission by the UN nuclear watchdog, carrying a commentary published by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti. The commentary highlighted Syria's strong denial of the US allegations and recent statements by International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei that the watchdog had no evidence of Syrian nuclear foul-play.

“We believe therefore that the IAEA team's mission is a routine visit aimed at putting an end to the rumours over a Syrian nuclear programme,” the commentary said. It added that it remained unclear however whether “the United States will be satisfied with such an outcome or will press on with its accusations to create a Syrian nuclear issue similar to the Iranian or North Korean ones.” Washington has circulated photographs it says show that the Al-Kibar facility was a nuclear plant similar to the Yongbyon reactor in North Korea and being built with Pyongyang's assistance. Syria says Al-Kibar was a disused military facility. The IAEA team is scheduled to leave Syria on Tuesday evening after completing its inspection of the site. But the mission's leader, IAEA deputy chief Olli Heinonen, said he would not be returning to the watchdog's headquarters in Vienna until Wednesday evening. It was not immediately clear how the inspectors would be spending the additional time.

The team is to submit its findings to the UN watchdog's next regular board meeting in September.

A Syrian newspaper accused the United States on Monday of making false nuclear accusations against Damascus and expressed hope that a fact-finding trip by UN nuclear inspectors to Syria won't turn into a “prolonged affair.”

The editorial in Syria's independent but government-guided Al-Watan newspaper was the only mention so far in Syria of the UN nuclear inspection under way. Otherwise, Syria has placed strict bans on media reporting the IAEA visit to the country.

On Sunday, officials at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna confirmed its team had left for Syria for the visit – which is to examine US allegations that Syria has secret nuclear sites.

Neither Syria nor the IAEA has confirmed any details since, or even said whether the delegation has arrived. But a woman at Vienna airport flight information, who declined to identify herself on the phone because she was not authorized to speak to the media, said the Austrian Airlines flight carrying the inspectors landed in Syria on Sunday afternoon, a few minutes ahead of schedule.

Damascus denies working on a secret nuclear program but Washington hopes the UN agency team will find evidence backing US intelligence that a structure destroyed by Israeli war planes in September was a nearly completed plutonium-producing reactor.

If so, the IAEA visit could mark the start of massive investigation similar to the agency's five-year probe into Iran's activities. It could also draw in countries such as North Korea, which Washington says helped Damascus and Iran. Media reports also have linked Iran with Syria's nuclear efforts.

Syria agreed after months' delay to allow IAEA inspectors to visit the bombed Al Kibar, but not three other locations suspected as secret nuclear sites. The agency has little formal inspection rights in Syria, which has declared only a rudimentary nuclear program using a small 27-kilowatt reactor for research and the production of isotopes for medical and agricultural uses.

Al-Watan said Syria, by allowing the IAEA visit, wished to demonstrate "its transparency and desire for peace and nuclear nonproliferation."

"However, the inspections should not turn into a series with protracted episodes similar to the Iraqi and Iranian" cases, it said, referring to IAEA's protracted probe during late Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's rule, and the agency's tussle with Iran.

While Al-Watan does not officially reflect government thinking, in a country where state security generally monitors and controls the flow of news, an editorial on such a sensitive matter indicates at least tacit government consent.

Al-Watan also said the US nuclear accusations aim to turn the nuclear issue into a "sword hanging over Syria ... in what resembles a blackmail policy that might later turn into direct targeting."

The editorial also blasted Washington for "protecting" Israel's alleged nuclear program while going after countries whose policies it opposes, such as Iran, Syria and North Korea.

"While everything is possible against countries that oppose US policies ... Washington provides full protection for Israel although that country has close to 200 nuclear heads," the editorial said.

Israel is widely believed to have developed nuclear weapons though the Israeli government has never officially acknowledged them.

Can Syria avoid sanctions with a U.N. nuclear inspection?

An IAEA team visits the site of an alleged nuclear weapons facility bombed by Israel in September.

By Julien Barnes-Dacey | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

from the **June 25, 2008** edition

26 minutes ago [*Accessed 2008-06-24T18:30Z*]

Damascus, Syria - International nuclear detectives are at work in the Syrian sands following American allegations of covert nuclear activity, in a trip that could well determine Syria's international fate.

In Damascus, the inquiry has been met with both a sense of foreboding and cautious optimism. While the country fears Iran-like isolation, it hopes that by opening its doors to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) it can prevent any global sanctions.

"What's driving Syria right now is an anxiety about becoming a pariah," says Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma.

According to the US government, the remote desert site in northeastern Syria, which was bombed by Israeli planes last September, was a nuclear facility being built with North Korean assistance. The IAEA placed Syria on its proliferation watch list in April following US photographic evidence showing the construction of an alleged reactor. Syria has granted inspectors access to the area, but it razed the site after it was bombed.

On Sunday, Der Spiegel, a German news weekly, reported that Syria, North Korea, and Iran were jointly developing a nuclear reactor to build weapons-grade plutonium at the location.

The allegations have been fervently denied by Syria – a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – which says the site was a military location with no nuclear activity. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said the evidence was "fabricated 100 percent."

Nonetheless, the IAEA visit comes at a precarious time for Syria and risks undermining recent diplomatic gains after a long period of international condemnation.

Following the Doha agreement in May that temporarily settled Lebanon's internal political disputes, the resumption of Turkish-mediated peace talks with Israel, and most recently the Hamas-Israeli cease-fire, which Syria says it helped broker using influence over Damascus-based Hamas leaders, Syria is slowly breaking out of isolation.

Most significantly, France resumed diplomatic ties and has invited Mr. Assad to Paris in July to attend a Euro-Mediterranean conference and Bastille Day celebrations.

With claims of illicit nuclear activity continuing to swirl over Syria's head however, Syrians are concerned that it could yet become a pariah state like Iran. An editorial in Syria's Al-Watan newspaper Monday said America's nuclear claim is a "sword hanging over Syria ... in what resembles a blackmail policy that might later turn into direct targeting."

It is these fears that prompted Syria, against all expectations, to cooperate with the IAEA, say analysts.

"Iran can afford to thumb their nose at the West because they have so much money coming in from oil that will help insulate them from sanctioning," says Mr. Landis. "Syria doesn't have a cushion like that."

Already suffering severe economic difficulties, the Assad regime, which trades economic provision for domestic legitimacy, can ill-afford international sanctions in addition to those already put in place by the US.

But even as Syria has opened the bombed site to IAEA inspectors, it has maintained a tight grip over proceedings, drawing comparisons to Iran, which in recent years has provided the UN nuclear watchdog only limited access to its nuclear facilities. A request by the IAEA to visit three other sites was denied by Syrian officials, and local and international press have been given no access.

"The reality here is that there's some pretty strong evidence out there about what Syria was doing.... It's important that the IAEA be allowed to fully investigate that facility and any other one that they might find of interest to them," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said last week.

While calling on Syria to show "absolute transparency," IAEA chief Mohamed El Baradei says it is unlikely investigators will discover any evidence so long after the September bombing. He criticized the US and Israel for withholding intelligence from his agency and taking unilateral action against the site.

Syrian government officials say they are confident that they will weather the political storm, which they see as the Bush administration's attempt to scuttle the country's world standing.

"America has tried and tried to put pressures on Syria ... but it is all false," says Suleiman Haddad, chairman of the parliament's foreign affairs committee. "We will not respond to this pressure. We are in full cooperation with the IAEA to prove to the world that Syria has nothing to hide."

Like many Syrian analysts, Mr. Haddad says that Syria will only be able to fully return to the fold once a new American administration comes to power.

Syria planned to supply Iran with nuclear fuel, Israel says

Ian Black, Middle East editor

The Guardian,

Wednesday June 25, 2008

Israel believes that Syria was planning to supply Iran with spent nuclear fuel for reprocessing into weapons-grade plutonium from the site it bombed last September, and which is currently being inspected by the UN's nuclear watchdog.

The claim from an adviser to Israel's national security council, came yesterday as speculation mounts about a possible Israeli attack on Iran. The Israeli government officially backs UN sanctions to force Tehran to halt its uranium enrichment but has little faith they will succeed.

Details about the alleged Syrian reactor and the Israeli raid remain shrouded in secrecy. Syria denies it has or had a covert nuclear weapons programme and insists the Israelis hit an ordinary military structure being built at al-Kibar, in the country's north-eastern desert.

The US claimed in April that Syria had almost completed the plant with the help of North Korea, which evaded the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) checks and tested a nuclear device in 2006. Officials in Damascus accused the US of fabricating evidence in collusion with Israel, which unlike Syria and Iran is not a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and is the Middle East's only nuclear power. Washington did not mention any link to Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The Israeli adviser told the Guardian: "The Iranians were involved in the Syrian programme. The idea was that the Syrians produce plutonium and the Iranians get their share. Syria had no reprocessing facility for the spent fuel. It's not deduction alone that brings almost everyone to think that the link exists."

On Monday the German magazine Der Spiegel quoted "intelligence reports" as making similar claims. A Syrian government spokesman dismissed them as "nonsense". But Der Spiegel said that the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, was considering withdrawing support for the Iranian nuclear programme. Tehran and Damascus have had close relations since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Both support Hizbullah, which fought Israel in 2006.

Amos Yadlin, head of Israel's military intelligence, told MPs last Sunday that the Syrians were "concerned" about the inspection by the IAEA and were trying to conceal their actions.

The IAEA team, led by Olli Heinonen of Finland, reached al-Kibar on Monday and was due to hold talks with Syrian officials before returning to Vienna today.

The IAEA put Syria on its proliferation watch-list in April after receiving intelligence photographs from the US, said to show a reactor that could have yielded plutonium. Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of IAEA, condemned the Israeli raid and criticised the US for failing to share intelligence on Syria sooner. Last week ElBaradei cast doubt on his inspectors' ability to establish the nature of the site. "It is doubtful that we will find anything there now, assuming there was anything there in the first place," he said.

The Israeli adviser said the US "implored" Israel for months to agree to release details of the September attack, which Israel has never officially acknowledged. Israel was reluctant to do so to avoid Syrian retaliation. Since then, the two countries have begun peace talks brokered by Turkey.

Earlier this month 100 Israeli fighter aircraft reportedly rehearsed an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. The jets flew more than 870 miles, roughly the distance between Israel and Iran's main uranium enrichment plant at Natanz. An attack would "turn the region into a fireball," ElBaradei warned.

North Korea nuclear accounting won't include bombs

By BURT HERMAN

31 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-06-25T18:05Z]

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea is expected this week to turn over its long-delayed accounting of its nuclear weapons activities, part of a chain of events leading to a unique photo opportunity: the destruction of the cooling tower at Pyongyang's main reactor.

One item that won't make the declaration, which the White House says is due Thursday, will be North Korea's nuclear bombs. The omission means the world will have to wait for an answer to the question at the heart of the nearly six-year-old standoff: Is the North ready to give up its nuclear weapons?

North Korea has invited foreign TV stations to broadcast the toppling of the cooling tower to demonstrate its plan to give up its nuclear ambitions. Sung Kim, the top State Department expert on Korea, will travel to North Korea for the planned destruction of the cooling tower at its Yongbyon nuclear reactor, an official at South Korea's Foreign Ministry said. He spoke on condition of anonymity, citing ministry policy.

U.S. officials who earlier insisted North Korea's declaration should be "complete and correct" have repeatedly scaled back expectations for the document in the wake of resistance from Pyongyang, which failed to meet a deadline for submitting the list at the end of last year.

Already, the declaration that the White House says is due Thursday is not expected to include details of the North's alleged attempts to enrich uranium — the dispute that sparked the nuclear standoff in late 2002. The list also will not describe how the North allegedly helped Syria build a nuclear plant.

Instead, those thorny issues will simply be "acknowledged" by Pyongyang, with the U.S. hoping that it can get more information in later discussions with the North, given that it has few other ways to dig for intelligence from the world's most closed country.

The main U.S. envoy to nuclear talks with North Korea affirmed this week that the communist nation's bombs also will not make the cut for the declaration. Instead, details on the bombs will be left to the next stage of the talks, when Pyongyang is supposed to abandon and dismantle its nuclear weapons program.

"The North Koreans have acknowledged that we have to deal with the weapons," Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said in Beijing. "We're going to deal with it as soon as we sit down again to begin to map out the remaining piece of this negotiation."

The White House said Wednesday it will move quickly to lift sanctions and remove North Korea from the U.S. blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism in exchange for handing over the declaration.

The North is expected in the declaration to say how much plutonium it has produced at its main reactor facility. The next step in the disarmament talks will be to verify that claim, through procedures that Hill said would be set up within 45 days.

That verification will not mean the U.S. or any other country will yet actually see the weapons-grade plutonium, or that nuclear inspectors will roam the countryside peeking into the North's vast network of secret underground tunnels to track down traces of radioactive material.

Instead, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said this month that verification at first will simply mean reviewing documents and inspecting the reactor to infer how much plutonium was produced, to be compared with the amount that the North claims in the declaration.

"Once we have a clearer view of how much plutonium has actually been made, I think we'll also have a clearer view of what might have happened to it," Rice told an audience at the Heritage Foundation in Washington.

In a report earlier this year, the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security estimated the North has between 61 and 110 pounds of plutonium, which could be enough to build from six to 10 bombs. The North proved it could build a working nuclear bomb when it carried out an underground nuclear test blast in October 2006.

The fireworks at the reactor will be a mostly symbolic move signaling that North Korea does not intend to make more plutonium for bombs. The reactor was shut down last year and already largely disabled so that it cannot easily be restarted.

What happens next with the bombs and fissile material the North already has stockpiled will be the real test of Pyongyang's commitment to disarm.

Syrian nuclear probe off to 'good start': IAEA chief inspector

1 hour ago [Accessed 2008-06-25T20:55Z]

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN nuclear watchdog's probe into an alleged covert nuclear facility in the Syrian desert has gotten off to "a good start," a top official said on Wednesday.

"It was a good start, but there's still work that remains to be done," Olli Heinonen, deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters on returning from a three-day trip to Syria.

"For this trip we did what we agreed to. We achieved what we wanted on this first trip. We took samples which we wanted to take. Now it's time to analyse them," Heinonen said after getting off a flight from Damascus to Vienna.

Asked whether he expected to return to Syria in the near future for follow-up investigations, the IAEA's number two said: "It's too early to say. The work will continue. We'll see in days and weeks to come what happens next."

Heinonen and two other inspectors had flown to Syria Sunday to investigate allegations that a mysterious site bombed by Israel last year had been a covert nuclear reactor nearing completion.

Observers expect the trip to serve as merely the start of a long investigation, similar to the IAEA's five-year probe into Iran's disputed nuclear activities.

Diplomats told AFP that the IAEA experts visited and inspected the site, at Al-Kibar in a remote desert area of northeastern Syria on the Euphrates River.

Washington claims Al-Kibar, razed to the ground by Israeli planes in September, was a nuclear facility built with North Korean help and close to becoming operational. It has provided intelligence and photographic evidence to support its claims.

Syria has denied the allegations as "ridiculous," saying the edifice was simply a disused military building.

The problem is Damascus has wiped clean the site, making the IAEA inspection more difficult, adding to suspicions within elements of the international community about the exact nature of the site.

Heinonen said he was generally satisfied with the degree of cooperation shown by the Syrian authorities so far.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gwu1N6NdbI7MThXmiNHyFH-ZMHygD91HAN0G0>

UN team says deeper Syrian nuke probe needed

By GEORGE JAHN

15 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-06-25T20:45Z]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — An initial probe of U.S. allegations that a Syrian site hit by Israeli warplanes was a secretly built nuclear reactor is inconclusive and further checks are necessary, a senior U.N. atomic inspector said Wednesday.

Olli Heinonen, a deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he was satisfied with what was achieved on his four-day trip but "there is still work that needs to be done" in following up on the claims that Syria was hiding elements of a potential nuclear arms program.

Heinonen spoke to reporters after arriving on a flight from Damascus back to Vienna, headquarters of the IAEA. He met in the Syrian capital with officials in charge of the nation's nuclear program and senior Syrian generals. Damascus claims that the building flattened by Israel was a non-nuclear military structure.

With Syrian authorities imposing a virtual news blackout on his trip, few details had surfaced beyond the fact that Syrian authorities allowed the three-man inspecting team to visit the Al Kibar site targeted in September.

Washington hopes that the U.N. agency team is carrying persuasive evidence backing U.S. intelligence that the structure hit by Israel in September was a nearly completed plutonium-producing reactor.

If so, the trip could mark the start of an investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to over the past five years. The process could draw in countries like North Korea, which Washington says helped Damascus, and Iran, also linked by media reports to Syria's nuclear strivings.

But Heinonen declined to tip his cards on what he and his team had been able to see and do beyond acknowledging they were able to take environmental samples in the large area where material from the site may have been spread by the exploding Israeli ordnance.

"We achieved what we wanted on this first trip," he said. "We continue our discussions, we took the samples we need to take and now it's time to analyze them and also look at the information we got from Syria.

"We will see in the days and weeks what will happen next," he said when asked about the chances of another visit.

Syria agreed to allow the nuclear inspectors to visit the bombed Al Kibar site in early June only after months of delay. And even before the IAEA team left for Damascus on Saturday, Syrian authorities had already said three other locations suspected of possibly harboring secret nuclear activities were off limits.

IAEA officials had sought to play down heightened expectations ahead of the trip. The agency has little formal inspection rights in Syria, which has only a rudimentary declared nuclear program revolving around research and the production of isotopes for medical and agricultural uses, using a small, 27-kilowatt reactor.

Ahead of the trip, a Vienna-based senior diplomat briefed on the inspection team's agenda said they would ask for information related to allegations of secret Syrian nuclear procurements, either from North Korea or the nuclear black market headed by Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan.

A traditional method at suspected nuclear sites — taking swipes in the search for radioactive traces — should be of no use at Al Kibar. That's because none had been introduced into the alleged reactor before it was struck by Israel, according to intelligence given the agency, both by the U.S and Israel and subsequently by other sources.

So the inspectors focused on other telltale signs — minute quantities of graphite, for instance, which is used as a cooling element in the type of North Korean prototype allegedly being built with help from Pyongyang. Such a reactor contains hundreds of tons of graphite, and any major explosion would have sent dust over the immediate area.

But — if the Syrians are interested in a cover-up — they could have scoured the region to bury, wash away and otherwise remove any such traces.

And although U.S. intelligence says the reactor was close to completion, it is possible any graphite elements were not yet installed at the time of the Sept. 6 bombing.

The inspectors also were expected to have looked for traces of other metals and substances commonly contained in the type of reactor that the Syrians were suspected of building.

Syrian VP: Syria allowed UN probe to prove US wrong

Associated Press

Published: 06.26.08, 00:00 / Israel News

Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa said his country allowed UN nuclear inspectors to visit the Al Kibar site in the remote eastern desert, destroyed by Israeli jets last year, to prove US allegations of a covert Syrian nuclear program are false.

Olli Heinonen, a deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told reporters in Vienna on Wednesday that the initial probe was inconclusive and further checks are necessary.

He said he was satisfied with what was achieved on his three-day trip but "there is still work that needs to be done" in following up on the claims that Syria was hiding elements of a potential nuclear arms program.

However al-Sharaa warned that the IAEA inspectors will not be allowed to probe beyond the Al Kibar site, despite the UN request to visit three other suspect locations.

His comments in an interview with the Hizbullah-owned Al Manar TV station were the first from Syria on the UN visit.

'Achieved what we wanted'

Heinonen met in the Syrian capital with officials in charge of the nation's nuclear program and senior Syrian generals, in keeping with claims by Damascus that the building flattened by Israel was a non-nuclear military object.

With Syrian authorities imposing a virtual news blackout on his trip, few details of the visit had surfaced beyond the fact that Syrian authorities had allowed the three-main inspecting team to visit the Al Kibar site.

Washington hopes that the UN agency team is carrying persuasive evidence backing US intelligence that the structure was a nearly completed plutonium-producing reactor. If so, the trip could mark the start of massive atomic agency investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to over the past five years. What's more, the process could draw in countries like North Korea, which Washington says helped Damascus, and Iran, also linked by media reports to Syria's nuclear strivings.

But Heinonen declined to tip his cards on what he and his team had been able to see and do beyond acknowledging that they were able to take environmental samples in the area designed to capture traces of material that were likely spread over a large area by Israeli ordinance.

"We achieved what we wanted on this first trip," he said. "We continue our discussions, we took the samples we need to take and now it's time to analyze them and also look at the information we got from Syria. We will see in the days and weeks what will happen next," he answered when asked about the chances of a follow-up visit.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/26/AR2008062600720.html>

U.S. says Syria must not hinder IAEA nuclear probe

By Mark Heinrich

Thursday, June 26, 2008; 7:15 AM

VIENNA (Reuters) - The United States on Thursday welcomed a U.N. check of a Syrian site said to have harbored an almost-built secret nuclear reactor before Israel destroyed it, but called on Damascus not to restrict the investigation.

Syria gave International Atomic Energy Agency sleuths a good look at the isolated desert site during a four-day fact-finding trip, but results were inconclusive and further investigation is needed, they said on their return from Syria on Wednesday.

"We welcome the inspection as a first step and stand ready to support the IAEA as it continues its investigation into Syria's clandestine nuclear activities," said Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the U.N. nuclear watchdog.

"We call on Syria to fully cooperate with the IAEA and in no way hinder the investigation by refusing the IAEA unfettered access to any site or information needed for the investigation," he said in a statement emailed to Reuters.

Syria denies concealing anything from the IAEA in violation of its non-proliferation treaty commitments, saying Israeli warplanes bombed an ordinary military building last September.

Washington says Syria built a camouflaged graphite reactor based on a North Korean design, with Pyongyang's assistance.

U.S. nuclear analysts say satellite images show the Syrians swiftly razed the site, removed debris and put up a new building after the bombing in what they regard as a possible cover-up.

The initial scope of the IAEA inquiry was limited by what diplomats said was Syria's refusal to let the inspectors search two or three other sites for any signs of a source of fuel for the reactor, or relevant equipment or facilities.

Syria denied access on national security grounds, asserting such sites were conventional military bases only and off-limits.

Asked about other sites, the IAEA's inspections chief Olli Heinonen said on Wednesday the issue would be addressed later.

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Syrian Vice President Farouq al-Shara told Lebanon's Al-Manar television that Damascus opened al-Kibar to the IAEA so it could see for itself "the allegations are forged and false."

But he said the IAEA had a mandate to "visit the site in question only." Al-Manar did not say when Shara's remarks were taped. Syria imposed a news blackout on the inspectors' visit and was maintaining official silence on Thursday.

Heinonen said his team was able to take extensive samples in search of traces of evidence at the remote desert location and the sensitive inquiry was off to "a good start," with Syria's cooperation generally satisfactory at this stage.

He said it would take some time to evaluate initial findings and talks with Syrian officials to get explanations would go on. He hinted further visits would be needed to resolve the mystery.

Mark Fitzpatrick, non-proliferation scholar at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, said Heinonen's remarks were diplomatically phrased to obscure the true level of Syrian cooperation which appeared to be little.

"Environmental samples that would show the presence of uranium particles have little meaning at a site where there apparently was no uranium fuel to begin with," said Fitzpatrick.

"It would be useful to know whether Syria allowed the inspectors to use sonar equipment to judge what is below the surface at the site, including the buried pipes for cooling and discharge to the Euphrates River," he said.

"And did Syria allow the inspectors to look for graphite particles in the areas outside the land that was bulldozed after the Israeli attack? I suspect that the inspectors were tightly restricted in what they were allowed to observe and measure."

The IAEA dispatched nuclear detectives to Syria after receiving satellite and ground photos from U.S. intelligence of the al-Kibar site in April.

Damascus is an ally of Iran, whose secretive nuclear program has been under IAEA investigation since 2003. Damascus has accused the United States of doctoring evidence in collusion with Israel, believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear-armed power.



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
June 26, 2008

Statement by the Press Secretary on North Korea

The United States welcomes the North Korean declaration of its nuclear programs. Today's development is an important step in the multi-step process laid out in the Six Party Talks between North Korea, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States.

The Six Party Talks are based on a principle of "action for action." North Korea has pledged to disable all its nuclear facilities and tomorrow will destroy the cooling tower of the Yongbyon reactor. North Korea also pledged to declare its nuclear activities. This information will be essential to verifying that North Korea is ending all of its nuclear programs and activities.

The United States will respond to North Korea's actions by lifting the provisions of the Trading with the Enemy Act as well as announcing our intent to rescind North Korea's designation as a State Sponsor of Terror in 45 days. During this period, the United States will carefully assess North Korea's actions particularly with regard to verification.

There is still more work to be done in order for North Korea to end its isolation. It must dismantle all of its nuclear facilities, give up its separated plutonium, and resolve outstanding questions on its highly enriched uranium and proliferation activities. It must end these activities in a fully verifiable way.

Multilateral diplomacy is the best way to peacefully resolve the nuclear issue. North Korea should seize this moment of opportunity to restore its relationship with the international community.

The President will make a statement on this subject in the Rose Garden at 7:40 am EDT today.



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
June 26, 2008

President Bush Discusses North Korea

Rose Garden
7:40 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. The policy of the United States is a Korean Peninsula free of all nuclear weapons. This morning, we moved a step closer to that goal, when North Korean officials submitted a declaration of their nuclear programs to the Chinese government as part of the six-party talks.

The United States has no illusions about the regime in Pyongyang. We remain deeply concerned about North Korea's human rights abuses, uranium enrichment activities, nuclear testing and proliferation, ballistic missile programs, and the threat it continues to pose to South Korea and its neighbors.

Yet we welcome today's development as one step in the multi-step process laid out by the six-party talks between North Korea, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United States.

Last year, North Korea pledged to disable its nuclear facilities. North Korea has begun disabling its Yongbyon nuclear facility -- which was being used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. This work is being overseen by officials from the United States and the IAEA. And to demonstrate its commitment, North Korea has said it will destroy the cooling tower of the Yongbyon reactor in front of international television cameras tomorrow.

Last year, North Korea also pledged to declare its nuclear activity. With today's declaration, North Korea has begun describing its plutonium-related activities. It's also provided other documents related to its nuclear programs going back to 1986. It has promised access to the reactor core and waste facilities at Yongbyon, as well as personnel related to its nuclear program. All this information will be essential to verifying that North Korea is ending its nuclear programs and activities.

The six-party talks are based on a principle of "action for action." So in keeping with the existing six-party agreements, the United States is responding to North Korea's actions with two actions of our own:

First, I'm issuing a proclamation that lifts the provisions of the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to North Korea.

And secondly, I am notifying Congress of my intent to rescind North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terror in 45 days. The next 45 days will be an important period for North Korea to show its seriousness of its cooperation. We will work through the six-party talks to develop a comprehensive and rigorous verification protocol. And during this period, the United States will carefully observe North Korea's actions -- and act accordingly.

The two actions America is taking will have little impact on North Korea's financial and diplomatic isolation. North Korea will remain one of the most heavily sanctioned nations in the world. The sanctions that North Korea faces for its human rights violations, its nuclear test in 2006, and its weapons proliferation will all stay in effect. And all United Nations Security Council sanctions will stay in effect as well.

The six-party process has shed light on a number of issues of serious concern to the United States and the international community. To end its isolation, North Korea must address these concerns. It must dismantle all of its nuclear facilities, give up its separated plutonium, resolve outstanding questions on its highly enriched uranium and proliferation activities, and end these activities in a way that we can fully verify.

North Korea must also meet other obligations it has undertaken in the six-party talks. The United States will never forget the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Koreans. We will continue to closely cooperate and coordinate with Japan and press North Korea to swiftly resolve the abduction issue.

This can be a moment of opportunity for North Korea. If North Korea continues to make the right choices, it can repair its relationship with the international community -- much as Libya has done over the past few years. If North Korea makes the wrong choices, the United States and our partners in the six-party talks will respond accordingly. If they do not fully disclose and end their plutonium, their enrichment, and their proliferation efforts and activities, there will be further consequences.

Multilateral diplomacy is the best way to peacefully solve the nuclear issue with North Korea. Today's developments show that tough multilateral diplomacy can yield promising results. Yet the diplomatic process is not an end in itself. Our ultimate goal remains clear: a stable and peaceful Korean Peninsula, where people are free from oppression, free from hunger and disease, and free from nuclear weapons. The journey toward that goal remains long, but today we have taken an important step in the right direction.

I'll take a couple of questions.

Mike.

Q Mr. President, thank you very much. After declaring them a member of the "axis of evil," and then after that underground nuclear tests that North Korea conducted in 2006, I'm wondering if you ever doubted getting to this stage. And also, I'm wondering if you have a message for the North Korean people.

THE PRESIDENT: I knew that the United States could not solve, or begin to solve, this issue without partners at the table. In order for diplomacy to be effective, there has to be leverage. You have to have a -- there has to be consequential diplomacy.

And so I worked hard to get the Chinese and the South Koreans and the Japanese and the Russians to join with us in sending a concerted message to the North Koreans, and that is, that if you promise and then fulfill your promises to dismantle your nuclear programs, there's a better way forward for you and the people. In other words, as I said in the statement, it's action for action.

It took a while for the North Koreans to take the six-party talks seriously, and it also took there to be concerted messages from people other than the United States saying that if you choose not to respond positively there will be consequences.

And so I'm -- it's been a -- multilateral diplomacy is difficult at times. It's hard to get people heading in the same direction, and yet we were able to do so along -- our partners helped a lot, don't get me wrong.

The message to the North Korean people is, is that we don't want you to be hungry; we want you to have a better life; that our concerns are for you, not against you; and that we have given your leadership a way forward to have better relations with the international community. This is a society that is regularly going through famines. When I campaigned for President, I said we will never use food as a diplomatic weapon. In North Korea, we have been concerned that food shipments sometimes don't make it to the people themselves -- in other words, the regime takes the food for their own use.

So my message to the people is, is that we'll continue to care for you and worry about you, and at the same time, pursue a Korean Peninsula that's nuclear weapons free. And today we have taken a step, and it's a very positive step, but there's more steps to be done.

Deb.

Q Mr. President, what do you say to critics who claim that you've accepted a watered-down declaration just to get something done before you leave office? I mean, you said that it doesn't address the uranium enrichment issue, and, of course, it doesn't address what North Korea might have done to help Syria build its reactor.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first, let me review where we have been. In the past, we would provide benefits to the North Koreans in the hope that they would fulfill a vague promise. In other words, that's the way it was before I came into office.

Everybody was concerned about North Korea possessing a nuclear weapon; everybody was concerned about the proliferation activities. And yet the policy in the past was, here are some benefits for you, and we hope that you respond. And, of course, we found they weren't responding. And so our policy has changed, that says, in return for positive action, in return for verifiable steps, we will reduce penalties. And there are plenty of restrictions still on North Korea.

And so my point is this, is that -- we'll see. They said they're going to destroy parts of their plant in Yongbyon. That's a very positive step -- after all, it's the plant that made plutonium. They have said in their declarations, if you read their declarations of September last year, they have said specifically what they will do. And our policy, and the statement today, makes it clear we will hold them to account for

their promises. And when they fulfill their promises, more restrictions will be eased. If they don't fulfill their promises, more restrictions will be placed on them. This is action for action. This is we will trust you only to the extent that you fulfill your promises.

So I'm pleased with the progress. I'm under no illusions that this is the first step; this isn't the end of the process, this is the beginning of the process of action for action. And the point I want to make to our fellow citizens is that we have worked hard to put multilateral diplomacy in place, because the United States sitting down with Kim Jong-il didn't work in the past. Sitting alone at the table just didn't work.

Now, as I mentioned in my statement, there's a lot more verification that needs to be done. I mentioned our concerns about enrichment. We expect the North Korean regime to be forthcoming about their programs. We talked about proliferation. We expect them to be forthcoming about their proliferation activities and cease such activities. I mentioned the fact that we're beginning to take inventory, because of our access to the Yongbyon plant, about what they have produced, and we expect them to be forthcoming with what they have produced and the material itself.

So today I'm just talking about the first step of a multi-step process. And I want to thank our partners at the six-party talks. It's been incredibly helpful to achieve -- the beginnings of achieving a vision of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula to have the Chinese to be as robustly involved as they are. You notice that the North Koreans passed on their documents to the Chinese; after all, we're all partners in the six-party talks.

The other thing I want to assure our friends in Japan is that this process will not leave behind -- leave them behind on the abduction issue. The United States takes the abduction issue very seriously. We expect the North Koreans to solve this issue in a positive way for the Japanese. There's a lot of folks in Japan that are deeply concerned about what took place. I remember meeting a mother of a child who was abducted by the North Koreans right here in the Oval Office. It was a heart-wrenching moment to listen to the mother talk about what it was like to lose her daughter. And it is important for the Japanese people to know that the United States will not abandon our strong ally and friend when it comes to helping resolve that issue.

Today is a positive day; it's a positive step forward. There's more work to be done, and we've got the process in place to get it done in a verifiable way.

Thank you.

END 7:53 A.M. EDT



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
June 26, 2008

Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room
9:23 A.M. EDT

[EXCERPTS]

MR. HADLEY: Good morning. I think you probably all heard the President's statement this morning about developments in the six-party talks involving the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. I wanted to provide a little more detail on some of the things that the President talked about, and then I'd be delighted to answer questions.

[deletia]

We appreciate the declaration, obviously, that North Korea has provided to China today, and that will be ultimately circulated to the six parties. That said, we have some concerns that will be addressed as part of this verification and monitoring process that we talked about today.

One of those, of course, is just exactly how much plutonium has North Korea produced, and the access to records and personnels and to sites that the North Koreans have said the six parties will have will help answer that question, because understanding how much plutonium North Korea has produced, of course, is the step to ultimately having that plutonium removed from North Korea as part of the denuclearization of the Peninsula to which North Korea has agreed.

Secondly, there's concerns about the uranium enrichment program. This was something that was really discovered in 2001-2002 time frame. The North Koreans initially affirmed the program; they subsequently denied it. They have basically said that they are not now engaged in any enrichment activities, and they will not be engaging in uranium enrichment activities in the future.

That said, our intelligence community has some concerns about their past activities and has some concerns about potentially ongoing activities. And we have been learning more about these potential activities, as part of this six-party process. That's one of the things that has been useful about it. And the second thing is that it provides a framework for us to be able to pursue these concerns with North

Korea and to get to the bottom of this issue of the uranium enrichment program, because it would be one of the programs that North Korea has agreed to end as part of the six-party process -- because, remember, it is a denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the ending of all nuclear programs and activities by North Korea. That's what North Korea has agreed to; that's what this process is about.

Obviously we're concerned about their proliferation activities. Everybody knows about the activity with respect to Syria and North Korea assistance in building a nuclear reactor in Syria. We want to get to the bottom of that so we understand what that activity was to make sure there is not continuing activity going on between North Korea and Syria, or activity with respect to other locations as well.

And that is why, of course, the verification and monitoring regime that we talked about -- the verification and monitoring protocol is so important, and we believe it will -- using the access that North Korea has agreed to give us, will allow us over time to get to the bottom of these questions. But I want to emphasize the "over time." This is a process. It is going to take time. This is an important step today. I think it marks some real progress in this process that we have had -- not had before, but as the President emphasized, it needs to be followed by a series of other steps. And this is going to take some time.

So a good day. More to do. And I'd be delighted to answer any questions. Terry.

Q Could you clarify -- does North Korea come clean about its cooperation with Syria on its nuclear program? Does it document how many nuclear bombs, nuclear weapons that it has? And does it come clean about uranium enrichment? You said that these are things you need to get to the bottom of.

MR. HADLEY: Right.

Q Are they not in this accounting?

MR. HADLEY: What they -- the accounting they have given is, we are not now engaged in any enrichment program or any proliferation activities and will -- we will not in the future. But, of course, part of being able to confirm that they're not now engaging in these activities is to be able to understand what they did in the past, because that is the only way we can be able to say we understand what was done in the past, we have seen that being wound down, and we therefore have confidence that they are not undergoing that activity.

So the declaration they've made, what the disclosure they made is, we're not engaged in this activity now, will not engage it in the future. We've made it very clear in this process and in the documents that constitute the declaration, that we have concerns about their past activities in Syria and in the enrichment area, and that raises questions about whether they have, in fact, are engaging in none of that activity today.

We've made those concerns clear. The North Koreans acknowledge those concerns. They know we are going to want to be pursuing them in this six-party process, and that's, of course, what is ahead of us.

[deletia]

Q You say that you are aware, or that they are aware of your concerns about these other issues not addressed today.

MR. HADLEY: Well, addressed in the sense, Bill, of they say they're not engaged in these activities now and won't in the future. They also have acknowledged in writing that we have raised concerns about their enrichment activities in the past and their actions with respect to Syria. And they have, as you've noticed, have not been out publicly denying that -- or discounting these concerns. So we're in a situation of not quite admitting, not denying, but opening the door for us to be able to try and get greater clarity.

Q Is this, does anything in the present agreements obligate them to come clean on these issues? You know what your critics are saying, that they will continue to evade, prevaricate and otherwise avoid full answers.

MR. HADLEY: Well, we will see. We've made it clear that in order for this process to go forward, which has further obligations by them, but also further benefits for them in terms of ultimately moving to normalization of relations and the like, we've made it very clear that for us to move forward, we are going to need to be able to get to the bottom of these issues with respect to plutonium enrichment and proliferation.

Q But they're not obliged to give you all of these answers.

MR. HADLEY: Well, we've -- they've set up a process; they've said we will have access. We've said we were going to be making the questions, and that we need to get answers and be satisfied or we aren't going to be able to move forward. It's pretty clear.

Sir.

Q Secretary Rice said that the U.S. has the information to verify the dismantlement of the nuclear program, but isn't nonproliferation a different issue? Isn't that something that's going to be very difficult to monitor in the future, as it has been in the past?

MR. HADLEY: Yes. Yes. This is a very closed regime. And part of this process is to see if we can get this regime to open up with respect to the nuclear issues. And our hope, of course, is that -- and it's in the September '05 document -- that the opening up that we hope the regime will do on the nuclear issues in order for us to get satisfaction on these three issues will be part of a gradual process of opening this regime, because we think that is the way, ultimately, we're going to be able to do something which is something all of us would like to do, and that the President talked about today -- have this regime open up and provide a better life to their people.

Q Is there anything in this process that makes pursuing their proliferation in the future easier for you to follow on?

MR. HADLEY: Yes, there is a monitoring mechanism, and we have the commitments from the North Koreans for the kind of access that I described. One of the things, for example, that will be very important is to get a better understanding of their uranium ore and processing activities up front, how much uranium ore were they able to pull out of the ground, because that will tell you how much they might have had available for proliferation for a plutonium program, for an enrichment program, and potentially, proliferation overseas, which, of course, would be extremely troubling.

The thing that will be difficult to get our hands around is other arrangements like they had with Syria, other facilities either in Syria that we have suspicions about, perhaps, or other facilities and patterns of cooperation with other countries. That's why access to the people involved in the nuclear program is going to be very important, because in the end of the day, those are programs driven less by material and more by brains, and brains are in the hands of their people. And so that's why we think access to their personnel is going to be very important.

[deletia]

Q What is your response to criticism that, in effect, a term paper is being accepted that isn't complete because the most contentious issues -- the highly enriched uranium and the proliferation activity with regard to Syria -- are not in this report?

MR. HADLEY: Well, I think the most serious issues are front and center. Because, remember, as best we can understand, it is the plutonium program that produced plutonium that was in the weapons that North Korea tested in 2006. And it is the plutonium infrastructure that can, if it is not dismantled, churn out additional nuclear materials for nuclear weapons. So we think getting our hands around that program, knowing exactly how much plutonium was produced, getting that at some point given up, or as we say, abandoned by the North Koreans, and getting that infrastructure disabled and dismantled is the most immediate source of nuclear material for North Korea and the most threatening source.

So we think that's a priority. But at the same time, we have recognized that we do have a declaration by the North Koreans on these other items -- that is to say their assertions that they're not engaged in either proliferation or uranium activity and will not in the future. But we also have a mechanism that will allow us to get satisfaction, we hope, over time, of the concerns we have.

So this is not accepting a passing grade. In some sense it is we're passing the paper back and asking the student to come in and work with us cooperatively to resolve the questions we have about their draft. That's what we're trying to do.

[deletia]

END 10:04 A.M. EDT



Diplomacy Is Working on North Korea

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Op-Ed

The Wall Street Journal

June 26, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

North Korea will soon make a declaration of its nuclear programs, facilities and materials. This is an important, if initial, step and we will demand that it be verifiable as complete and accurate.

Amidst all the focus on our diplomatic tactics, it is important to keep two broader points in mind. One, we are learning more about Pyongyang's nuclear efforts through the six-party framework than we otherwise would be. And two, this policy is our best option to achieve the strategic goal of verifiably eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons and programs.

[deletia]

Getting a handle on North Korea's uranium-enrichment program is harder, because we simply do not know its full scale or what it yielded. And yet, because of our current policy, we now know more about North Korea's uranium-enrichment efforts than before, and we are learning more still – much of it troubling. North Korea acknowledges our concerns about its uranium-enrichment program, and we will insist on getting to the bottom of this issue.

Similarly, we know that North Korea proliferated nuclear technology to Syria, but we do not know whether that is the end of the story. Rather than just trying to address this threat unilaterally, we will be more effective in learning about North Korean proliferation and preventing its continuation through a cooperative effort with Japan, South Korea, China and Russia.

[deletia]

Released on June 26, 2008

http://www.spacewar.com/reports/NKorea_mum_on_past_proliferation_enrichment_US_999.html

NKorea mum on past proliferation, enrichment: US

by Staff Writers

Washington (AFP) June 26, 2008

The White House on Thursday acknowledged that North Korea's nuclear accounting did not meet past US demands for a full detailing of alleged uranium enrichment or shared atomic know-how overseas.

"The accounting they have given is: 'We are not now engaged in any enrichment program or any proliferation activities and we will not in the future,'" said US national security adviser Stephen Hadley.

Repeatedly pressed on whether the secretive communist regime in Pyongyang had spelled out its past activities on both fronts, Hadley gave reporters variations on the same answer and said Washington still had concerns.

"The declaration they've made, with the disclosure they've made, is 'we're not engaged in this activity now. We'll not engage it in the future,'" and pledged to work on a structure for verifying their past activities, he said.

"And they have, as you've noticed, have not been out publicly denying that or discounting these concerns.

"So we're in the situation of not quite admitting, not denying, but opening the door for us to be able to try and get greater clarity," Hadley said.

The outstanding issues include Washington's charges that North Korea helped Syria start construction on a suspect nuclear site, which Israel destroyed in an air strike in September, he said. Syria denies the allegation.

"We want to get to the bottom of that so we understand what that activity was to make sure there is not continuing activity going on between North Korea and Syria or activity with respect to other locations, as well," said Hadley.

The State Department said however in a statement that North Korea had handed China "a package" of nuclear declarations which "addresses North Korea's uranium enrichment and proliferation activities" without giving any details.

North Korea will not be removed from the US terrorism list until a verification system is put in place and verification itself begins, the statement said.

"After a period of 45 calendar days and absent the enactment of a joint resolution blocking the proposed rescission, the secretary of state may rescind North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism on August 11," it said.

http://groups.google.com.mx/group/alt.war.terrorism/browse_thread/thread/f00f58f96d52093a

Grupos de noticias: alt.war.terrorism

De: FalconsLair <searche...@ssl-mail.com>

Fecha: Tue, 24 Jun 2008 07:25:30 -0700 (PDT)

Local: Mart 24 jun 2008 09:25

Asunto: Breaking News: Al-Kibar, In Syria, Was Nuclear Reactor For Iran....

6/24/2008: Intel News Brief: Breaking News: Al-Kibar, In Syria, Was Nuclear Reactor For Iran:

According to German intelligence reports, a joint plan by Syria, North Korea and Iran for a secret nuclear reactor for military use was to have been developed at the Al-Kibar site in Syria, which was destroyed by Israel last September, Der Spiegel is reporting.

The report claimed that Al-Kibar was to have been used as a temporary site for Iran to develop a nuclear bomb until it was able to do so on its own territory.

The plan was discussed during a visit by Iranian President Mamhoud Ahmadinejad to Syria in 2006. The report comes as a team of IAEA inspectors arrived in Syria on Sunday for a first-hand look at the al-Kibar site.

Damascus quickly buried the bombed-out structure in hopes such a UN inspection would not detect its nuclear use.

Syria denies it has any covert nuclear weapons program and says the Israelis hit an ordinary military structure being built at al-Kibar, in the northeastern desert.

Source: Morning Intel News Brief via TTIC

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/27/AR2008062700399.html>

Analysis: Nuclear papers leave many questions open

By ANNE GEARAN

The Associated Press

Friday, June 27, 2008; 3:29 AM

WASHINGTON -- The Bush administration breathed easier when the prickly and unpredictable North Korean government stuck to its script and handed over long-delayed nuclear paperwork as planned.

But if the documentation provided Thursday were a college term paper, the grade would be "incomplete."

The documents do not spell out the number of plutonium bombs in storage or make promises about what happens to them. That could come in the next phase of the often-troubled talks with North Korea, when the reclusive communist country is supposed to destroy its weapons and facilities.

Missing are details about an alleged parallel program to seek weapons fueled by enriched uranium. Also missing is a complete account of North Korea's role in helping Syria develop what the U.S. alleges was a nuclear facility. The site was destroyed by Israel last year.

Those activities are addressed in a separate two-page document turned over to the U.S. in April, a senior U.S. official told The Associated Press. That previously secret document, known as a "confidential minute," probably will be attached to the longer declaration.

In the attachment, the U.S. outlines its concerns about uranium enrichment and the nuclear cooperation with Syria. North Korea acknowledges those concerns and says it will cooperate to work out differences to "mutual satisfaction," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the agreement before the documents were released Thursday.

In fact, the papers awaited by the world for months leave unanswered the biggest questions about North Korea's nuclear work and will tell investigators little they didn't already know.

The chief unanswered question almost surely will outlast the Bush administration: Is North Korea serious about giving up nuclear weapons that have proved a valuable bargaining chip?

"How this process will work out in the end and whether they will give up their nuclear weapons, frankly, I think nobody knows the answer right now," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said at the Pentagon.

The document and the underlying deal it solidifies provide no assurance that the North Korea, which cheated on an earlier agreement with the U.S., will not do so again.

The roughly 60-page document is less precise than what the U.S. once demanded, opening the administration to conservatives' charge that President Bush wanted a deal so badly that he settled for a bad one.

For the administration, the main value of the handover is that it happened at all. It is a small but important marker that Bush did not misplace his newfound confidence in a country he once branded as part of an "axis of evil."

Bush tried to inoculate himself against criticism from the right with a Rose Garden announcement that rapped North Korea even as he delivered on a promise of economic and political goodies in return for the nuclear accounting.

"The United States has no illusions about the regime in Pyongyang," Bush said, and will only trust North Korea to the extent it shows it can be trusted.

Washington says it will retaliate if North Korea reneges on a promise to eventually get rid of all its weapons, and that even North Korea's sometime protectors in Asia will do the same.

The carefully orchestrated handover is of little practical consequence to North Korea. It gains no immediate benefit from the lifting of some trade penalties or from Bush's promise to remove the country from the U.S. list of nations that sponsor terrorism.

Those are symbolic political victories for impoverished and isolated North Korea, however, and ruler Kim Jong Il is expected to make the most of them. He offered a symbolic gesture of his own _ the televised destruction of the distinctive conical cooling tower at the shuttered Yongbyon plutonium complex.

The papers themselves document the work of Yongbyon, an aging facility some analysts think was nearly obsolete anyway.

Still, the paperwork emerged as a linchpin for the nuclear disarmament deal the North has worked out over three years with the United States, Japan, South Korea, China and Russia. During that time, the talks stopped and started several times, and North Korea exploded a nuclear device in an underground test.

North Korea missed an end-of-2007 deadline to turn over the inventory, and complained that the United States was moving the goal posts. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill worked out a painstaking compromise that culminated in Thursday's handover.

Had the clock run much longer, Bush would have had little chance of getting the more significant prize _ the destruction of actual bombs _ before he leaves office. As it is, Hill has said it will be difficult to complete the deal by the end of this year.

The declaration details the amount of plutonium the North produced, down to the gram. A senior U.S. official says North Korea claims to have produced an amount of plutonium in the low 40-kilogram range (about 88 pounds), including estimates of waste.

That is enough to construct at least a half-dozen nuclear bombs and is in line with U.S. intelligence estimates.

North Korea stopped making plutonium and has partly disabled its nuclear facilities so they cannot be quickly restarted. But it has its stockpile of radioactive material for now.

"I'm pleased with the progress," Bush said. "I'm under no illusions that this is the first step; this isn't the end of the process, this is the beginning."

[Sourcebook note: a "confidential minute" was also part of the North Korea – US nuclear agreement of October, 1994. See Strategic Implications of the U.S.-DPRK Framework Agreement by Thomas L. Wilborn: <http://www.milnet.com/korea/usdprkp1.htm#N2> . According to Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy by Richard Haass and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "[the] confidential minute barred nuclear reactors or related facilities at other sites."]

Syrian minister laments Israel's nuclear edge

Mon Jun 30, 2008 9:03am EDT

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - Syria's foreign minister said on Monday he wished his country could match Israel's atomic arsenal, but denied U.S. allegations that it had been building a secret nuclear reactor at a site bombed by Israel last year.

Walid al-Moualem, making Syria's first official comments on last week's visit to the site by U.N. nuclear investigators, said it had been handled solely by Syrian security officials.

"Syria would not have allowed the inspectors in if it had such a secret (nuclear) program," Moualem told reporters after meeting his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Stoere.

"As a private citizen, I wish Syria had this program quite simply because Israel has made huge advances in its manufacturing of nuclear bombs," the foreign minister said.

Syria has accused the United States of helping Israel conduct the September 6 raid that Washington said destroyed a reactor built with the help of North Korea. Syria said the site was a normal military complex. Israeli officials have kept quiet on the nature of the target.

Unlike Syria, Israel has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is widely believed to have the only nuclear arsenal in the Middle East, developed over decades with Western help.

Investigators from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said after a four-day visit to Syria last week that they had examined the bombed site, but that more checks were needed.

Chief inspector Olli Heinonen said the inquiry was off to a good start, with Syria's cooperation satisfactory so far.

Syria said it was not hiding anything and urged the world to hold Israel accountable for what it described as a massive Israeli nuclear arms program.

The IAEA sent Heinonen's team after receiving U.S. photos of the al-Kibar site that prompted the U.N. nuclear watchdog to put Syria on its proliferation watch list in April.

The IAEA inspectorate is expected to report to the agency's board of governors before its next meeting in September.

Syria and Israel began indirect peace talks months after the raid. Moualem said the Turkish-mediated talks had their "ups and downs" but he expected a third round of negotiations to take place in Turkey soon.

"The present negotiations process aims at establishing the basis to launch direct talks. We have an opportunity to reach a just and comprehensive peace. I hope the Israelis do not waste it by their internal wrangling," Moualem said.

[deletia]

**Syria denies bombed site was nuclear reactor;
minister says he wishes Syria had such a program**

The Associated Press

Monday, June 30, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

DAMASCUS, Syria: Syria's foreign minister on Monday repeated his country's denials that a site bombed by Israel last year was a nascent nuclear reactor but said he wished his country had such a program to counter Israel's nuclear might.

[deletia]

"As a Syrian citizen, I think that had Syria had such a secret program, it wouldn't have allowed inspectors to visit the site. ... This is logic," Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said at a joint news conference in Damascus with his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Stoere.

"But as a citizen, I wish that Syria would have such a program because Israel simply has made strides in manufacturing nuclear weapons," he said.

Syria's vice president, Farouk al-Sharaa, said Wednesday his country allowed U.N. inspectors to visit the site destroyed by Israeli jets to prove that U.S. allegations of a covert Syrian nuclear program were false.

Al-Sharaa said, however, that the inspectors from the IAEA, the U.N.'s nuclear monitoring agency, will not be allowed to investigate beyond the Al Kibar site, despite a U.N. request to visit three other suspect locations.

Damascus strongly denies U.S. allegations that it is involved in any nuclear activities and fears that Washington could use the accusations to rally international pressure against it.

[deletia]

U.S. Government Nonproliferation Priorities & Asia

Friday, 4 July 2008, 5:37 am

Press Release: US State Department

Patricia A. McNerney, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, International Security and Nonproliferation

Remarks at the Sydney Institute

Sydney, Australia

July 1, 2008

[EXCERPT]

North Korea

The threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program has proven uniquely challenging as a threat to Asian and global security, and to the global nonproliferation regime. We continue to seek the verifiable denuclearization of North Korea in the Six-Party Talks, as agreed in the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement, and have met with some success in moving toward this goal. On February 13, 2007, the Six Parties agreed to an Initial Actions Agreement to implement the commitments made in the 2005 Joint Statement. Under this agreement, the DPRK shut down and sealed the Yongbyon nuclear facility, with a view to its eventual abandonment. Since July 2007, IAEA personnel have been on the ground in the DPRK monitoring and verifying the shut down status of Yongbyon. And, in October 2007, the Six Parties agreed to a joint statement on Second-Phase actions, where North Korea committed to disable all existing nuclear facilities, beginning with the three core facilities at Yongbyon. Additionally, North Korea agreed to provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs and reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how.

Currently, U.S. personnel are at Yongbyon monitoring disablement activities. To date, eight of eleven agreed disablement actions at the three core facilities have been completed. In addition, the DPRK has taken additional action at Yongbyon by collapsing the cooling tower.

North Korea has now begun to fulfill its commitment to a complete and correct declaration by submitting a declaration to China, the Chair of the Six-Party Talks. In return, President Bush issued a proclamation lifting provisions of the Trading With the Enemy Act with respect to North Korea, and notified the United States Congress of his intent to rescind North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terror within 45 days.

As part of its declaration package, North Korea has acknowledged our concerns about the DPRK's uranium enrichment and nuclear proliferation activities, specifically with regard to Syria. North Korea's declaration, including its claims about uranium enrichment and proliferation activities, must now be subjected to a comprehensive and rigorous verification process aimed at resolving any discrepancies and verifying the accuracy and completeness of the declaration. Additionally, an accounting of its weapons for eventual abandonment must occur in the next phase.

The United States has repeatedly noted that with denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, many things are possible. The abandonment of North Korea's nuclear programs and weapons would open the

way for eventual normalization of U.S.-North Korea relations, and a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. This process, however, cannot move forward without the full implementation of the Joint Statement, leading to the verifiable denuclearization and North Korea's return to the NPT and IAEA Safeguards as a non-nuclear weapons state. In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 1718 will remain in effect until such time as those obligations have been met ensuring North Korea's access to the international community will be restored only upon its nuclear weapons abandonment.

Syria

I cannot talk about the threats posed by North Korean proliferation without mentioning the North Korea-Syria relationship. The United States has long had concerns about North Korean proliferation activities, and in particular their clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria. Based on strong evidence, the United States believes North Korea assisted with the construction of a reactor at Al-Kibar in Syria. The reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on September 6 of last year, appeared intended to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

We strongly support the IAEA's investigation into this cooperation. We certainly do not believe that this one inspection closes the book on Syria's clandestine nuclear cooperation. It will take time and we urge Syria to admit to the IAEA all of its nuclear activities.

In addition to supporting the IAEA's ongoing investigation of Syria's activities, we have sought to address North Korea's proliferation activity through the Six Party framework. We have made our concerns known to North Korea and it has acknowledged our concerns. The North has stated that there is no ongoing nuclear cooperation with any foreign country, and that there will be no such cooperation in the future. As we begin a verification process for North Korea's nuclear declaration, we will seek to verify that this cooperation has ceased. We will continue to be on the alert for signs of possible renewed cooperation.

Progress Made on N. Korea Disarmament Talks

By Edward Cody

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, July 12, 2008; 9:02 AM

BEIJING, July 12 -- Diplomats from six nations agreed in principle Saturday to set up an intrusive inspection program to verify that North Korea has genuinely dismantled its plutonium-based program to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.

After three days of talks in Beijing, the negotiators were unable to complete a detailed inspection schedule, however, and decided to refer specific issues back to their capitals in hopes of working out an itemized inspection regime in September, according to the chief U.S. negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill.

"All this kind of stuff requires a lot of scrutiny," Hill said.

The limited progress -- agreement in principle but still bogged down in details -- was typical of the tortuous path followed during the past five years of Chinese-sponsored six-party negotiations designed to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons program. It left in suspension such key questions as when North Korea will, as it has pledged several times, reveal whether it has any completed nuclear weapons and where they are stored.

The slow pace increased the probability that the Bush administration will come to an end before complete resolution of one of its main foreign policy goals, ridding North Asia of the threat of nuclear weapons under the command of Kim Jong Il, the unpredictable North Korean leader.

In addition, North Korea has yet to respond in detail to U.S. questions about whether it was seeking to produce material for nuclear weapons through a separate program based on highly enriched uranium and whether it cooperated with Syria in a nuclear development project that was destroyed by Israeli warplanes in September.

For the moment, China announced in a statement, North Korea has agreed to finish by October dismantling its Yongbion nuclear reactor, the facility near Pyongyang where the plutonium-based program was carried out. Wu Dawei, a vice foreign minister who headed China's delegation to the talks, said the North Korean government also agreed that inspections to verify the dismantlement will include visits by experts, perusal of official documents and interviews with key scientists.

At the same time, the other parties to the negotiations -- which include Japan and Russia in addition to China, the United States and the two Koreas -- agreed to make sure that promised fuel deliveries, amounting to the equivalent of 1 million tons, arrive in North Korean ports before the same deadline, he said.

The United States and Russia agreed to shoulder the main financial burden of providing the heavy fuel oil required by North Korea, the Chinese statement said. China and South Korea said they would combine for other kinds of economic aid, including equipment for the country's rickety electricity grid and transport system, it added.

Despite its wealth, Japan has refused to provide aid until it gets an acceptable accounting of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korean intelligence in the 1970s and 1980s to train North Korean spies.

North Korea has said it refuses to move forward on revealing the full extent of its nuclear program, as promised in February 2007, until the fuel and other economic aid it was promised is actually delivered. So far, the North Korean government complained, only about 40 percent has been provided.

<http://talkradionews.com/2008/07/israel%E2%80%99s-airstrike-on-syria-still-creating-political-puzzlement/>

Israel's airstrike on Syria still creating political puzzlement

Talk Radio News Service

Staff

July 14, 2008

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) held a discussion on "Israel's Airstrike on Syria's Nuclear Reactor: Preventive War and the Nonproliferation Regime." In September of 2007, Israel attacked what was rumored to be a partially constructed nuclear facility in Syria, and this facility has remained a subject of speculation in the months following the attack. Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association, explained that there was very little information pertaining to this Syrian site immediately after the raid. Now, seven months after the fact, Kimball said U.S. intelligence believes that the site was a small nuclear facility under construction for Syrian military purposes.

David Albright, the president of the Institute for Science and International Security, said that Israel's airstrike on Syria is a very strange and almost bizarre issue. Albright said that there was no doubt in his mind that a plutonium producing nuclear reactor was being constructed in Syria. He explained that there had been too much debate on whether a reactor was present and not enough discussion on whether Israel should have attacked the site in the first place. Albright also said that The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has not been paying enough attention to illicit nuclear trading; evidence had been obtained showing that Syria had used a North Korean trading company in order to get ahold of the nuclear materials needed for the facility.

Avner Cohen, a senior fellow at USIP, agreed with Albright and said the situation was "quite bizarre" and caused a lot of political puzzlement. Cohen explained that this attack was similar to Israel's attack on Iraq in 1981, but also very different. In 1981, Cohen said that Israel attacked the Iraqi site on their own and acknowledged, defended, and justified their actions after the fact. The 2007 attack on Syria, however, was accomplished with communication with North Korea, and was not acknowledged. Cohen explained that not only did Israel not acknowledge the attack, but Syria also said nothing and made no complaints other than an air space violation. According to Cohen, this response of a "very loud silence" is the main difference between the two Israeli-an attacks.

Leonard Spector, the deputy director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, talked about the attacks correlation with Iran. He said that the deliberate silence following the incident does not serve as a "green light" for taking action in Iran. Spector also talked about the Six Party talks and explained that though these talks are making progress, they are still "a far way from home." Spector said that construction of the nuclear site in Syria was under way during the Six Party talks and nuclear exports with North Korea were taking place during these talks.



**Press Briefing by Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council,
Dennis Wilder, on President's Trip to Asia**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

July 30, 2008

4:20 P.M. EDT

[EXCERPT]

[deletia]

Q And on North Korea?

MR. WILDER: North Korea -- we are obviously all aware that the President talked about the de-listing of the North Koreans from the state sponsors of terrorism if the North Koreans agree to a verification protocol that included the plutonium program, the highly enriched uranium activities, and the proliferation efforts. At this point, we don't have that agreement yet. We are still in discussion with the North Koreans on this issue. The six-party -- all the members of the six-party are in these discussions, and we are looking for the North to come back to us and agree to the kind of protocol that all of the rest of the six-party participants believe is necessary.

We have a little more than 10 days left before the first opportunity for the President to open that window and de-list the North. We hope to hear from the North in this period of time that they will agree to the kinds of measures that are absolutely essential to verify what they have done in the nuclear area. So we are waiting to hear the North's response.

Q Would the President like that to happen while he's in South Korea?

MR. WILDER: The President would like to hear that the North accepts, whenever they accept, whether he's in Thailand, South Korea, or Beijing. I will say that without this action, which we hope the North will take, the de-listing will not occur on that time line.

Q I think it's the 11th is the end of the 45-day notification period.

MR. WILDER: Right.

Q But you just referred to, I believe, is the first opportunity for the President to de-list them. I mean, wouldn't, at the end of that period, if they hadn't agreed to this verification, wouldn't that be the end of the opportunity?

MR. WILDER: No.

Q Okay. Can you explain it?

MR. WILDER: No, the window for doing this remains open. The President has notified the Congress of his intent to de-list, but there is no sort of closure on that. Once he has given the notification, and Congress has acceded to -- then the President -- actually, it's the Secretary of State who will ultimately send this notification to Congress that we have actually de-listed, but the President will instruct the Secretary of State. But he can wait on that notification. There is no -- I'm not aware of any deadline on that.

Q What's the purpose of the 45 days then?

MR. WILDER: The 45 days is to give Congress a chance to comment, and to react to the President's decision.

[deletia]



North Korean Six-Party Talks and Implementation Activities

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services

Washington, DC

July 31, 2008

[EXCERPT]

Current Status of Six-Party Actions

So what is the status of the implementation of these agreements? The Initial Phase was concluded in July 2007. We are currently completing Second Phase actions and moving into the Third Phase of implementing the September 2005 Joint Statement. In the first two phases, we have made important progress. Under the February 13, 2007 agreement on "Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement," the DPRK shut down and sealed core nuclear facilities and invited back the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct monitoring and verification activities. IAEA personnel have remained in place, monitoring the shut-down and sealing of the Yongbyon nuclear facility, since July 2007. Under the October 3, 2007 agreement on "Second Phase Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement," the DPRK has taken significant steps to disable three core Yongbyon nuclear facilities, and on June 26, it provided a declaration of its nuclear programs to the Chinese chair. On June 27, in an important symbol of its commitment to the disablement process, North Korea collapsed the cooling tower at Yongbyon before the international media.

Since November 2007, a rotating team of U.S. experts has been on the ground overseeing disablement of the three core nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, and North Korea is no longer able to produce weapons-grade plutonium at Yongbyon. As of today, the DPRK has completed eight out of 11 agreed disablement tasks, and has discharged more than half of the 8,000 spent fuel rods from the 5-MW(e) reactor. Upon completion of all 11 steps, the DPRK would have to expend significant effort, and time -- upwards of 12 months -- to reconstitute all of the disabled facilities. Our experts continue to report good cooperation with DPRK experts at the site.

The declaration package that the DPRK provided to the Chinese on June 26 addresses its plutonium program, and acknowledged our concerns about the DPRK's uranium enrichment and nuclear proliferation activities, specifically with regard to Syria. The DPRK's declaration is not an end point in our efforts to understand North Korea's nuclear programs, but rather is the basis for a rigorous process of verifying all of the DPRK's nuclear programs. Review of the copies of 19,000 pages of documents, consisting of copies of operating records from its 5-MW(e) reactor at Yongbyon and the reprocessing facility, that the DPRK provided to the United States in May, is already producing results. The Six Parties have agreed to general principles for verification that are guiding ongoing discussions of a

verification mechanism. These principles include access to facilities, documents, and interviews with personnel, and other measures as agreed by the Six Parties. The verification process would include participation by experts from the Six Parties and the IAEA.

In response to the DPRK's actions to fulfill its Second Phase commitments, the United States has also moved forward on fulfilling our Second Phase commitments. On June 26, President Bush announced that he was terminating the exercise of authorities under the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to the DPRK, and notified Congress of his intent to rescind designation of the DPRK as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) following the 45-day Congressional notification period. The President made clear that we would use this 45-day period to assess the DPRK's cooperation, including on reaching agreement on a verification protocol, and respond accordingly.

Sniper Assassinates Top Syrian General With Links To Hizbullah and North Korea

08/03/2008

A top Syrian general who served as the country's liaison officer to Hizbullah was shot dead by a sniper in the Syrian port city of Tartous on Friday. Sources in Damascus said that General Mohammed Suleiman was a key orchestrator in the sharing of nuclear information and technology between Iran, Syrian and North Korea. According to reports he was also responsible for securing the Syrian Al-Kibar nuclear reactor which was destroyed in an Israeli Air Strike last year. The sources said that Syrian authorities had been trying to prevent news of Suleiman's death from being published.

Sunday, 03 August 2008, 15:39

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000541

NOFORN

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ELA

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH

EO 12958 DECL: 08/03/2028

TAGS PGOV, PTER, SY, LE, IS

SUBJECT: TOP ASAD SECURITY AIDE ASSASSINATED

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Tim Pounds for reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

1. (S/NF) Syrian Presidential security aide Brigadier General Muhammad Sulayman was assassinated by a sniper late on the evening of August 1 in the coastal city of Tartous. Sulayman enjoyed a reputation among Embassy contacts as having special status and proximity to Bashar. Sulayman was said to have managed special projects for Asad, some of which may have been unknown to the broader Syrian military leadership. Our expectation is that the SARG will try to keep this incident under wraps as long as possible, but that will become more difficult as regional and international press run with the story. End summary.

Details Murky After Official News Blackout

2. (S/NF) On August 3, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz cited "senior sources in Damascus" in reporting Sulayman's assassination on its website, identifying Sulayman as Asad's "liaison" to Hizballah. Al Hayat and the news ticker Al Bawaba also reported the story. A reliable Embassy press contact said that he had heard of the attack yesterday, and said that the version of the story he had heard was that Sulayman's entire family had also been killed. According to the contact, Syrian security services quickly cordoned and searched the entire beach neighborhood where the shooting had occurred. Other Embassy sources would say little except that Syria-based reporters are under instructions not to report the story. As of late August 3, all Syrian-based press remains silent.

Pointing the SARG Finger

3. (S/NF) As in other recent assassinations in Syria, speculation about who could have done it will likely be rampant. The most obvious suspects are the Israelis. SARG security services are well aware

that the coastal city of Tartous would offer easier access to Israeli operatives than would more inland locations such as Damascus. Sulayman was not a highly visible government official, and the use of a sniper suggests the assassin could visually identify Sulayman from a distance. As Tartous is also close to the northern-most part of the Syrian-Lebanese border, the SARG might blame pro-Saudi Islamist militants from Tripoli or the Nahr al-Barid camp. Some may even go so far as to suggest the (comment: unlikely) possibility that this was an inside job to prevent Sulayman from damaging the Syrian regime.

Implications

4. (S/NF) Although officially just a Brigadier General, Sulayman was considered President Asad's top security aide and was known to manage several special projects for Bashar -- some of which may have been unknown to the broader Syrian military leadership. Sulayman's proximity to Asad granted him special status in the eyes of senior Syrian military officials.

5. (S/NF) If the SARG were to suspect an Israeli role in the assassination, it may be reluctant to level public accusations as (1) they may not know who did it; (2) such accusations could impair or end Syria's nascent peace negotiations with Israel; and (3) publicizing the event would reveal yet another lapse in Syria's vaunted security apparatus. Syria could seek to retaliate against Israel via proxies and allies in Lebanon or elsewhere. If terrorist groups are suspected, this may prompt a domestic crackdown or counterstrikes on targets within the suspected group.

6. (S/NF) Although unlikely, elements within the SARG may suspect or allege a U.S. role. Possible responses could include staged demonstrations against U.S. interests in Syria, retaliatory diplomatic or security measures, or the threat of targeting U.S. installations via proxies. To date, Post has no indications that the SARG is seeking to blame the USG for the assassination, impose retaliatory measures, or retreat from its commitment to ensure security for our facilities and personnel. Additionally, core country team assesses that no immediate, new threats have been identified as a result of post-incident reporting.

Probable Short-term Reaction

7. (S/NF) For now, the most likely default SARG response will be to clamp down on information and say nothing while the various security services scramble to identify a culprit and avoid being blamed. However long the Syrians can hold out without saying anything, they will. SARG leaders will likely view any publicity of the assassination as a net loss for the regime.

Comment

8. (S/NF) As press in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region reports Sulayman's assassination, it will be increasingly difficult for the SARG to keep a lid on this high-profile attack. Coinciding with Bashar's trip to Tehran and on the heels of the latest round of indirect talks with Israel, the assassination will likely weaken advocates of the peace negotiations, including Bashar himself.

CHASE

<http://tinyurl.com/4wp48x>

From: RJ <rebelfir...@gmail.com>

Date: Sun, 3 Aug 2008 13:59:00 -0400

Subject: The assassinated Syrian general was in charge of securing the al Kibar reactor

**The assassinated Syrian general was in charge of securing the al Kibar reactor –
www.debka.com**

DEBKAFile's intelligence sources report that Gen. Muhammad Suleiman, whom a sniper shot dead in the Syrian port town of Tartus early Saturday, Aug. 2, was a shadowy figure who acted for Bashar Assad in the regime's four most sensitive and confidential spheres:

1. He was the president's liaison man with the North Korean government. On his frequent trips to Pyongyang, Gen. Suleiman organized the consignment of components for the plutonium reactor in northern Syria, which Israeli demolished last September, and the security of the North Korean scientists and technicians who accompanied them.

2. Muhammad Suleiman was also the president's private channel of communication with Iranian military and intelligence chiefs; in this capacity, he most probably facilitated the Syrian-Iranian-North Korean connection. The Syrian reactor was designed to produce nuclear fuel for the Iranian program and radioactive weapons for Syria.

3. The late general also acted as the president's contact man with Hizballah's leaders. He worked directly with Imad Mughniyeh, head of Hizballah's security apparatus, who was killed in Damascus last February.

4. His key function was the management of Assad's personal interaction with the Syrian chief of staff, generals and heads of military intelligence. There was no state secret from the powerful general. He was to have accompanied the Syrian president on his state visit to Tehran Saturday; instead he was laid to rest in his home village of Driekesh in the north.

Damascus has done its utmost to keep the general's death under wraps, but word has spread and theories abound: Speculation ranges from an outside hand, or a jealous rival to an internal element who felt the concentration of so much power in one hand was a threat to the regime.

[Sourcebook note: See 2008-09-26 sourcebook entry concerning an apparent reference to Suleiman by IAEA head Mohammad ElBaradei.]

Syria rules out new IAEA visit to bombed site

Foreign ministry justifies act; country denies it has hidden nuclear facilities

The Associated Press

updated 2:24 p.m. PT, Sat., Aug. 9, 2008

DAMASCUS, Syria - Syria on Saturday declared that U.N. nuclear sleuths were barred from revisiting the site of a suspected atomic reactor that was bombed by Israeli jets last year.

The decision dealt a blow to efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency to follow up on intelligence made available to its experts asserting that Syria was hiding a nuclear program that could be used to make weapons.

Justifying the move, a Syrian Foreign Ministry official told reporters that its agreement with the U.N. agency — which already toured the site in June — allowed only one visit. The official, who was not authorized to talk to the media, spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Syrian statement appeared to be prompted by comments made by diplomats accredited to the Vienna, Austria-based IAEA, who told The Associated Press earlier Saturday that Damascus late last month turned down a request from the agency for a follow-up trip.

A return to the bombed facility — alleged by the U.S. to have been a nearly completed plutonium-producing reactor — would have been on the IAEA agenda. Plutonium can be used as the fissile core of warheads.

But a second trip also was meant to focus on the broader issue of whether North Korea was involved in building the alleged Syrian program.

As well, IAEA officials would have pressed for permission to visit three other sites purportedly linked to the alleged reactor destroyed by the Israelis — although Syria has already said that those locations are off limits because they are in restricted military areas.

The diplomats said the agency investigation is based on intelligence provided to the IAEA by the U.S., Israel and a third country they declined to identify.

Syria denies hidden nuclear facilities

In Vienna, a senior diplomat told the AP that "the Syrians said that a visit at this time was inopportune." He and two other diplomats agreed to discuss the issue on condition of anonymity because their information was confidential.

That appeared to leave open the possibility of a later inspection tour. But one of the other diplomats said members of the Syrian mission to the IAEA were spreading the word among other missions that additional trips beyond the one in June were unlikely.

Syria fears the IAEA probe could lead to a massive investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to for more than five years — and to related fallout. Iran is under three sets of U.N. sanctions because of its refusal to heed Security Council demands to curb its nuclear activities.

The diplomats also said Washington had circulated a note among members of the IAEA board opposing a Syrian push for a seat on the 35-nation board. The board normally works by consensus and if Damascus gained a seat it would likely use it to try to hinder further investigation into its alleged secret nuclear activities.

"Syria's election to the board while under investigation for secretly ... building an undeclared nuclear reactor not suited for peaceful purposes would make a mockery" of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, said the note, as read to the AP.

The diplomats said that the U.S. was encouraging Kazakhstan to challenge Damascus for the seat, but the Kazakhs apparently are reluctant to do so, fearing lack of support from its nominating group of Mideast and Central Asian nations.

IAEA experts came back June 25 from a four-day visit, carrying environmental samples from the Al Kibar site hit by Israel in September. Those are now being evaluated but the results might be inconclusive.

Because intelligence suggests that radioactive material had not yet been introduced into the alleged reactor before it was hit by Israel, swipes taken in search of radioactive traces were unlikely to have been of use.

So, the inspectors also looked for minute quantities of graphite, a cooling element in the type of North Korean prototype that was allegedly being built with help from Pyongyang. Such a reactor contains hundreds of tons of graphite, and any major explosion would have sent dust over the immediate area.

But — if the Syrians were interested in a cover-up — they would have scoured the region to bury, wash away and otherwise remove any such traces. And although U.S. intelligence says the reactor was close to completion, it is possible that graphite elements were not yet installed at the time of the Sept. 6 bombing.

Such uncertainties — and IAEA hopes of being able to visit the other suspected sites — dictated the need for a follow-up mission.

More broadly, IAEA experts were looking to put questions to Syrian officials based on the intelligence made available to them alleging years of extensive cooperation between the Syrians and teams of visiting North Korean nuclear officials.

North Korea detonated a nuclear device in 2006 in a test. The North is believed by experts to have produced enough weapons-grade plutonium to make as many as 10 nuclear bombs before agreeing to dismantle its weapons program early last year.

But the diplomats said Syria was strenuously denying any concerted North Korean presence in the country — despite intelligence alleging that the building bombed was a reactor of the type only built by the communist state.

They said Syrian officials described meetings between nuclear officials from Pyongyang and their Syrian counterparts as occasional and informal, despite intelligence information to the contrary.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/21/2008/08/09/187761.htm>



Official Source Comments on Reports about Visit of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to Syria



Saturday, August 09, 2008 - 07:25 PM

Damascus, (SANA)- An official source at the Foreign Ministry said that Damascus, commenting on reports circulated by some news agencies on the visit of the delegation of the Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to Syria, clarifies that it had already reached a memo of understanding with the IAEA on only visiting the site of al-Khobar which had been bombed by Israel and just for one time.

The source added that Syria had carried out what it had committed to in this regard, and also stressed that if the IAEA, after visiting the site, wants any other clarifications then Syria can give answers to them.

The source added that Syria stresses that all these allegations circulated by the U.S. at this very time to justify the Israeli aggression on al-Khobar site from one side, and to dissuade the countries from supporting the nomination of Syria to a at the IAEA Governing Board from the other, are false allegations because Syria had never sought to establish a nuclear reactor in cooperation with the Democratic Republic of Korea or with any other country.

The source said Syria is committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its record in cooperation with the IAEA proves that, and if the U.S. enjoys the minimum level of credibility it should have drawn the attention to the nuclear weapon possessed by Israel and threats the regions' security and stability.

Ahmad Fathi ZAHRA

Syria says ready to answer IAEA questions

Sat Aug 9, 2008 6:52pm EDT

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - Syria is willing to answer questions by the U.N. nuclear watchdog about an alleged nuclear complex but has not agreed with the agency to allow more visits to the site, a foreign ministry statement said on Saturday.

In June, experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) visited the al-Kibar complex, which Israeli warplanes raided last year. Syria says the site is a military complex under construction and denies any nuclear activity.

The United States, Israel's chief ally, said the site was an unfinished nuclear reactor that was being built with the help of North Korea. The IAEA team said more checks were needed before they could say whether there was a reactor in Kibar.

Responding to media reports about a possible second visit by the inspectors, the foreign ministry said Syria had only agreed with the IAEA to the one visit that took place in June.

"A memorandum of understanding was reached between Syria and the IAEA that stipulated a visit exclusively to the Kibar site and for one time only," the statement said.

"Syria has honored this and affirmed that if the agency had any queries after the visit it could present them to the Syrian side to answer," the statement added.

The statement repeated Syrian denials that no nuclear facility had been constructed at Kibar and that Damascus has not violated the non-proliferation treaty.

"Syria did not work on setting up a nuclear reactor with the Korean Democratic Republic or any other country," it said.

Israel, which began indirect peace talks with Syria under Turkish auspices several months after bombing Kibar, kept quiet about the target. IAEA inspectors are expected to issue a report to the agency's board of governors ahead of their next meeting in September.

(Reporting by Khaled Yacoub Oweis)

Syrian sources confirm death of Assad confidential aide and his nuclear link

DEBKAFfile Exclusive Report

August 11, 2008, 10:30 AM (GMT+02:00)



IAEA Dep. Dir. Olli Heinonen - last Westerner to see Gen. Suleiman alive

Damascus Sunday broke its silence about the mysterious assassination of Gen. Muhammad Suleiman in Tartus early Saturday, Aug. 2 and confirmed DEBKAFfile's disclosure that the general played an important role in administering the al Kibar plutonium reactor. Officials in Damascus leaked to Middle East media that Suleiman was a member of the Syrian Research Commission, the government body in charge of missile, chemical and biological weapons and nuclear development.

They said he had met the team of nuclear watchdog monitors, headed by Olli Heinonen, which visited Syria in late June to check out US and Israeli charges that Syria had been building a plutonium reactor at al Kibar.

Those sources also stressed his murder was unrelated to the 2005 assassination of Lebanese ex-prime minister Rafiq Hariri in Beirut, or any internal rivalries in the ruling regime in Damascus.

DEBKAFfile reported earlier:

Gen. Muhammad Suleiman was a shadowy figure who acted for Bashar Assad in the regime's four most sensitive and confidential spheres:

1. He was the president's liaison man with the North Korean government. On his frequent trips to Pyongyang, Gen. Suleiman organized the consignment of components for the plutonium reactor in northern Syria, which Israeli demolished last September, and the security of the North Korean scientists and technicians who accompanied them.
2. Muhammad Suleiman was also the president's private channel of communication with Iranian military and intelligence chiefs; in this capacity, he most probably facilitated the Syrian-Iranian-North Korean connection. The Syrian reactor was designed to produce nuclear fuel for the Iranian program and radioactive weapons for Syria.
3. The late general also acted as the president's contact man with Hizballah's leaders. He worked directly with Imad Mughniyeh, head of Hizballah's security apparatus, who was killed in Damascus last February.

4. His key function was the management of Assad's personal interaction with the Syrian chief of staff, generals and heads of military intelligence. There was no state secret from the powerful general. He was to have accompanied the Syrian president on his state visit to Tehran Saturday; instead he was laid to rest in his home village of Driekesh in the north.

Damascus has done its utmost to keep the general's death under wraps, but word has spread and theories abound: Speculation ranges from an outside hand, or a jealous rival to an internal element who felt the concentration of so much power in one hand was a threat to the regime.

Doubts About Nuclear Verification Keep N. Korea on List of Terrorist States

By Dan Eggen

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, August 12, 2008; A09

North Korea missed its first chance yesterday to be removed from the State Department's list of terrorist states, U.S. officials said, because it has not provided a way for international inspectors to verify claims about its nuclear program.

President Bush said in June that the United States would begin the process of taking North Korea off its terrorism blacklist, and yesterday was the earliest that Pyongyang could have been removed. But U.S. officials said that North Korea has not followed through on allowing outside verification of its nuclear program, which the Bush administration has set as a condition for action.

"We need to have a strong verification regime in order to remove North Korea from the list," said State Department spokesman Kelley Osterthaler. "They know what they need to do on a verification package, and we're continuing to work with them."

The possible removal is part of ongoing six-party talks -- made up of China, Japan, Russia, the United States, and North and South Korea -- aimed at persuading Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons program in return for aid and the end to sanctions, including those that come with being listed as a state sponsor of terrorism.

North Korea is listed alongside Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria as state sponsors of terrorism, and thus faces bans on defense sales and other restrictions on trade, foreign aid and financial transactions. The last incident tying its government to an act of terrorism came in 1987, when its agents planted a bomb on a South Korean commercial jet.

Pyongyang turned over a 60-page declaration in June that included details of plutonium production in its nuclear program. It also dynamited a cooling tower at its deactivated Yongbyon nuclear facility in an attempt to convince the world that it is serious about abandoning its nuclear weapons program.

But the declaration contained less detail than the Bush administration had sought, and negotiations continue over how to verify North Korea's claims. Pyongyang has yet to disclose how many weapons it has or to provide details about its involvement in the construction of a Syrian reactor that was destroyed by Israel last year.

Dennis Wilder, the Asia director on the National Security Council, told reporters traveling with Bush in China over the weekend that the administration was "in discussions with the North" over the issue.

"We continue to try to work with them on this question of a robust verification regime," Wilder said. "But we aren't at the point where we are satisfied with what they have put on the table thus far."

Michael J. Green, who handled Asia issues for Bush on the National Security Council from 2001 to 2005, said the administration is correct to demand more before removing North Korea from the terrorism list or eliminating sanctions. "If the administration lifted sanctions anyway, without verification, it would have just shot our credibility in the whole region," he said.

Green said it is likely Pyongyang decided to "run out the clock" on the Bush administration, in order to wait for a new president in January.

<http://www.usnews.com/blogs/washington-whispers/2008/08/15/a-cia-standing-o-for-president-bush.html>

A CIA Standing-O for President Bush

August 15, 2008 11:54 AM ET

Paul BedardIt's named for his dad, but if his visit to Langley on Thursday was any indication, current President Bush owns the CIA.

In advance of vacationing at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, Bush visited the CIA HQ to receive briefings on the war on terror and the situation in Georgia. But instead of a quickie stop, he stayed for over two hours and met with many of the agency's workers during lunch. In his fifth visit to the CIA since becoming president, Bush was joined by CIA Director Mike Hayden and Deputy Director Steve Kappes to meet with counterterrorism experts and then political and military analysts on Georgia and Russia.

Bush then walked into the agency's cafeteria where he was greeted with a standing ovation by the 2,000 employees inside. Clearly pleased, he told them, "I appreciate your service more than you could possibly know."

Bush then took a seat at a table with two dozen junior employees. They included analysts, clandestine operatives, scientists and engineers, and support personnel. In between bites, he asked them about their jobs and where they have served overseas. One analyst, who played a key role for the CIA in identifying the nuclear reactor that was being built in Syria with North Korean assistance, gave the president a bronze commemorative coin that Hayden had presented to each agency employee who was directly involved in that intelligence effort.

The 3-inch diameter coin was inscribed with, "Syria-North Korea Project" and the words, "No Core, No War."

During the visit, which went two hours longer than scheduled, we hear that the president shook hands, gave hugs, and signed autographs, even on \$5 and \$10 bills some employees gave him for signature because they didn't have another piece of paper handy.

As he left, Bush praised the agency. "It's really important for the people who work here to understand the significant — the significance of the contributions they're making to secure the homeland. The people here work long and hard hours. They're smart, capable, and they deserve the nation's thanks," said Bush.

Hayden issued his own inside memo to employees: "Supporting our government with timely, accurate intelligence is our job 24/7, but it isn't every day that we hear directly from our top customer just how important our work is—and that he stays two hours longer than scheduled. Thank you for ensuring that CIA remains central to the security of our nation, and for making this visit such a great success."



KCNA Slams U.S. Provocative Act to Scuttle Denuclearization Process of Korean Peninsula

Pyongyang, **August 18 [2008]** (KCNA) -- The United States is again raising the "human rights issue" of the DPRK.

This is clearly evidenced by the fact that U.S. President Bush during his junket to Asian countries blustered that he would handle the "human rights issue" as "an element for negotiations with north Korea."

We categorically dismiss this as a premeditated act of the U.S. to deliberately throw a hurdle in the process of the six-party talks and, furthermore, go without implementing points of the October 3 agreement on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

As far as the "human rights issue" touted by the U.S. is concerned, it is a trite method it employed whenever it felt it necessary to delay or scuttle the talks in a bid to pursue its hostile policy toward the DPRK.

This is clearly proved by the whole process of the six-party talks.

At the third session of the six-party talks held in June 2004 all the parties to the talks agreed in unison to abide by the principles of "words for words" and "action for action".

But no sooner had the talks come to an end than the U.S. enacted and put into force the "North Korean Human Rights Act". It went the lengths of peddling the story of the "test of poisonous gas on human bodies" based on "testimonies made by defectors from the north", thus branding the DPRK as a "human rights abuser".

Even after the adoption of the September 19 joint statement in 2005 the U.S. escalated "human rights offensive" against the DPRK, talking about "counterfeiting" and "drug smuggling", thus throwing a big hurdle in the progress of the six-party talks and the implementation of the joint statement.

It even cooked up the story of "illegal trafficking" and applied sanctions against the dialogue partner, thus completely scuttling the already scheduled six-party talks and putting the talks in a stalemate for more than one year.

The "human rights" ruckus again kicked up by the U.S. is a product of its deliberate scheme to deter the six-party talks from making progress and completely scuttle the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula.

As already known, the DPRK submitted an accurate and complete nuclear declaration according to the October 3 agreement of the six-party talks.

The U.S., however, has not honored its commitment to write the DPRK off the list of "state sponsors of terrorism", a key political compensation in concluding the implementation of the agreement, although the date it promised to do so has already passed.

This is obviously a violation of the principle of "action for action" essential for realizing denuclearization.

The implementation of the agreed points of the six-party talks has been delayed due to the U.S. perfidious attitude.

However, the U.S. raised the "human rights issue" before the deadline it set as regards the delisting of the DPRK as a "state sponsor of terrorism". Lurking behind this is its sinister intention to shirk off the responsibility for the delayed implementation of the agreement on to the DPRK.

This proves that the U.S. has sought the sinister purpose of putting pressure upon the DPRK while letting the talks to drag on without any results, showing no interest in settling the nuclear issue between the DPRK and the U.S. through the talks from their outset.

Explicitly speaking, there is no "human rights issue" much touted by the U.S. in the DPRK.

The Korean people fully enjoy genuine freedom and rights under the socialist system where all people form a big family. It is the consistent popular policy of the DPRK government to fully guarantee the rights of the citizens in a responsible manner.

In the DPRK based on the man-centered Juche idea all working people do labor according to their abilities and wishes and lead a genuine life, given ample opportunity of learning.

It is absolutely illogical for the U.S. to talk about the "human rights issue" while ignoring such reality.

There is the most serious human rights issue in the U.S. as it is a rogue state that exterminated tens of millions of native Indians and accumulated wealth through slave trade and flesh traffic and a country where the almighty dollar principle and the fin de sickle lifestyle based on the law of the jungle prevail.

The impoverishment of Americans in the mental and cultural lives is actively fostered institutionally, driving them into the abyss of corruption, despair and crimes. This is a true picture of the American society today.

The U.S. administration fabricated the "Cuban Adjustment Act", thus causing huge casualties and preventing independent countries from making progress for the past more than four decades. It even infringed upon the sovereignty of Iraq by force of arms on the basis of false information and indiscriminately dropped bombs upon heads of innocent and peaceable citizens and children. This was the most vivid manifestation of human rights abuses.

The U.S. cursed and censured as the kingpin of human rights abuses is still behaving as if it were a "human rights judge". This is nothing but a poor charade of the U.S. which does not know where it stands and does not feel ashamed of itself.

The "human rights" piffle made by the U.S. high-ranking officials indicates that they have no stand to recognize and respect the dialogue partner.

The U.S. is persisting in the politically motivated provocations as evidenced by the ruckus kicked up over the non-existent "human rights issue" in the DPRK, an indication of its deep-rooted hostility and inveterate enmity toward the DPRK. This attitude leaves the DPRK and the countries concerned skeptical about the U.S. intention to implement the points of the October 3 agreement.

Such provocative acts of the U.S. as slandering and pulling up its dialogue partner can never help the talks make any progress in the positive direction.

No Progress in Nuclear Verification Protocol

By Jung Sung-ki

Staff Reporter

08-20-2008 17:22

A compromise is unlikely soon between the United States and North Korea on verifying the communist country's nuclear disarmament, a senior government official said Wednesday.

Pyongyang remains stubborn on the verification system, and this has delayed its removal from the U.S. list of terrorism sponsoring states, the Foreign Ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

North Korea's foreign ministry said it will increase vigilance against unjust U.S. demands over talks on ending the North's nuclear programs, claiming the ongoing South Korea-U.S. military exercises are aimed at launching a preemptive nuclear attack against the communist state, according to the Yonhap News Agency.

"The U.S. and North Korea are consulting on the verification protocol, but it seems difficult for the two sides to reach a compromise soon," the official told reporters.

"But I don't want to describe this situation as pessimistic since these kinds of difficulties are a kind of ritual when it comes to negotiations with North Korea."

He said North Korea agreed in principle to cooperate with the establishment of a protocol for international inspectors to verify its nuclear declaration made in June, but failed to implement it by refusing to cooperate on drawing up the protocol.

Chief nuclear envoys from the United States, South Korea and Japan recently discussed how to persuade the North to accept a U.S.-proposed verification protocol, he added, referring to Seoul envoy Kim Sook's recent trips to Washington and Tokyo for talks.

South Korea wants the second-phase denuclearization process to be completed and the third and final phase on the full disablement of North Korea's nuclear facilities to begin by year's end, said the official.

In a meeting with reporters, Kim said now is the time for "patience" in talks on the verification system.

"I think more time is needed for the U.S. and North Korea to narrow their differences," he said.

"China could play a constructive role in this process."

China is the host nation for the six-party forum involving the United States, the two Koreas, Japan and Russia aimed at ending the North's nuclear ambition.

Negotiators from the six nations have stepped up meetings on breaking the deadlock over the verification.

North Korea in June submitted an inventory of its nuclear materials and programs, prompting U.S. President George W. Bush to give the minimum 45-day notice to Congress of his intent to remove the North from the list of terrorism sponsors. That deadline passed Aug. 11.

The delisting is crucial for Pyongyang since Washington has banned the impoverished communist country from receiving foreign aid and loans. North Korea was put on the list in 1988 after its agents blew up a South Korean passenger plane, killing all 115 people aboard.

The Bush administration cited insufficient progress made in finding ways to verify the nuclear declaration. The declaration contains less detail on the North's alleged secret uranium enrichment program and nuclear proliferation, it said.

Washington also wants to know how many nuclear weapons Pyongyang has.

The North has threatened to break its earlier promise to disable its nuclear facilities by the end of October unless Washington delists it and lifts sanctions. Instead, Pyongyang is urging other six-party members to provide energy aid under the denuclearization accord by that time.

Under the Feb. 13 agreement, North Korea is required to abandon its nuclear programs in return for economic aid and political concessions from the other five parties. On the economic front, the North will receive one million tons of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent in aid.

Japan has refused to provide aid and opposes the North's delisting over Pyongyang's kidnapping of Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 80s.

Pyongyang and Tokyo last week agreed on procedures for a reinvestigation into the fate of the abductees.

gallantjung@koreatimes.co.kr

Israel and Iran

At each other's throats

From The Economist print edition

Sep 4th 2008

[Review of

The Secret War with Iran

Ronen Bergman

Simon & Schuster, London, 2008

ISBN 9781416558392]

IF THIS murky tale of spies and their doings can be reduced to a single proposition it is this: Iran and Israel are locked in mortal clandestine combat and for the most part the Iranians, together with their allies in Lebanon's Hizbullah, are running circles around their flatfooted Israeli adversaries. That in itself lifts Ronen Bergman's book above the ordinary. Too many accounts of spying in the Middle East dwell on the high reputation of Israel's Mossad, a reputation which may just conceivably be out of date.

[deletia]

If Lebanon has been the main arena of conflict between Iran and Israel, the main issue between them has long been Iran's presumed quest for nuclear weapons. Here too Mr Bergman argues that the Iranians have consistently deceived and outwitted Israel and its Western allies. But this story is not yet over" and for those who want it there is reason to wonder whether Iran's defeat of Israeli intelligence has been quite as comprehensive as Mr Bergman claims. One example is the assassination" by Israel, according to Hizbullah" of Mughniyeh in Damascus in February, just as Mr Bergman's book was about to go to press. Another was Israel's discovery, and destruction in September 2007, of what appears to have been a secret Syrian nuclear reactor, which Mr Bergman claims Iran was helping to pay for.

But was Iran really involved? One of this reviewer's own intelligence sources says that Iran was not complicit in and seemed to know nothing about the Syrian venture. Another, who has reason to know about such things, doubts Mr Bergman's claim that a crucial tip-off came from Ali Reza Askari [also transliterated as *Asgari and Asghari*], an Iranian general who disappeared and is thought to have defected to the CIA. Still, spying is a rum business. Sometimes, as Winston Churchill said, the truth is so precious it must be protected by a bodyguard of lies. Not every juicy detail in this book is necessarily correct, and few can be easily verified. Mr Bergman's portrayal of Israel's confrontation with Iran will also strike some non-Israeli readers as excessively Manichean. But it makes nonetheless for an enthralling read.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

Iran's Nuclear Program:
What Threat Does It Pose?

Remarks by Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte
U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency
and the United Nations in Vienna

Nobel Institute
Oslo, Norway

September 9, 2008

[EXCERPT]

I am here today to discuss to discuss a dark subject: the threat posed by Iran's nuclear pursuits as well as our concerns about Syria's clandestine nuclear activities.

But let me start on a more positive note.

Two historic events took place last weekend.

First, Norway and the United States joined the other members of the 45-country Nuclear Suppliers Group in agreeing to allow civil nuclear cooperation with India.

This was an important and positive decision for all of our relations with India and for India's relationship with the world's nuclear nonproliferation regime.

This decision helps India meet its growing energy needs with less greenhouse gas.

This decision brings India into the mainstream of our efforts to avert the spread of nuclear weapons.

Second, Secretary Rice went to Libya.

Her visit was the first by a U.S. Secretary of State since 1953.

As the Secretary said, "this demonstrates that the United States has no permanent enemies."

Instead, as she explained, "when countries are prepared to make strategic changes in direction, the United States is prepared to respond."

What do these positive developments mean for the subject of today's discussion?

They mean that concerted international diplomacy can succeed in bolstering the world's efforts to confront the dangers posed by nuclear weapons.

We also hope the weekend's developments send a clear message to Tehran and Damascus:

Meet your obligations. Act to build confidence. This is the way to earn the world's respect and cooperation.

The Dangerous Pursuits of Two Dangerous Regimes

In two weeks, the IAEA Board of Governors will meet.

Among other items on our agenda, we will consider the nuclear activities of Iran and Syria.

Iran and Syria are two IAEA members who have violated their IAEA obligations.

They are two dangerous regimes on dangerous pursuits.

- Both are state sponsors of terrorism.
- Both are opponents of regional peace and stability.
- Both have pursued nuclear capabilities that make no civil sense but that can produce fissile material for nuclear weapons.
- Both had outside assistance, Syria from a known nuclear violator, Iran from an international smuggling network for nuclear weapons technology.
- Both pursued these capabilities covertly and illicitly, successfully hiding them from IAEA inspectors until exposed by others.
- Both remain actively engaged in covering up the full extent of their activities.

This dangerous situation poses serious risks to the security of Norway and the United States, Europe and NATO.

- Iran's nuclear pursuits remain the most threatening.
- But Syria's clandestine activities show how a determined regime can flout the IAEA.
- Each underscores the risks of nuclear proliferation in one of the world's most dangerous regions.

Syria's Covert Nuclear Activities

Syria's covert nuclear activities were exposed last April when we briefed your government and others on the construction of a nuclear reactor in the eastern desert of Syria.

This was not a typical reactor that a country might build for medical research or power production.

Instead, our intelligence experts are confident that the Syrian reactor was built with the assistance of North Korea and was of the same type that North Korea built at Yongbyon to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons.

We have good reason to believe that Syria's reactor, like North Korea's, was not intended for peaceful purposes.

- First, we assess the Syrian reactor was configured to produce plutonium.

It had no capability to generate electricity and was ill-suited for peaceful research.

- Second, Syria went to great pains to keep the facility secret.

It located the reactor in the remote desert.

It built earthen berms and fake walls to hide it from observation.

It hid the pipelines bringing cooling water to and from the Euphrates.

It did not declare the reactor to the IAEA as required by Code 3.1 of its safeguard agreement.

- Third, Syria went to great lengths to cover up its activities after a military strike destroyed the reactor one year ago.

While putting off IAEA requests to visit the site, Syrian engineers hauled away incriminating equipment, buried what remained of the reactor, and built a large structure over the top.

Under mounting pressure at our Board meeting in June, Syria eventually allowed IAEA inspectors to visit the reactor site.

But the IAEA inspectors also did what IAEA inspectors do well:

They gathered information from multiple sources, they asked for additional access, and they probing questions.

Syria allowed one visit but has yet to provide the full access and information that the inspectors have requested.

Whether in the Board room in June, or with IAEA inspectors since, Syria is using stalling tactics striking similar to those of Iran.

Instead of looking to Iran, Syria should follow the example of Libya.

Now that it has been caught, Syria should admit its illicit nuclear activities and give IAEA inspectors the necessary information and access to assure the world they have stopped.

It is time for disclosure, not continuing deception.

[deletia]



Japan: 'Source' Says Reprocessing Facility for Syrian Plutonium Built in Iran

By Takashi Arimoto in Washington:

"Reprocessing Facility of Bombed Nuclear Base in Iran; Intimate Ties Between Syria and North Korea"

Sankei Shimbun (Internet version-WWW)

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On the facility in Syria believed to be pivotal to the nuclear development that was bombed by the Israeli military last September, a source familiar with the Syrian nuclear issue revealed that the reprocessing facility to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel is in a military facility in Iran, and not in Syria. Another information source revealed that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are planning to deploy small North Korean-made submarines in a military port in Syria. It highlighted once again the collaborative relationship among North Korea, Iran, and Syria even a year following the air strike.

In order to produce plutonium -- a raw material required to make nuclear bombs -- a facility is required to reprocess spent nuclear fuel, as well as a nuclear reactor. However, when the US Government revealed at the end of April that the nuclear reactor was built through cooperation between Syria and North Korea, the picture released only revealed the nuclear reactor but not the reprocessing plant.

It has been said that US President George W. Bush revealed the picture to sound out the alarm on nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and he criticized Iran in particular by name. However, there are some experts who are casting doubts (about the picture) because there is no explanation about the reprocessing facility.

The source of the information commented on the reason that the reprocessing facility was built in Iran: "I think it was built in Iran because Syria did not have the reprocessing technology." On the specific location, he only said: "It is in a secret Iranian Revolutionary Guards base."

A high-ranking Iranian official twice inspected a facility in the desert near Al Kibar in the eastern Syria in 2005 and 2006. Spiegel, a German magazine, said that according to a German intelligence report, the nuclear reactor was built by Syria and North Korea to support Iran's nuclear development program.

Meanwhile, another source said that Iran and Syria agreed to establish a base in the port of Latakia, a city along the coast of the Mediterranean in Syria, to support Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shiite Muslim organization. Reportedly, a few small North Korean submarines as well as five or six small boats will be dispatched.

Compared with Tartus, another Syrian port, Latakia is far from Lebanon but the same source says: "Latakia was chosen because there are Russian military personnel in Tartus."

North Korea , Iran and Syria have also cooperated in the development of chemical weapons. During the chemical plant explosion in northern Syria last July, many scientists and military related personnel of the three countries died, including three North Korean military experts.

All three countries have denied that there is a collaborative relationship on nuclear development. A spokesperson of the US Embassy in Syria commented on the facility in Al Kibar: "It is an unused military base under construction." On the military relationship with Iran , he said: "Everything has been made public and there is no secret agreement."

(passage omitted on the Iranian Embassy in Japan sharply criticizing this article and denying a military relationship between Iran and North Korea).

(Description of Source: Tokyo Sankei Shimbun (Internet version-[WWW](#)) -- Internet version of daily published by Fuji Sankei Communications Group)

'Barak the worst defense minister ever'

Sep. 13, 2008

JPost.com Staff , THE JERUSALEM POST

Defense Minister Ehud Barak "was bold until the day he failed as prime minister, and then he lost his political courage," Kadima MK Isaac Ben-Israel, a retired major-general, said on Saturday.

Addressing a cultural event in Beersheba, Ben-Israel lashed out at Barak on a plethora of issues, including the September 6, 2007, strike on a suspected nuclear plant in Syria and IDF operations against terrorists.

"I do not know of a worse defense minister than Barak," he said. "The guideline he follows is 'sit and do nothing.'"

"No politician has ever paid for not going to war," Ben-Israel said, referring to the limited IDF activity against terrorists in the Gaza Strip and Hizbullah's reemergence on the northern border.

Barak "even opposed the strike on September 6" last year, he said.

Turning to Iran, Ben-Israel said the Islamic Republic was facing some difficulties and was still at least a year, or even two, from acquiring a nuclear bomb.

Israel might eventually come to the difficult conclusion that it had to attack Iran on its own, he said. Ben-Israel said this was within Israel's military capabilities.

There was no immediate response from Barak's office.

A year on, Israel still won't discuss Syria strike

By Dan Williams

14 Sep 2008 14:01:13 GMT

JERUSALEM, Sept 14 (Reuters) - A year after its jets bombed a Syrian facility which U.S. officials openly described as a secret nuclear reactor, Israel still refuses to give an account -- not even formally confirming the raid ever happened.

Such reticence is unusual for a country steeped in military myth. Israel's fractious politics, dominated by ex-generals, has long made war stories a staple part of the national discourse.

For Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, going public about the Sept. 6, 2007, sortie might be the last chance to craft a legacy: He is due to tender his resignation later this week, haunted by graft scandals and the setbacks of Israel's 2006 war in Lebanon.

But Olmert has made clear the muzzle will remain.

"Over the past year, we have taken care not to comment on, respond to, confirm or deny, and to act with the necessary restraint and responsibility, regarding security issues of the highest order," he told his cabinet on Sunday.

Olmert appeared to be criticising televised remarks by a lawmaker from his Kadima party who suggested Defence Minister Ehud Barak, a former top general whose Labour party props up the coalition government, had been slow to approve the Syria strike.

"It is inconceivable that somebody -- for whatever reasons, be they political or personal -- allows himself to say things that I unequivocally reject," said Olmert.

Those Israeli officials who agree to speak -- on condition of anonymity -- as well as independent analysts attributed Olmert's silence to a desire to see progress in Turkish-mediated peace talks with Syria which were unveiled in May.

They say that Israeli assertions about the target of the raid would risk humiliating Syrian President Bashar Assad, who has denied allegations by the CIA and White House that his government pursued nuclear weapons with the help of North Korea.

There may also be operational considerations.

Assumed to have the Middle East's only atomic arsenal, Israel has hinted it could attack Iran as a last resort to deny its arch-foe access to nuclear technologies with bomb-making potential.

Should that happen, Israel formally giving details about the Syrian raid could help Iran better prepare its defences.

Some Israeli officials voiced quiet dismay at the American disclosures in May about the Syria strike, though CIA director Michael Hayden said intelligence on the targeted facility was being published as part of a "team effort".

"Any discussion of what happened in Syria carries the danger of divulging information on tactics we may have to reuse," said one Israeli official. (Editing by Mariam Karouny)

Iran: Secret memo reveals Khamenei plan for nuclear arms, says report

Tehran, **15 Sept. [2008]** (AKI) - Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, reportedly has a secret plan to accelerate nuclear arms production by simulating a breakdown at the nuclear reactor of Bushehr.

That is according to a memorandum circulated among several western intelligence services cited in the Italian daily, La Stampa.

The Khamenei initiative dates back to the day after 6 September 2007 when Israeli warplanes struck an alleged nuclear reactor that was allegedly being developed in northern Syria.

The effectiveness of that attack frightened Khamenei who feared the same could happen to Iranian nuclear plants.

A few weeks later in Iranian capital Tehran, Khamenei gathered a group of senior officials responsible for national security and nuclear power, including Mohsen Fahrizadeh, entitled Project III - the programme suspected of planning the development of nuclear arms.

On that occasion, according to the memorandum, Khamenei spoke of the need to accelerate the military project in such a way that it did not run the risk of breaching the rules of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

During the meeting several proposals were discussed and at the end of the talks, "Khamenei called for a plan to be drawn up to exploit the nuclear material of the Bushehr plant to obtain plutonium".

According to sources cited in the document, there were moments of tension during the meeting because several of the officials there "warned Khamenei repeatedly" that if they took this course, Iran would "pay a serious political price".

But Khamenei reportedly decided nevertheless to approve details of the plan that had been presented to him.

Under the plan submitted, options included heating bars of material for 300 days, producing plutonium but of an inferior quality to military fuel to produce 600 kilogrammes to make 75 bombs of low quality.

Under a second option, the reactor would be activated to its maximum power for two months to produce 120 kilogrammes of material for 15 nuclear bombs.

All would have been done in secret to coincide with a fake accident at the reactor - an incident that would justify to the international community why its normal activities had stopped.

The memorandum is in marked contrast to the many official pronouncements by the Iranian government that it only intends to use nuclear material for peaceful purposes.

Strike on Syria reactor a joint spy victory: CIA

Tue Sep 16, 2008 4:44pm EDT

By Randall Mikkelsen

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The destruction of a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor last year was the result of an intelligence collaboration that included a "foreign partner" who first identified the facility's purpose, CIA Director Gen. Michael Hayden said on Tuesday.

The reactor at the desert outpost of Al-Kibar was flattened in an air strike on September 6, 2007 that senior U.S. intelligence officials have said was carried out by Israel on its own initiative.

"Our foreign partnerships ... were critical to the final outcome," Hayden said in a speech for delivery to the World Affairs Council of Los Angeles.

A U.S. intelligence official declined to specify the partner Hayden referred to or to say whether it was Israel. He said there have been no signs that Syria was trying to replace the destroyed reactor.

Israel has never given an account of the strike or formally confirmed that it took place and some Israeli officials have quietly voiced dismay at U.S. disclosures about the strike.

"We were able last year to spoil a big secret, a project that could have provided Syria with plutonium for nuclear weapons," Hayden said.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has denied U.S. allegations that his government pursued nuclear weapons with the help of North Korea.

Hayden said a report from the unnamed foreign partner first identified the facility as a reactor similar to one in North Korea, although U.S. intelligence had identified it as suspicious.

"When pipes for a massive cooling system were laid out to the Euphrates River in the spring of 2007, there would have been little doubt this was a nuclear reactor," Hayden said.

"We would have known it was North Korean, too, given the quantity and variety of intelligence reports on nuclear ties between Pyongyang and Damascus."

[deletia]



Director's Remarks at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council

Remarks by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden
at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council
(as prepared for delivery)

September 16, 2008

Posted: Sep 16, 2008 03:21 PM

Last Updated: Sep 16, 2008 03:22 PM

Last Reviewed: Sep 16, 2008 03:21 PM

[EXCERPT]

Pyongyang's WMD programs present a double threat. As part of North Korea's arsenal, they endanger the peace and stability of northeastern Asia. As a source of global proliferation, they have been without equal since a joint operation with our British partners took down A.Q. Khan earlier this decade. Like Khan, whose network had been the world's most dangerous black market supplier of nuclear technology, North Korea asks only two things of its customers: first, can they pay, and second, can they keep a secret.

Thanks to some outstanding intelligence work, we were able last year to spoil a big secret, a project that could have provided Syria with plutonium for nuclear weapons. I'd like to cover it here because it's an excellent example of how CIA and our Community colleagues attack the problem of nuclear proliferation.

It was reported in the press last April, and you're probably familiar with its outlines. We knew that North Korea and Syria had been cooperating since the late 1990s in the nuclear field. The depth of that relationship was revealed in the spring of last year, when we identified a nuclear reactor at Al-Kibar in the eastern desert of Syria. It was similar to the one at Yongbyon in North Korea, but with its outer structure heavily disguised.

The situation became critical late last summer, when we judged the facility could be nearing operation. The Al-Kibar reactor was destroyed the morning of 6 September 2007. The Syrians immediately cleared away the rubble and every trace of the building, stonewalling the IAEA when asked to explain. Their cover-up only underlined the intense secrecy of this project and the danger it had posed to a volatile region.

I want to focus briefly on two important aspects of this intelligence effort: the quality of tradecraft, in terms of collection and analysis, and the value of collaboration, both with colleagues in our government and with foreign services.

More than anything else, our work was a classic example of multidisciplinary, blue-collar analysis. We had a group of officers who started working overtime on this issue in April 2007 and kept at it for months. Virtually every form of intelligence—imagery, signals, human source, you name it—informed their assessments, so that they were never completely dependent on any single channel.

For instance, a report from a foreign partner initially identified the structure at Al-Kibar as a nuclear reactor similar to one in North Korea. But even without that piece of the puzzle, it wouldn't have been long before we reached the same conclusion. We had previously identified the facility on imagery as a suspicious target. When pipes for a massive cooling system were laid out to the Euphrates River in the spring of 2007, there would have been little doubt this was a nuclear reactor. We would have known it was North Korean, too, given the quantity and variety of intelligence reports on nuclear ties between Pyongyang and Damascus.

Still, our analysts were open to alternative possibilities at every juncture. Early on, they applied a methodology that laid out the inconsistencies in each competing hypothesis. They carefully examined whether the building might be for another purpose, like a conventional power plant, or a water treatment facility. In each case, the arguments simply didn't add up. The reactor hypothesis was the most difficult to refute with the available evidence.

We then stepped back and tried to turn the basic premise on its head: OK, we've got a nuclear reactor in Syria built with North Korean help, but is it necessarily for a Syrian program? Might it have been built by North Korea for its own use, to secretly replace the Yongbyon reactor they had pledged to shut down? We took that hypothesis and worked very hard on it, but the mainstream theory held sway.

Finally, this was a success reached through close collaboration across agencies, departments, and governments. Dedicated officers at CIA, DIA, the Department of Energy, the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and NSA came together as a team, each bringing a specific expertise to the table. And this was an intelligence problem that required a wide range of knowledge. I already mentioned all the different forms of collection, but it also drew from a remarkable diversity of analytic firepower—everyone from nuclear technology and weapons experts to political and leadership analysts.

Our foreign partnerships too were critical to the final outcome. These relationships aren't a matter of occasionally passing along a report that may or may not be useful. They're more akin to working together on a complex equation over a long period. Each tries to solve a variable that in turn helps a partner solve another, and so on until we've cracked the case. That's what good intelligence is all about.

I hope my remarks today have given you a better idea of how CIA is meeting the counterproliferation challenge. The Intelligence Community as a whole has taken great strides since the pre-war NIE on Iraq to strengthen our tradecraft, and I think it shows with both the Iran estimate and the Al-Kibar effort. The rigor of our sourcing, the emphasis on alternative analysis, and the integration of our expertise with those of our colleagues have never been greater.

No reply from Syria to IAEA over suspect sites: diplomat

VIENNA, Sept 19 (AFP)

Sep 19, 2008

Syria has yet to reply to a request from the UN atomic watchdog to let it inspect three or four sites allegedly involved in clandestine nuclear activities, diplomatic sources said Friday.

In June, Syria allowed a three-member team from the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit Al-Kibar in a remote desert area of northeastern Syria on the Euphrates River.

The United States claims the site, razed to the ground by Israeli planes in September 2007, was a nuclear facility built with North Korean help and was close to becoming operational.

But Syria has since ruled out a follow-up trip, saying it had agreed to one visit only.

At the time, diplomats had said the nuclear watchdog was also interested in two or three other sites, allegedly used to store the debris of the destroyed building.

A diplomat close to the IAEA told AFP on Friday that an official request by the IAEA to visit "three or four other sites" had so far gone unanswered by Damascus.

The request was apparently made after the IAEA received new information, probably from western secret services, the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The findings of the initial visit, which was led by the nuclear watchdog's deputy director general Olli Heinonen, have still to be evaluated.

So the Syrian dossier is not officially on the agenda of next week's meeting of the IAEA's 35-member board.

But IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei is expected to talk about Syria in his opening address to the assembly on Monday, diplomats said.

And the dossier could be discussed in greater detail at the IAEA's next board meeting in November, by which time the findings of the first trip might be known, diplomats added.

<http://www.amny.com/news/nationworld/wire/sns-ap-eu-nuclear-syria,0,6589748.story>

Diplomats say initial probe of alleged Syrian secret nuclear site comes up empty

By GEORGE JAHN | Associated Press Writer

4:38 PM EDT, September 20, 2008

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Partial results of samples from a Syrian site bombed by Israel show nothing to back up U.S. assertions that the target was a secret nuclear reactor, diplomats said Saturday.

The diplomats cautioned that the results from the International Atomic Energy Agency probe are preliminary because findings of more detailed environmental tests are still outstanding.

Still, two of the three who spoke to The Associated Press said that IAEA officials did not expect the results from the samples still being tested to strongly contradict the first results.

All three diplomats were informed of the status of the IAEA probe but demanded anonymity because their information was confidential.

Washington says that the Al Kibar site that Israel destroyed last year was a near-finished plutonium-producing reactor built with North Korean help, and that Damascus continues to hide linked facilities. Syria denies that.

While allowing a small IAEA team to visit the bombed structure in a remote part of the Syrian desert earlier this year, Damascus subsequently turned down an agency request to revisit that and other suspect sites. That, and no evidence of a nuclear program from the rest of the samples, could spell the end of the investigation into the U.S. allegations.

IAEA inspectors looking for unreported nuclear activity usually test for radioactivity. But in this case, their mission was more difficult.

According to intelligence given to the Vienna-based agency by the U.S., Israel and a third, unidentified country, the alleged reactor was not yet completed at the time of the Sept. 6, 2007, bombing. That meant no nuclear material would have been present.

So, the inspectors looked for minute quantities of graphite, which is used as a cooling element in the type of North Korean prototype that was allegedly being built. Such a reactor contains hundreds of tons of graphite, and any major explosion would have sent dust over the immediate area.

But — if they were interested in a cover-up — the Syrians would have scoured the region to bury, wash away and otherwise remove any such traces. Long before the time of the June IAEA visit to the site, it had been encased in concrete that served as the foundation of a new building erected by the Syrians.

Former U.N. nuclear inspector David Albright, whose Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security closely tracks suspect secret proliferators, said another possibility was that the Israeli bombs did not penetrate deeply enough into the building to disperse the graphite.

While it is possible that none of the samples will yield traces of graphite, Albright said it was important to wait for the second batch of results, which "are more sensitive and can pick up smaller quantities."

Beyond Al Kibar, the agency is also interested in going to three other locations suspected of harboring other secret nuclear activities — sites the Syrians insist are off limits because opening them up would expose military secrets.

More broadly, IAEA experts want to use a follow-up visit to put questions to Syrian officials based on intelligence they have been given outlining years of extensive cooperation between the Syrians and teams of visiting North Korean nuclear officials.

North Korea exploded a nuclear device in 2006. It is believed by experts to have produced enough weapons-grade plutonium to make as many as 10 nuclear bombs before agreeing to dismantle its weapons program early last year. It recently threatened to restart its nuclear reactor because of alleged U.S. failure to fulfill obligations under an international disarmament-for-aid deal.

Diplomats say Syria is strenuously denying any concerted North Korean presence in the country — despite U.S. intelligence alleging that the building bombed was a reactor of the type only built by the communist state.

They said Syrian officials described meetings between nuclear officials from Pyongyang and their Syrian counterparts as occasional and informal.

UN: Syria may have buried nuclear traces

Reuters

Published: 09.21.08, 20:47 / Israel News

IAEA investigators suspect Damascus may have ordered traces of alleged reactor bulldozed, covered with concrete after Israel bombed site in order to hide evidence of nuclear activity – causing UN probe to come up empty-handed

UN investigators believe Syria may have buried under concrete traces of what Washington suspects was a covert nuclear reactor at a site bombed by Israel a year ago, diplomats said on Sunday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency began probing Syria in April based on US Intelligence suggesting a remote desert complex targeted by Israel was a reactor almost completed with North Korean help and designed to make plutonium for atom bombs.

Satellite pictures indicated Syria swiftly bulldozed the area, removed debris and erected a new building in a possible cover-up, US nuclear analysts say.

Syria has denied hiding nuclear activity from the UN watchdog and said the bombed site at al-Kibar was an ordinary military building. It gave IAEA inspectors access in June.

Partial results of environmental swipe samples showed no traces of carbon or maraging steel, an especially strong alloy of the metal, that would have indicated a graphite reactor, diplomats familiar with the inquiry told Reuters.

The diplomats said Syria has rebuffed IAEA requests to revisit al-Kibar and examine three military sites seen as interlinked, citing grounds of national security.

Full test results from the June mission may not be available until November and may not prove conclusive either, they said.

US intelligence indicated the reactor had not begun to process material before Israel's attack, so there would have been no radioactive material to detect.

"This doesn't mean there was nothing there, just that the inspectors did not (or could not) search the right places," said a senior Vienna diplomat versed in the matter.

"Syria laid a big slab of concrete over it (ground where the alleged reactor stood) after digging a hole. Ideally the IAEA should be able to examine the chunks of debris but the feeling is that the Syrians may have dumped all of it down the hole.

Inconclusive results

IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei, opening a regular meeting of the agency's 25-nation board of governors on Monday, was expected to say the Syria inquiry remained inconclusive and inspectors needed more cooperation from Damascus.

Unlike Iran's disputed nuclear work, Syria was not on the board's official agenda because inspectors, lacking substantive findings, submitted no written report for debate.

Still, the United States and Western allies were expected to call in statements for Syrian transparency and full cooperation.

ElBaradei has rebuked the United States and Israel for not alerting the IAEA of their suspicions before the bombing, saying a "shoot first and asking questions later" approach would make it much harder for the UN watchdog to establish the truth.

A European diplomat said Syria's tough posture and slowness reacting to requests for access reminded some of ally Iran's stonewalling of IAEA probes into whether Tehran has tried to adapt explosives and missile cones for nuclear weapons.



Statements of the Director General
22 September 2008 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

**Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei**

Our agenda for this meeting covers a broad range of Agency activities. I will limit my remarks to a few key areas.

[deletia]

Implementation of Safeguards in the Syrian Arab Republic

In April this year, the Agency received information claiming that an installation destroyed by Israel in September 2007 at Al Kibar in Syria was a nuclear reactor. The Syrian authorities have repeatedly stated that the alleged site was not involved in any nuclear activities.

With Syria's cooperation, the Agency was able to visit Al Kibar in June 2008. Samples taken from the site are still being analysed and evaluated by the Agency, but so far we have found no indication of any nuclear material.

In order to assess the veracity of information available to the Agency, we asked the Syrian authorities in July to provide access to additional information and locations. Syria has not yet responded to this request but has indicated that any further developments would depend on the results of the samples taken during the first visit.

I trust that Syria will show maximum cooperation and transparency and provide all the information needed by the Agency to complete its assessment.

[deletia]

Contact man's murder delays Syria nuclear probe: IAEA

17 hours ago [Accessed 2008-09-26T12:10Z]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN atomic watchdog's probe into alleged illicit nuclear work in Syria has been delayed because the agency's contact man in Syria was murdered, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei revealed Thursday.

"The reason that Syria has been late in providing additional information (is) that our interlocutor has been assassinated in Syria," ElBaradei told a closed-door session of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-member board. A recording of his remarks was obtained by AFP.

He did not provide any further details about the identity of the man or circumstances of the assassination.

But according to Arab media reports last month, a brigadier general thought to be the Syrian regime's liaison with Hezbollah in Lebanon was assassinated.

The Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat said the victim was a senior Syrian officer "in charge of sensitive files and closely linked to the Syrian top brass."

Al-Bawaba, an Arab news website, named the officer as Mohammed Sleiman, saying he was "Syria's liaison officer with Lebanon's Hezbollah movement."

[Sourcebook note: See sourcebook entries for 2008-08-03 and 2008-08-11 concerning Mohammed Suleiman.]

The Lebanese anti-Syrian daily al-Mustaqbal quoted a Syrian news site as saying Sleiman was the head of security at the presidential palace in Damascus and President Bashar al-Assad's "right-hand man."

ElBaradei's revelation came on the fourth and final day of the IAEA board meeting, where Syria was the final matter of debate.

During the discussions, Western countries, and the United States and Australia in particular, complained that Syria was dragging its feet in the IAEA investigation.

Washington claims that Damascus had been building a clandestine nuclear facility at Al-Kibar, a remote desert area of northeastern Syria on the Euphrates River, until it was bombed by Israeli planes in September 2007.

Syria has denied the allegations as "ridiculous," saying the edifice was simply a disused military building.

While Syria allowed a three-member IAEA team to visit the site in June, it has since refused any follow-up trips.

ElBaradei said the IAEA was still evaluating samples taken from the site, but that inspectors had found "no indication" so far of any nuclear material.

He also said that Syria had not yet responded to IAEA requests for additional access to individuals, sites and information.

During the debate, the US envoy to the IAEA, Gregory Schulte, called for "a comprehensive report" by agency inspectors in time for the next board meeting in November.

The report should "detail, in writing, the status of the investigation in Syria and Syria's cooperation with that investigation," Schulte said.

ElBaradei replied that a report would be submitted as soon as possible.

"We have not provided a report and we will provide a report as and when we have enough facts assessment to provide a report," he said.

"Our decision on the report will be based, not on politics, but on when we are ready with assessment and facting (sic)," ElBaradei said.

He insisted that he was not trying to be evasive.

"I'm just telling you how difficult, how complex the situation has become, particularly after the evidence has been eliminated and if we were not to find nuclear material."

Washington claims the facility was being built with North Korean help and resembled Pyongyang's Soviet-type nuclear reactor at Yongbyon used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

US officials allege that Damascus undertook extensive efforts to clean up the site after it was bombed and has since constructed a large building where the reactor stood.

ElBaradei said the cooperation shown by Syria so far was "good" and criticised the Israeli decision to bomb the site.

"I am, as I said last time, quite concerned that with the gratuitous use of force before we have been able to get access to the evidence and once the evidence has been eliminated, it is becoming quite difficult for us to establish the facts," he said.

"We are in a very awkward situation, because the corpse has gone, and we are now at a stage when we have to reconstruct a facility that is not there," he said.

Assad aide killing hurts U.N. probe in Syria: diplomats

Thu Sep 25, 2008 3:10pm EDT

By Mark Heinrich and Sylvia Westall

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - An International Atomic Energy Agency inquiry into Syria's nuclear activity has been set back by the August assassination of the IAEA's main Syrian contact, the U.N. watchdog's chief said on Thursday.

Diplomats familiar with the matter identified the official as Brigadier General Mohammad Suleiman, 49, a senior security adviser to President Bashar al-Assad. A sniper shot him dead on a Mediterranean beach, Syrian opposition websites said.

"The assassination of the IAEA's main interlocutor has made our inquiry more difficult," agency Director Mohamed ElBaradei said during a closed-door meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation governing board on the status of the Syria investigation.

ElBaradei did not identify the interlocutor. But a senior diplomat with knowledge of the inquiry said it was Suleiman who had escorted U.N. inspectors during their first and so only investigative visit to Syria in June.

"His murder made the IAEA's job that much harder. Suleiman knew what was what and had the ability to deliver things," the diplomat said, alluding to access and answers to questions.

Israeli media said Suleiman was a central figure in an alleged secret nuclear program the United States accused Syria of pursuing after Israeli warplanes destroyed a desert complex that Washington said was a nascent plutonium-producing reactor.

Damascus did not comment. But officials have said the site was only an ordinary military building and accused the United States of doctoring intelligence including satellite photos suggesting Syria had hidden nuclear activity from the IAEA.

The IAEA, whose six-year effort to resolve questions about Iran's secretive nuclear activity has reached an impasse, began probing Syria in May after Washington forwarded intelligence suggesting that the site targeted by Israel was an almost-completed reactor built with North Korean expertise.

Earlier, U.S. Ambassador Gregory Schulte urged ElBaradei to give a full written report on an inquiry into allegations Syria had a covert program to produce bomb-grade plutonium.

[deletia]

ElBaradei said the first set of environmental swipe samples taken at the bombed site in June turned up no indications of nuclear material. Full results were due in 2-3 weeks.

Syrian Ambassador Badi Khattab denied Damascus had been obstructing IAEA access or dodging questions.

"It took us less than a month to invite inspectors to the site after the first request came," he said in an interview.

"We reached an understanding with the IAEA that they would take samples at al-Kibar and then once they delivered to us the final analysis, we will discuss further developments," he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/27/AR2008092701836.html>

U.S. Envoy to Travel to N. Korea for Nuclear Talks

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, September 27, 2008; 3:12 PM

A top U.S. envoy is planning to travel to North Korea shortly in a last-ditch effort to salvage a faltering accord to end Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs, sources said Saturday.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill is seeking to arrange the rare visit in the wake of North Korea's statement last week that it plans to begin reprocessing spent fuel rods into the raw material needed for nuclear weapons. The announcement was a setback for the Bush administration's efforts to claim progress in restraining North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack did not respond to a request for comment on Hill's travel plans. During meetings at the United Nations last week, Hill and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with key officials from countries involved in the six-nation negotiating group on North Korea's weapons.

"We all are sending strong messages to the North Koreans that they should stop any reversals that they are carrying out," Rice told Reuters in an interview on Friday.

Hill visited North Korea in June and last December, after a long period in which U.S. officials were barred from substantive bilateral contacts with North Korean officials.

With great fanfare in June, North Korea blew up the cooling tower attached to its nuclear reactor in Yongbyon as a way of signaling its commitment to ending its weapons programs. North Korea also provided a declaration on the extent of its plutonium production, a key demand of the United States.

In the preceding eight months, North Korea had also taken steps to disable key parts of the reactor and related facilities, which U.S. officials had claimed would take as long as a year to restart.

But North Korea appears able to more quickly begin the reprocessing process -- possibly in a matter of weeks. This would allow it to add to its stockpile of nearly 40 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium, enough for at least a half dozen weapons.

The talks have faltered because North Korea has refused to accept U.S. proposals for verifying its declaration and answering questions about a possible separate uranium-based program and North Korea's links to a Syrian reactor destroyed last year by Israel. Because of the dispute, Bush has not followed through on a pledge to remove North Korea from the State Department list of state sponsors of terror, infuriating Pyongyang.

Some officials argue that the initial verification plan was too harsh and spooked North Korea. Others say North Korea never seriously sought to negotiate an alternative, with its counterproposal failing to meet the bare minimum for verification, such as allowing environmental sampling.

Under one idea being considered by Hill and his aides -- though not yet approved by more senior officials -- North Korea would give China, the host of the talks, a plan that include sampling, access to

key sites and other provisions sought by the United States. Bush would then provisionally delist North Korea from the terror list, and after that China would announce North Korean acceptance of the verification plan. This would allow North Korea to save face and claim that the delisting occurred before the verification plan was in place.

"We have to have a verification protocol that is going to give us confidence that we are able to verify the declaration and that we're able to answer certain unresolved questions," Rice told Reuters.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2008

Transcript: Syria's Walid Moallem

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem talked to The Wall Street Journal's Jay Solomon Monday [2008-09-29] in New York.

[EXCERPT]

WSJ: What's Syria's view on Israel's attack last September on an alleged nuclear reactor?

Mr. Moallem: The American side admits they were collecting information, supplied by a third country in the Middle East... Israel... to attack this location, claiming it's a nuclear reactor, which is totally untrue. We agreed with the...IAEA. They sent their observers to this location. They took biological samples, and we are waiting for them to give us their report on the result. **The important issue is that this is a military location, not a nuclear location.**

At the same time, we want to tell the American side we would not repeat their experience and lies on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction before the war in Iraq. You can't be partners in an aggression against a target in a sovereign country, and you're a member of this Agency. And after destroying this target you go to the Agency and say this is a nuclear target. You should have done this before.

Clash looms as Syria bids for seat on IAEA panel

Tue 30 Sep 2008, 15:28 GMT

By Mark Heinrich

(Adds Afghan envoy, paragraphs 10-11)

VIENNA, Sept 30 (Reuters) - Syria said on Tuesday it would pursue its bid for a seat on the U.N. nuclear watchdog's governing body despite U.S.-led opposition to Damascus, which is under investigation for alleged covert atomic work.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been investigating Syria since May over U.S. intelligence allegations that it almost built a secret, plutonium-producing reactor before Israel destroyed the site in an air strike a year ago.

Damascus has denied having a secret nuclear programme and the IAEA said last week preliminary findings from an inspectors' visit to the site in June showed no evidence of one.

Syria is competing with U.S. ally Afghanistan for the nomination to a seat on the IAEA's 35-country Board of Governors reserved for a representative of the Middle East and South Asian group in the IAEA's assembly of 145 member states.

Known as MESA, the group must agree on one candidate by consensus to win automatic approval by the assembly, whose annual General Conference opened in Vienna on Monday.

Arab diplomats said Afghanistan was clinging to its candidacy with U.S. encouragement, despite scant support within MESA, while Syria had broad backing within the group, where fellow Arab League countries predominate.

If MESA cannot settle on a single candidate, the assembly will hold a vote later this week on both candidates, unprecedented and highly divisive in a body that prides itself on consensus. The winner would be chosen by a simple majority.

NO REASON TO DROP OUT

Mohammad Badi Khattab, Syria's ambassador to the IAEA, said Damascus saw no reason to drop out because it had official Arab League support and Afghanistan was isolated in MESA.

"The matter is not yet settled. Syria and Afghanistan are still in the race. But nobody in MESA backs Afghanistan, they are alone," Khattab told Reuters.

Afghanistan's IAEA envoy told Reuters Kabul would not back out because it could count on majority backing in the assembly.

"We are the better candidate. We'll represent Islamic interests and improve understanding between the Islamic world and the West, and being on the board will contribute to the progress of democracy in Afghanistan," said Wahid Monawar.

A senior Western diplomat said consultations showed some 89 members of the assembly would oppose Syria in a vote, including all European Union members, Japan, Canada, Australia and some African, Asian and Latin American states.

The diplomat said Syria's backing in MESA was not as solid as it seemed and that some in the group would turn against Damascus in a secret ballot.

"Some who back Syria publicly won't do it privately."

A second Western diplomat said: "A matter of principle is at stake here -- we can't have countries on this (policy-making) board who are not IAEA members in good standing."

Arab diplomats said Syria was unlikely to back out because its candidacy was endorsed at an Arab League summit in March.

"The Americans lobbied almost every other Arab country that was not on the board, mainly (pro-Western) Gulf countries, to go for the seat but failed," one Arab diplomat said.

"Why block Syria? There is no proven proliferation problem there. Libya was on the board for a year recently even though it remained under IAEA investigation."

Libya renounced an illicit atomic bomb programme in 2003 and an IAEA report this month certified that the North African state had indeed eliminated its nuclear weapons capacity.

People of the Year: Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi: Rehabilitating the IDF

By YAAKOV KATZ

Sep 25, 2008 9:36 | Updated Oct 1, 2008 12:12

In the almost two years since he became chief of General Staff, the public has yet to really get to know Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi. Unlike his predecessor Dan Halutz, Ashkenazi keeps his distance from the media and even after 19 months on the job has yet to give a single interview.

[deletia]

While his public image is of a gruff infantry soldier, Ashkenazi is an intelligent tactician and strategist. It was his decision, for example, to clamp a complete media blackout on last September's air strike against what turned out to be a Syrian nuclear reactor. His decision, defense officials admit today, spared the country an unnecessary war.

[deletia]

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5h2kzrZLoYJLwluVh1Jzra8ZfnrWA>

Syria, Afghanistan battle for seat on IAEA board

3 hours ago [*Accessed 2008-10-01T19:45Z*]

VIENNA (AFP) — Despite opposition from the West and the United States in particular, Syria appears determined to pursue its bid for a seat on the UN atomic watchdog's board, now that Iran is officially out of the running.

But in a looming clash at the International Atomic Energy Agency's general conference here this week, Afghanistan -- a US ally -- also announced its candidature on Wednesday.

Diplomats said Kabul enjoys the support of most of the IAEA's 145 member countries.

The matter comes up for discussion on Friday and could be forced to a vote.

Members of the IAEA's 35-strong board of governors are designated and elected each year by the body's highest policy-making body, the General Conference.

Decisions are traditionally adopted by consensus, but if no consensus is possible, it goes to a vote.

A seat has become free for the so-called Middle East and South Asia (MESA) group with the expiry of Pakistan's one-year term.

Iran had also been seen as a potential candidate, but it pulled out in favour of its staunch regional ally Syria.

If MESA cannot agree on a single country, it will be up to the general conference to vote between the different candidates.

For the US and others, however, Syria would be unacceptable because of current allegations it was building a covert nuclear facility at a remote desert site called Al-Kibar until it was destroyed by Israeli bombs in September 2007.

Damascus has yet to clear up the allegations, which it has simply dismissed as "ridiculous".

Apart from allowing IAEA experts to inspect the suspect site in a one-off visit in June, Syria has not undertaken any further action to actively disprove the accusations.

"Having Syria on the board would be like having a suspected arsonist oversee the fire brigade," one conference participant told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Syria, for its part, refuses to withdraw its candidacy, in spite of US-led opposition, saying it has the support of the Arab League.

But Afghanistan had the wider backing of other Islamic countries, a diplomat close to the IAEA said.

"In the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference), you can go through the list and you'll see the majority of people would vote for Afghanistan," the diplomat said.

"Albania is an Islamic country, so is Azerbaijan. There are countries in Africa that are Islamic and members of OIC that would certainly support Afghanistan, because we are an Islamic republic with a better, progressive constitution," the diplomat said.

The hope was that "by Friday, Syria will come to an understanding" and back down, the diplomat continued.

"It's simple maths. If 89 are for Afghanistan, out of a total 145, that's 56 countries there for Syria."

The diplomat said Afghanistan had approached numerous delegations and had already received great many letters of support from various capitals.

A conference participant, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said Syria was running into a great deal of resistance.

"The Syrian ambassador is frantically canvassing IAEA members -- and learning that he will lose," the participant said.

Kabul's permanent representative to the IAEA, Wahid Monawar, told AFP that he thought the time was right for Afghanistan to take a seat on the board.

"We believe that as a progressive nation, and a developing nation (we will) bring a better understanding of Islamic countries, the Islamic understanding, to the West and articulate the issues that need to be articulated," Monawar said.

"We believe this opportunity is right, the year is right. It's an opportunity for the Afghan people to benefit from the technology that is afforded by the agency."

Report: Damascus renews nuclear activity

Roe Nahmias

Published: **10.02.08**, 11:06 / Israel News

Asharq Al-Awsat quotes Israeli officials as saying Damascus, with North Korea's help, constructing military nuclear plants according to Iranian model. 'Nuclear Syria red line that must not be crossed,' one source says

Israeli security officials have accused Syria of resuming the construction of nuclear facilities in its territory for military purposes, the London-based Arabic-language newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat reported Thursday.

In a briefing to reporters on Wednesday, Israeli military sources said the country would not allow a repeat of the Iranian model in Syria and would not wait for Damascus to complete the construction of a nuclear reactor before using all means at its disposal to stop the program.

According to the report, following last year's bombing of the alleged Syrian nuclear facility near Dir A-Zur, Damascus resumed the construction of a number of new plants. The Israeli military sources were quoted as saying that the Syrians are following the Iranian nuclear model, meaning the simultaneous construction of a number of nuclear facilities in different locations.

The sources said North Korea was behind the project, adding that experts from Pyongyang visited Syria last month to begin planning the project.

"The past year has seen three incidents indicating that Syria's nuclear armament is a red line that must not be crossed," Asharq Al-Awsat quoted one of the Israeli officials, who was apparently referring to the bombing at Dir A-Zur, the assassination of Syrian President Bashar Assad's top security advisor Brigadier General Mohammed Suleiman and Saturday's deadly car bomb explosion near a Syrian intelligence facility.

Israel believes General Suleiman was in charge of Syria's nuclear program and the cooperation with North Korea. The military officials also alluded to the possibility that Israel was operating inside Syria. Israel has never admitted to bombing the nuclear facility in Dir A-Zur.

According to one report, among those killed in Saturday's car bomb attack near Damascus was Brig.-Gen. George Gharbi, another top Syrian military official involved in the country's nuclear program, and his son, who held the rank of lieutenant.

Another report said the senior officer killed in the blast was Abed el-Karim Abbas, deputy head of the Palestine Division in Syrian intelligence.

The Italian news agency AKI quoted Syrian opposition figures as saying that Abbas was among the officers interrogated over the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Asharq Al-Awsat further quoted western officials in Israel as saying that the car bomb attack has heightened tensions between Jerusalem and Damascus. Syria has not directly accused Israel of involvement in the attack, but hinted that the 'terrorists' came from abroad.

The western sources told the newspaper that Israel was looking to damage Syria's relations with a number of European countries.

Syria Reportedly Renews Its Nuclear Pursuits

Thursday, **October 02, 2008**

By Julie Stahl

Jerusalem (CNSNews.com) – Israel would not allow a nuclear-armed Syria any more than it would a nuclear-armed Iran, an Israeli official said on Thursday.

The senior Israeli official spoke following reports that Damascus has restarted its nuclear program, apparently undeterred by a reported Israeli air strike on a nuclear facility deep inside Syria a year ago.

The Arabic Asharq Alawsat quoted unnamed Israeli military sources on Thursday as saying that Syria had patterned its renewed program on Iran's model of building a number of facilities throughout the country.

According to the London-based newspaper, the new facilities are being built with North Korean backing, just as the bombed reactor had been. **And a group of Iranian experts joined the endeavor last month in Syria, reports said.**

The sources said three separate events proved that Israel would not tolerate a nuclear- armed Syria.

They named the reported bombing of the first reactor; the assassination of a top Syrian official Brig-Gen. Muhammad Suleiman in August, who was believed to be responsible for Syria's nuclear program; and a car bomb explosion in Damascus last weekend in which another senior official involved in the nuclear program was reported to be among the fatalities.

The article appeared on the front page of the Saudi-owned newspaper. One analyst said whether the report is true or not, the Saudis wanted to deliver a message to Syria, with whom tensions have been high for years because of Syria's role in Lebanon and close ties with Iran.

The Israeli army would not respond to the report, saying that it does not comment on reports that quote anonymous Israeli sources.

The Israeli government would not comment on the report, either. But a senior Israeli official said that Israel is not likely to allow a nuclear Syria.

“We don't appreciate Iran's nuclear race. It's not reasonable to believe we would allow Syria to provide itself with nuclear weapons,” said the official who asked not to be named.

Dr. Ephraim Asculai, from the Tel-Aviv based Institute for National Security Studies, said that while the article didn't contain good references and it seemed out of character for Israeli military sources to be quoted by the paper, it was still plausible that Syria was developing a nuclear program.

“I think it is possible,” said Asculai, who worked for more than 40 years at the Israel Atomic Energy Commission and a number of years with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

Asculai told CNSNews.com he is not certain that Syria would try to build a reactor but they could go the other route of enriching uranium, which is “easier to hide.” With 25 kilos (about 55 pounds) of enriched uranium, it is possible to construct a bomb, he said.

According to Asculai, no one knows for sure if North Korea is working to enrich uranium but it is highly likely that they are and they could be helping Syria. Tehran (which has strategic alliances with Damascus) could also be helping Syria, he said.

Last week, the U.S. called for a full report on the allegations that Syria had been building an undeclared nuclear facility, reports said.

IAEA inspectors visited the site in June and took soil samples for analysis, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said. So far they have not found any indication of nuclear material, he said.

Syria has denied that it was building a nuclear facility and said the bombed site was a military installation. It has refused subsequent visits to the site by the IAEA.

Washington says that North Korea was helping to build the site, which resembled its reactor, which was used to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Syria rejects opening military sites to atom probe

By Mark Heinrich

Fri 3 Oct 2008, 10:07 GMT

VIENNA, Oct 3 (Reuters) - Syria said on Friday it was cooperating fully with a U.N. inquiry into its nuclear activity but would not go as far as opening up military sites because this would undermine its national security.

Diplomats say the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has asked to examine several Syrian military installations, but the comments from Damascus clearly ruled this out.

The Vienna-based U.N. nuclear watchdog has been probing Syria since May over U.S. intelligence allegations that it almost built a secret, plutonium-producing reactor before Israel destroyed the site in an air strike a year ago.

Syria -- an ally of Iran, which is the subject of a much longer-running, and now stalled, IAEA investigation -- has denied having a secret nuclear programme.

The IAEA said last week that preliminary findings from test samples taken by inspectors on a visit granted by Damascus to the desert site in June showed no evidence of one. Syria says all that was there was a disused military building.

Western countries accused Syria at the annual meeting of the IAEA's 145-nation assembly this week of denying the IAEA full access to documentation, officials and sites that they said was needed to get to the bottom of the allegations.

IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei credited Syrian cooperation so far but said he looked for Damascus to show "maximum transparency" and provide all information needed for the agency to draw conclusions.

NATIONAL SECURITY

"We would like to underline that my government is cooperating with the agency in full transparency and will follow suit all along the way," Ibrahim Othman, Syria's Atomic Energy Commission director, told the IAEA's assembly on Friday.

"However, this cooperation will not in any way come at the expense of exposing our military sites or causing a threat to our national security," said Othman.

Diplomats close to the IAEA have said Syria has ignored agency requests to check three military installations believed linked to the alleged reactor site.

"We regret statements by some countries calling on us to show more transparency. I would like you here to recall what (ElBaradei) said, namely that Syria has cooperated and complied with implementation of the measures agreed to by the agency."

Othman also urged the gathering to back Syria's candidacy for a two-year seat on the IAEA's 35-nation, policymaking Board of Governors, strongly opposed by Western nations since Damascus is under investigation over proliferation concerns.

He said Syria played a "positive role" during an earlier tenure on the board and had a record of "fruitful cooperation" with the IAEA in peaceful applications of nuclear know-how. Syria's only declared nuclear site is an older research reactor.

Syria is competing with U.S. ally Afghanistan for the nomination to a seat on the board reserved for a representative of the Middle East and South Asian (MESA) group in the assembly.

Diplomats said MESA had been unable to come to the usual consensus on one candidate and the assembly therefore was expected to vote on both candidates later on Friday -- a rare and highly divisive step in a body that prides itself on consensus.

The winner would be chosen by a simple majority.

Western diplomats said they had a majority for Afghanistan, including all European Union members, Japan, Canada, Australia and some African, Asian and Latin American countries. (Editing by Mark Trevelyan)

Under Western pressure, Syria drops bid for IAEA board – Summary

Posted : **Fri, 03 Oct 2008** 15:36:33 GMT

Author : DPA

Vienna - Facing Western opposition, Syria dropped its bid for a rotating seat on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board Friday, according to diplomats. The United States and other Western nations opposed board membership for the Middle Eastern nation as it is alleged to have built a secret nuclear reactor with North Korean help.

Instead of Syria, rival candidate Afghanistan was set to take a seat on the 35-member steering committee of the IAEA after the agency's general conference officially adopts the decision later on Friday.

Diplomats said Afghanistan would likely have won the vote for the board membership, although a number of developing countries would have supported Syria, as the nuclear allegations have not yet been proven

"This is a clear victory for the credibility of the IAEA," a senior Western diplomat said. "It would have been absurd to have on the board a country that is under investigation for suspended nuclear activities."

Syria's last-minute backing down prevented a split among agency members, who are used to adopting board candidates without a vote.

In April, Washington provided the Vienna-based agency with intelligence indicating Damascus was close to completing a reactor that was bombed by the Israeli air force last year.

A first visit of IAEA inspectors to the alleged site in the Syrian desert yielded inconclusive results.

Damascus maintains the site was a conventional military installation.

Western nations have criticized Syria for not having allowed further visits by inspectors, and for banning access to additional sites.

"We would like to underline that my government is cooperating with the agency and we will follow suit all along the way," Ibrahim Othman, director general of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission, told the general conference earlier on Friday.

"However, this cooperation will not be in any way at the expense of disclosing our military sites or causing a threat to our national security," he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/04/AR2008100400646.html>

N.Korea has helped arm 6 Mideast nations: Israel

By Mark Heinrich

Saturday, **October 4, 2008**; 7:18 AM

VIENNA (Reuters) - Israel accused North Korea on Saturday of providing weapons of mass destruction to six countries in the Middle East that ignored arms-control commitments.

The Jewish state spoke as the 145-nation assembly of the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, adopted a resolution unanimously urging North Korea to reverse steps it has taken to revive its shutdown atom bomb program.

Israel itself is the target of two hotly disputed Arab-sponsored draft resolutions in the assembly urging it to give up its nuclear arms monopoly in the Middle East, join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and accept full IAEA inspections.

Israel said there were six Middle Eastern countries which had obtained the means produce doomsday weapons and ballistic missiles covertly from North Korea while ignoring commitments as members of the NPT and other arms-control regimes.

"At a time when the international community concentrates on North Korea's nuclear activities and its non-compliance with safeguards agreements, the Middle East is at the receiving end of North Korea's reckless practices," Israeli envoy David Danieli told the global meeting in Vienna.

"North Korea has long become a source of proliferation of dangerous weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles in the Middle East," he said.

SIX COUNTRIES

"At least half a dozen countries in the region who do not even pay lip service to control regimes and are acting in bad faith regarding their stated policy and their undertakings regarding non-proliferation conventions have become eager recipients of North Korea mostly through black market and covert network channels." Danieli did not name the six nations.

Western intelligence officials and non-proliferation experts have said that Iran, Syria, Libya and Iraq under Saddam Hussein were believed to have received North Korean military aid, some applicable to mass-destruction weaponry, in the past.

"No due attention is paid to this dark aspect of North Korean behavior which has become a matter of great concern to my government and others," Danieli said.

He said there was growing evidence that such states were "emulating the dangerous unlawful practices" of North Korea, which left the NPT in 2003 and developed atom bombs.

"(We) call the attention of the international community to these dangerous developments and their consequences," he said.

Iran is under IAEA investigation over intelligence allegations of secret atomic bomb research. Syria is under IAEA scrutiny over U.S. reports it almost built a plutonium-producing reactor before Israeli warplanes bombed the site a year ago.

Iran and Syria, adversaries of Israel, deny the allegations. Libya scrapped a covert nuclear arms program in 2003.

U.S. envoy Chris Hill ended three days of meetings in North Korea on Friday meant to salvage the collapsing denuclearization deal, calling the talks substantive but not saying if he swayed Pyongyang to give up plans to restart its nuclear complex.

The resolution passed by the IAEA assembly underlined the need for denuclearization fully verifiable by IAEA inspectors -- a demand resisted by Pyongyang and at the heart of disputes that have crippled its denuclearization deal with five powers.

http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2008/10/09/us_to_take_nkorea_off_terrorist_list_in_oct_report/

U.S. to take N.Korea off terrorist list in Oct: Kyodo

October 9, 2008

TOKYO (Reuters) - The United States has told Japan that it will remove North Korea from its terrorist blacklist this month, Kyodo news agency reported on Thursday, quoting unidentified Japanese government sources.

The report follows talks in Tokyo on Wednesday between Japan's top negotiator on North Korean nuclear issues and U.S. special envoy Sung Kim.

A Japanese foreign ministry spokesman said he could not immediately comment on the report.

Kyodo reported that U.S. envoy Christopher Hill, in talks in North Korea earlier this month, agreed that Washington would not make verification of Pyongyang's uranium enrichment program or proliferation activities a condition of delisting.

Hill also agreed that first verification of the North's plutonium-related activities listed by Pyongyang in June would be conducted, Kyodo reported.

The United States agreed to continue food support begun in June and asked Japan to consider helping with such humanitarian aid, Kyodo said.

Prime Minister Taro Aso had been informed of the U.S. decision and that Sung Kim had apparently conveyed it to Japan's top negotiator on North Korean nuclear issues, Akitaka Saiki, in talks on Wednesday in Tokyo, Kyodo said.

Japan was prepared to accept the delisting but would decline the request for food aid, taking into consideration that it plans to extend economic sanctions on Pyongyang because of a lack of progress in settling a feud over Japanese citizens kidnapped to the North decades ago, it reported.

Washington said it would take North Korea off the terrorism list, bringing economic and diplomatic benefits, once a system had been agreed to verify Pyongyang's nuclear program.

(Reporting by Linda Sieg and Yoko Kubota; Editing by Paul Tait)

Exclusive interview with the Syrian head of state Bashar Assad

Monday Morning, Lebanon - 17 hours ago [Accessed 2008-10-11T14:00Z]

[with Melhem Karam of Monday Morning]

[EXCERPT]

No Syrian nuclear reactor

Monday Morning: Mr. President, reports and rumors have been spread about the Israeli piracy against the Kobar position in the Syrian Desert. What exactly were the airplanes targeting, and were the installations targeted intended for the manufacture of nuclear products despite the IAEA chief Baradei's recent announcement?

President Assad: Mohammad El-Baradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA], has denied the existence of nuclear installations or of a nuclear reactor, as the IAEA has also. This naturally corresponds to what Syria announced earlier several times following the Israeli raid. It's a question of a military position, and we didn't say it was a civilian position, but it has never been a nuclear site. The statements of Baradei have settled the matter. Before the visit of the IAEA's inspectors we were giving continuous explanations and after the inspectors took samples from the river and the building itself and performed analysis and tests, none of the Israeli and US pretexts and lies turned out to be true.

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/ros-lehtinen-criticizes-us-decision-to,575836.shtml>

Ros-Lehtinen Criticizes U.S. Decision to Remove North Korean Regime from List of State Sponsors of Terrorism

Posted : Sat, 11 Oct 2008 13:49:37 GMT

Author : House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Republican Office)

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 DC-ForeignAffairsComm

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, strongly criticized today's decision by the U.S. Government to remove North Korea from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism without first requiring full verification of the dismantlement of all nuclear facilities. In June, Congress received notification that such a decision was possible, following an understanding between the regime and other members of the "Six Party Talks." In recent weeks, North Korea has denied international inspectors access to suspected nuclear sites. Earlier this year, Ros-Lehtinen successfully included an amendment in the Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Reform Act (H.R. 5916) requiring North Korea to take verifiable action to end its proliferation activities, such as ceasing to provide nuclear assistance to Syria and Iran, before it can be considered for removal from the list. Statement of Ros-Lehtinen:

While I am not surprised by today's decision, I am profoundly disappointed. Given the regime's decision to restart its plutonium reactor at Yongbyon and actions barring access to the site by inspectors from the

International Atomic Energy Agency, it is clear that North Korea has no intention of meeting its commitment to end its nuclear program.

North Korea should not be rewarded with removal from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism when it continues to engage in activities that threaten critical U.S. interests, including proliferation of nuclear material, technology, and expertise to extremist regimes. We know that it provided crucial assistance to Syria's illicit nuclear program which was revealed by an Israeli air strike last year on a clandestine facility. This assistance was flowing even as the regime was assuring our negotiators that all such efforts had stopped and was demanding that it be removed from the list.

The plutonium reactor at Yongbyon is only one part of the problem. The regime's continued denial of its secret uranium program and its refusal to allow inspectors to adequately verify that claim have been central issues in the impasse.

With today's action, the Administration has given up a critical instrument of leverage. By rewarding North Korea before the regime has carried out its commitments, we are encouraging this regime to continue its illicit nuclear program and violate its pledge to no longer provide nuclear assistance to extremist regimes. We are also sending a strong message to other rogue nations, such as Iran and Syria, that we will not hold them to their commitments, even as we give in to their demands.

SOURCE House Committee on Foreign Affairs (Republican Office)



Special Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
October 11, 2008

On the Record Briefing: Special Envoy for the Six-Party Talks Ambassador Sung Kim, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Sean McCormack, Assistant Secretary of State for Verification, Compliance, and Implementation Paula DeSutter, and Acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Patricia McNerney on North Korea

2008/869

[EXCERPTS]

MR. MCCORMACK: Good morning, everybody. I want to thank you for coming in on a **Saturday morning**. I see a few faces that we don't normally see in the briefing room.

You have a couple of pieces of paper in front of you. One of them is a fact sheet that I'm going to read here just for the record. You also have in front of you a fact sheet called Existing Sanctions and Reporting Provisions Related to North Korea. I think that's a useful reference for part of our discussion a little bit later on. So let me get started here. I'm going to read a couple of statements which we'll have in paper form for you, and we're also going to invite a couple of other guest speakers up here: Ambassador Sung Kim from the EAP Bureau, Acting Assistant Secretary Patty McNerney, Assistant Secretary Paula DeSutter. They're going to make brief statements and then we can get into a Q&A session and talk about this morning's events.

The participants in the Six-Party Talks have, for some time, been discussing the importance of verification measures that will allow the parties to reliably verify North Korea's denuclearization as the process moves forward. The Six-Party heads of delegation met in July to discuss verification measures and draft papers were exchanged among the parties. On July 12th, China, the chair of the Six-Party Talks, released a press communiqué stating that verification measures would include visits to facilities, review of documents, and interviews with technical personnel as well as other measures unanimously agreed among the Six Parties.

Upon the invitation of the North Korean Government, a U.S. negotiating team, on behalf of the Six Parties, visited Pyongyang from October 1st to the 3rd for intensive talks on verification measures, and Ambassador Sung Kim was part of that delegation. He can talk a little bit in depth and from firsthand accounts about those negotiations.

Based on these discussions, the United States and North Korea negotiators agreed – and I have to emphasize this is an agreement – on a number of important verification measures, including agreement that experts from all Six Parties may participate in verification activities including experts from non-nuclear states; agreement that the IAEA will have an important consultative and support role in verification; agreement that experts will have access to all declared facilities, and based on mutual consent, to undeclared sites; agreement on the use of scientific procedures, including sampling and forensic activities, and agreement that all measures contained in the verification protocol will apply to the plutonium-based program and any uranium enrichment and proliferation activities. In addition, the monitoring mechanism already agreed by the Six Parties to monitor compliance with the Six-Party documents applies to proliferation and uranium enrichment activities.

So at this point, what I'd like to do is turn it over to Ambassador Kim and then we'll go through our other speakers and then we can get right to questions.

[Massive deletions from this point forward.]

MR. MCCORMACK: Charlie.

QUESTION: Yes, probably for Sean, but can you take us back and tell us when the President signed off on this, when the Secretary actually signed it upstairs? Is this a document that'll --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. I don't have exact times for you. The President, late yesterday afternoon, early evening made the decision to move forward on this. And the Secretary actually signed the document, I think, somewhere shortly after 7:30 this morning.

QUESTION: Here in the building?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, I think she was at her residence.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right. Let's just take a couple of more questions here. I know there's a lot of demand.

Kirit.

QUESTION: Could one of you give us just a sense, going forward, on the timeline of when you expect the verification to begin, if you could, and then how long you think it might take? I mean, I understand maybe that's an open-ended process, but just to give us a sense of when you might expect people to get there on the ground and start working.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DESUTTER: Let me tell you that how long it will take is going to depend very largely on North Korea and its level of cooperation. Remember in the Libya case, they took us to facilities that we didn't know about, that they hadn't originally declared. That makes it faster.

And remember that – and another exciting part of this agreement is that they have agreed that the verification activities apply not just to plutonium, not just to Yongbyon, but to HEU and to the

proliferation activities. And so what – each piece that we do, we hope that that will be additive and make it more efficient. I mean, we don't – we're going to want to conduct an efficient and smart verification regime because that makes more sense for everybody. But if the North Koreans are, you

know, ready, willing and able to add facilities – okay, functional facilities, for example – we know that material leaves Yongbyon, and at some point, it becomes a pit in a bomb. We know that happens in one or more places. So where are those places, how are we going to get to them?

So again, we're going to have to conduct verification activities at a number of facilities, make sure that everything that we've discovered that's relevant is added to the declaration so that at the end of the day, we can say – and remember, we're verifiers. We're never – there's never going to be a hundred percent confidence that we're done. There will be questions. There will be ambiguities. The best we can do is say, here are the activities we have undertaken; these are the things that we have discovered; these are the things that we have gotten declared; here is the analysis that we have; and we want to attain a reasonable degree of confidence that we've done that.

At that point, you decide, are there any follow-on measures that you need to have. Like with Libya, we set up a trilateral consultative group so that if we had ongoing issues, we had a venue that we could raise them in. And so, you know, I think I would say probably years. But they could surprise us.

QUESTION: Just to clarify on that answer, the declaration that they gave earlier this year was focused mostly on a plutonium program.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DESUTTER: Right.

QUESTION: And so is it fair to say that the verification that's going to proceed is going to basically start with the plutonium program, or will you be moving on parallel tracks at the same time with uranium enrichment – possible uranium enrichment and the proliferation activities related to Syria? Or is it you first get through --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DESUTTER: We will --

QUESTION: -- this plutonium declaration?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DESUTTER: We will be starting with plutonium, okay? That's not an insignificant challenge, okay? You have to know – we know basically where it's made. We don't know the other places that it goes to. You need to know, you know, what are the test activities. You know, there's an awful lot about the plutonium. You need to follow the material from when it comes out of a uranium mine and goes all the way through the process until it becomes a pit. And so that would be quite a bit. Now will we learn things about the uranium program by virtue of that? I hope so. I haven't – so those are going to be hard.

QUESTION: But that's --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY DESUTTER: The plan is to start with a materials approach and try to follow the material to see where it's been. We just think that that makes the most sense. We're not going on a fishing expedition.

QUESTION: Okay. But – so the uranium enrichment and proliferation is the second order of magnitude at this time?

MS. MCNERNEY: I wouldn't say it's – yeah.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for one last question. Jay, you're going to be it – no --

MS. MCNERNEY: I wouldn't say it's the second order of magnitude. On the proliferation, for example, one of the key things the Secretary laid out is we need access to facilities, to people, to documents. And when you start having that kind of access, building a record, you start to determine, was there proliferation of material, did – were people involved in any kind of engagement outside of North Korea. So all of that will be part and parcel of this larger process. Same with uranium enrichment; when you start talking to some of these individuals, you start raising questions across the board. But obviously, the largest program that we all are aware of is the plutonium program, so it makes sense to start there.



Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
October 11, 2008

U.S.-North Korea Understandings on Verification

* The participants in the Six-Party Talks have for some time been discussing the importance of verification measures that will allow the Parties to reliably verify North Korea's denuclearization as the process moves forward.

* The Six-Party Heads of Delegation met in July to discuss verification measures, and draft papers were exchanged among the Parties.

* On July 12, China, the Chair of the Six-Party Talks, released a Press Communiqué stating that verification measures would include visits to facilities, review of documents, and interviews with technical personnel as well as other measures unanimously agreed among the Six Parties.

* Upon the invitation of the North Korean government, a U.S. negotiating team on behalf of the Six Parties visited Pyongyang from October 1 – 3 for intensive talks on verification measures.

* Based upon these discussions, U.S. and North Korean negotiators agreed on a number of important verification measures, including:

- o Agreement that experts from all Six Parties may participate in verification activities, including experts from non-nuclear states;

- o Agreement that the IAEA will have an important consultative and support role in verification

- o Agreement that experts will have access to all declared facilities and, based on mutual consent, to undeclared sites;

- o Agreement on the use of scientific procedures, including sampling and forensic activities; and

- o Agreement that all measures contained in the Verification Protocol will apply to the plutonium-based program and any uranium enrichment and proliferation activities. In addition, the Monitoring Mechanism already agreed by the Six Parties to monitor compliance with Six-Party documents applies to proliferation and uranium enrichment activities.

* The U.S.-DPRK agreement on these verification measures has been codified in a joint document between the United States and North Korea and certain other understandings, and has been reaffirmed

through intensive consultations. The agreement and associated understandings have been conveyed to the other parties.

* These measures will serve as the baseline for a Verification Protocol to be finalized and adopted by the Six Parties in the near future.

* Verification of the North Korea declaration submitted on June 26 has already begun with review of the over 18,000 pages of operating records from Yongbyon that North Korea provided on May 8.



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
Speech

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, D.C.)

As Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, October 28, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

In 2001, after a thorough review of our strategic posture, President Bush announced a New Triad. It consists of: First, our strike capabilities, including our traditional nuclear deterrent and conventional capabilities; second, defenses, including limited ballistic missile defenses; and finally, an infrastructure to support the other two. The goal of the New Triad is to reduce our emphasis on nuclear weapons for deterrence and provide the President more non-nuclear deterrence options and responses to potential crises.

Even so, we must be realistic about the world around us – about the challenges we face and about our ability to predict what other nations will do. President Clinton called his nuclear arms reductions part of a “lead and hedge” strategy: We’ll lead the way in reducing our arsenal, but we must always hedge against a dangerous and unpredictable world.

That is still true today, and maybe even more so. Rising and resurgent powers, rogue nations pursuing nuclear weapons, proliferation, international terrorism – all demand that we preserve this “hedge.”

There is no way to ignore efforts by rogue states such as North Korea and Iran to develop and deploy nuclear weapons, or Russian or Chinese strategic modernization programs. As long as other states have or seek nuclear weapons – and potentially can threaten us, our allies, and friends – then we must have a deterrent capacity that makes it clear that challenging the United States in the nuclear arena – or with other weapons of mass destruction – could result in an overwhelming, catastrophic response.

There is little doubt that some nations will continue to think that possession of nuclear weapons is the best way to preserve their regime or threaten their neighbors. We remain concerned that this is the case with North Korea and Iran today, as it was with Libya and Iraq in the past.

[deletia]

I've spent most of my time talking about our nuclear arsenal. Before closing, I want to take a step back and discuss, briefly, some of the broader implications of deterrence in the 21st century.

There can be little doubt that the post-Cold War world offers a new strategic paradigm for nuclear weapons, and particularly for the concept of deterrence. As our 2008 National Defense Strategy puts it, "the challenge is one of deterring or dissuading a range of potential adversaries from taking a variety of actions."

Deterrence has a specific policy goal – and, in this sense, deterrent strategies can be applied to many situations.

A few examples come to mind.

Rogue regimes that threaten their neighbors and our allies, potentially with nuclear weapons, are a problem today and will be in the future. Our goal is, in part, to reduce their ability to hold other nations hostage, and to deny them the ability to project power. The New Triad I mentioned earlier, with a conventional strike force and ballistic missile defense, helps achieve this. A conventional strike force means that more targets are vulnerable without our having to resort to nuclear weapons. And missile defenses reinforce deterrence and minimize the benefits of rogue nations investing heavily in ballistic missiles: They won't know if their missiles will be effective, thus other nations will feel less threatened. And let's not forget the deterrent value of other parts of our conventional military forces.

We also still face the problem of weapons passing from nation-states into the hands of terrorists. After September 11th, the president announced that we would make no distinction between terrorists and the states that sponsor or harbor them. Indeed, the United States has made it clear for many years that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our people, our forces, and our friends and allies. Today we also make clear that the United States will hold any state, terrorist group, or other non-state actor or individual fully accountable for supporting or enabling terrorist efforts to obtain or use weapons of mass destruction – whether by facilitating, financing, or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts. To add teeth to the deterrent goal of this policy, we are pursuing new technologies to identify the forensic signatures of any nuclear material used in an attack – to trace it back to the source.

[deletia]



Transcript of Interview with IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei

CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer

Aired 28 October 2007 - 11:00 ET

This is a rush transcript. This copy may not be in its final form and may be updated. [Accessed 2008-11-11T18:10]

[EXCERPT]

BLITZER: As you know, the Israelis, in early September, bombed some sort of facility in Syria that was suspected of being a nuclear reactor, maybe a nuclear reactor built on a North Korean model. I know you've seen these pictures. You've seen the before and the after. What's your conclusion? Was this a nuclear reactor that the Syrians were building in their country based on a North Korean model?

ELBARADEI: Wolf, I'm very distressed, frankly, about this Syrian bombing because nobody - there had been chatter for the last few years. John Bolton three years ago went to testify before Congress and said there is concern about Syria. And yet, until today, we have not received information about any nuclear-related activities, clandestine nuclear-related activities in Syria. The bombing, again, happened, and we never, until today, received any piece of information. That to me is very distressful because we have a system. If countries have information that the country is working on a nuclear-related program, they should come to us. We have the authority to go out and investigate. But to bomb first and then ask questions later, I think it undermines the system and it doesn't lead to any solution to any suspicion, because we are the eyes and ears of the international community. It's only the agencies and inspectors who can go and verify the information.

If Syria were working on a nuclear program, a clandestine program, then we'd obviously be able to draw the consequences. But today I don't know where to go. I didn't get any information. I contacted the Syrians. They said this is a military facility, has nothing to do with nuclear. And I would hope if anybody has information before they take the law into their own hands, to come and pass the information on.

BLITZER: So what you're suggesting, Dr. ElBaradei, is neither the Israelis nor the U.S. government - or for that matter, any other government - gave you any hard evidence to back up this claim that this was a North Korean modeled nuclear reactor.

ELBARADEI: Or any evidence at all. Not only hard evidence, Wolf.

BLITZER: I know you've seen some commercial satellite photos though of the before and after. Are there any conclusions you can draw based on what you've seen in those satellite photos?

ELBARADEI: These are commercial satellite photos that we procured ourselves, has not been providing to us. And we're still investigating them. We're still comparing the pre and after. But in addition to us buying commercial photos, I would very much hope that countries will come forward if they have information so we'll do - go through a due process.

BLITZER: We're almost out of time, but based on the commercial photos that you've seen from these satellite reconnaissance, are there any conclusions that you and your team have been able to come up with?

ELBARADEI: Not at this stage, Wolf. Not at all.

BLITZER: All right, and so it would be premature to allege that North Korea was proliferating in cooperation with the Syrians? Is that what you're saying as well?

ELBARADEI: That's correct.

BLITZER: Because I want to play a little clip of what the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, Peter Hoekstra, told me here on "Late Edition" last Sunday. Listen to this.

[Begin Video Clip]

[REP. PETER HOEKSTRA, R-MICH.: If North Korea or if Iran or other countries were involved in Syria, it, again, will be an indicator of what kind of agreement they will make and whether they would be willing to adhere to the agreements that they make in public.]

[End Video Clip]

BLITZER: Because he certainly seemed to be concerned, and he's among a handful of members of the U.S. Congress who have been briefed by the Bush administration on what the Israelis did in Syria. He seems to suggest that you can't trust the North Koreans at all because they've been cheating on their promises. I take it you're not willing to go that far by a long shot.

ELBARADEI: I can't because I don't have any evidence to support that assumption, Wolf.

BLITZER: Would you like the Israelis to brief you on what they know?

ELBARADEI: Absolutely, or anybody who has information. But you can't trust anybody. We don't work on the base of trust. But we - as President Reagan said, "trust and verify." And what I want very much is to be able to verify whether Syria, in fact, were working on a nuclear power program in a clandestine way or not. And the only way to do that is get information and to go out and verify.

BLITZER: You have a lot of credibility in these areas, Dr. ElBaradei, because before the war started with Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein, you were contradicting the Bush administration, insisting there was absolutely no evidence that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. Do you feel vindicated as a result of that, as you go into this next round of fears that Iran may be developing some sort of nuclear weapons program?

ELBARADEI: Well, Wolf, I don't necessarily feel vindicated. I feel relieved that we discovered that Iraq did not have nuclear weapons. I feel also that people now should listen to us, because we have no hidden agenda. All we want to do is bring the facts out. We should not take decisions that has to do - that crucial to war around peace before we are able 100 percent to make sure that the information on the basis we are working are accurate and professional.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/10/29/Official_wants_probe_of_Syrian_nuke_site/UPI-95871225303857/

Official wants probe of Syrian nuke site

Published: Oct. 29, 2008 at 2:10 PM

VIENNA, Oct. 29 (UPI) -- Diplomats in Vienna say there is enough evidence to justify further investigation of a suspected Syrian nuclear site bombed by Israel in September 2007.

Experts from the The International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, want to revisit the site and also to follow up on allegations North Korea was helping Syria build a plutonium reactor at the El Kibar site, DEBKAFfile reported Wednesday.

The military intelligence Web site says it has learned that IAEA director Mohammed ElBaradei and his deputy Olli Heinonen have been at odds for months over whether the U.N. agency should push ahead with its probe against Syria.

Sources say Heinonen wants to continue the investigation and has submitted a list of dates that Syrian officials are suspected of meeting secretly with North Korean nuclear physicists.

DEBKAFfile reported exclusively Oct. 4 that Syria had resumed its nuclear program.

Diplomats: IAEA says Syrian nuke info needs probe

By GEORGE JAHN

18 hours ago [Accessed 2008-10-29T14:40Z]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Freshly evaluated soil and air samples from a Syrian site bombed by Israel on suspicion it was a covert nuclear reactor provide enough evidence to push ahead with a U.N probe, diplomats said Tuesday.

The findings are important after months of uncertainty about the status of the investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Preliminary results regarding environmental samples collected from the site by an IAEA team and made public earlier this year were inconclusive, adding weight to Syrian assertions that no trips beyond the initial IAEA visit in June were necessary. But the diplomats told The Associated Press that the IAEA's final evaluation, completed a few days ago, has the agency convinced it needs to press on with its investigation.

The agency feels "there is enough evidence there to warrant a follow-up" said one of the diplomats. He, and a colleague from another IAEA country demanded anonymity in exchange for divulging confidential information, which is not meant to be made public until the IAEA's meeting of its 35-nation board of governors next month.

Damascus denies running a covert program. On Tuesday, Ambassador Mohammed Badi Khattab — his country's chief IAEA delegate — told the AP he was unaware that the evaluation had been completed and could not comment until his country was told of the findings.

Ibrahim Othman, Syria's nuclear chief, has said his country would wait for final environmental results before deciding how to respond to repeated IAEA requests for follow-up visits to the one in June, when the samples were collected. Khattab repeated that stance, saying "further developments will depend on us receiving the final result."

In an oral report to an IAEA board meeting last month, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei told the board meeting that preliminary results from the environmental samples came up with "no indication" to back the claims that the destroyed target was a nuclear facility.

Alluding to Othman's stance, he said Syria would decide on whether to provide more information and allow further IAEA visits depending "on the results of the samples taken during the first visit" — implying that Damascus could shut the doors on the probe if the all the samples came up empty.

A diplomat attending that closed meeting told the AP Khattab suggested Syria would not allow further visits under any circumstances because it was still technically at war with Israel and was concerned any additional IAEA probe would expose some of its non-nuclear military secrets.

Another cited ElBaradei as saying "the corpse is gone" — alluding to the difficulty of investigating the bombed site months after it was hit last year by Israel and subsequently cleaned up and altered by the Syrians.

But — while the diplomats queried Tuesday had no specifics on what the samples contained — one of them said it convinced the IAEA it needs to press on with its probe.

Another said that ElBaradei was planning a written report on Syria for the upcoming board meeting starting Nov. 27 — something he had said he would do only if he had substantive developments to share.

Beyond wanting to revisit the site bombed nearly 14 months ago by Israel, IAEA experts also want to follow up on U.S, Israeli and other intelligence that North Korea was involved in building the alleged Syrian program.

As well, IAEA officials have been seeking permission to visit three other sites purportedly linked to the alleged reactor destroyed by the Israelis — although Syria has already said that those locations are off limits because they are in restricted military areas.

Syria fears the IAEA probe could lead to a massive investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to for more than five years — and to related fallout. Iran is under three sets of U.N. sanctions because of its refusal to heed Security Council demands to curb its nuclear activities.

IAEA experts came back June 25 from a four-day visit carrying environmental samples from the Al Kibar site hit by Israel. But intelligence suggests that radioactive material had not yet been introduced into the alleged reactor before it was destroyed, so swipes taken in search of radioactive traces were unlikely to have been of use.

That left the inspectors looking for other components, including minute quantities of graphite, a cooling element in the type of North Korean prototype that was allegedly being built with help from Pyongyang. Such a reactor contains hundreds of tons of graphite, and any major explosion would have sent dust over the immediate area.

But — if the Syrians were interested in a cover-up — they would have scoured the region to bury, wash away and otherwise remove any such traces.

http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5hdIJpStT2jiOw5jm_o5e7Ddaiug

Syria would consider another UN nuclear agency visit, foreign minister says

59 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-10-29T20:00Z]

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria's deputy foreign minister said Wednesday that Damascus would consider a request by the UN nuclear watchdog to revisit a site bombed by Israeli jets last year.

The official, Fayssal Mekdad, spoke to The Associated Press a day after diplomats at the International Atomic Energy Association said freshly evaluated soil and air samples from the site provide enough evidence to push ahead with a UN probe.

Israel bombed the Al Kibar site in Syria on suspicion it was a covert nuclear reactor, a claim Syria denies.

The United States has said the facility was a nearly completed reactor that, when on line, could produce plutonium, a pathway to nuclear arms.

Mekdad said Syria was still waiting for an official report on findings from the IAEA visit to the site in June.

Preliminary results made public from that visit were inconclusive, adding weight to Syrian assertions that no trips beyond the initial visit by the Vienna, Austria-based IAEA were necessary.

However, diplomats told the AP on Tuesday that the IAEA's final evaluation, completed a few days ago, has the agency convinced it needs to press on with its investigation.

"They should make a request and we will study it," Mekdad said.

But despite willingness to consider a request for a revisit, three other sites the IAEA has wanted to visit - supposedly because they are linked to the bombed location - will remain off limits because they are in restricted military areas, Mekdad said.

"There isn't a country in the world that allows inspections of its military sites," Mekdad added.

Still, his remarks were a turn from a Syrian statement two months ago that UN investigators were barred from revisiting Al Kibar.

Syria fears the IAEA investigation could lead to a massive investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to for more than five years, and to related fallout. Iran is under three sets of UN sanctions because of its refusal to heed Security Council demands to curb its nuclear activities.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/oct/111392.htm>



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
October 29, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

10:39 a.m. EDT

[deletia]

QUESTION: Also on Syria, a different subject. Do you have any comment on the IAEA yesterday talking about going back to Syria, wanting to go back and do more work in Syria on the nuclear site?

MR. MCCORMACK: Clearly, the book isn't closed on the questions the IAEA has on these allegations of Syria having, at one point, a nuclear reactor, building a nuclear reactor outside of the declarations to the IAEA. So if they're going to continue their work, I'll let them comment on how they see the situation or the status of their work. But I think one can take from those comments that clearly the book isn't closed on it.

[deletia]

(The briefing was concluded at 11:09 a.m.)



Transcript of Conversation with IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei

Charlie Rose Show with Charlie Rose

30 October 2007

[EXCERPT]

ROSE: Someone said that you see your role - this was in a New York Times piece, I think, Lynn Schwinn and others, whoever wrote it, I've forgotten - that you see your role as a secular pope, making sure that people don't kill each other.

ELBARADEI: I think that's correct. I mean, I think - people misunderstand that. I mean, it is not self-aggrandizement. "Secular pope" means I have to remind people of the basic principles they subscribe to. You know, I have to remind the weapons states that they committed themselves to move to nuclear disarmament. I have to remind everybody that they committed to resolve issues through peaceful means. I have to remind people that there is an inspection process at work, so we don't go and bomb, like the Israelis did in Syria, before at least going through the process. So this is.

ROSE: Wait, wait, wait. I don't want to go too far past that, because I meant to bring that up. So what impact did that have? The Israelis say that they had material from North Korea, that they were beginning to build a nuclear reactor, I guess they thought. Were they?

ELBARADEI: I don't know. I mean, I never - I never got a shred of information from anybody, Charlie.

ROSE: Did anybody ask you to find out for them?

ELBARADEI: No, no. And that's why I said, I got very disturbed because that's really undermining the system which we continued to build over the years, that if you have information that a country is building a clandestine program, you give that information to us, and we go and check it, you know. But - but you don't go and take the law in your own hands before you use the system, because you are simply undermining the system. And I hope that was not nuclear related, because nobody came to us. Until today, I don't have any piece of information. I have to check with the Syrians. The Syrians said this is just simply a military installation. But I need - if I get any information, I certainly will send our...

ROSE: Have the Israelis given you information?

ELBARADEI: No.

ROSE: Has the U.S. given you any information?

ELBARADEI: No. We didn't get any.

ROSE: Did you ask for it?

ELBARADEI: Of course, we did.

ROSE: I thought so, but I had to ask.

ELBARADEI: No, we did. We did.

ROSE: And the U.S. and the Israelis are not giving you any information. The Syrians and...

[Crosstalk]

ELBARADEI: We did not get any information. And I find that, you know, frankly, is not helpful, because if you have - if you have a system, you know, you can make use of that system, and the system probably could be much more efficient. Because then we go on the ground, then we see what's going on. Then we bring the facts out.

ROSE: There is also this, though. The Israelis will say, look what happened when we - whenever it was - that we bombed Saddam. Saddam was trying to develop a nuclear capacity. If we hadn't done that, he would probably have a nuclear weapon by now, because nobody else was doing anything about it. Do they have a point?

ELBARADEI: I don't think they do. Again, they bombed Saddam Hussein's research reactor at that time, again, on the fear that Saddam Hussein might walk out of the system, might develop nuclear weapons. But what happened is that Saddam Hussein immediately, year after, went underground and built a huge - a clandestine nuclear weapon program which we...

ROSE: Discovered after '91.

ELBARADEI: ...discovered after '91, because we didn't even have the authority to look after it at that time. But in many cases, and that's why I say, when I go back to Iran, I said nuclear use of force is no solution, because in many - in Iran today, for example, all the facilities are just nascent facilities. They are not fully-fledged working facilities. So the knowledge is there. You cannot bomb the knowledge. And if you go and bomb them, all what you are going to do is simply mobilize everybody to support the regime.

North Korean Plane Was Grounded at U.S. Request

By JAY SOLOMON, KRISHNA POKHAREL and PETER WONACOTT

NOVEMBER 1, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

India blocked a North Korean plane from delivering cargo to Iran in August, responding to a U.S. request based on fears about the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The secret action, described by Western and Asian officials, took place nine weeks before President George W. Bush removed North Korea from Washington's list of terrorism sponsors, as part of an agreement to declaw the North's nuclear program.

[deletia]

According to the Western and Asian officials, the North Korean plane, an Ilyushin-62 long-range jet owned by the North Korean state airline, made a stop in Myanmar on Aug. 7 and sought permission from Indian air-traffic controllers to fly over Indian airspace. India eventually blocked the flight at Washington's behest, the officials said.

Neither the White House nor the Indian prime minister's office would comment on the operation or describe the cargo believed to be aboard the plane. But officials familiar with the matter said the move was part of the Bush administration's Proliferation Security Initiative, which aims to block the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Any action under the initiative would be ordered only if the plane was suspected of carrying nuclear materials, long-range missile components or other potentially lethal cargo, they said.

The U.S. has long charged Pyongyang with supplying missile technologies to countries like Iran, Syria and Libya. In June 2007, the Bush administration worked with allies to block a Syrian aircraft from landing in Pyongyang on the belief it was engaged in the missile trade. A 2006 United Nations Security Council resolution bars North Korean involvement in long-range missile sales or purchases.

"We never saw nuclear cooperation" between North Korea and Iran, "but ballistic-missile cooperation is a key part of the process of delivering a nuclear payload," said John Bolton, who started the antiproliferation initiative and helped to oversee it as a State Department official during President Bush's first term.

[deletia]

On Oct. 23, the State Department blacklisted two North Korean companies, Korea Mining Development Corp. and Korea Taesong Trading Co., for violating U.S. bans on the sale of equipment used in building missiles or other weapons of mass destruction to Iran and Syria.

[deletia]

In the August incident, the North Korean Air Koryo jet, which had stopped in Mandalay, Myanmar, was initially given permission by air-traffic control in Kolkata to fly through Indian airspace.

At 6:35 a.m. Greenwich Mean Time on Aug. 7, India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation in New Delhi sent a message to the Kolkata controllers canceling permission, according to D. Guin, a supervisor at Kolkata Air Traffic Control. Mr. Guin reviewed the flight records of Air Koryo Flight 621 at the request of The Wall Street Journal. Mr. Guin said the denial was then passed on to air traffic control officials in Yangon, Myanmar's capital, who turned back the flight.

A Western official working on antiproliferation activities who was briefed on the Indian action said the U.S. requested the move in support of its antiproliferation program. The official didn't specify the cargo but said the Air Koryo flight was scheduled to fly to Iran.

"North Korea has been supplying missiles to Iran and Syria for some time," said the official. "North Korea has never agreed to stop selling arms to anyone," despite the nuclear accord, he said.

[deletia]

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com, Krishna Pokharel at krishna.pokharel@wsj.com and Peter Wonacott at peter.wonacott@wsj.com

Formal report drafted on Syria atom probe

By Mark Heinrich

Mon 10 Nov 2008, 15:31 GMT

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog is drafting an investigative report on Syria for the first time, suggesting to Western diplomats the agency has found some sign of undeclared activity at a site bombed by Israel last year.

Moreover, Syria has been made an official agenda item at the year-end November 27-28 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors, unlike previously when IAEA officials said initial inquiries were inconclusive.

[deletia]

A restricted copy of the 35-nation meeting's agenda said Syria was added to address a pending report by IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei, similar in format to those issued quarterly on an agency probe into Iran's secretive nuclear programme.

"The agency clearly thinks it has something significant enough to report to put Syria on the (nuclear safeguards) agenda right after North Korea and Iran," said a senior diplomat with ties to the Vienna-based U.N. watchdog.

"We do not have firm word on what the inspectors found (at the site), only that the findings suggest there are more questions to pursue," said another senior diplomat accredited to the agency.

The diplomats asked for anonymity in exchange for discussing politically sensitive and confidential information.

Syria -- an ally of Iran, which is subject of a much longer-running, and now stalled, IAEA investigation -- has one declared nuclear site -- an old research reactor.

ElBaradei told an IAEA board meeting in September that preliminary findings from test samples taken by inspectors granted a visit in June to the desert location hit by Israel bore no traces of atomic activity.

Diplomats said the IAEA apparently had now evaluated all the environmental swipe samples but exactly what the sleuths found remained unclear and would be laid out in the report.

[deletia]

Diplomats close to the IAEA say Syria has ignored agency requests to check three military installations that may have harboured materials connected to the alleged reactor site.

(Editing by Dominic Evans)

IAEA finds uranium traces at Syrian site: diplomats

By Mark Heinrich

Mon Nov 10, 2008 12:09pm EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. investigators have found traces of uranium at a Syrian site Washington says was a secret nuclear reactor almost built before Israel bombed the target last year, diplomats said on Monday.

They said the uranium contamination turned up in some environmental swipe samples U.N. inspectors took at the site in a visit last June. They said the finding was not enough to draw conclusions but raised concerns requiring further clarification.

The International Atomic Energy Agency had no immediate comment. But word of the finding leaked hours after IAEA officials confirmed Director Mohamed ElBaradei was preparing a formal written report on Syria for the first time.

Moreover, Syria has been made an official agenda item at the year-end November 27-28 meeting of the U.N. watchdog's 35-nation board of governors, unlike previously when IAEA officials said initial inquiries were inconclusive.

[deletia]

"MAN-MADE" TRACES

Diplomats accredited to the Vienna-based nuclear watchdog said a wider range of samples had now been analyzed by its sleuths and some had traces of a certain uranium compound.

"It isn't enough to conclude or prove what the Syrians were doing but the IAEA has concluded this requires further investigation," said one diplomat accredited to the IAEA.

"It was a man-made component, not natural (ore). There is no sign there was already nuclear fuel or (production) activity there," another diplomat told Reuters.

This diplomat noted that such traces could have been carried to the site inadvertently on the clothes of scientists or workers or on equipment brought in from elsewhere.

That could echo a key, past finding made in the IAEA's longrunning investigation of Iran's secretive nuclear program.

Diplomats close to the IAEA have said Syria has ignored agency requests to check three military sites for equipment or other evidence possibly linked to the alleged reactor site.

"The agency clearly thinks it has something significant enough to report to put Syria on the (nuclear safeguards) agenda right after North Korea and Iran," said a senior diplomat with ties to the Vienna-based U.N. watchdog.

"It's been made clear to us that the samples raise further questions," said a fourth diplomat who like others asked for anonymity in exchange for discussing confidential information.

[deletia]

(Editing by Dominic Evans)

Uranium found in Syria by UN nuclear inspectors

by Damien McElroy, Foreign Affairs Correspondent

Last Updated: 6:03PM GMT 10 Nov 2008

Uranium traces have been retrieved from a suspected Syrian nuclear plant that was bombed in an Israeli cross-border airstrike last year.

Syria has vehemently rejected Israeli and American claims that it was constructing a secret nuclear plant at the destroyed facility. However Damascus failed to bring its protests over the violation of its sovereignty during the attack to the United Nations Security Council.

Instead it razed the site, which was located near the Euphrates River near the border with Iraq, before granting access to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Diplomats in Vienna reported that inspectors had found uranium particles, despite the Syrian clean-up.

The composition of the material indicated that the facility was designed to process nuclear materials. "It was a man-made component, not natural (ore)," said one official accredited to the UN agency.

A second official said that Syria would have to accept the formal restrictions imposed on states suspected of pursuing a covert nuclear activities. He said: "The agency clearly thinks it has something significant enough to report to put Syria on the (nuclear safeguards) agenda right after North Korea and Iran."

Israeli intelligence material appeared to show that Syria had relied on imported North Korean scientists to provide the technical expertise to construct the plant.

There is no evidence of Iranian involvement despite the close alliance the countries established in other security realms. Western diplomats have reported that exposure of the Syrian plant caused strains in the relationship with Iran, which was unaware of the project.

The rational *[sic]* for Syria's apparent pursuit of a nuclear capability has puzzled most regional observers but suspicions centre on its heightened fear of a US invasion in the wake of the 2003 Iraq war. Syria's Ba'athist regime curtailed co-operation with Western governments as Damascus sought to guarantee its own survival.

Syria's grudging acceptance of the UN-sanctioned inspections and its failure to officially protest the Israeli raid stands in marked contrast to its angry denunciation of a US anti-terrorist operation in the same region last month.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,589432,00.html>

INTERVIEW WITH SYRIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER

'America's Role Is Central'

Interview conducted by Bernhard Zand.

11/10/2008

Syria has great hopes that President-elect Barack Obama can help push the Middle East peace process forward. "This truly is the time to come to a comprehensive peace," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem tells SPIEGEL ONLINE in an interview. He also wants to see direct talks with Iran.

[EXCERPT]

SPIEGEL ONLINE: The situation would improve even further if Damascus gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to all the facilities in Syria it wants to inspect.

Moallem: Seven months after an aggression against a Syrian military position near Deir al-Zor, Israel went to the IAEA and claimed that Syria intended to build a nuclear reactor. This is totally untrue. We have allowed inspectors to visit the site. They spent three days there, they took samples and analyzed them. I assure you: They did not find the materials needed to build a reactor -- graphite, for example. They came to Damascus fulfilling a memorandum of understanding between Syria and the agency in which we allowed them to visit the site once.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: The IAEA would like to see three other sites as well.

Moallem: We do not want Syria to experience what Iraq has experienced. You remember the big American lies before the war in Iraq. Now they want to see this location, then they want to see three other locations and then, maybe, another four. We are not ready to repeat this. This will harm our national security.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Part of Iraq's tragedy was that Saddam Hussein failed to clear up any doubts.

Moallem: We assure the world that we do not have any nuclear intention, no intention to build a nuclear military capability. It costs a lot of money, it is useless -- and the only country in the world that ever dared to use nuclear weapons was the United States.

The Press Association

'Uranium found' at Syrian site

6 hours ago [Accessed 2008-11-11T13:35Z]

Samples taken from a Syrian site bombed by Israel on suspicion it was a covert nuclear reactor contained traces of uranium combined with other elements that merit further investigation, diplomats said.

The diplomats said the uranium was processed and not in raw form, suggesting some kind of nuclear link.

But one of the diplomats said the uranium finding itself was significant only in the context of other traces found in the oil or air samples taken by International Atomic Energy Agency experts during their visit to the site in June.

Syria has a rudimentary declared nuclear programme revolving around research and the production of isotopes for medical and agricultural uses, using a small, 27-kilowatt reactor, and the uranium traces might have originated from there and inadvertently been carried to the bombed site.

But taken together, the uranium and the other components found on the environmental swipes "tell a story" worth investigating, said the diplomat.

The second diplomat said the findings would figure in a report on Syria that will be presented to the IAEA's 35-nation board next week before a scheduled two-day meeting starting on November 24.

Diplomats already said late last month that air and soil samples taken at the site bombed last year by Israeli warplanes had turned up traces of elements that the agency felt needed to be followed up.

The findings are important after months of uncertainty about the status of the investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Preliminary results of the environmental samples collected from the site by an IAEA team were inconclusive, adding weight to Syrian assertions that no trips beyond the initial IAEA visit in June were necessary.

The US says the facility hit by Israeli warplanes more than a year ago was a nearly-completed reactor that - when on line - could produce plutonium, a pathway to nuclear arms.

'Uranium traces' at Syrian site

Page last updated at 12:56 GMT, Tuesday, 11 November 2008

The IAEA has been investigating claims of secret Syrian nuclear activity

Traces of uranium have been found at a Syrian installation suspected of being a nuclear plant, diplomats linked to the UN's nuclear watchdog have said.

The traces could have come off equipment or inspectors' clothes, but still needed more investigation, the diplomats told journalists at the IAEA.

The leak by unofficial sources was denounced by the Vienna-based watchdog which is due to report on its findings.

Syrian officials had no comment. The site was bombed by Israel in 2007.

Since then the International Atomic Energy Agency has been examining claims of secret nuclear activity at the al-Kibar desert site in northern Syria.

The IAEA has not confirmed the findings, saying evaluation was still under way, but it was "regrettable" that people were trying to prejudge the IAEA's technical assessment.

The agency is for the first time preparing a formal written report on its investigations in Syria, ahead of its next board meeting at the end of November.

IAEA taking Syria nuclear allegations seriously

By KAREL JANICEK

34 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-11-11T16:25Z]

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (AP) — The chief U.N. nuclear inspector said Tuesday his agency is taking allegations of a secret Syrian atomic program seriously and urged the country to cooperate fully with his investigation.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also urged other nations with information that could help the investigation to share what they know.

He spoke a day after diplomats told The Associated Press that IAEA samples taken from a Syrian site bombed by Israel on suspicion it was a covert nuclear reactor contained traces of uranium combined with other elements — a finding that merits further information.

Syrian officials had no comment Tuesday. Syria has previously denied any covert nuclear program. Deputy Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad has said Damascus would consider a request by the nuclear watchdog to revisit the bombed site.

Elbaradei, who spoke to reporters in the Czech capital after meeting Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, declined to comment on what the diplomats said, telling reporters only that his agency still has "a number of questions" linked to the allegations.

Indirectly criticizing Israel for launching the strike more than a year ago, ElBaradei said "the fact that we were not allowed to investigate that issue before the facility was destroyed" had made the probe "much more complicated for us."

The U.S. says the facility was a nearly completed reactor that — when on line — could have produced plutonium, a pathway to nuclear arms.

In the IAEA's Vienna headquarters, agency spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said the latest findings on Syria are "still being drafted and our assessment and evaluation is still under way."

"Once it is finished, the report will be submitted to the IAEA Board of Governors ahead of its next meeting, which is scheduled to take place on 27-28 November."

For his part, Elbaradei urged "Syria to give us maximum transparency."

"But I also continue to call on all these countries who have any information including satellite imageries to share it with the agency," Elbaradei said.

Ibrahim Othman, Syria's nuclear chief, has said his country would wait for final environmental results before deciding how to respond to repeated IAEA requests for follow-up visits to the one in June, when the samples were collected.

But a diplomat attending a closed IAEA meeting in September told the AP that Syrian Ambassador Mohammed Badi Khattab suggested his country would not allow further visits under any circumstances because it was still technically at war with Israel and was concerned any additional IAEA probe would expose some of its non-nuclear military secrets.

Beyond wanting to revisit the site bombed by Israel, IAEA experts also want to follow up on U.S, Israeli and other intelligence that North Korea was involved in building the alleged Syrian program.

Also, IAEA officials have been seeking permission to visit three other sites purportedly linked to the alleged reactor destroyed by the Israelis — although Syria already has said that those locations are off limits because they are in restricted military areas.

Syria fears the IAEA probe could lead to a massive investigation similar to the probe Iran has been subjected to for more than five years — and to related fallout. Iran is under U.N. sanctions because of its refusal to heed Security Council demands to curb its nuclear activities.

Associated Press Writer George Jahn contributed to this report from Vienna, Austria.

IAEA irked at "premature" Syria nuclear disclosures

Tue Nov 11, 2008 9:30am EST

By Mark Heinrich

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog criticized on Tuesday diplomatic disclosures that it had found uranium traces at a Syrian site under investigation, saying this was an effort to prejudge the agency's conclusions.

It was a rare open expression of irritation within the agency about news leaks, which some say risk putting a political spin on its technical findings in probes of nations suspected in the West to be illicit nuclear proliferators.

Several diplomats tracking the International Atomic Energy Agency said on Monday that particles of processed uranium turned up in some test samples IAEA inspectors took at the site. These were not enough to draw conclusions about any undeclared nuclear activity but warranted further investigation, they told Reuters.

IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming confirmed the agency was drafting a report on Syria and had put it on the agenda of the agency's November 27-28 governors meeting -- both firsts, in what diplomats said hinted inspectors had found something serious.

But she said the IAEA's evaluation of findings from a June visit to the site, which Washington says was a secret nuclear reactor almost built before it was bombed by Israel in 2007, was not finished and a public verdict was unwarranted until then.

"We regret that people are trying to prejudge the IAEA's technical assessment. We are, however, accustomed to these kinds of efforts to hype and undermine the process before every meeting of the IAEA board (of governors)," Fleming said.

The IAEA did not challenge the substance of Monday's revelations about the uranium traces.

A diplomat close to the agency said its concern was that the leaks could not reflect the full picture and that circulating highly confidential information before an official report could discourage Syrian cooperation with the IAEA.

SYRIA MUM

Syria's ambassador to the IAEA did not return messages asking for comment. There was also no comment from Damascus. It has dismissed U.S. intelligence pointing to a nascent plutonium-making reactor at the site as fabricated.

Diplomats said the question was the provenance of the contamination, since intelligence from Washington and other nations contained nothing to suggest nuclear fuel was stored at the site.

The particles retrieved from some environmental swipe samples were of processed uranium -- which could include the enriched version that in large quantities would fuel power plants or bombs, not of raw uranium ore, they said.

Such traces, they said, could have been carried to the site inadvertently on scientists or workers or on equipment trucked in. Syria has one declared atomic site, a research reactor.

A remote source could resemble a finding made in a long IAEA investigation of Iran's secretive nuclear program.

Bomb-grade uranium particles found by IAEA sleuths there were assessed to have come with used equipment obtained from Pakistan, not from any undeclared domestic production facility.

Iran says its expanding uranium enrichment program is for electricity only, but is under IAEA scrutiny and U.N. sanctions for refusing to suspend the work and curbing IAEA access meant to verify there is no parallel military nuclear activity there.

Iran and Syria have balked at granting IAEA investigators' access to military sites. Both are adversaries of the United States and Israel and do not want to reveal possible targets.

(Editing by Elizabeth Piper)

Syria blames Israeli bombs for uranium traces

The Associated Press

Wednesday, November 12, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

DAMASCUS, Syria: Syria's foreign minister suggested Wednesday that Israeli bombs may be the source of uranium traces that diplomats at the U.N. nuclear agency said were found at a suspected nuclear site.

Walid al-Moallem said the leaks by the diplomats about the traces found at the site that was targeted by Israeli warplanes in September 2007 were politically motivated and aimed at pressuring Syria.

"No one has ever asked himself what kind of Israeli bombs had hit the site, and what did they contain?" he went on, adding that the United States and Israel had "similar acts" of using bombs containing depleted uranium in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"These media leaks are a clear-cut signal that the purpose was to pressure Syria. This means that the subject is not technical but rather political," al-Moallem said at a news conference with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari.

[deletia]

Al-Moallem said the original U.S. contention was that the alleged Syrian reactor was under construction, and not operational. "So the question is: From where the traces of enriched uranium came?"

Syria has previously denied any covert nuclear program, and al-Moallem said Wednesday Damascus was waiting for ElBaradei's report to respond.

<http://mathaba.net/news/?x=611562>

ElBaradei's written Iran report to be released mid next week

Posted: 2008/11/14

From: MNN

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 'IAEA' Director General Mohammed ElBaradei's written report on Iran will be released in the middle of next week.

An IAEA official told on Friday that ElBaradei's written Syria report too will be released in the midst of next week.

The IAEA usually prepares the Director General's report one week before quarterly meeting of its Board of Governors and puts it at the disposal of the Board members for study.

West queries IAEA aid for Syria during atomic probe

Fri Nov 14, 2008 1:42pm EST

By Mark Heinrich

VIENNA (Reuters) - Western powers have questioned an International Atomic Energy Agency offer to help Syria look into building a nuclear power plant while it is under investigation for alleged covert atomic activity, diplomats said on Friday.

But they said that whether the United States and close allies act to bar the "technical cooperation" project at an IAEA governors meeting in two weeks -- a rare and politically divisive step -- will depend on the findings of the agency's first investigative report on Syria due next week.

Diplomats tracking the U.N. nuclear watchdog said on Monday that traces of uranium turned up in some test samples taken by IAEA inspectors from a Syrian site Washington says was a nascent atomic reactor before it was bombed by Israel in 2007.

The IAEA declined comment pending the report.

Syria has said the site was a disused military building and that U.S. intelligence driving the IAEA investigation is fabricated. It suggested that the uranium particles came with munitions Israel dropped on the site.

Some diplomats and analysts said the traces were more likely to have come from uranium that was at some stage of processing for fuel, but the origin remained unclear.

The IAEA was expected to caution that the findings warranted further investigation before conclusions could be drawn.

Vienna diplomats, who asked for anonymity, said the mere fact Syria was being probed over nuclear proliferation concerns meant that approving the nuclear power plant study now could send the wrong message.

A restricted IAEA document obtained by Reuters listed a proposal for a "technical and economic feasibility study and site selection" for a power station at a cost of \$350,000 from 2009 through 2011.

OTHER PROJECTS NOT IN DISPUTE

This was one of eight draft technical cooperation (TC) projects in Syria of the sort the IAEA does in many member states seeking to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

TC plans come up for ratification by the IAEA's 35-nation board of governors every November. Such projects must be approved by consensus.

The other seven projects listed for Syria had innocuous medical, farming or safety applications and diplomats said these would face no objections.

The United States, Britain and France -- among the biggest contributors of funding for IAEA aid projects -- aired the issue of power plant study in a meeting of Western diplomatic missions accredited to the IAEA, diplomats said.

"Eyebrows were raised and questions were posed about the timeline for this power plant study, whether it's premature before other issues are resolved," said one European diplomat.

"There was some question as to whether it would be appropriate first to assess Syria's energy needs," said another.

But diplomats said many delegations on the global governing body were loath to "politicize" IAEA technical aid without urgent reasons and Western powers were awaiting the IAEA report before deciding a course of action.

In a rare step, the board stripped Iran of some TC projects two years ago. But, unlike Syria, Iran had already been found by the IAEA to have hidden proliferation-sensitive activity and had come under U.N. sanctions which prohibited such IAEA aid.

http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/news/international/ElBaradei_says_Syria_uranium_traces_not_conclusive.html?siteSect=143&sid=9980507&cKey=1226935395000&ty=ti

ElBaradei says Syria uranium traces not conclusive

By John Irish

November 17, 2008 - 3:16 PM

[EXCERPT]

DUBAI (Reuters) - Traces of uranium found at a Syrian site bombed by Israel last year were not sufficient evidence of nuclear activity there, the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said Monday.

"We won't be able to reach a quick conclusion unless we have credible information," Mohamed ElBaradei, told a news conference in Dubai. "There was uranium but it does not mean there was a reactor."

Diplomats in Vienna told Reuters earlier this month that particles of processed uranium were found in samples taken by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors from the site in eastern Syria, and said the findings warranted further investigation before any conclusions were drawn.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem has dismissed as politically motivated the disclosures about the uranium traces and said the uranium could have come from munitions used by Israel to bomb the site in September last year.

ElBaradei said a report on Syria's alleged covert atomic activity which the IAEA will release later this week will also not be conclusive.

"The report will say that there is still a lot of work to do. (There will be) no conclusion on whether there was a reactor or not," he said.

Both Syria and Israel should cooperate with the IAEA's investigation of Syria's alleged covert program, he said.

"We need cooperation from Syria; we need cooperation from Israel," he said. "I would still like more transparency from the Syrians," he added.

[deletia]

Syria nuclear clues 'not damning'

Page last updated at 15:40 GMT, Monday, 17 November 2008

[EXCERPT]

The director of the UN atomic watchdog, has said a report he is due to present later this week on Syrian nuclear activity will "not be conclusive".

"We still have work to do," the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, said in Dubai.

"We need more co-operation from Syria... We need also co-operation from Israel," Mr ElBaradei told reporters.

Recent unconfirmed reports said the IAEA had found traces of atomic material on a site bombed by Israel.

"We won't be able to reach a quick conclusion unless we have credible information.

"There was uranium but it doesn't mean there was a reactor... It's not highly enriched uranium," Mr ElBaradei added.

[deletia]

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LH654856.htm>

IAEA urges Syria transparency in probe -ElBaradei

17 Nov 2008 13:50:36 GMT

DUBAI, Nov 17 (Reuters) - The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog urged Syria on Monday to be more transparent in dealing with inspectors looking into the country's alleged atomic activity.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said that a report expected later this week from the IAEA on the country's alleged covert nuclear programme would not be conclusive.

"We are still in discussions with Syria, still not conclusive. I call on Syria to be as transparent with us so we can form our assessment," ElBaradei said at a conference in Dubai.

(Reporting by John Irish; Editing by Inal Ersan)

IAEA Chief: Uranium Found in Syria

Monday, November 17, 2008

AP

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates —

[EXCERPTS]

The head of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog said Monday the agency needs more transparency from Syria and other nations to determine whether traces of uranium found at a site bombed by Israeli planes indicate Damascus was building a nuclear reactor there.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei confirmed that the radioactive material was found at the site, but said the source was inconclusive.

"It's not highly enriched uranium. It could have come from so many different ways," he told reporters in Dubai. "That's why we're looking at so many different scenarios."

[deletia]

"We still have a lot of work to do. We haven't yet reached a conclusion whether that was a reactor or not a reactor," ElBaradei said.

[deletia]

The IAEA chief called specifically for more cooperation from Damascus, saying it needs "a lot of transparency on the part of Syria." He said he was hopeful that Syria would allow inspectors back into the country to carry out further tests.

But he also said Israel needs to provide more information to address Syrian allegations that the uranium may have come from Israeli bombs dropped on the site during the September 2007 raid.

[Syrian foreign minister] Al-Moallem last week said it was unclear what type of bombs targeted the site, adding that the United States has used bombs containing depleted uranium in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Israeli Foreign Ministry had no comment on the matter when asked last week.

ElBaradei also called on countries that have satellite images of the site to cooperate with the investigation.

"We need cooperation from everybody," he said. "We are not going to be able to reach a quick conclusion or jump the gun unless we have absolutely credible information."



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
November 17, 2008

10:45 a.m. EST

[EXCERPT]

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, why don't we let Nina have a crack and --

QUESTION: Can I just ask about these IAEA findings that uranium – traces of uranium were found at this Syrian suspected nuclear site? Any reaction to that?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, the IAEA will speak for itself in terms of what it has found, and it's a continuing investigation. But if accurate, certainly, that would indicate that there was some basis for this investigation and that it should continue until a full picture is able to be drawn by the IAEA as to what exactly happened at that site.

QUESTION: But it doesn't necessarily prove they were enriching uranium at the site. I mean, it could have been that some other Syrian officials who were working at other sites in the country were enriching uranium there.

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, at other undeclared sites in the country, right. Look, the IAEA is investigating this, and, you know, we'll let them investigate it. Quite clearly, this is a serious effort on their part which we as well as others support.

(The briefing was concluded at 11:05 a.m.)

EI Baradei says Syria uranium traces not conclusive

By John Irish

Monday, November 17, 2008; 7:44 PM

[EXCERPTS]

DUBAI (Reuters) - Uranium traces found at a Syrian site bombed by Israel were not sufficient evidence of undeclared nuclear activity but Syria must be more open to help clarify the issue, the head of the U.N. atomic watchdog said on Monday.

"We won't be able to reach a quick conclusion unless we have credible information," International Atomic Energy Agency Director Mohamed ElBaradei told a news conference in Dubai. "There was uranium but it does not mean there was a reactor."

[deletia]

Israel has kept silent on what it targeted. Syria said the site was a disused military building. "We have certainly nothing to hide," Syrian presidential adviser Bouthaina Shaaban told CNN later when asked about ElBaradei's remarks.

ElBaradei said the uranium particles were not highly enriched -- the type used to fuel atomic bombs. "It could have come in so many different ways We are looking at so many different scenarios," he said.

Both Syria and Israel should do more to help the IAEA's investigation, he said. "We need cooperation from Syria; we need cooperation from Israel. I would still like more transparency from the Syrians."

[deletia]

ORIGIN OF URANIUM TRACES KEY

They said the traces appeared to be of a processed form of uranium, possibly at the stage at which it would be loaded into a reactor for enrichment as fuel for civilian energy or for weapons. The origin of the traces was unclear.

"We just need to know what is the source of this low-level, or man-made uranium," ElBaradei told a CNN interviewer.

"It could have come in peoples' clothes, for example. It could have come through some nuclear material stored somewhere. It could have come, as Syria says, through the bombings."

Syria said last week the disclosures about uranium particles were politically motivated and they could have been on munitions used by Israel to bomb the site.

What would be helpful for investigators, ElBaradei told CNN, was any satellite imagery of the site taken immediately after the September 2007 bombing, before Syria razed the site and built another building on it.

He suggested some member states should have such pictures and urged them to provide them to the IAEA.

"Now that we showed the sampling to (Syria), I hope they will allow soon another IAEA visit and (to) other sites where we would like to visit," he said. Syria has said it will not permit further IAEA trips to military sites on security grounds.

ElBaradei will issue his first investigative report on Syria later this week. "(It) will say that there is still a lot of work to do. (There will be) no conclusion on whether there was a reactor or not," he told the news conference.

[deletia]

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jSDUatq4ZvateADSsyQMPIAItKiA>

Uranium at Syria site come from Israeli missiles: FM

1 hour ago [Accessed 2008-11-18T18:00Z]

[EXCERPTS]

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Traces of uranium on a site in northern Syria were residue from Israeli missiles used to bomb the area in September 2007, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said on Tuesday [2008-11-18].

"The traces of uranium found on the site come from Israeli missiles launched during the destruction of the building. It is the only plausible explanation," Muallem said.

The facility destroyed by Israel "was a military building that had no nuclear vocation," Muallem said at a joint news conference with visiting British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

[deletia]

"We are having a report by the end of this week with regards to Syria... It's still not conclusive," [IAEA Director] ElBaradei told reporters at an economic conference in Dubai. "We are taking the issue very seriously."

[deletia]

Muallem also insisted it was soon to pre-empt the IAEA report.

"Syria has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and will wait for Mr ElBaradei's report," Muallem said.

Miliband said he discussed the issue with the Syrian authorities but that Britain will issue no comments before the IAEA report is published officially.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5ivsUZsK-S3bo5xaueWC9pzg07KlQD94I05B00>

Diplomats: IAEA to circulate Syria, Iran reports

By GEORGE JAHN

1 hour ago [*Accessed 2008-11-19T13:45Z*]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — Diplomats say that the U.N nuclear watchdog agency is expected to circulate reports on Syria and Iran later in the day.

The Syrian investigation was sparked by U.S. allegations that a building destroyed last year by Israeli jets was a nearly completed nuclear reactor meant to produce plutonium. Iran is suspected of past efforts to make nuclear arms and is under U.N sanctions for refusing to stop uranium enrichment.

The diplomats say the Iran report will reflect failed efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency to investigate the weapons program allegations and show that enrichment continues. They say the Syria document will expand on IAEA findings of processed uranium at the bombed site.

They diplomats demanded anonymity because their information was confidential.

<http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/News/2008/iransyriareport1108.html>



Latest Iran and Syria Safeguards Reports Circulated to IAEA Board

Staff Report

19 November 2008

IAEA Board of Governors

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei circulated his latest reports on nuclear safeguards in Iran and Syria to the Agency's Board of Governors, the 35-member policymaking body. The Iran report outlines developments since the Director General's report of 16 September. Dr. ElBaradei last reported on safeguards in Syria in his statement to the Board in September 2008.

The IAEA Board of Governors will discuss the reports when it next convenes in Vienna on 27 November. The reports are entitled [Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 \(2006\), 1747 \(2007\), 1803 \(2008\) and 1835 \(2008\) in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#), and [Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic](#).

Their circulation is restricted and cannot be released to the public unless the IAEA Board decides otherwise.



Board of Governors

GOV/2008/60

Date: 19 November 2008

Restricted Distribution

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Item 6(d) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2008/57)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic¹

Report by the Director General

1. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that, in April of this year, the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation destroyed by Israel in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) last September was a nuclear reactor. According to this information, the reactor was not yet operational and no nuclear material had been introduced into it.² The Director General also informed the Board of Governors that Agency inspectors were scheduled to visit the site of the installation (Dair Alzour³), in order to verify, to the extent possible, the veracity of the available information. Syria has stated that the Dair Alzour site was a military site and was not involved in any nuclear activities. On 22 September 2008, the Director General provided an update on the events in his introductory statement to the Board of Governors.
2. The purpose of this report is to inform the Board of Governors of developments related to the Agency's ongoing inquiry into the allegation.

A. Chronology of Events

3. In a letter dated 2 May 2008, the Agency informed Syria that, in accordance with the Agency's safeguards responsibilities and Syria's safeguards obligations, the Agency intended to send a team of inspectors to Syria to review all available information and to visit the Dair Alzour site and three other locations alleged by some Member States to be of relevance.⁴

In a letter dated 31 May 2008, Syria agreed to a visit by the Agency to the Dair Alzour site and to the taking of environmental samples at that site. The Agency's visit to Syria, which took place between 22 and 24 June 2008, involved meetings with Syrian authorities in Damascus on 22 and 24 June 2008, and a visit to the Dair Alzour site on 23 June 2008.

4. During the Agency's 23 June 2008 visit to the Dair Alzour site, Syria provided unrestricted access to all of the buildings on the site, as a transparency measure, and reiterated that the site was a military installation which had not been, and was not, related to any nuclear applications. Syria has not yet acceded to the Agency's request to provide any documentation relevant to the destroyed building, or any of the other buildings, to support its statements.

5. During the meeting on 24 June 2008, the Agency reiterated its request for supporting documentation concerning the past and current use of the buildings at the Dair Alzour site and at the three other locations. The Agency also requested clarification about certain procurement activities by Syrian entities. During the meeting, Syria stated that the destroyed building could not have been a nuclear facility because of, inter alia, the unreliable and insufficient electricity supplies in the area, the limited availability of human resources in Syria and the unavailability of large quantities of treated water.

6. In a follow up letter to Syria dated 3 July 2008, the Agency reiterated its request for the information and documentation referred to in previous correspondence and discussions, and proposed dates for another Agency visit to Syria. In its reply of 21 July 2008, Syria responded that the visit should be postponed until "the necessary arrangements have been made with the bodies concerned in Syria". The Agency wrote to Syria on 15 August 2008, again reiterating its request, in response to which Syria, in a letter dated 24 August 2008, replied that any further developments must be based on the results of the sample analyses.

7. On 22 October 2008, the Agency provided the results of the environmental sample analyses to Syria, and requested a meeting with Syria with a view to discussing the results, obtaining the requested information and securing a visit to the three other locations. The Agency has not received a response to this request.

8. In a letter dated 11 November 2008, Syria confirmed its compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT) and provided the following clarifications⁵:

- "The American allegation presented to the Agency for verification referred to a building under construction and not in operation;"
- "The analysis results of the samples taken from the destroyed site do not show any materials belonging to the construction of a nuclear reactor, confirming that the site which was under construction was for military purposes;"
- "We find it strange that there are a very limited number of humanly modified uranium particles in the analysis results of some samples, taking into consideration that the site was destroyed by Israeli missiles, the component parts of which are not known;"
- "It is necessary to draw attention also to the fact that the result of the analysis of one sample points to three uranium particles, whereas the results of four other samples taken from the same place within a 30 metre range contained no uranium particles;"

- “The only explanation for the presence of these modified uranium particles is that they were contained in the missiles that were dropped from the Israeli planes onto the building to increase the destructive power. Based on this, we hope that the Agency will verify the nature of the materials used in these missiles.”

B. Agency’s Verification

9. The Agency has conducted a thorough analysis of all information available to it as a result of the visit to the Dair Alzour site as well as information from other sources, including commercially available and other satellite imagery, open source photographs said to have been taken at the Dair Alzour site before the building was destroyed, information regarding procurement and the results of environmental sampling analyses.

10. Analysis of the available satellite imagery shows that construction activities were started at the Dair Alzour site between 26 April 2001 and 4 August 2001. The images show ongoing construction until August 2007. Imagery taken prior to and immediately after the bombing indicates that the destroyed box-shaped building may have had underground levels. Its containment structure appears to have been similar in dimension and layout to that required for a biological shield for nuclear reactors, and the overall size of the building was sufficient to house the equipment needed for a nuclear reactor of the type alleged.

11. As part of its assessment, the Agency has conducted an evaluation of the water pumping infrastructure observed by it during the June 2008 visit to Dair Alzour. The results of that evaluation indicate that the pumping capacity is adequate for a reactor of the size referred to in the allegation (25 MWth). During its visit to the site, the Agency observed sufficient electrical capacity to operate the pumping system.

12. Analysis of the environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site carried out by a number of the Agency’s Network of Analytical Laboratories revealed a significant number of natural uranium particles. The analysis of these particles indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic, i.e. that the material was produced as a result of chemical processing. As indicated above, Syria stated that the only explanation for these particles was that they were contained in the missiles used to destroy the building.

13. The Agency continues to assess the information related to efforts by Syrian entities to procure materials and equipment which could support the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor. It should be noted that it is possible that the procurement of such items was for non-nuclear use. The Agency has not yet received the requested information from Syria.

14. Satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency concerning installations at the three other locations in Syria referred to above suggest that those locations may be of relevance to the activities at the Dair Alzour site. As indicated above, the Agency requested access to the three locations on 2 May 2008. Analysis of satellite imagery taken of these locations indicates that landscaping activities and the removal of large containers took place shortly after the Agency’s request for access. While these activities may be unrelated to the Dair Alzour site, it would be helpful if Syria were to provide an explanation for these activities and to permit the Agency to visit the three locations.

C. Current Assessment

15. The Director General emphasizes that the Agency was severely hampered in discharging its responsibilities under the NPT and under Syria’s Safeguards Agreement by the unilateral use of force

and by the late provision of information concerning the building at the Dair Alzour site. In light of the destruction of the building and the subsequent removal of the remains, the Agency's verification of the situation has been made more difficult and complex, as well as more time and resource consuming.

16. The information provided by some Member States to the Agency includes satellite imagery of the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations. For its assessment of the site immediately after the bombing, the Agency used satellite imagery provided by Member States, as there was no high resolution imagery for that period available to the Agency from commercial vendors. The first commercial images that the Agency was able to obtain after the bombing on 6 September 2007 were taken on 24 October 2007; these images indicate large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the Dair Alzour site after the bombing. To the extent it has been recently authorized by the providers to do so, the Agency intends, during its next meeting with Syria, to share with Syria that satellite imagery which is of relevance to the Agency's assessment.

17. While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building, as described above, along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site. Syria has not yet provided the requested documentation in support of its declarations concerning the nature or function of the destroyed building, nor agreed to a visit to the three other locations which the Agency has requested to visit.

18. The Agency is assessing Syria's explanation of the origin of the uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour site and intends to request Syria to permit the Agency to, inter alia, visit the locations where the debris from the building and any equipment removed from the Dair Alzour site are, for the purpose of taking samples. The Agency also intends to request Israel to provide information pertaining to Syria's claims regarding the origin of the uranium particles.

19. The Director General has called on Syria to provide the necessary transparency, including allowing visits to the requested locations and access to all available information, for the Agency to complete its assessment. The Director General also calls on other States that may possess relevant information, including satellite imagery, to make this available to the Agency and to authorize the Agency to share the information with Syria.

20. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ INFCIRC/407.

² GOV/OR.1206, paras 26 and 28.

³ Also referred to in open sources as "Al Kibar".

⁴ The locations are alleged to have been functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

⁵ In the letter, Syria also expressed dissatisfaction with the leaking of the environmental sampling results to the media and concern that this was an indication of other parties attempting to use the Agency's activities for political purposes.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hmf5y5p3U5E1WJcCfWWVtV8ebLAW>

IAEA unable to say if bombed Syrian site was nuclear reactor

2 hours ago [Accessed 2008-11-19T18:40Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN atomic watchdog said Wednesday it could not yet determine if a building in a remote site in the Syrian desert bombed by Israeli planes last year was a nuclear reactor, as the United States claims.

Nevertheless, puzzling anomalies had been found at the site, the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

"We are not in a situation to say that it was a nuclear reactor," an official close to the IAEA said, adding at the same time that "we cannot exclude that it was" one.

The watchdog addressed the matter in a restricted report circulated to the agency's board of governors on Wednesday, a copy of which was obtained by AFP.

"While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building ... along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site," the IAEA said.

Furthermore, traces of uranium had been found by IAEA investigators in environmental samples taken from the site, known alternatively as either Al-Kibar or Dair Alzour, which was razed to the ground by Israeli planes on September 6, 2007.

"The analysis of these particles indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic. ie. that the material was produced as a result of chemical processing," the report said.

"No such nuclear material had so far been declared in Syria's inventory ... In principle, that sort of nuclear material should not exist there. It's not usual to find man-made uranium in sand," a senior UN official said.

[deletia]

The IAEA's inspectors had "not been able to establish the exact origin, because the particles were fairly small," the senior UN official said.

A second official said the report -- the IAEA's first since it dispatched a team of experts to investigate Dair Alzour in June -- was "not conclusive."

The IAEA was "assessing Syria's explanation of the origin of the uranium particles."

It added that it "intends to request Syria to permit the agency to, inter alia, visit the locations where the debris from the building and any equipment removed from the Dair Alzour site are, for the purpose of taking samples."

"The Agency also intends to request Israel to provide information pertaining to Syria's claims regarding the origin of the uranium particles."

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei urged Syria "to provide the necessary transparency," including permission for follow-up visits to Dair Alzour, plus visits -- so far denied -- to three other related locations "and access to all available information".

But he also called on "other states that may possess relevant information, including satellite imagery, to make this available to the agency and to authorise the agency to share the information with Syria."

ElBaradei complained that the IAEA's work had been "severely hampered ... by the unilateral use of force and by the late provision of information concerning the building at the Dair Alzour site."

"In light of the destruction of the building and the subsequent removal of the remains, the agency's verification of the situation has been made more difficult and complex, as well as more time and resource consuming," the report said.

Syrian site 'resembled reactor'

Published: 2008/11/19 18:07:19 GMT

[EXCERPTS]

A Syrian site bombed by Israel last year had features resembling those of a nuclear reactor site, the UN nuclear watchdog says in a report.

But the International Atomic Energy Agency did not exclude the possibility the site was being used for purposes unrelated to nuclear activity.

In the first report on its findings in Syria, the IAEA said "significant" quantities of uranium were also found.

[deletia]

"While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building, along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site," said the IAEA report, sent to its 35-nation board of governors ahead of a meeting next week.

It added that IAEA inspectors had found "a significant number of natural uranium particles" in environmental samples taken from the site.

'Israeli residue'

IAEA inspectors visited the bombed al-Kibar site in June, where they took samples that appear to have contained the radioactive material, but Damascus has blocked any follow-up trips.

According to the confidential report, a copy of which was obtained by the BBC, Syria says the uranium found there was residue from the Israeli missiles used in the air-raid.

The IAEA says it wants to visit three locations in Syria to take further samples.

It also says it will ask Israel to provide information about Syria's claims about the uranium particles.

But a senior official close to the IAEA said the type of uranium found was not that usually found in munitions.

[deletia]

The IAEA also noted that Syria had not produced requested documentation to support its declarations about the nature of the building.

[deletia]

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=avS2.JukgKUo&refer=home>

Iran, Syria Fail on UN Nuclear Cooperation, IAEA Says (Update1)

By Jonathan Tirone

Last Updated: November 19, 2008 12:07 EST

[EXCERPTS]

Nov. 19 (Bloomberg) -- Iran and Syria have failed to provide sufficient assistance with two separate investigations into suspected clandestine nuclear work, the United Nations atomic agency said.

[deletia]

Uranium Particles

The agency said it wants to talk with Israel about what kinds of munitions were used to bomb the Syrian facility. Syria says that uranium particles found at the site came from Israeli weapons.

“The agency is assessing Syria's explanation of the origin of the uranium particles” found at the site, the IAEA reported. Inspectors have requested access to shrapnel and equipment removed from the location.

Any amount of man-made uranium at such a site is highly unusual, UN officials said. The uranium may have come from conventional munitions, and there's no declared facility on Syrian soil from which such uranium could have come, they added.

The site's “containment structure appears to have been similar in the dimension and layout to that required for a biological shield for nuclear reactors, and the overall size of the building was sufficient to house the equipment needed for a nuclear reactor,” the IAEA said.

Tensions

Four IAEA requests for further visits since an initial June 23 trip by inspectors have gone unheeded by Syrian authorities, the IAEA said.

[deletia]

Syria site hit by Israel resembled atom plant: IAEA

By Mark Heinrich

Wed Nov 19, 2008 1:24pm EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - A Syrian complex bombed by Israel bore features resembling those of an undeclared nuclear reactor and U.N. inspectors found "significant" traces of uranium at the site, a watchdog report said on Wednesday.

But the International Atomic Energy Agency report said the findings gleaned from inspectors' visit to the site in June were not enough to conclude a reactor was once there. It said further investigation and greater Syrian transparency were needed.

The confidential nuclear safeguards report said Syria would be asked to show to inspectors debris and equipment whisked away from the site after the September 2007 Israeli air raid.

[deletia]

"While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building, along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site," said the IAEA report, sent to its 35-nation board of governors ahead of a November 27-28 meeting.

It noted Syria had not produced requested documentation to support its declarations about the nature of the building nor agreed to follow-up IAEA visits to three other locations seen as harboring possible evidence linked to Israel's target.

The IAEA intended to ask Syria to let inspectors take swipe samples from rubble and any equipment removed from the site.

SYRIAN TRANSPARENCY NEEDED

It said IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei had urged Syria to "provide the necessary transparency including allowing visits to the requested locations and access to all available information for the agency to complete its assessment."

"Without such cooperation, we will not be able to make progress," said a senior U.N. official familiar with the report.

The IAEA will ask Israel to answer Syria's remarks about the provenance of the uranium. Syria should also produce shrapnel from the bombing for testing purposes, he said.

U.N. officials said the uranium traces retrieved from soil samples at the site were a "chemically processed" form of the mineral that was not the enriched variety used to run nuclear power plants or in the core of atomic bombs.

But the element found was also not depleted uranium, the kind used to boost the penetrating power of munitions -- but primarily anti-tank shells, not aerial bombs, analysts say.

"There's enough uranium here to raise questions. The onus of this verification is on Syria," said a senior U.N. official. He said the uranium compound that turned up in environmental swipe samples was not in Syria's declared nuclear inventory.

Syria's only declared nuclear plant is an old research reactor. The IAEA has said Syria seems to lack the sophisticated technology and infrastructure needed to produce nuclear energy.

The report said Syria had told inspectors the site could not have been a nuclear facility because of unreliable, insufficient electricity supplies locally, limited available manpower and the lack of large quantities of treated water.

Another senior U.N. official said the investigation had urgent need of high-resolution pictures of the site he said must have been taken in the immediate aftermath of the bombing.

He said eight countries, which he declined to identify, had access to such imagery but had not turned it over to date.

The report complained that the investigation had been "severely hampered by (Israel's) unilateral use of force" and by a U.S. failure to hand over relevant intelligence until seven months after the bombing -- after Syria swept the area clean and erected a new building on the spot.

"In light of (that), the agency's verification of the situation has been made more difficult and complex, as well as more time- and resource-consuming," the report said.

Bombed Syrian Site Appears to Have Been Nuclear Reactor

By Joby Warrick

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, November 19, 2008; 3:10 PM

The Syrian facility bombed by Israeli planes last year bore multiple hallmarks of a nuclear reactor, and the ruined site was contaminated with uranium, United Nations nuclear inspectors confirmed today in a report that largely backed Bush administration accounts of a secret atomic program in the Syrian desert.

The report stopped short of declaring the Syrian facility to be a nuclear reactor, noting that Damascus had taken extensive steps to sanitize the site before officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency were allowed to visit. But agency officials said Syria had failed to provide blueprints or other documents to support its claim that the destroyed building had a non-nuclear purpose.

In a separate report, the agency also heaped new criticism on Iran for failing to cooperate with U.N. inspectors in clearing up questions about past nuclear research that appears linked to a military weapons program. The report said Iran continues to expand its capacity for making enriched uranium, a key ingredient in both commercial nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

The IAEA has been engaged in a contentious negotiations with both Syria and Iran as it seeks to assess claims that both countries were secretly planning to make nuclear weapons. Syria has denied having nuclear ambitions, while Iran contends that its nuclear program is exclusively for electricity production.

The Syrian facility, on the banks of the Euphrates River near the village of Al Kibar, was obliterated by Israeli bombs Sept. 6, 2007. Although the Bush administration previously released photographs and other evidence suggesting that the building was a partly completed nuclear reactor, the new IAEA report provides independent support for the U.S. claim.

The report said the IAEA's analysis of satellite photos taken before and immediately after the bombing revealed numerous features suggestive of a nuclear reactor, including a containment shield, an extensive power supply and large water pumps for cooling.

But more provocative was the IAEA's discovery, during a visit to the site in May, of traces of uranium in soil recovered from the site. A senior U.N. official, describing the finding, said the soil samples contained "significant" amounts of uranium in a form that clearly suggested human manipulation. The uranium was not enriched but had been "chemically processed," official said.

Some nuclear reactors, such as the Yongbyon reactor built by North Korea, use a form of processed uranium that has not been artificially enriched. U.S. intelligence officials say North Korea assisted Syria in constructing the al Kibar facility, which closely resembled the Yongbyon reactor.

Last week, after news accounts surfaced about the discovery of uranium traces at the Al Kibar site, Syrian officials suggested the uranium might have come from Israeli bombs. Some munitions used in attacking fortified structures are coated with depleted uranium, which is known for its density.

However, the senior U.N. official said IAEA inspectors had found no trace of depleted uranium at the site. He said the agency is evaluating new documents provided by Syria that attempt to explain the presence of the uranium.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iaea20-2008nov20,0,2599676.story>

IAEA's Syria report brings more speculation over radioactive traces

By Borzou Daragahi

7:18 PM PST, November 19, 2008

[EXCERPT]

[deletia]

Diplomats first reported the existence of the uranium last week. Syrian officials have said that not even U.S. officials claim that they were already operating a plutonium plant.

"The only explanation for the presence of these modified uranium particles is that they were contained in the missiles dropped from the Israeli planes," the report said.

But officials close to the IAEA said the uranium samples found were not the depleted type used in some weapons and have few practical applications. Nor do they match any Syrian uranium samples previously declared to the IAEA. Nor are they compatible with the reactor suspected of being planned for the site.

[deletia]

IAEA Issues Tough Report on Alleged Syrian Nuclear Site

By Greg Webb

Global Security Newswire

Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

"The jury is out and we are working busily to resolve what sort of installation it was, whether it was nuclear or military, as the Syrians have claimed," a senior official close to the U.N. nuclear watchdog said today. On that question, "you have to wait for a while."

[deletia]

Natural Uranium Found

That activity might have hidden some of the most damning evidence of all: samples of uranium that turned up in soil samples.

"There was quite a lot of landscaping after cleaning the place, so most of these particles were found in places where there was no landscaping," the senior official said today.

Some soil samples included "a significant number of natural uranium particles," the report says, ending media speculation about the nature of the material. Experts had questioned whether the uranium had been enriched or depleted, but the report makes clear it was neither.

Furthermore, the uranium was clearly processed and was not in a chemical form found in nature. It was man-made, the report says.

"This type of material should not be there. It's not part of [the] declared inventory of Syria," the senior official added.

Natural uranium is the fuel used by a North Korean reactor that U.S. officials have claimed served as the design basis for the alleged Syrian reactor.

The finding would also appear to undermine Syrian claims that the uranium must have been part of the Israeli weapons used to destroy the site. Some antitank ammunition uses depleted uranium to penetrate thick armor, but defense experts have told Global Security Newswire that they are unaware of depleted uranium being used in air-delivered bombs (see GSN, Nov. 12).

"Not one single depleted uranium particle has been found so far," the senior official said.

[deletia]

The Rebuilt Site

Syria has built a new structure where the old one was bombed, but the senior official refused to describe it in detail.

"I can tell as a former army soldier what is inside, but I cannot tell to you," the official said.

http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/11526.htm

Senior IAEA Official: 'Severe' Report Means Syria Must Cooperate

Posted at: 2008-11-20

A senior official from the International Atomic Energy Agency has called a report it released yesterday "severe."

The report states that the site attacked in Syria in September 2007 looks like a nuclear reactor.

He said that Syria had no choice but to cooperate with IAEA inspectors and to allow them to revisit the site, or else "the Syrian dossier will become like the Iranian one."

Source: Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, London, November 20, 2008



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

Statement

Ambassador Gregory L Schulte
Permanent U.S. Representative to the IAEA
Vienna, November 21, 2008

Earlier this week, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei released reports on the IAEA's investigation of Iran and Syria.

The Director General reports that Iran continues to enrich uranium – this despite the absence of an obvious civil requirement. At the same time, Iran refuses to explain its past activities relevant to fashioning highly enriched uranium into nuclear weapons. This is deeply troubling. It is deeply troubling because Iran's actions violate multiple resolutions of the IAEA Board and the UN Security Council. It is deeply troubling because it is only a small step from the low enriched uranium that Iran is now stockpiling to the highly enriched uranium that Iran would need to build a bomb.

This week's report on Syria is the first written report on the IAEA's investigation. At the September meeting of the IAEA Board, the Director General said that he would issue a written report if he has something of substance to report. Reading the report makes clear that he does. Indeed the report raises real, substantive concerns that deserve careful consideration by the IAEA Board and continued investigation by the Agency's inspectors.

The Director General's report reinforces the assessment of my government that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in its eastern desert and thereby violating its IAEA safeguards obligations. The report sharply contradicts a number of Syria's claims and catalogues Syria's repeated refusal to answer IAEA questions. We strongly support the IAEA's continued investigation and encourage Syria's authorities to give Agency inspectors necessary access to facilities, individuals, and information. **The IAEA needs to understand what Syria was building in secret then buried under meters of earth and a new building. The IAEA also needs to be confident that there are no other undeclared activities in Syria.**

Syria is not Iran, and we do not seek to make Syria into Iran. But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA. We hope that it will not adopt the tactics of hindrance and unhelpfulness that Tehran has so finely honed and that remain so evident in the Director General's latest report.

The IAEA Board will consider both of these reports at its meeting next week. We expect Board members to call on both countries to cooperate with the IAEA and meet their international obligations.

IAEA report hardens suspicions against Syria: US

20 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-11-21T15:25Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN atomic watchdog's first report on Syria's alleged nuclear activities has hardened suspicions that it had been building a nuclear reactor at a remote desert site, a top US envoy said Friday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's report "reinforces the assessment of my government that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in its eastern desert," Washington's ambassador to the Vienna-based watchdog, Gregory Schulte, said.

"The report sharply contradicts a number of Syria's claims and catalogues Syria's repeated refusal to answer IAEA questions."

[deletia]

Schulte said in a statement: "We strongly support the IAEA's continued investigation and encourage Syria's authorities to give Agency inspectors necessary access to facilities, individuals, and information.

"Syria is not Iran, and we do not seek to make Syria into Iran. But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA. We hope that it will not adopt the tactics of hindrance and unhelpfulness that Tehran has so finely honed ..."

In a separate report on Wednesday, the IAEA said Iran was still stonewalling a long-running probe into alleged atomic bomb research by Tehran.

[deletia]

Both reports are scheduled to be discussed by the board of governors at a two-day meeting next week.

Schulte he expected board members to "call on both countries to cooperate with the IAEA and meet their international obligations."

U.S. says IAEA hardens fear of covert Syria atom site

By Mark Heinrich

Fri Nov 21, 2008 5:41pm IST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - The United States said on Friday the first independent monitoring report on an alleged Syrian nuclear site had hardened suspicions that Syria was building a covert reactor and would raise pressure on it to come clean.

[deletia]

"The report reinforces the assessment of my government that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in its eastern desert and thereby violating its IAEA (non-proliferation) safeguards obligations," said Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the U.N. nuclear monitor.

"The report sharply contradicts a number of Syria's claims and catalogues Syria's repeated refusal to answer IAEA questions," he said in a statement, the first official U.S. response.

[deletia]

"The IAEA needs to understand what Syria was building in secret then buried under meters of earth and a new building," Schulte said.

"Syria is not Iran and we do not seek to make Syria into Iran. But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA.

"We hope that it will not adopt the tactics of hindrance and unhelpfulness that Tehran has so finely honed and that remain so evident in the (IAEA's) latest report," he said.

[deletia]

Schulte said members of the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors would press Iran and Syria to cooperate at the body's end-of-year meeting on Nov. 27-28.

US: Syria should not mimic Iran nuclear probe block

Posted : Fri, 21 Nov 2008 15:27:39 GMT

Author : DPA

[EXCERPT]

Vienna - A senior United States diplomat in Vienna called on Syria on Friday to answer the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) questions about an alleged secret nuclear programme, and not to follow Iran's path of stalling a probe of its nuclear activities. "Syria is not Iran, and we do not seek to make Syria into Iran," Gregory Schulte, the US ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna, said in a statement. "But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA," he said.

On Wednesday, the IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei issued his first report after his organisation's inspectors visited the al-Kibar site in Syria in June, where the US alleges Syria was constructing a nuclear reactor that was bombed by the Israeli air force in September 2007.

"The Director General's report reinforces the assessment of my government that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in its eastern desert and thereby violating its IAEA safeguards obligations," Schulte said.

Syria dismisses IAEA report, says probe should end

By Mark Heinrich

Fri Nov 21, 2008 12:54pm EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - Syria said on Friday a U.N. watchdog report on an alleged secret Syrian nuclear site bombed by Israel proved nothing and the investigation should be closed.

Syrian nuclear energy chief Ibrahim Othman said his country would stick by a written agreement with U.N. inspectors that allowed only one visit to the Al-Kibar site -- which took place last June -- and "we will not allow another visit."

[deletia]

Othman, speaking after a closed IAEA briefing to members of its 35-nation board of governors, repeated Syria's position that Israel's target was only a conventional military building.

"What they are now saying about uranium particles -- collecting three particles from the desert is not enough to say there was a reactor there at all," he told reporters, speaking English in Syria's first public reaction to the report.

"Now, I think to follow up there should be a good reason to say there is something there. In our opinion this file should be closed," said Othman, head of Syria's atomic energy commission.

Syria has one declared atomic facility, an old research reactor.

[deletia]

Pressed on whether Syria was slamming the door to further contact with the IAEA over the probe, Othman said, "No, no. If the information required belongs to the accusation, then we will supply it," suggesting there could be more discussions.

But he poured cold water on the prospect of intrusive inspections of more sites he said were military installations Syria could not afford to expose given its official state of war with Israel, which has an undeclared nuclear arsenal.

"If our authorities find it is possible to visit, it's not myself who will decide. But I'm pointing out these are military positions, buildings, activities, and remind you all we are still in a war in the Middle East," Othman said.

He said Syria would continue cooperation with the IAEA but according to its agreement with the agency, which provides for inspections only at declared atomic sites.

(Editing by Giles Elgood)

ElBaradei hits Western challenge to Syria nuclear aid

By Mark Heinrich

Reuters

Monday, November 24, 2008

The U.N. nuclear watchdog chief objected to Western moves on Monday to block aid for a planned Syrian nuclear power plant, saying U.S. intelligence pointing to secret Syrian atomic weapons programme remained unproven.

Diplomats at a 35-nation meeting of International Atomic Energy Agency governors said the United States, Canada and the European Union signalled it would be prudent to halt the project while Syria is under IAEA investigation over the U.S. reports.

China, Russia and developing nations, which together comprise the majority on the governing body, rejected the Western challenge as "political interference" undercutting the IAEA's aid programme for civilian atomic energy development.

Western nations were alarmed by an IAEA report last week saying a Syrian building demolished in an Israeli air raid last year bore similarities to a nuclear reactor and inspectors later found striking amounts of uranium particles in the area.

The findings were not enough to prove a covert reactor of North Korean design meant to yield plutonium for atom bombs was there, as U.S. intelligence indicated, the report said.

But further checks at the site and visits to three others as well as full Syrian cooperation, including documentation about their uses, were essential to draw conclusions, it said.

U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the IAEA report showed it would be wrong to give technical information to Syria to build a nuclear power station.

"It's wholly inappropriate, we believe, given the fact that Syria is under investigation by the IAEA for building a nuclear reactor outside the bounds of its international legal commitments," he said.

Syria has said all four locations are conventional military sites, the uranium came from missiles Israel used in the bombing and that wider, intrusive IAEA access was unacceptable on national security grounds, noting its state of war with Israel.

'INNOCENT TILL PROVEN GUILTY'

IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei urged the agency governors to approve the Syrian aid project, saying it would be wrong to curb Damascus's IAEA membership rights based on unverified reports that it had violated non-proliferation commitments.

"There are claims against Syria, which we're looking at. There were claims against Iraq, which were proven bonkers (mad), and after, the result was a terrible war," he said in remarks to the closed gathering relayed to Reuters.

U.S. assertions Saddam Hussein had a mass-destruction weapon programme led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq but proved unfounded.

"So we have to be very careful when we talk about an investigation," ElBaradei said. "Even people who are not a lawyer would know that people and countries are innocent until proven guilty. And we continue to act on that basis."

The proposal stirring the governors was a "technical and economic feasibility and site selection" study drafted by the IAEA Secretariat for a nuclear power station in Syria. It would cost \$350,000 and run from 2009 to 2011.

Syria applied for the study in August 2007, three weeks before Israel's air raid, according to an IAEA briefing paper circulated to the governors. It certified that the project did not undercut IAEA safeguards standards in Syria.

The IAEA conducts "technical cooperation" (TC) projects in member states worldwide seeking to develop peaceful nuclear energy. The Syrian study was among 629 projects up for approval later this week at the governors' year-end meeting.

An EU statement to the meeting said it would have been preferable to suspend the project for a year to give time to resolve the accusations against Syria. It did not say where the EU would stand if the matter came to a vote later this week.

Diplomats said there were some internal EU differences over whether to join the U.S.-led bid to block the project.

If a vote happens, it would be rare and divisive and erode the IAEA's board's tradition of taking decisions by consensus.

In 2006, governors decided by consensus to strip Iran of an IAEA safety design study at a heavy-water reactor project over concerns the plant could be secretly used to make plutonium. Iran says it will make radio-isotopes for medical care there.

But that decision was legally clearcut as Iran was under U.N. sanctions over non-compliance with IAEA rules for failing to declare proliferation-sensitive uranium enrichment work and denying the IAEA full access to verify it was for peaceful ends.

(Additional reporting by Susan Cornwell in Washington; Editing by Dominic Evans)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/nov/112294.htm>



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
November 24, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Sean, please, anything on the latest clash between the United States and the IAEA about providing nuclear information to Syria?

MR. MCCORMACK: I hadn't seen the word "clashing." What were we clashing about? Fill me in.

QUESTION: That ElBaradei thinks that the – his organization should proceed and provide technical information to Syria, and the United States is opposing that.

MR. MCCORMACK: Oh, right. I understand the issue. I hadn't seen his particular comments, but I know – I'm familiar with the issue, it's wholly inappropriate, we believe, given the fact that Syria is under investigation by the IAEA for building a nuclear reactor outside the bounds of its international legal commitments, and then for the IAEA to be involved in providing technical information concerning nuclear activities would seem to be contradictory, if not ironic.

In US defeat, UN agency approves Syria nuclear aid

By GEORGE JAHN

1 hour ago [*Accessed 2008-11-26T20:30Z*]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — The U.N. nuclear agency on Wednesday overrode U.S. concerns and approved sensitive technical aid for Syria, despite allegations the country has a secret atomic program that could be used to make weapons.

In the end, Washington and its allies agreed to the deal, which provides IAEA expertise and equipment to help Syria build a power-producing reactor.

But they did so only after three days of deadlock at a closed meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The dispute pitted Western nations against backers of Syria, which included Iran, Russia and China.

Agreeing to approval appeared to have been a painful concession for the U.S., Canada, Australia, France and Britain — the nations that at the start of the meeting spearheaded the effort to deny Syria the aid.

Beyond helping the Syrians develop expertise, the \$350,000 aid project would send the wrong signal about a country under investigation by the IAEA, critics argued.

A Western diplomat sought to depict approval of the project in a positive light.

"We've made our point," she said, demanding anonymity because she was not authorized to discuss the closed meeting. "The one Syrian project is now under the spotlight and will remain under the spotlight."

But Syria portrayed the decision as vindication.

Approval by the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency showed an "understanding of the position of Syria," Ibrahim Othman, head of Syria's nuclear agency, told The Associated Press.

An IAEA report last week said satellite imagery and other information suggested a site bombed last year by Israel was a nuclear reactor, adding that agency inspectors had found traces of processed uranium on location. The U.S. says the target was a nearly completed reactor built with North Korean help that would have produced plutonium, a possible fissile warhead component.

But Syria denies running a secret nuclear program. And on Wednesday [2008-11-26], Othman dismissed Western assertions that a country being probed by the IAEA should not be privy to sensitive nuclear technological aid — and even denied his country was being probed.

"We are not under investigation," he said, calling the case against his country "accusations without any proof."

Reluctant Western acceptance of the aid project came only after a spirited endorsement by IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei earlier in the week that appeared strengthen pro-Syria sentiment.

The U.S. and its allies could have forced a vote. But the outcome would have been uncertain. And it would have further charged the tense atmosphere of a meeting that normally decides by consensus and without controversy on projects to IAEA members meant to help them master civilian nuclear projects.

The last project denied was two years ago for Iran, which is under U.N. sanctions for defying Security Council demands to curb uranium enrichment and other activities that could be used in a weapons program.

Nations opposed to the Syria package settled for language Wednesday allowing to voice their concerns in the restricted document approving the deal.

That text, made available to The Associated Press, noted that "a number of states expressed strong reservations" and committed the IAEA to "monitor the project closely ... and ensure that any equipment provided is used only for the purposes intended."



Statements of the Director General

27 November 2008 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of Safeguards in the Syrian Arab Republic

In June this year, I informed the Board that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation destroyed by Israel in Syria in September 2007 was a nuclear reactor. Syria has stated that the Dair Alzour site was a military site and was not involved in any nuclear activities.

The Agency has, in accordance with its responsibility under comprehensive safeguards agreements, conducted a thorough analysis of all information available to it. As I mentioned in my report, the Agency was severely hampered in its assessment by the unilateral use of force and by the late provision of information about the destroyed building. The destruction of the building and the subsequent removal of the debris made the Agency's verification work quite difficult and complex, rendering the results so far inconclusive.

For its assessment of the site immediately after the bombing, the Agency was unable to obtain commercial satellite imagery. It is regrettable, and indeed baffling, that imagery for this critical period, which would have been most valuable in helping to clarify the nature of the building that was destroyed, was not available. The Agency has recently been able to secure agreement to show Syria imagery from Member State satellites of the site shortly after the bombing, and will do so at the earliest opportunity.

Analysis of environmental samples from the Dair Alzour site revealed a significant number of natural uranium particles, which had been produced as a result of chemical processing. Syria stated that the only explanation for these particles was that they were contained in the missiles used to destroy the building. The Agency is assessing Syria's claim. We have asked Syria to permit the Agency to visit the locations of debris and equipment removed from the site in order to take samples that would help us to assess the origin of the uranium and also to ascertain the possible existence of any nuclear grade graphite that is normally associated with the type of alleged reactor. The Agency has also asked Israel to provide detailed information concerning Syria's claims regarding the origin of the uranium particles.

As stated in the report, while it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building, along with the availability of adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site. In light of this, it is important that Syria provide the Agency with documentation in support of its statements concerning the nature and function of the destroyed building.

Syria should also agree, as a transparency measure, to let the Agency visit other locations. As I mentioned in the case of Iran, I am confident that modalities can be developed which will protect the confidentiality of military information while enabling the Agency to continue with its assessment.

For the Agency to complete its assessment, maximum transparency by Syria and the full sharing with the Agency of all relevant information which other States may have are essential.

General Verification Issues

Finally, I would like to clarify a number of important general verification issues that have been raised recently in Board discussions and Secretariat briefings.

First, it is the Agency's obligation to assess the veracity of any information made available to it and to assure itself at all times, in accordance with its obligations under comprehensive safeguards agreements, that there are no undeclared nuclear material or activities in a given country. This clearly requires full cooperation by the State concerned.

Second, in certain situations, the Agency has to rely on transparency measures by the State concerned that go beyond the Agency's rights under comprehensive safeguards agreements and the additional protocol in order to be in a position to complete our assessments, since our legal authority to address certain issues is limited. It is in the interests of the State concerned to engage in such cooperation in order to assist the Agency in clarifying any allegations made against it. As I have said many times, our effectiveness depends on the legal authority and tools we have and the cooperation we receive. The more legal authority, tools and cooperation we have, the more effective we can be.

Third, several Member States have raised questions concerning the Agency's reliance on laboratories in Member States in assessing environmental samples. As the Deputy Director General for Safeguards noted during the informal briefing last week, we take all necessary measures to ensure the anonymity of samples and we rely on more than one lab for results. The fact remains, however, that in some cases we are not able to independently validate the results of sample analysis on our own because of the lack of certain analytical capabilities at our Safeguards Analytical Laboratory (SAL).

You have received a report on the current status of plans to refurbish SAL and transform it into an advanced, state of the art facility. This is key to the Agency's capability, and independence, with regard to environmental sample and nuclear material sample analysis. We estimate the overall cost at around €35 million. With the exception of Japan, which pledged €2 million, no additional pledges of support have been received. If sufficient funds are not forthcoming, it will be necessary to request supplementary budget appropriations. The sooner SAL is operating with the high capabilities required, the greater will be the confidence of all Member States in our ability to independently validate the results of samples analysed by Member State laboratories. This is a matter which I have highlighted in the past and which has been clearly spelled out in the Report of the Commission of Eminent Persons. So the ball really is in your court.

Fourth, concerning satellite imagery, which has proven to be a useful tool, in particular in contributing to the assessment of claims of undeclared nuclear activities, it is of course unfortunate that the Agency, like the United Nations as a whole, does not have an independent satellite capability, as was proposed some years ago by France. As that is unlikely to change any time soon, we will continue to make use of available commercial and Member State satellite imagery. But I should stress that, because the Agency cannot verify the authenticity of such imagery, we rely on it only as an auxiliary source to corroborate other information which we can authenticate, and it is never the sole basis of our assessments. Depending on the availability of other information, this may mean that the Agency's assessments in some cases are inconclusive.

IAEA chief baffled over lack of Syria nuke info

The Associated Press

Thursday, November 27, 2008

1 hour ago [Accessed 2008-11-27T15:15Z]

VIENNA, Austria: The chief U.N. nuclear inspector said Thursday [2008-11-27] that his agency's Syria probe has been hampered because key satellite images of an alleged nuclear reactor bombed by Israel are inexplicably unavailable on the market.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei did [*sic; should be "did not"?*] point any fingers in the "baffling" failure of his agency's efforts to obtain the images of the Syrian site hit last year by Israel immediately after the bombing.

But diplomats familiar with the IAEA's Syria probe said agency officials were considering two scenarios -- that either Syria had bought the photos as part of its cover-up or that seven nations with commercial satellite networks covering the struck had ordered them withdrawn.

One of the diplomats said the five U.N. Security Council nations -- the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain were among the seven countries that had such networks. Both diplomats who spoke on the issue asked for anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the allegations.

Another suggested the comments by ElBaradei were at least partially out of date. He said the agency had "very recently" been able to locate commercial images showing the site after the Israeli strike.

All of the diplomats asked for anonymity in exchange for speaking to The Associated Press because their information was privileged.

ElBaradei's comments at the start of a two-day full meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board partially reflected the focus of the gathering -- Syria and Iran and suspicions about their nuclear activities.

"For its assessment of the site immediately after the bombing, the agency was unable to obtain commercial satellite imagery," ElBaradei told the meeting. "It is regrettable, and indeed baffling, that imagery for this critical period ... was not available."

An IAEA report last week drew on what satellite imagery was available and other information in suggesting the bombed site was a nuclear reactor, adding that agency inspectors had found traces of processed uranium on location. The U.S. says the target was a nearly completed reactor built with North Korean help that would have produced plutonium, a possible fissile warhead component.

Syria denies running a secret nuclear program. It has signaled it will not permit IAEA inspectors to return to the country after their initial visit to the bombed site in June, despite repeated agency requests for renewed access both to the facility hit by Israel and initial visits to three others allegedly linked to the bombed structure.

If on-ground inspection is barred by the Syria, satellite images become even more important in the IAEA probe.

ElBaradei, in comments to the closed meeting made available to reporters, also repeated criticism of Israel -- for bombing the site -- and the U.S. for waiting months before providing his agency with intelligence backing up its allegations of a secret Syrian nuclear program.

"The agency was severely hampered in its assessment by the unilateral use of force and by the late provision of information about the destroyed building," he said. The Israeli attack contributed to making the results of the Syria probe "inconclusive" so far, added ElBaradei.

IAEA Chief: Will Confront Syria With Imagery Of Suspect Site

Thursday November 27th, 2008 / 13h15

VIENNA (AFP)--The U.N. atomic watchdog hopes to confront Syria soon with satellite imagery of a suspect nuclear site bombed by Israeli planes last year, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said Thursday.

The IAEA "has recently been able to secure agreement to show Syria imagery from member state satellites of the site shortly after the bombing, and will do so at the earliest opportunity," ElBaradei told the agency's board of governors at the start of a two-day meeting.

He didn't specify which member states had come forward with the imagery.

But ElBaradei said no commercial satellite imagery - as opposed to intelligence imagery - of the site was yet available.

"For its assessment of the site immediately after the bombing, the agency was unable to obtain commercial satellite imagery," ElBaradei said.

"It is regrettable, and indeed baffling, that imagery for this critical period, which would have been most valuable in helping to clarify the nature of the building that was destroyed, was not available."

EI Baradei prods Syria on atom probe, cites pictures

By Mark Heinrich

Thu Nov 27, 2008 10:31am EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog chief prodded Syria on Thursday to open up military sites to investigators and said he would soon show Damascus satellite images which Washington says indicate covert atomic activity.

[deletia]

"For the agency to complete its assessment, maximum transparency by Syria and the full sharing with the agency of all relevant information which other states may have are essential," IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei said.

He was alluding in particular to Israel, which has never commented on the nature of the site its air force took out.

"Syria should also agree, as a transparency measure, to let the agency visit other locations. I am confident modalities can be developed which will protect the confidentiality of military information," he told a meeting of the IAEA governing board.

[deletia]

"BAFFLING" LACK OF KEY SATELLITE PICTURES

Inspectors believe these sites could harbor items, possibly for fabricating nuclear fuel, linked to the bombed site, or which may have been whisked away from it soon after the attack -- and after the IAEA asked for access to examine it.

ElBaradei said it was "regrettable, indeed baffling" why there was no high-resolution satellite imagery of the site available for the period right after the bombing.

That would have been before Syria carted away potentially relevant evidence like rubble and equipment, diplomats say.

Diplomats close to the inquiry said it was possible that the seven states with commercial satellite networks pulled pictures for that period from circulation for undetermined security reasons, or Syria had bought them up to impede investigators.

The seven countries are the United States, Israel, France, Russia, China, India and Japan, said a senior diplomat, who like others, asked for anonymity because they were discussing restricted information.

ElBaradei said the IAEA recently won permission to show Syria some pictures from member state satellites taken of the site "shortly after the bombing" to elicit a response. He did not say what they showed or how sharp the images were.

One diplomat said the IAEA recently had found some pictures from the attack aftermath but they were not high-resolution.

ElBaradei cautioned that satellite pictures were no panacea in difficult nuclear investigations. "Because the agency cannot verify the authenticity of such imagery, we rely on it only as an auxiliary source to corroborate other information ... It is never the sole basis of our assessments," he told the governors.

[deletia]

(Additional reporting by Sylvia Westall; editing by Philippa Fletcher)

<http://vienna.usmission.gov/>



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

November 28 U.S. Statement to the IAEA Board of Governors

<http://vienna.usmission.gov/081128syria.html>

IAEA Board of Governors Meeting
November 27-28, 2008

Implementation of NPT Safeguards Agreements in the Syrian Arab Republic

U.S. Statement
Ambassador Gregory L Schulte
Permanent U.S. Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency

Madam Chairwoman,

On Wednesday I heard encouraging words from the distinguished representative of Syria. He told the Technical Assistance and Cooperation Committee, in this room, that Syria will cooperate with all aspects of IAEA activities. Let us hope that he meant it.

Indeed we would welcome hearing the same commitment under this new item on our agenda. We would welcome such a commitment because, as the Director General reports, Syria has not yet demonstrated the cooperation and transparency needed by the IAEA inspectors to conduct their investigation.

As we have read, Syria has repeatedly refused to answer the questions of IAEA inspectors or to give them access to three other sites. **At Friday's technical briefing, we saw dramatic evidence that Syria took immediate steps to sanitize the three sites after the IAEA requested access.** This was in addition to Syria's efforts to conceal Al-Kibar, both before and after the facility was destroyed. Furthermore, the report sharply contradicts a number of Syria's claims about the nature of the facility and the origin of the uranium particles found at the location.

The Director General's report reinforces the assessment of my government that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in its eastern desert with the assistance of North Korea. This is a serious violation of Syria's safeguards obligations. **But it is all the more serious because the reactor's characteristics -- not configured for power production, isolated from civilian population, ill-suited for research -- suggests it was not intended for peaceful purposes. Indeed we believe that the reactor under construction was of the same type that North Korea built at Yongbyon to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.**

Madame Chairperson,

Given the gravity of this situation, we join other Board members in strongly supporting the IAEA's continued investigation and encouraging Syria's authorities to grant all access requested to facilities, individuals, and information.

The IAEA needs to understand what Syria was building in secret and then buried under meters of earth and a new building. The IAEA needs to be confident that there are no other undeclared activities in Syria. The IAEA needs to determine the procurement routes and networks that were involved. And finally, the IAEA needs to demonstrate that illicit nuclear activities, whether in Syria or elsewhere, will be caught and investigated.

This case underlines the limitations of the Agency in a country without an Additional Protocol. The Additional Protocol was developed to give inspectors information and access to help detect undeclared activities. Syria is one state that declined to adopt the Additional Protocol. Perhaps we now understand why.

We join other members of the Board in calling on Syria to sign and implement the Additional Protocol and undertake whatever additional transparency measures the Agency deems necessary.

Madame Chairperson,

Under the last agenda item, I recalled sitting through fifteen Board sessions on Iran. By failing to cooperate with the IAEA and comply with the UN, Iran's leaders have inscribed their case on our agenda, and eventually the agenda of the Security Council, on a near-permanent basis.

Syria's leaders need not make the same choice. They can avoid becoming a permanent topic of critical discussion like Iran and North Korea.

But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA. So far Syria seems to be testing the tactics of hindrance and unhelpfulness that Iran has so finely honed. We hope that Syria's leadership does not persist in these tactics.

Instead, we hope that Syria will look elsewhere in the Arab world, specifically to Libya. Libya was just on our agenda, but in a good sense -- to welcome its cooperation, cooperation based on the Additional Protocol but also going well beyond it, and to return its case to routine verification.

Libya shows that a government, through cooperation and transparency, can remove itself from the IAEA agenda and gain international respect after a serious safeguards violation. We hope that the government of Syria has taken note, and we call on it to cooperate openly and transparently with the IAEA's investigation.

Madame Chairperson,

We thank the Director General for his written report and look forward to a second written report for our meeting in March.

US: Alleged Syrian reactor had no peaceful uses

Deutsche Presse Agentur

22 minutes ago [Accessed 2008-11-28T13:15Z]

The United States' ambassador at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Friday [2008-11-28] in Vienna that the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor that Israel bombed in 2007 seems not to have been intended for peaceful purposes.

The suspect al-Kibar site in Syria's eastern desert was not configured for energy production, was located in a remote area and was ill-suited for research purposes, Ambassador Gregory Schulte told the 35 countries represented on the IAEA's governing board.

Last week, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei issued a first report on Syria, in which he did not draw conclusions but noted that the features of the building were similar to what may be found at a reactor.

Inspectors of the Vienna-based agency also found a significant amount of uranium particles when they visited al-Kibar for the first time in June.

In a joint statement, the EU said the report was "troubling in many regards."

In April, the US provided the IAEA with intelligence indicating Syria had almost completed construction of the reactor, possibly with help from North Korea.

"Given the gravity of this situation, we join other Board members in strongly supporting the IAEA's continued investigation and encouraging Syria's authorities to grant all access requested to facilities, individuals, and information," Schulte said.

Syria has stated that al-Kibar was a conventional military installation, and that the uranium found was part of munitions used in the Israeli attack in September 2007.

The country has so far not allowed further IAEA inspections.



Syrian Official Reiterates Refusal To Allow IAEA To Visit 'Military Sites'

Report by Buthaynah Abd-al-Rahman in Vienna: "Syrian Atomic Energy Agency Director to 'Al-Sharq al-Awsat': We Will Cooperate But, Like Others, We Will Not Allow Visits to Military Sites"

Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online

Friday, November 28, 2008 T12:13:14Z

Journal Code: 1431 Language: ENGLISH Record Type: FULLTEXT

Document Type: OSC Translated Excerpt

Word Count: 514

Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), reiterated yesterday morning the agency's demands from Syria to allow the international inspectors to visit several Syrian sites in addition to examining and getting more samples of the remains and debris Syria had removed from Al-Kubar site, which Israel had destroyed, so that the IAEA can complete the investigations and inspections of that sites which it had already started so as to verify whether it was a nuclear reactor, as Israel claims, or a military site, as Syria is asserting. He underlined the IAEA's desire to maintain the secrecy of all the sites that the agency is demanding to visit.

This followed a day of a decisive meeting which approved the IAEA's technical and technical cooperation programs for the years 2009-2011, including aid costing \$350,000 to Syria to prepare the economic technical feasibility study and select the site for a nuclear plant to generate electricity. There was strong Western opposition to this project from the United States, the EU countries, Canada, and Australia on the pretext that Syria was under IAEA investigation and inspection. But ElBaradei refuted these allegations and underlined the need for dealing with Syria in accordance with the legal principle which asserts that the defendant is innocent unless otherwise proven guilty, and was strongly supported in this by the Nonaligned countries' group, Russia, and China.

On his part, Dr. Ibrahim Uthman, director of the Syrian Atomic Energy Agency, asserted in reply to an "Al-Sharq al-Awsat" question yesterday morning that Syria would start work on building the above plan in full cooperation with the IAEA and in accordance with the usual rules and regulations. In reply to another "Al-Sharq al-Awsat" question about the fate and future of the IAEA's investigations and inspections of al-Kubar site, Dr. Ibrahim pointed out that this was something else, adding that the site was destroyed and then asked: Why did the parties which say they have information disclose this only seven months after the site's bombardment? He pointed out that Syria stressed that the site was an old military one and denied that Syrian statements had said at first it was an agricultural center belonging to the Arab League and said: "An Israeli journalist said this."

He went on to say that "Syria did not prevent at all and will not prevent the IAEA from making any visits but at the same time will not allow any visits to military sites, as every other country does." He added: Who allows his country to become open for tourism by all. The tourism sites are known. (Passage omitted on ElBaradei's speech at opening session and deliberations)

(Description of Source: London Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online in Arabic -- Website of influential London-based pan-Arab Saudi daily; editorial line reflects Saudi official stance. URL: <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/>)

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i02n0NaZUE48gghSU-UVbp-_T50Q

Syria 'sanitized' suspected nuclear sites: US

1 day ago [*Sic; Accessed Friday, 2008-11-28T13:25Z*]

VIENNA (AFP) — The United States and Europe expressed concern here Friday that Syria had cleaned up sites that a UN watchdog had asked to see as part of its probe into alleged illicit nuclear work by Damascus.

At a closed-door briefing by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors last week [*sic*], "we saw dramatic evidence that Syria took immediate steps to sanitize the three sites after the IAEA requested access," US envoy Gregory Schulte told the agency's 35-member board of governors on Friday.

Syria was the main topic of debate on the second and last day of the IAEA's end-of-year meeting here.

The United States claims that a remote site in the Syrian desert called Al-Kibar had been a covert nuclear reactor close to completion, until it was razed to the ground by Israeli bombs in September 2007.

Damascus has repeatedly dismissed the allegations, insisting that Al-Kibar was a disused military facility.

But in its first report on the matter -- issued after inspectors visited the site in June -- the IAEA found that Al-Kibar appeared to share some of the characteristics of a nuclear reactor and that traces of uranium had been found there, even if it was too early to draw any definitive conclusions.

IAEA inspectors have since made multiple requests to visit additional sites, all to no avail.

The 27-member EU also insisted that Damascus explain why "landscaping" work had been undertaken at the three sites in question immediately following the IAEA's request to inspect them.

"The EU appreciates the fact that Syria granted the IAEA access to (Al-Kibar)", French ambassador Francois-Xavier Deniau said.

"But it regrets, on the other hand, that Syria has not yet granted access to the other sites that interest the IAEA. The EU calls on Syria to cooperate with the IAEA without reservation, to supply plans of the site of Dair Alzour (also known as Al-Kibar) and to answer questions on procurement," Deniau said.



Othman, Political Use of the Destroyed al-Kubar Site Does Not Serve IAEA Objectives on Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Nov 29, 2008

Vienna, (SANA) _ Syria said Friday the building in al-Kubar site, in Deir Al-Zur, bombed by Israeli planes last year wasn't a nuclear reactor.

" The building was a military building and invested by the armed forces. Some countries are trying to exploit this issue for political purposes that do not serve the Agency objectives on the preservation of prevention of nuclear Non-Proliferation,"

Director-General of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission Dr. Ibrahim Othman said. In his statement before the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors in Vienna, Othman added that what inspectors of the Agency has got, doesn't prove that the destroyed building in al-Kubar site is a nuclear reactor.

" Israel to violate airspace of a UN member state and destroy facilities within its territories under suspicion pretext, is a flagrant contradiction to all international legislations and deserves to be seriously studied by the international community to take a deterrent measures to such behaviors." Othman said.

" Syria, fully, cooperated with the IAEA delegation when it visited the site last June in accordance with what was agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two parties in May 2008," Othman noted, affirming that the delegation's report denied any clear signs on existence of a nuclear reactor or material.

" Syria was one of the first countries that worked at the regional and international levels in order to make the Middle East a region free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction," The Director said.

He indicated that the IAEA inspectors, annually, visit the research reactor in the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission as does the Agency experts within the technical cooperation projects. Othman concluded by saying that Syria had never put any conditions on the experts' visits.

Moreover, It allows all the trainees from many countries to enter laboratories and all sites that use the applications of nuclear energy that matter which asserts nonexistence of undeclared activities in Syria.

Ghossoun /

IAEA chief baffled over lack of Syria nuclear info

By GEORGE JAHN

4 days ago [Accessed 2008-12-02T15:50Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA, Austria (AP) — The chief U.N. nuclear inspector said Thursday that his agency's Syria probe has been hampered because key satellite images of an alleged nuclear reactor bombed by Israel are inexplicably unavailable on the market.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei did not point any fingers in the "baffling" failure of his agency's efforts to obtain the images of the Syrian site immediately after it was bombed by Israel last year.

But diplomats familiar with the IAEA's Syria investigation said agency officials were considering several scenarios, including the possibility that Syria or other nations with an interest in a cover-up had bought the photos and all rights to them from commercial satellite companies.

ElBaradei's comments at the start of a two-day full meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board partially reflected the focus of the gathering — suspicions about Syria's and Iran's nuclear activities.

[deletia]

In the case of Syria, ElBaradei noted that his "agency was unable to obtain commercial satellite imagery" of the site immediately after the bombing, adding: "It is regrettable, and indeed baffling, that imagery for this critical period ... was not available."

Syrian nuclear chief Ibrahim Othman was dismissive, telling The Associated Press: "The theory that we bought all the photos is nonsense."

The IAEA often turns to commercial images beyond any spy satellite photos shared by governments.

But the two nations most likely to have satellite intelligence were unlikely to have provided it with immediate information. Israel still has not confirmed it was behind the strike, while the United States waited for more than six months before sharing knowledge with the IAEA.

The possibility that commercial companies simply did not know where to look immediately after the bombing was raised by David Albright, whose Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security closely tracks suspected secret proliferators.

[Sourcebook comment: As detailed in Appendix B, on 5, 10, 15, 18 and 28 August, 2007, the DigitalGlobe QuickBird satellite imaged the site of the impending strike. The circumstances leading to that coverage are as yet unknown, but indicate knowledge of at least the approximate location of the site.]

"The United States and Israel went to great lengths to prevent others from finding out where the site was," said Albright, whose institute was the first to publish commercial satellite images of the site more than a year ago and identify it as a likely North-Korean-model nuclear reactor.

"No one knew where the site was immediately after the bombing," said Albright, whose institute published photos taken nearly a month before the Sept. 6, 2007, Israeli strike.

Albright also noted that ElBaradei was initially skeptical of the U.S. assertions, which could have led to Washington and Israel to withhold satellite photos.

"Why would U.S. intelligence give photos to ElBaradei if he was predisposed not to believe" that they showed a secret nuclear reactor, Albright said in an interview.

Meanwhile, a senior diplomat familiar with the Syria probe suggested that the comments by ElBaradei were at least partially out of date. He said the agency had "very recently" been able to locate commercial images showing the site after the Israeli strike.

IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said the agency would not comment on the issue.

All of the diplomats asked for anonymity in exchange for speaking to The Associated Press because their information was privileged.

While the agency was unable to find satellite images immediately after the bombing, it acquired photos showing the building at other stages. An IAEA report said those images and other information showed the bombed building had the features of a reactor, adding that agency inspectors had found traces of processed uranium on location. The U.S. says the target was a nearly completed reactor that would have produced plutonium, a possible fissile warhead component.

Syria has signaled it will not permit IAEA inspectors to return to the country after their initial visit to the bombed site in June, or permit initial visits to three other suspicious locations. Such a ban would make satellite images become even more important in the IAEA probe.

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> View	1010010008BC8F00	QB02	2008/10/26	18.88°	18.26°	40.70°	0%	0%	Pan+MS1
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> View	1010010008757600	QB02	2008/08/20	19.22°	18.28°	63.12°	12%	0%	Pan+MS1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> View	10100100085E6600	QB02	2008/08/02	19.26°	18.32°	67.33°	0%	0%	Pan+MS1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> View	10100100074B1000	QB02	2007/10/24	11.13°	11.13°	41.95°	11%	0%	Pan+MS1

Online search for DigitalGlobe imagery of the strike site made 2008-12-02

1m IKONOS (B&W / MS) Results

	Footprint	Preview	Retrieve	Acquisition Date	Cloud Cover	Elevation/Tilt Angle	Data Owner	Scene ID	Source ID	RFQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2007-11-23	8	75.4694	SIME	2000038460800THC	2007112308164480000011621755	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2007-06-25	2	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891502R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2007-06-25	5	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891501R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000000178508R10	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000021193308THC	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online search for GeoEye Ikonos imagery of the strike site made ca. 2008-01-01

1m IKONOS (B&W / MS) Results

	Footprint	Preview	Retrieve	Acquisition Date	Cloud Cover	Elevation/Tilt Angle	Data Owner	Scene ID	Source ID	RFQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2007-06-25	2	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891502R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2007-06-25	5	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891501R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000000178508R10	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000021193308THC	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>

Online search for GeoEye Ikonos imagery of the strike site made 2008-12-02. Note the absence of the 2007-11-23 image listed in the ca. 2008-01-01 search. The 2007-11-23 image is included in Appendix B of this sourcebook.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122792135584465829.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

IAEA Broadens Probe of Syria Plans To Build Up Its Nuclear Program

By JAY SOLOMON

NOVEMBER 29, 2008

VIENNA -- The United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, is broadening its probe of Syria's suspected nuclear program and pushing for information from its alleged collaborator, North Korea, as well as from Israel, officials said this past week.

Despite signs that the U.S. and Israel aren't in a punitive mood toward Damascus, the suspected nuclear program is emerging as a major international issue.

The IAEA's probe places the incoming Obama administration in a difficult spot diplomatically. President-elect Barack Obama has indicated his desire to engage Syria, but he also backs global antiproliferation efforts.

Israeli jets destroyed a suspected Syrian nuclear facility in September 2007. U.S. intelligence agencies said that at the time, the facility was weeks from being operational. Syria has denied it was building a nuclear reactor, and suggested that uranium particles found there by U.N. inspectors in June came from Israeli bombs.

Earlier this week, the IAEA sent a letter to Jerusalem seeking clarification on whether Israeli bombs could have been the source of the uranium particles, U.N. officials and Western diplomats said. An Israeli official declined to comment.

The Central Intelligence Agency has alleged that North Korea was the principal designer and builder of the Syrian facility, known as Al Kibar.

A senior U.N. official close to the investigation said the IAEA is hoping to learn more through the disarmament talks between North Korea, the U.S. and other powers. North Korea's alleged role in exporting nuclear technologies to third countries is a principal focus of the talks.

Damascus has refused to allow the IAEA to visit at least three other sites suspected of being linked to the Al Kibar complex. It has so far ruled out additional visits to Syria by agency officials.

"We will not allow another visit," Ibrahim Othman, the head of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission, told reporters at IAEA headquarters in Vienna on Nov. 21. "No other country would allow any person to visit a restricted military site, just because he would like to see it."

U.N. officials said the investigation has been hampered by the August assassination of Syrian Brig. Gen. Mohammed Suleiman, the IAEA's principal contact in Damascus. The officials said Gen. Suleiman oversaw the IAEA's access to suspected Syrian sites, as well as briefings by Syria to the IAEA inspectors. "We don't have a new source" of contact inside Syria, said the senior U.N. official.

Another snag was cited by IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei this week. He said the agency has had trouble obtaining commercial satellite images of the Syrian site in the weeks after the Israeli attack, perhaps because someone bought them up. "It is regrettable, and indeed baffling, that imagery for this critical period...was not available," Mr. ElBaradei told the IAEA's board of governors on Wednesday.

Israel has neither confirmed nor denied its role in the Syria attack. A U.N. official said investigators found no traces of depleted uranium -- the normal form of uranium found in munitions -- at Al Kibar, but said he couldn't rule out that other forms of uranium may have been used in the Israeli bombs dropped on the site.

U.N. officials said the IAEA hasn't found evidence so far that uranium from a North Korean nuclear facility at Yongbyon was diverted to Syria. The IAEA hasn't ruled out that the uranium could have come from a separate North Korean site, and is looking into whether it came from a third country.

The Bush administration has regularly stated its desire to cooperate with Damascus on the nuclear issue and avoid the type of U.N. sanctions imposed on Iran in response to Tehran's dispute with the IAEA over nuclear inspections.

"Syria is not Iran, and we do not seek to make Syria into Iran," said Gregory Schulte, the U.S. representative to the IAEA, last week. "But this requires Syria to cooperate with the IAEA."

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

[Extracted from Google News article excerpts on 2008-12-05]

Syria's Secret Nuclear Sites

Intelligence Online, France

Dec 3, 2008

However, the [IAEA] inspectors were barred access to three other sites used for the storage and re-processing of plutonium in Syria. The first reportedly lies in the Homs region close to the Oronte river...

The two other sites that interest the IAEA are in the hinterland, in the Alaouite-dominated region some 75 km from the border with Turkey...

[The French, and presumably original, version reads as follows:]

L'AIEA s'est en revanche vue refuser l'accès à trois autres sites de stockage et de retraitement du plutonium en Syrie. Le premier est situé dans la région de Homs, non loin des rives de l'Oronte...

Les deux autres sites qui intéressent l'AIEA se trouvent dans l'arrière-pays alaouite, à 75 kilomètres de la frontière avec la Turquie...

[Sourcebook note added 2009-05-27: An OSC transcription of the original English version is,

Unattributed report: "Syria's Secret Nuclear Sites"

Intelligence Online

Thursday, December 4, 2008 T10:55:13Z

[deletia]

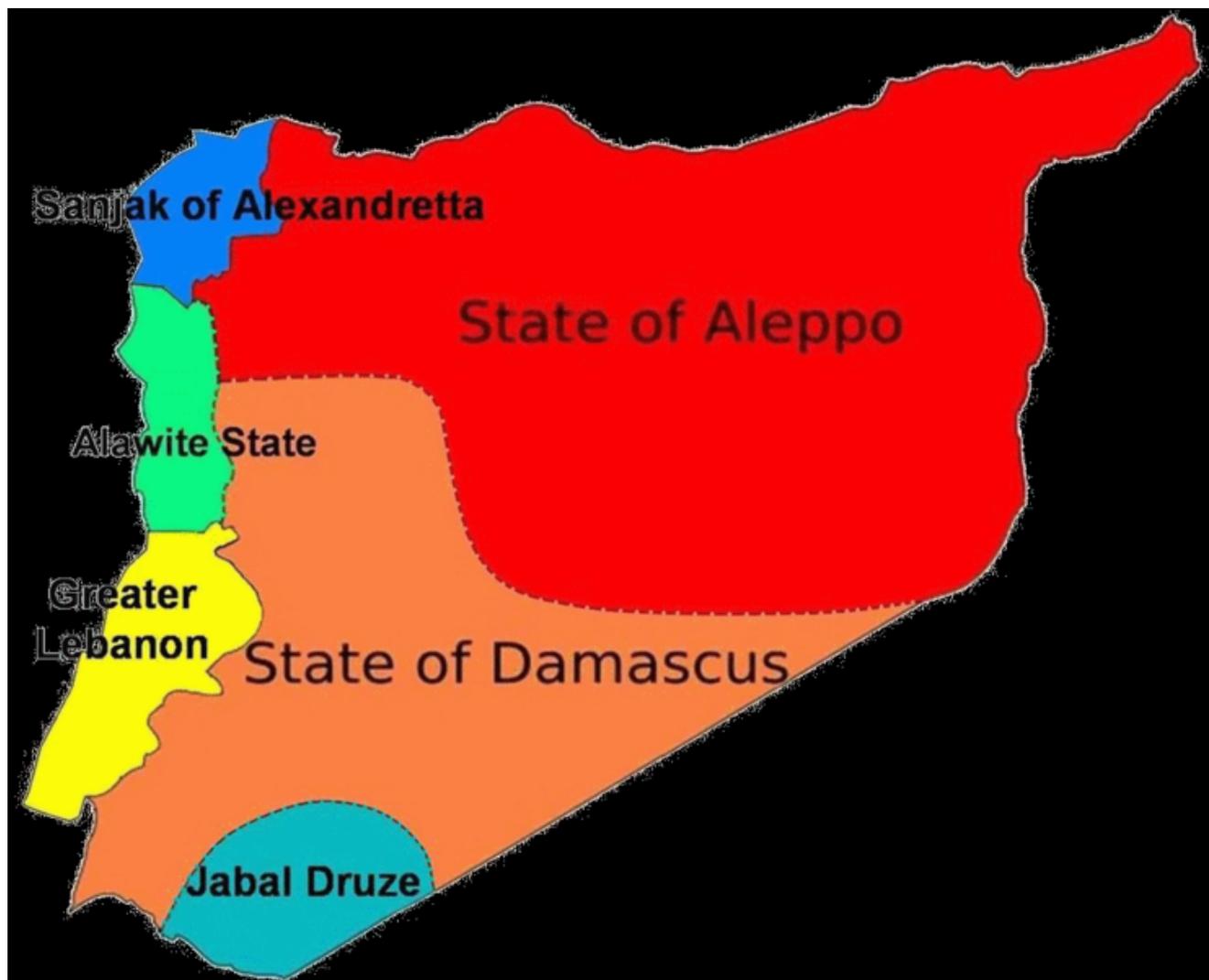
However, the inspectors were barred access to three other sites used for the storage and re-processing of plutonium in Syria. The first reportedly lies in the Homs region close to the Oronte river which springs from the Anti-Lebanon mountains and runs into the Mediterranean near Antioch.

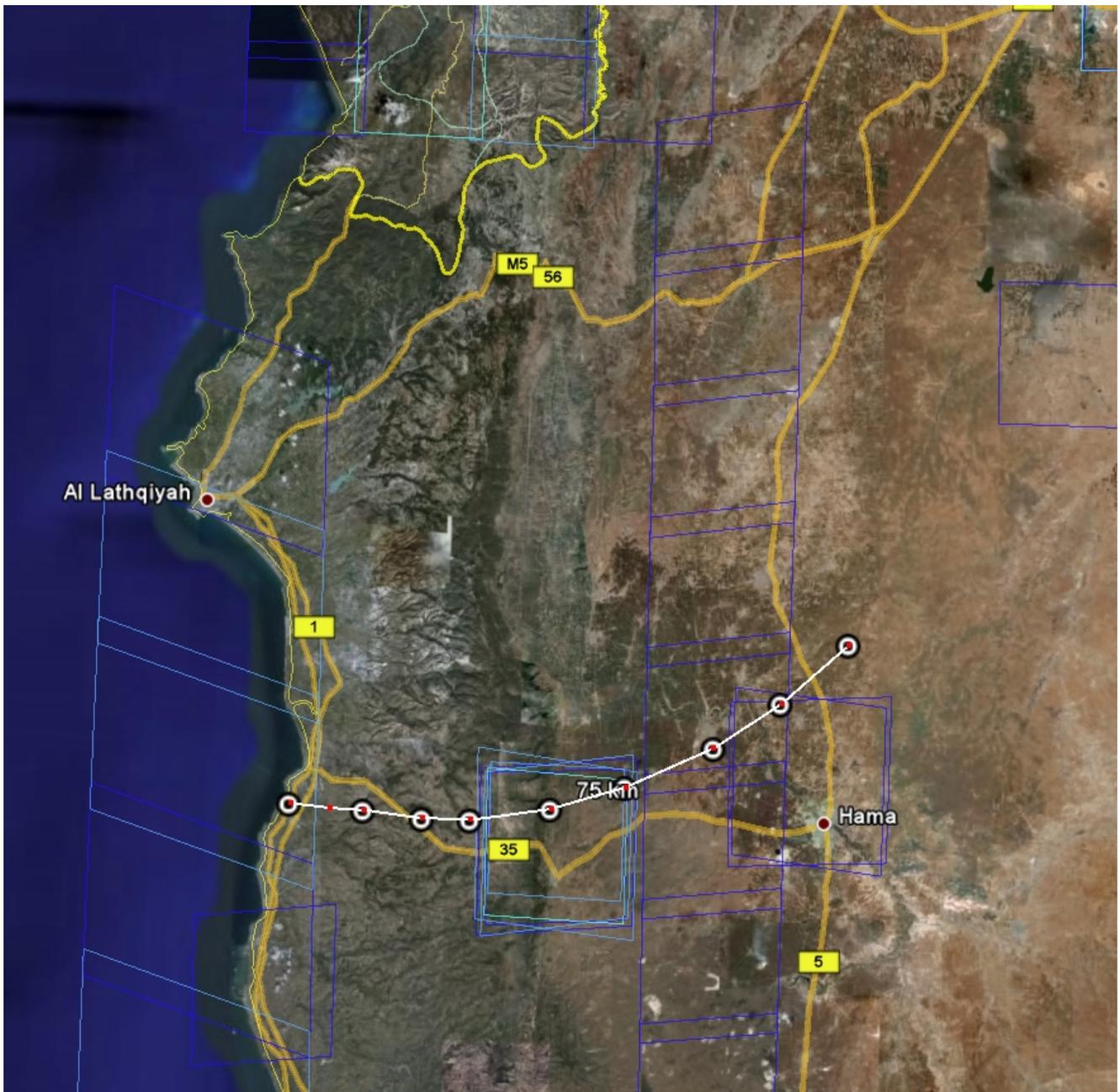
The two other sites that interest the IAEA are in the hinterland, in the Alaouite-dominated region some 75 km from the border with Turkey. The first to reveal the role and importance of the three sites was Iranian defector Ali Resa Asghari, who fled to the West in February, 2007 (IOL 553)

[deletia]

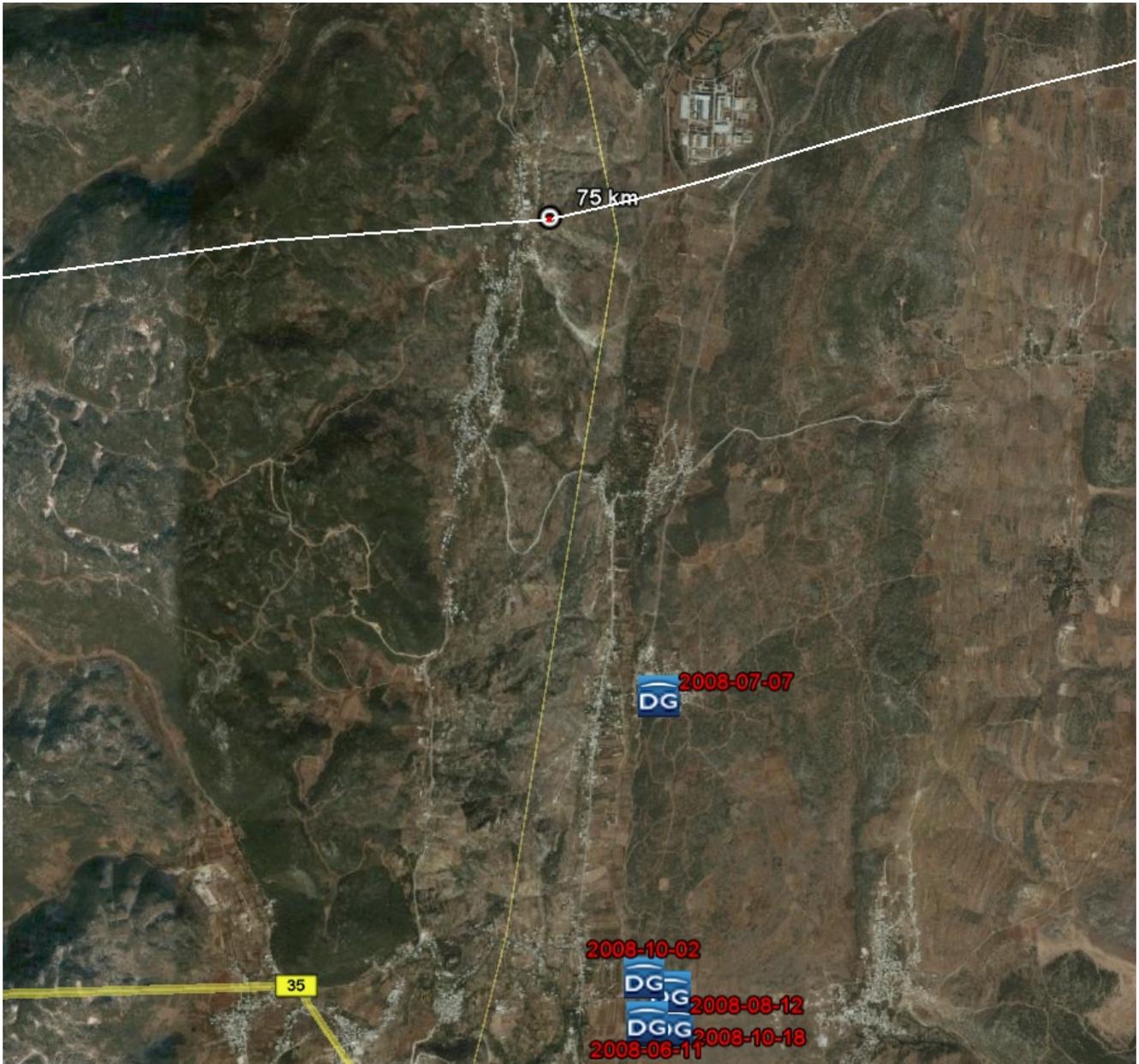
]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mandate_of_Syria.png





*Google Earth Image of Alawite territory accessed 2008-12-06 showing
75 km distance from the Turkish border.
DigitalGlobe coverage during 2008 shown by blue parallelograms.
(Date of the base image is 2007-09-15.)
Note area of repeated coverage west of Hama.*



*Detail of 2008 coverage.
Note facility immediately to the north of the 75 km line.*

Covert marine operation uncovers Syria's return to plutonium production

DEBKAFfile Exclusive Report

December 5, 2008, 1:21 PM (GMT+02:00)

In the face of Damascus' refusal to allow UN inspectors access to three suspect "research laboratories, Western agents recently carried out a daring covert operation to collect water samples from the Orontes river in Syria where it drains into the Mediterranean, DEBKAFfile's intelligence sources reveal. Their discoveries were presented to a closed session of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency's board on Nov. 27-28.

Situated on the river bank near Homs is one of the three research institutes where Syrian, Iranian and North Korean technicians and scientists are suspected of reprocessing plutonium for Syria's clandestine military nuclear program. The Orontes samples confirmed the suspicion that Syria has gone back to the plutonium project which was cut short when Israeli destroyed its reactor at Al Kibar in September 2007.

The Orontes rises at Tal al Musa north of Damascus and south of Homs. It flows into the sea near Antakya, which is north of Latakia and west of Aleppo, not far from the Turkish border.

The IAEA board meeting was told in general terms how the tainted river samples were obtained. DEBKAFfile's military sources add that western nuclear technicians collected them from a boat which sailed surreptitiously up to the river mouth in Syria. To make sure of their finding, they collected river water on three different dates in the last two months.

Their discovery tied in with a separate report reaching the nuclear watchdog board that Iran and North Korea were frantically drafting in nuclear specialists to help Syria revive its plutonium reprocessing project. The product is to be stored in protected hideouts.

It was the view of some board members that Tehran and Pyongyang had determined to prove that the Israeli attack had not put Syria off its nuclear program. Both were even more insistent on showing the world that the Iranian nuclear program of which the Syrian project was a part was unstoppable.

Syria and North Korea accordingly renewed their clandestine nuclear cooperation accord on Oct. 22, so making sure of an uninterrupted flow from Pyongyang of nuclear materials, technology and experts for Syria's covert nuclear facilities.



Daily Press Briefing
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
December 11, 2008
10:34 a.m. EST

[EXCERPT]

MR. MCCORMACK: Good morning, everybody. Sorry for being a little bit late. I don't have anything to start with. We'll get right to your questions. Sure.

QUESTION: Can you explain exactly what was – what this document means?

MR. MCCORMACK: I can't read it. Sorry.

QUESTION: This would be the Chairman's statement of the Six-Party Talks.

MR. MCCORMACK: Okay, all right. Sure, let me --

QUESTION: Because it doesn't really --

MR. MCCORMACK: It doesn't address the issue at hand. Right. Let me try to – I'm prepared to try to do that. I'll let you be the judge as to how precise my explanation is.

Chris is on his way back. And I guess the best way to put this is that, you know, from our point of view, and I think this is a shared point of view certainly among the five parties, North Korea perhaps being the exception, but the objective of this Six-Party round was to formalize the understandings that the U.S. and North Korea had previously reached verification, just to "Six-Party-ize" this so everybody – so everybody could initial it, everybody could put all of these understandings down on paper.

Just to rewind the tape a little bit, in terms – with our – in our negotiations with the North Koreans, we had agreed upon many things on pieces – on a piece of paper that both sides could initial, if you will. Some of the understandings that we reached were part of an oral understanding that we took very precise and careful notes on. In subsequent conversations with other members of the Six-Party Talks, they affirmed that this was their understanding of our conversation with the North Koreans based on their separate interactions with the North Koreans.

So the whole – the idea was to put all of this on a piece of paper so that everybody could understand what was – what had been agreed to in the verification discussions. And part of this – two important points in this were that the reference to scientific – the scientific procedures meant sampling. I know that that is something that there's been a lot of discussion about. And it also covered not just plutonium, but HEU and proliferation activities. So the scope of the agreement covered all three of those areas, and that one of the agreed upon verification members – one of the agreed upon verification measures was sampling.

So that's to kind of bring you up to the present date. The draft – and this is an interesting point. The draft that North Korea said it could not sign onto at this round of the Six-Party Talks was a Chinese draft. We had signed onto the draft, so what – North Korea wasn't – you know, wasn't rejecting – rejecting is not the right word – didn't want to sign onto an American draft. This was a Chinese draft. And I think it's safe to say that all the other members of the Six-Party Talks supported this draft. So in that sense, North Korea, on this question, is isolated.

And where we stand now is that North Korea said it could not, at that meeting, accept the draft, it could not initial the draft. All the parties said okay, let's – let's adjourn the meeting, go back to capitals, think about it, and we'll keep working this process. But this is, I think, an indication – it's a public indication of how central to this process we view verification. Verification is absolutely essential to this process. Quite frankly, it is not going to be able to move forward without agreement on a verification protocol. So we will – in terms of our obligations, I don't see those moving forward until we have an agreement on this verification protocol.

US demands Syria cooperate on nuke plan

Roe Nahmias

Published: 12.13.08, 09:26

Israel News

A warning to Syria: US Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Gregory Schulte says Syria has three months – until the United Nations nuclear watchdog's next governors' meeting in March – to start cooperating on its nuclear program, or it will be punished. A failure to do so, he warns, will lead to "punishment measures".

In an interview published Saturday [2008-12-13] with the London-based Arabic-language al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper, Schulte said that "the Damascus authorities must decide whether they wish to follow in Iran's footsteps or cooperate."

Schulte also noted that North Korea has neither denied nor confirmed its involvement in the construction of the Syrian nuclear reactor allegedly bombed by Israel.

"I hope the Syrians reach the conclusion that they should cooperate, for the sake of their own interests," he said.

According to Schulte, if Damascus failed to cooperate "this would lead to a negative response, and serious questions would be raised".

Schulte refused to discuss the sanctions which would be imposed on Syria if it continued its policy, saying that the IAEA's goal at this time is to convince Damascus to cooperate.

"No one is talking about sanctions today. The only thing we are talking about is a probe. The international agency is giving the Syrians an opportunity to cooperate, and they have an extension until the next meeting to cooperate."

He added that this was not an official extension, but a date on which the nuclear watchdog would reexamine the Syrian nuclear issue, after the matter was discussed in the council's latest meeting two weeks ago.

Despite his reservations, Schulte added that "Syria is engaging in a tactic used by Iran in recent years – the failure to cooperate. This is not the road we want Syria to take. We hope Syria cooperates fully with the agency in regards to what happened in the Syrian desert. If they fail to cooperate, there will be consequences."

Only two weeks ago, the IAEA decided to provide Syria with technical support as part of its efforts to develop a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes. This decision was a serious blow to the United States and Israel, who have been working in the past year to thwart this move, claiming Damascus is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The UN nuclear watchdog has been probing Syria since May, following American intelligence reports which stated that Damascus was close to completing the Pyongyang-supervised construction of a nuclear reactor for the production of plutonium, at the site bombed by Israel.

According to reports published last month, IAEA inspectors discovered uranium traces at the secret site attacked by Israel in September 2007. Syria denied claims that it had tried to attain nuclear energy for military purposes, violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it had signed.

Situation in Somalia
Secretary Condoleezza Rice
Remarks Following the UN Security Council Meeting on the Situation in Somalia

New York City, New York
December 16, 2008

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: On the Six-Party Talks, the last round of meetings last week ended with no new declaration from North Korea. How do you leave this to your successors, and how do you respond to those who say that this has been a failure?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we leave in place – first of all, we are going to continue to work on it until the very last day. But we leave in place a Six-Party framework in which at least five parties are completely agreed as to what the verification mechanism has to look like. I might just note that we have an agreement with the North Koreans about a verification protocol, but there were a number of issues that had to be clarified in order to make sure that that verification protocol was going to be workable. And those assurances were given to us by the North Koreans. We, in fact, reported those assurances to the Chinese chair before this Six-Party round took place. And what happened in Beijing was that the North Koreans at the – at this last session wouldn't write them down. And at some point, those assurances are going to have to be written down. But there is, in fact, a verification protocol and a set of assurances that the five are agreed to and that the North Koreans, at least privately, before we lifted the terrorist designation, had also agreed to. And so we'll just have to work through this.

I might note, too, that the disabling – first, the shutdown of the reactor and then the disabling of the reactor has been an important step forward in dealing with the plutonium program. But we have a lot of questions about the highly enriched uranium route for North Korea. We have a lot of questions about proliferation. And we believe that the mechanism of the Six Parties and an associated verification protocol will be the best way to resolve those questions and to get to the bottom of the entire nature of the North Korean program.

And I just might note, too, that the September 19th agreement of a couple of years ago lays out a path for the completely denuclearization of North Korea and of the Korean Peninsula, and that agreement is an agreement among the Six Parties. So I think we leave a pretty good framework, but we'll continue to see if we can get the North Koreans to write down the assurances that they gave us.

Israel bites back at UN watchdog over alleged strike on Syria reactor

By Yossi Melman

Thu., December 18, 2008 Kislev 21, 5769

Israel is assisting the International Atomic Energy Agency in its efforts to determine what Syria planned to manufacture in the nuclear reactor it was building that was destroyed in an Israeli Air Force strike in September 2007.

An Israeli source said that although the state neither confirmed nor denied that it carried out the attack on the reactor, "We are finding our own ways to relay the information that needs to be relayed."

Israel apparently "laundered" the intelligence at its disposal about the Syrian reactor via the United States. In April the Central Intelligence Agency released a multimedia presentation featuring satellite images as well as photographs taken inside the reactor. The agency declared that the bombed site was a nuclear reactor in the final stages of construction.

This is the background to the serious accusations traded between the Israel Atomic Energy Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Recently Israel's representative to the IAEA, Israel Michaeli, sent a sharply worded letter of protest to Director General Mohammed ElBaradei.

The crisis began in May, when the IAEA began claiming that Israel was not providing satellite images of the reactor that was hit, hurting the investigation. The agency's spokeswoman, Melissa Fleming, later sent a letter to The Wall Street Journal reiterating claims made by ElBaradei.

On a number of occasions the agency head argued that by bombing the reactor instead of first reporting its suspicions to the IAEA Israel harmed the organization's ability to thoroughly investigate what was in the reactor.

The letter to the Wall Street Journal stated that "information was withheld from the IAEA for more than six months" - the satellite images and perhaps also important intelligence information - "by which time Syria had cleaned away the rubble and built a new facility." On the same occasion Fleming strayed from the ostensible topic, the Syrian reactor, to charge that Israel, together with Iraq, Iran and North Korea, was "in violation of [IAEA] rules and [to have] restricted [its] IAEA technical cooperation projects." This was a reference to Israel's refusal to permit the agency's inspectors to visit the Dimona nuclear reactor.

Israel's Atomic Energy Commission, which is one of the most secretive and silent organizations in the country, generally prefers to stay out of the headlines. But this time it decided not to hold back. It is still unclear whether this was a one-time response to a specific situation or a change in approach related to the change in leadership. A year ago Dr. Shaul Horev replaced Gideon Frank as the commission's director general after 12 years.

In any event, a decision was made early this month, with the approval of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, to launch a frontal assault against the IAEA. In addition to the letter of protest to the agency, commission spokeswoman Nili Lifshitz sent her own letter to the Wall Street Journal.

"The claim that Israel is withholding critical information on the site is nothing but a smoke screen," Lifshitz wrote, adding, "Nothing should stand in the way of the agency's search for evidence" regarding

the purpose of the destroyed Syrian installation. Lifshitz argued that the IAEA should obtain commercial satellite images to back up its findings if it needs them. She noted a recent IAEA report on Syria that stated that the agency is examining uranium particles found at the Syrian site where some features are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site, and has asked Syria to allow visits to locations containing the debris and any equipment removed from the site for the purpose of taking samples.

"Each time the agency comes under political criticism for handling of a Middle Eastern country's flagrant breaches of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or its safeguards agreement, the agency immediately resorts to publicly invoking Israel's name," Lifshitz wrote. According to the Israeli source: "We are fed up with the IAEA's attacks on us. This time they went too far."

UN atomic chief calls for Syria to cooperate

By ZEINA KARAM

19 hours ago [Accessed 2008-12-22T15:05Z]

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — The head of the U.N. nuclear monitoring agency warned Syria to cooperate with the investigation of its nuclear activities or face deeper confrontation with the international community.

In an interview with the London-based Al Hayat newspaper published Sunday [2008-12-21], International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said his agency expects clarifications from Syria and Israel on issues related to a Syrian site bombed by Israel last year.

In a visit this year, IAEA inspectors found traces of processed uranium at the Al-Kibar site, which U.S. officials say was a nearly completed reactor of North Korean design that could have produced plutonium, a pathway to nuclear arms.

Syria denies having nuclear ambitions and says the site was an unused military installation.

Syria's foreign minister has suggested that the traces may have been from Israeli bombs dropped in the Sept. 6, 2007, airstrike.

ElBaradei said the agency has requested clarifications from Israel on the Syrian claim. "We are also looking into technical aspects to see whether it really was from the Israeli attack," he told the pan-Arab newspaper.

"We have not received a reply from the Israeli or Syrian side," he added.

Syria has signaled it will not permit IAEA inspectors to return after their initial visit to the bombed site in June. Syria is also refusing to allow visits to three other locations the IAEA regards as suspicious.

"I hope Syria will cooperate with us because that will be in its best interest. Lack of cooperation will ... lead to more confrontations and a negative reaction from the international community," the IAEA chief was quoted as saying.

"If it (Syria) has nothing to hide, I don't see any reason for not being 100 percent transparent with the agency," ElBaradei added.

ElBaradei also said the August killing of the Syrian government's representative participating in the agency's investigation has complicated the agency's work.

Arab media have said Brig. Gen. Mohammed Suleiman was killed by a sniper on a yacht at a beach resort in the northern port city of Tartous. Syrian officials have confirmed his death but gave no other details.

ElBaradei said Suleiman was the IAEA's contact on the Syrian side.

"Yes, he was our contact, and he was killed. ... His death of course has further complicated matters," he said.



Text of a Letter from the President

To the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Senate Committee of Foreign Relations

December 30, 2008

Dear Mr. Chairman: (Dear Representative:) (Dear Senator:)

I have considered the Protocol Additional to the Agreement between the United States of America and the International Atomic Energy Agency for the Application of Safeguards in the United States of America, with Annexes, signed at Vienna on June 12, 1998 (the "U.S.-IAEA Additional Protocol") (T. Doc. 107-7), along with the views, recommendations, and statements of all interested executive branch agencies. In accordance with the first condition of the March 31, 2004, Senate resolution of advice and consent to ratification of the U.S.- IAEA Additional Protocol, I hereby certify that not later than 180 days after the deposit of the United States instrument of ratification:

1. all necessary regulations will be promulgated and will be in force regarding the use of the National Security Exclusion under Article 1.b of the U.S.-IAEA Additional Protocol, and such regulations shall be made in accordance with the principles developed for the application of the National Security Exclusion;
2. the managed access provisions of Articles 7 and 1.c of the U.S.-IAEA Additional Protocol shall be implemented in accordance with the appropriate and necessary interagency guidance and regulation regarding such access; and
3. the necessary security and counterintelligence training and preparation will have been completed for any declared locations of direct national security significance.

In accordance with the second condition of the March 31, 2004, Senate resolution of advice and consent to ratification of the U.S.-IAEA Additional Protocol, I hereby certify that the necessary site vulnerability assessments regarding activities, locations, and information of direct national security significance to the United States will be completed not later than 180 days after the deposit of the United States instrument of ratification for the initial United States declaration to the International Atomic Energy Agency under the U.S.-IAEA Additional Protocol.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

<http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-37235820081230>

Bush signs nuclear inspection pact with U.N. Watchdog

Wed Dec 31, 2008 2:47am IST

CRAWFORD, Texas (Reuters) - President George W. Bush signed a nuclear safeguard agreement on Tuesday with the International Atomic Energy Agency that the United States hopes will prompt other countries to follow suit.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the IAEA, said earlier this year that the U.N. nuclear watchdog was hampered in its duties by the failure of countries like Syria to ratify the "Additional Protocol" that would allow short-notice visits to ensure no bomb-related work was taking place at secret sites.

The pact was signed in Vienna on June 12, 1998, and the U.S. Senate approved it on March 31, 2004. To date, 118 countries have signed the protocol with the IAEA and 89 countries have ratified, the White House said.

The pact improves the IAEA's ability to detect clandestine nuclear weapons programs in non-nuclear weapons states, the White House said.

The United States as a nuclear weapons country and party to the Nonproliferation Treaty was not obligated to accept IAEA safeguards on its nuclear activities, the White House said.

But wide acceptance of the protocol would contribute significantly to U.S. nonproliferation objectives, it added.

Media Note
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
December 31, 2008

The President Approves Ratification of the U.S. - IAEA Additional Protocol

On December 30, 2008, the President signed the instrument of ratification for the Protocol Additional to the Agreement between the United States of America and the International Atomic Energy Agency for the Application of Safeguards in the United States of America ("The Additional Protocol"). Ratification will be completed with deposit of the instrument with the IAEA in Vienna next week.

Additional Protocols with non-nuclear weapon states improve the IAEA's capability to detect clandestine nuclear weapons programs by providing it with increased information about and access to nuclear fuel cycle activities. By adopting an Additional Protocol for the United States, the President has underscored the U.S. commitment to combating nuclear proliferation.

The President's action gives us a stronger foundation from which to encourage other states to adopt the Protocol. The President has spearheaded international efforts to bring about universal adoption of the Additional Protocol. To date, 118 countries have signed an Additional Protocol and 89, including the United States, have ratified it.

2008/1108

Released on December 31, 2008

CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS

Jan. 9, 2009 – 12:01 p.m.

CQ Transcript: Vice President Cheney Interviewed by the Associated Press

SPEAKERS: VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY
DEB RIECHMANN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

[EXCERPT]

REICHMANN: Okay, let's go back to this question about what would the axis of evil be today. Obviously Iraq is not in there anymore.

CHENEY: I'm going to pass on that, partly because I don't want the headline, Cheney announces new axis of evil. (Laughter.) I can talk about problem areas that need to be watched and addressed, and I'll try to be brief. But North Korea continues to be a problem partly because they haven't kept their commitment to give us a full and complete declaration, partly because it looks like they have a continuing, ongoing program to produce highly enriched uranium, in addition to what they were doing in Yongbyon at their plutonium reactor. They helped the Syrians build a nuclear reactor, which is a major problem.

REICHMANN: For sure?

CHENEY: I'm going to leave North Korea at that point. Move on to --

REICHMANN: You said they helped them build one?

CHENEY: They did, yes.

REICHMANN: For sure?

CHENEY: Yes.

REICHMANN: Okay. Okay.

CHENEY: Yes, I'm confident of that statement.

REICHMANN: Okay, can we move -- go ahead.

[Sourcebook note: The above interview took place on Thursday, 2009-01-08:

<http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2009/01/08/ap5898202.html>

Cheney: NK helped Syria build reactor

By DEB RIECHMANN, 01.08.09, 06:18 PM EST

[EXCERPT]

In an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday, Cheney outlined reasons North Korea remains a trouble spot...]



Hillary Clinton Nomination Hearings To Be Secretary of State

Testimony
Secretary of State-Designate Hillary Rodham Clinton
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, DC
[2009-01-13]

[EXCERPT]

SENATOR MURKOWSKI: Well, I'm very pleased, very encouraged to hear that, and truly look forward to the opportunity to be working with you to advance these very important issues. And as we look to some of the basics that we're lacking up in the Arctic, whether it's the capacity for search and rescue, you know, what we need to be prepared for in this ever-evolving world without borders is quite a concept to think.

One more question, another that Alaskans look to with great interest because of our proximity to North Korea. As we look to the hot spots in the world, we certainly appreciate all of the other threats that you will be dealing with as Secretary of State. But you kind of get most nervous about those that are more proximate to you, and North Korea is certainly to us. In that vein, what do you see the future of the Six-Party Talks under your tenure? How do you anticipate that you'll be able to, whether it's jumpstart the process or -- how do you see that moving forward?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE CLINTON: Senator, I've had several lengthy conversations with Secretary Rice who has brought me up to date on the status of the Six-Party Talks. It is a framework that the President-elect and I believe has merit. But it also provides an opportunity, as Secretary Rice has testified before this Committee, for bilateral contact as well between North Korea and the United States. Again, this is under review. We're looking at all of the record of the negotiation up to this date.

Our goal is to end the North Korean nuclear programs, both the plutonium reprocessing program and the highly enriched uranium program, which there is reason to believe exist, although never quite verified. And it is our strong belief that the Six-Party Talks, particularly the role that China is currently playing, along with our close allies South Korea and Japan, is a vehicle for us to exert pressure on North Korea in a way that is more likely to alter their behavior. Again, I have no illusions about that. I think it takes tough reality-based diplomacy to determine what is doable. We have got to end North Korea as a proliferator. There is certainly reason to believe that North Korea has been involved with Syrian efforts. We know that it was involved with Libyan efforts.

So it's not only preventing the threat from North Korea, which is of particular interest to Hawaii, Alaska, and the West Coast of the United States, but it is their role as a proliferator. So we will embark upon a very aggressive effort to try to determine the best way forward to achieve our objectives with them.

Israel denies Syria claim it left traces of uranium at nuclear site bombed by IAF

By Reuters

Last update - 23:58 13/01/2009

[EXCERPT]

An Israeli official, who could not be identified by name, said Israel had replied to the IAEA since Jan. 1.

"Our ambassador to the IAEA told them, in essence, that there was no possibility that the uranium found at the site could have originated with the Israel Air Force," the official said.

"The response, as I understand it, basically said, 'It wasn't us', full stop," a senior Western diplomat said. "It was not a detailed response ... The nature of the response is not hugely surprising."

An IAEA spokeswoman could not confirm the exchange with Israel but said IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei would give an update on the Syria investigation in February.

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SUBJECT: IAEA; WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION WITH DIRECTOR GENERAL ELBARADEI
UPON ENTRY-INTO-FORCE OF U.S. ADDITIONAL PROTOCOL

REF: A. A: SECSTATE 246 B. B: UNVIE 005 Classified By: Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte for reasons
1.4b and d ----- Summary -----

[EXCERPTS]

4. (C) Turning to priorities at the IAEA, Ambassador began by noting that both Syria and Iran are blocking the safeguards investigations in their respective countries. While clearly the onus is on them to cooperate, the Secretariat and member states could not sit idly by and wait for that to happen, he said. Noting a recent conversation with Senator Specter shortly after his visit to Syria, ElBaradei said both Iran and Syria have decided to "play it by the book," but accepting only those safeguards activities for which they are explicitly obligated under their respective safeguards agreements. The DG said "of course we" in the Secretariat "will continue to do our jobs" and "go through the motions" to try to take forward the investigations. He said "our people are hard on them," but he doubted Tehran or Damascus would move without a political package deal that addresses broader issues of security and "face-saving" as well. On Syria, the DG said he believes such a package would have to address Syrian security concerns and offer "incentives," and at the same time assure Syria that coming clean on its nuclear activities would not be used by others as a premise for punitive sanctions. The Ambassador noted the imperative for the IAEA, regardless of any political package, to verify whether Syria has any continuing or reconstituted covert nuclear activities. The DG responded by saying he "didn't think they had the capability." (Comment: He did not offer any basis for this judgment.) When Ambassador Schulte noted that the EU has some leverage via the pending EU-Syria Association Agreement, the DG agreed, but noted it would only be effective as part of a broader package.

[deletia]

7. (C) ElBaradei's comments on Iran and Syria are familiar fare and reflect how important it will be to stay closely engaged with key safeguards staff to help encourage internal upwards pressure on the DG not to accept the status quo "stalemate." Our diplomacy should remain geared to ensuring others remain similarly engaged and that Board members make clear to the DG that he must do more than "go through the motions." On both files -- Syria in particular - we need to keep pounding the theme that the the IAEA's institutional credibility is at stake. ElBaradei's comments on the political environment in the Board, however, resonate with Mission's own analysis of the current Board dynamic. Unfortunately, ElBaradei is likely to remain part of the problem, rather than solution, if he becomes increasingly unwilling toward the end of his term to hold in check his proclivity to take a NAM-like view on key issues like the Middle East and fuel assurances. SCHULTE

SPIEGEL INTERVIEW WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR ASSAD

'Peace without Syria Is Unthinkable'

01/19/2009

[EXCERPTS]

Editor's note: The following interview was conducted on Thursday [2009-01-15] with Syrian President Assad prior to the announcement of unilateral cease-fires by Israel and Hamas.

SPIEGEL: Nevertheless, Washington counts Syria among the rogue states, partly because of your close relations with Tehran and Iran's nuclear bomb ambitions.

Assad: I don't believe that Iran is seeking to develop the bomb. Syria is fundamentally opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We want a nuclear-free Middle East, Israel included.

[deletia]

SPIEGEL: You yourself experienced what Israel is capable of in the summer of 2007, when the Israeli air force leveled a complex of buildings in northeastern Syria. You reacted to this attack with great restraint. Why?

Assad: We could have struck back. But should we really allow ourselves to be provoked into a war? Then we would have walked into an Israeli trap. The facility that was bombed was not a nuclear plant, but rather a conventional military installation.

SPIEGEL: But inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency found traces of uranium during their inspection. How do you explain this?

Assad: That uranium did not come from us. Perhaps, the Israelis dropped it from the air to make us the target of precisely these suspicions. If we had in fact had something to hide, we would not have allowed any inspectors into the country.

SPIEGEL: The inspectors would like to take additional samples and inspect other Syrian facilities. Why are you no longer allowing the experts into the country?

Assad: We gave them the opportunity to conduct their research. This is a political game. They are trying to pillory us. We will not let that happen.

SPIEGEL: So you have no ambitions to produce weapons of mass destruction, not even chemical weapons?

Assad: Chemical weapons, that's another thing. But you don't seriously expect me to present our weapons program to you here? We are in a state of war.

SPIEGEL: Do you work closely together with countries like North Korea and Iran as part of these weapons programs?

Assad: We work trustingly together with many countries on research programs.

[deletia]

Interview conducted by Dieter Bednarz, Erich Follath and Mathias Müller von Blumencron. Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan.

http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NDk5OTE0MzM5

Israeli ammo in Gaza had depleted uranium

Published Date: **January 20, 2009**

[Excerpts]

VIENNA: Arab nations accused Israel yesterday of blasting Gaza with ammunition containing depleted uranium and urged the International Atomic Energy Agency to investigate reports that traces of it had been found in victims of the shelling. In a letter on behalf of Arab ambassadors accredited in Austria, Prince Mansour Al-Saud, the Saudi Ambassador, expressed "our deep concern regarding the information ... that traces of depleted uranium have been found in Palestinian victims.

[deletia]

Syria, which is being investigated by the Vienna-based agency for alleged secret nuclear activities, says traces of uranium found by IAEA experts at a site bombed by Israel jets Sept 6, 2007 likely came from bombs or missiles used by the Israelis.

The Israelis have denied using such weaponry in that raid, and yesterday two diplomats accredited to the IAEA and familiar with its Syria investigations told the AP that the agency has virtually ruled out Israeli munitions as the source of the uranium. They asked for anonymity for discussing confidential information. The IAEA investigation is based in part on intelligence from the US, Israel and a third, unidentified country, alleging that the bombed site was a nearly completed nuclear reactor built with North Korean help and meant to produce plutonium - which can be used as the payload of nuclear weapons. The uranium traces were revealed by an analysis of environmental samples collected by IAEA experts during a visit to the site, in a remote part of the Syrian desert. Since that initial trip in June 2008, Syria has refused or deflected requests for follow up inspections both to the site and others allegedly linked to it.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/4331776/Syria-will-be-first-rogue-state-to-get-Barack-Obama-charm-offensive.html>

Syria will be first rogue state to get Barack Obama charm offensive

Barack Obama will seek to befriend Syria and enlist the rogue state's help in fighting terrorism, in what US officials see as the first test of his plans to talk to America's enemies.

By Tim Shipman in Washington

Last Updated: 4:50PM GMT 24 Jan 2009

Diplomats and Democrats in Washington have confirmed that Mr Obama wants to persuade the Syrian leader, Bashar Assad, to cooperate with the West, in the hope that he will loosen his country's close ties to Iran, forcing Tehran to the negotiating table as well.

During his presidential campaign, Mr Obama pledged to speak to states like Iran and Cuba without imposing preconditions as the Bush administration did on any contacts.

But in conversations with allies since his election, Mr Obama has made clear that he believes the key to improving the political situation in the Middle East is to peel Syria away from its longstanding alliance with Iran, rather than to immediately start negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear weapons programme.

US officials believe it will be more palatable for American voters for Mr Obama to launch his rogue nation outreach effort with Damascus rather than Iran and that dealing with the mullahs in Tehran would be much easier if they could no longer rely on knee-jerk support from Syria.

Both countries are accused of arming and sponsoring the terrorists groups Hamas and Hezbollah, funneling extremists and weapons into Iraq and attempting to purchase and develop nuclear technology. A Syrian nuclear plant was destroyed in an Israeli air attack last year *[sic]*.

One source, who has discussed foreign policy directly with Mr Obama in the last two weeks, has revealed that the president "is spending a lot of time thinking about Syria and how to improve relations".

During the election campaign, Mr Obama expressed support for tentative peace talks between Israel and Syria, which are still technically at war. While better relations with Syria could be key to improving the prospect of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal in years to come, Mr Obama's decision to sanction direct talks with Damascus has another short term goal.

A Western diplomat, who has discussed the Middle East with members of Mr Obama's team, told The Sunday Telegraph: "It's really about Iran. If you can isolate Iran, it makes it much more difficult for Tehran to continue with its hard line approach.

"Obama seems to have decided to go after Syria first before he tackles Iran or Cuba, which are much more emotive subjects in the US."

And Mr Obama does not seem to be alone in wanting to bring Syria back from the brink of the axis of evil to the diplomatic mainstream. President Assad sent him a message of congratulations after his election, a rare gesture.

A British official in Washington added: "Syria has shown the odd sign of wanting to build up a broader relationship with the West. The fact that Syria doesn't want to totally disengage and that it does not want to be seen as a bloc with Iran is an opening."

Other senior sources in Washington say that there will be a "Syrian track" to American diplomacy under Mr Obama.

British officials believe that Syria is prepared to cooperate because they don't want al Qaeda getting a foothold in their country and they are keen to wean themselves from their dependent relationship with Iran. Those who have studied Mr Assad say he is uncomfortable being so reliant on Iran and that encouraging him to go his own way will decisively change the balance of power in the entire Middle East.

British officials see an opportunity in Mr Obama's plans to cement close relations with the new US administration, since the UK has for several months been working to improve the dialogue with Damascus, an enterprise that culminated in a trip to Syria by Foreign Secretary David Miliband in November. Britain has resumed intelligence sharing with Syria and Mr Obama is likely to have been briefed on information MI6 has shared with the CIA.

The British ambassador in Washington, Sir Nigel Sheinwald, is also an old Syria hand, having made a trip as a secret envoy to Damascus when he was Tony Blair's chief foreign policy trouble shooter. He is well versed on negotiating tactics and potential pitfalls.

The hope is that if Syria is treated as a serious player in the region it is more likely to play a constructive role and be less reliant on the security blanket of its relationship with Tehran.

But dealing with Syria is a diplomatic minefield, as former prime minister Tony Blair discovered to his embarrassment during a previous thaw. On a visit to Damascus after the September 11 attacks, Mr Blair had to stand side by side with President Assad at a press conference while the Syrian dictator lectured the West about terrorism and praised Hamas, which has its political headquarters in Damascus, as freedom fighters.

ANALYSIS-Syria eyes strategic gains after Gaza war

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Mon Jan 26, 2009 10:07am EST

[EXCERPTS]

DAMASCUS, Jan 26 (Reuters) - Syria is trying to capitalise on Israel's failure to crush its Islamist ally Hamas to enhance its regional clout in peace talks with the Jewish state and forge good ties with the new U.S. administration.

The Syrian government, which has recently emerged from years of isolation, is now advocating a role for the Islamist group in Middle East peacemaking, Syrian officials and diplomats say.

[deletia]

Damascus is also hoping for a thaw in relations with Washington, and sees President Barack Obama as more amenable to supporting Israeli-Syrian peacemaking than his predecessor George W. Bush, who imposed sanctions on Syria and expanded them during his last year in office.

Damascus suspended the indirect talks with Israel during the Gaza crisis. But neither side has ruled out a resumption of the talks which have focused on the occupied Golan Heights and Syria's ties with Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran.

"Syria has benefited from the renewed international awareness that the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial to any broader Middle East settlement. Obama will have to engage Syria if he wants to attenuate regional divisions and radicalism," wrote Professor Joshua Landis on his Syria Comment Web site.

But Obama's Middle East envoy's first trip to the region will exclude Syria and recent statements by President Bashar al-Assad declaring a 2002 Arab peace initiative dead were unlikely to go down well with the new U.S. administration.

Continuing to be on the wrong side of Washington will not help Syria, with a tribunal to try suspects in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri due to start work in March and the International Atomic Energy Agency probing an alleged nuclear site bombed by Israel, the diplomats said.

"The Gaza war lowered the standing of Syria's regional rivals a notch, but the Syrians cannot continue to get away with playing the rejectionist card while pursuing peace with Israel," one of the diplomats said in the Syrian capital.

[deletia]

American Enterprise Institute

January 26, 2009

[Edited transcript from audio tapes]

Panelists:

John R. Bolton, AEI

Eliot Cohen, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies

Steven F. Hayward, AEI

Peter J. Wallison, AEI

Moderator:

Christopher DeMuth, AEI

[EXCERPTS]

Eliot Cohen: The second thing is I think we have to be very careful about turning the State Department into a monolith. It's not. There are different people. I knew people in the State Department who were, from my point of view, way too soft on Iran, and there were some who were just as hard as I was, which is pretty doggone hard. On particular set of issues, and I'll just name three that I was involved in: the North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria, the Russian invasion of Georgia, and then the brand [sounds like] of the administration dealing with piracy in Somalia. The Senior State people, and I mean, the Career people, were a lot tougher, a lot more hardheaded, a lot less accommodationist than their counterparts in the Defense Department, for a variety of reasons.

[deletia]

Eliot Cohen: With regard to secrecy, this, in a way, speaks to my first comment about the league of the likeminded. I participated in one episode where I was astounded that everything was kept entirely secret, and this was the North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. No matter what you think about the policy outcome, and there was a lot of very severe disagreement about whether we should take that thing out ourselves, we should try some sort of diplomatic overture, and in the end of the course, we decided simply, or the President decided simply to be quiet and let the Israelis do it. There was real debate. There was real disagreement. There was a small deputies' committee. There were no leaks, which astounded all of us. This was argued out among the principals and with the president, and the president made the decision.

Again, whether it was the right policy outcome, I think reasonable people can disagree. In terms of process, it was just fine and it was confidential. And I suspect that the largest part of the reason for that was that the team at the very top, at the principal's level, but also the team at my level or the undersecretary level trusted one another and there was room to have a spirited disagreement on both personal and institutional grounds without anybody wanting to blow this publicly.

The Middle Powers Initiative's Berlin Article VI-Forum „New Imperatives and Openings for a Nuclear Weapons-Free World“ - Opening address by Minister of State Gernot Erler

29.01.2009

Check against delivery

[EXCERPT]

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me cordially welcome you in the name of the German government. I am very pleased that with the support of the German Foreign Office this year's Article VI forum on nuclear disarmament takes place in Berlin, at the Rathaus Schöneberg. When US President Kennedy held his famous speech here in 1963, underlining the determination of the free world to stand up for Berlin, the existential threat of nuclear weapons was present in everybody's mind. Today, almost twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the acute feeling of insecurity of those times has faded. The menace of nuclear weapons being used has receded. But we must not be deluded: it has not gone away. In fact, stemming the proliferation of nuclear weapons continues to be one of the most pressing questions in international security policy. In today's world with complex and new evolving security threats, the need for action has actually increased:

* In spite of important reductions since the end of the Cold War, the estimated number of nuclear warheads is still at an incredible 25.000, more than 90 per cent of which are held by the USA and Russia. Several of the nuclear armed states continue to expand or modernize their nuclear arsenal and delivery systems.

* The world stockpile of weapons-usable fissile material is roughly 2.500 tons. This material could be used to produce an incredible further 200.000 nuclear bombs. Obviously it must be kept safely under lock and key. The risk of terrorists trying to get hold of fissile material has emerged as a new, unprecedented threat.

* Thanks to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the international community has managed to limit the number of possessor states of nuclear weapons. Let me mention again President Kennedy who in the early 1960's pointed at the possibility that the number of nuclear-weapon states might rise to 15 or 20 within a decade. While this prediction thankfully proved incorrect the danger is far from banned. We have witnessed the development of clandestine nuclear programmes. We are confronted with the risk of countries breaking out of the NPT and striving for nuclear weapons. In spite of the endeavours made by the international community, the proliferation threats of the Iranian nuclear programme as well as the North Korean case remain unsolved. Both are major challenges to the international non-proliferation regime. We expect North Korea to follow through with the dismantling of its nuclear installations and the verification of its nuclear activities.

* Iran must, in order to restore confidence, suspend critical activities, as requested by the UN Security Council, and fully cooperate with the IAEA.

* If the international community does not succeed here, there is a real risk of new arms races that threaten regional and world security. The questions concerning Syria and the nature of the facility bombed by the Israeli air force illustrate the seriousness of this threat.

* Basically the same countries which are of concern with regard to nuclear proliferation activities are also active in enhancing their capabilities in the production of missiles. The proliferation of ballistic missiles as possible means of delivery for nuclear weapons continues, in spite of efforts in the context of the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Hague Code of Conduct. Not only other regions of the world, but also Europe is increasingly confronted with the security challenges of combined weapons and missile proliferation.

* The proliferation cases at hand demonstrate that we need new concepts to prevent military abuse of legitimate nuclear energy production. We are faced with a situation where rising energy needs and climate change considerations lead to renewed interest in nuclear power. A growing number of countries is examining the expansion or the launch of civil nuclear programmes. The Director General of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, spoke of no fewer than 50 countries that have informed the IAEA of considering to introduce nuclear power, with 12 countries actively preparing nuclear energy programmes. Such a “nuclear renaissance” could dramatically increase the number of states that are interested in proliferation sensitive nuclear technology. IAEA Director General ElBaradei has spoken of the emergence of “virtual” nuclear weapon states once countries master the entire nuclear fuel cycle including enrichment and reprocessing. Even if - as we hope - all those countries refrain from any military program, all these additional nuclear facilities need to be secured against terrorists.

[deletia]

February 1, 2009

Eliot Cohen

Former Counselor to State Department & Senior Adviser to Sec. Condoleezza Rice, 2007-09

Info: This week on Q&A, our guest is Eliot Cohen. He talks about his experiences at the State Department in the Bush Administration serving as a counselor to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the past two years.

He is currently the director of the strategic studies program at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

[EXCERPTS]

COHEN: Well, in February of 2007, Secretary Rice called me, it was a complete call out of the blue because I had not – we had known each other, but not really well. She asked me to come to her office for a talk, we talked about foreign policy things and at the end of the conversation, she offered me the job of counselor of the Department of State. The – it's a very interesting position, not all Secretaries have had counselors, but basically I was an under Secretary ranked official who was her senior advisor. The portfolio she asked me to take on was perhaps not surprisingly the war portfolio. So I have spent the last two years doing a lot of work on Iraq, more I would say on Afghanistan, fair bit on Iran, good bit of time in Pakistan and then there have been other excursions; she asked me to lead the State Department response when we discovered a North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. I spent a couple of weeks traveling with her when the Russians invaded Georgia and – I kind of led the charge on dealing with Somali pirates. So it's been a pretty exciting couple of years and totally unexpected.

[deletia]

BRIAN LAMB, HOST, C-SPAN Q&A: Give us some of the things that fascinated you.

COHEN: Well, I think it – it's a little bit like being a theologian and you get a couple of years to live as a halibut. You spend your whole life studying these things and all of the sudden you're right at the center of them. It was fascinating for me, simply to be working closely with her to be going to the National Security Council, going to the sit room, the situation room in the White House, being embroiled in these quite high level discussions about say what do you do about a fact that you've found a North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria, hammering out Afghanistan policy. So that was fascinating. I spent a lot of time traveling, particularly in Afghanistan, but every three months or so I would go out to the theater with a few other officials and the head of the delegation was the Deputy National Security Advisor for Afghanistan and Iraq, Lieutenant General Lute, and we would travel all over the place and see all kinds of people. That was quite extraordinary.

[deletia]

LAMB: I'm being facetious, but I mean what's a good war story from your experience?

COHEN: I think the – it's not a very exciting story, but it's a reassuring story. It was in the spring of 2007, the Secretary called me to her office and she said, 'Well, there are only two people in the State Department who know what I'm about to tell you; I'm one and you're now the other. We think we've found this North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria' and my jaw dropped. And I had been reading a lot of high-speed intelligence, but this had not come up. It was kept in very, very narrow channels, which were just opened a little bit. And she asked me to lead our response to it and what then ensued was a whole summer of discussions in the sit room at the White House and what's called the Deputies Committee level, that is basically the people at the Undersecretary rank more or less and it was a very small group initially, it expanded somewhat as time went on. There was the Undersecretary of Defense for policy, you had the head of plans of the joint staff, you had a couple of senior intelligence officials, one or two people from the NSC staff.

And throughout that summer, we pulled together options for the President and for the principals, in other words the cabinet Secretaries and it was a – and it was an experience I'll never forget because it was done at a very high level of seriousness, obviously, it never leaked. We were all fearful that this would leak. It never leaked. It was done the way it ought to be done; we looked at a range of different options that are clear-cut options, there were arguments pro and con for those options. Those were given to the President and to his most senior advisors, my boss, Secretary Gates and Vice President and so on and at the end of it, I felt we had done a really good job and it's – it may not be much of a war story, but I think it tells you that if you have the right people, the U.S. Government can function the way that it's supposed to function and was done with a high level of professionalism, with collegiality. We disagreed with one another quite forcefully, but always in a collegial spirit. It was quite an encouraging experience.

LAMB: What was your position on the issue?

COHEN: When you go into these things, one of the challenges is to what extent do you represent the institutional position and to what extent do you represent your own position and one of the things I was very grateful to Secretary Rice for was she gave me room to do both. She trusted me to do both. Now, obviously, when her position would always trump my position. I think we – I was initially simply in favor of either letting the Israelis do it or considering should the United States, itself, consider taking out the reactor. She pushed us in the direction of formulating a rather elaborate diplomatic option, which I drafted, with the help of several senior colleagues at State, which we worked here – which was eventually the State position. But it was a long process of – the President's eventual decision was let the Israelis do it and if they don't want to talk about it, we won't talk about it either. Whether or not that was the right decision, we'll see. I mean there were – as with most governmental decisions, these are – they're all 51/49 kinds of decisions and you can't be entirely sure that they were right ones until a long time after the event.

LAMB: You think there is any residual from that decision for the Israelis to take out that nuclear site.

COHEN: Well, there were a number of consequences that flowed from it. In one way, I think was reassuring for the Israelis in terms of re-establishing some of their credibility after the Lebanon war of 2006, partly because they did it, but also partly because they did it and then were quiet about it and to some extent I think it was a sense of this is how the game is supposed to be played in the Middle East, just do it, you don't talk about it. So there was that. I have wondered whether it was a good idea for us not to talk about it immediately in order to put the Syrians on the back foot and in order to put pressure on the North Koreans who had behaved extraordinarily badly. I mean it was a debate about that. The Israelis initially did not want this publicized and I think the fear was of it leading to a broader conflict, which I think was a reasonable fear. The question is a little bit longer after the event, was that the right course of action? But it wasn't my decision to make and I – again, I think one of the wonderful things about working for Secretary Rice is I could give her views with which she disagreed, she would hear them out, we would argue back and forth and she did what a boss is supposed to do, she made a decision, but she never in any way discouraged me from making the arguments and sometimes she listened.

[Sourcebook note: Dr. Cohen was named counselor to Dr. Rice on 2007-03-02 and assumed the post after the end of the Spring semester at SAIS. In the interim, he served as a consultant to Dr. Rice.]

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/89824.htm>

Eliot A. Cohen
Counselor of the Department
Office of the Counselor of the Department
Term of Appointment: 04/30/2007 to present

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013003085.html>

A Conversation with Mohamed ElBaradei

Sunday, February 1, 2009; B03 [Accessed 2009-01-31T13:50Z]

As director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), did Mohamed ElBaradei soft-pedal Iran's nuclear ambitions to ensure that the Bush administration wouldn't attack that country? That's what many in the former administration, as well as nonproliferation experts of various political backgrounds, assert. Last week, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, ElBaradei sat down with Newsweek-Washington Post's Lally Weymouth to defend his record. Excerpts:

[EXCERPT]

[Weymouth:] People say you criticized Israel harshly for bombing the nuclear reactor in Syria -- that you weren't tough on Syria for building a nuclear reactor.

[ElBaradei:] I have been very harsh on Israel because they violated the rules of international law on the use of unilateral force, and they did not provide us with the information before the bombing, which we could then easily have established whether Syria was building a nuclear reactor. To that extent, the blame is also shared with the U.S., who sat on the information for a year and six months after the bombing. Now we are doing our best to try to see what Syria was doing, but it's like Iran. I cannot jump the gun and say Syria was building a nuclear facility because what we are doing now is trying to verify what was there.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/books/review/Kaplan-t.html?em>

It's All Yours

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

February 8, 2009 [Accessed 2009-02-07T15:00Z]

[Review of]

THE INHERITANCE

The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power

By David E. Sanger

[EXCERPT]

Sanger has a knack for getting administration officials to leak like sieves, though he never advertises his access. His discussion of North Korea's lunatic kingdom is especially revealing. Even as United States spy satellites were orbiting in search of Iraq's stockpiles, Koreans were erecting a nuclear reactor less than a hundred miles away in Syria. "Had a few other things on our mind," an American official concedes.

**Annual Threat Assessment of the
Intelligence Community
for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence**



Dennis C. Blair
Director of National Intelligence
12 February 2009

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE
FEBRUARY 2009

INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY
ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

UNCLASSIFIED
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

[EXCERPT]

On the proliferation side, North Korea has sold ballistic missiles and associated materials to several Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, and, in our assessment, assisted Syria with the construction of a nuclear reactor. We remain concerned North Korea could again export nuclear technology.

Israel on the IAEA's Ineffectiveness

NEWSWEEK

Published Feb 14, 2009

From the magazine issue dated Feb 23, 2009

The director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei ("On Nukes, Tread Softly," Feb. 9), has failed to persuade Syria to allow a visit by the IAEA's inspectors to three sites suspected to be part of Syria's covert nuclear program. He has also failed in his feeble demand for a proper investigation of Syria's bulldozing the wreckage and the cleanup operation at the Dair Alzour site, where Syria is suspected of constructing a North Korean nuclear reactor in clear violation of its Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement with the agency. Instead, ElBaradei lashes out at the state of Israel. Unfortunately, this has become a common practice by the director of the IAEA in his efforts to divert attention from his failure to conduct a vigorous and conclusive investigation amid mounting evidence of gross violations of international obligations under the NPT by some of its Middle Eastern members.

Nili Lifshitz, Spokeswoman
Israeli Atomic Energy Commission
Tel Aviv, Israel

ElBaradei says Iran, Syria not cooperating enough

(Reuters)

17 February 2009

[EXCERPTS]

PARIS - Iran is still not cooperating with efforts to resolve outstanding questions regarding its nuclear programme, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said on Tuesday.

[deletia]

Turning to the subject of an alleged reactor site in Syria that was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in 2007, ElBaradei repeated that samples from the site were not conclusive and called for greater cooperation from the Syrian authorities.

ElBaradei had said in November that uranium traces found at the Syrian site were not sufficient evidence of undeclared nuclear activity but Syria should be more open to help clarify the issue.



Board of Governors

GOV/2009/9

Date: 19 February 2009

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Item 5(e) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2009/6)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. On 19 November 2008, the Director General reported to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (GOV/2008/60). The Board requested the Director General to keep it informed of developments, as appropriate. This report covers relevant developments since that date.

A. Chronology of Events

2. As indicated in the Director General's previous report, analysis of the environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site revealed a significant number of anthropogenic natural uranium particles (i.e. produced as a result of chemical processing). Syria has stated that the origin of the uranium particles was the missiles used to destroy the building (GOV/2008/60, para. 8).

3. In order to confirm Syria's assertion about the possible source of uranium particles found at Dair Alzour, the Agency requested Syria, in a letter dated 26 November 2008, to provide access to the site (including the water treatment plant at the site), and any other locations where the debris from the building and equipment, and any salvaged equipment removed from Dair Alzour, had been and/or was currently located, so that the Agency could take samples of, and environmental samples from, these items and materials. In that letter, the Agency also:

- requested that Syria share the results of any assessments that it may have performed regarding the materials used during, or resulting from, the bombing;
- requested, as a transparency measure, that the Agency be permitted to visit additional locations;

- reminded Syria that the requests for information and documentation referred to in the Agency's letter of 3 July 2008, which related, inter alia, to information concerning the destroyed building, remained unanswered; and
- stated that it stood ready to discuss these matters and to conduct the activities referred to above as soon as possible.

4. In a letter dated 17 February 2009, Syria reiterated its statement that the destroyed facility, and the current facility, on the Dair Alzour site were military installations. Syria provided information in response to some of the questions raised in the Agency's letter of 3 July 2008 concerning the purpose of the water pumping station and the water purification station found on the site and procurement efforts in connection with certain equipment and material. However, the responses Syria provided were only partial and included information already provided to the Agency, and did not address most of the questions raised in the Agency's communications. The Agency is now assessing the information provided by Syria.

5. In a letter to Israel dated 26 November 2008, referring to the claims made by Syria about the origin of the uranium particles found at Dair Alzour, the Agency requested Israel to provide information which would enable the Agency to determine whether munitions alleged to have been used by it could have been the source of the uranium particles (GOV/2008/60, paras 8 and 18). With respect to the Agency's request, Israel, in a letter dated 24 December 2008, stated only that "it rejects Syrian claims on the matter" and that "Israel could not have been the source of the uranium particles found on the site of the nuclear reactor".

B. Agency Verification

6. The Agency has continued its analysis of all information available to it as a result of the 23 June 2008 visit to the Dair Alzour site, as well as information from other sources. Additional analyses of the environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site have also been carried out by a number of laboratories participating in the Agency's Network of Analytical Laboratories. These analyses have revealed additional particles of anthropogenic uranium. These uranium particles, and those identified as a result of the previous analyses, are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material.

7. The Agency's current assessment is that there is a low probability that the uranium was introduced by the use of missiles as the isotopic and chemical composition and the morphology of the particles are all inconsistent with what would be expected from the use of uranium based munitions.

8. As indicated in the Director General's previous report (GOV/2008/60, paras 5–7), the Agency has requested from Syria clarification of efforts by Syrian entities to procure materials and equipment which could support the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor. The Agency is continuing to assess the information related to these procurement efforts, including that provided by Syria in its letter of 17 February 2009.

C. Summary

9. The presence of the uranium particles at the Dair Alzour site, the imagery of the site available to the Agency and information about certain procurement activities need to be fully understood. Syria therefore needs to provide additional information and supporting documentation about the past use and nature of the building at the Dair Alzour site, and information about the procurement activities. Syria needs to be transparent by providing additional access to other locations alleged to be related to Dair Alzour. These measures, together with the sampling of destroyed and salvaged equipment and debris, are essential for the Agency to complete its assessment.

10. The Director General calls upon Syria to take the above measures as soon as possible. The Director General also calls on Israel and other States that may possess relevant information to make the information available to the Agency, including satellite imagery, and to agree to the Agency's sharing of such information with Syria.

11. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h_DqCdoqniVZQjatkHZHUZ741K-A

IAEA finds graphite, uranium traces at suspect Syrian site

1 hour ago [Accessed 2009-02-19T19:50Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN atomic watchdog has found further uranium particles, as well as traces of graphite at a remote desert site in Syria, which the US alleges was a covert nuclear reactor, it emerged Thursday.

UN inspectors detected more unexplained uranium particles at Al-Kibar, the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a restricted report.

And a senior official close to the agency revealed for the first time that particles of graphite had also been found at the site, but that it was too early to determine whether it was nuclear-grade graphite.

[deletia]

But in the restricted report circulated to IAEA member states on Thursday, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, the agency said that new analyses "have revealed additional particles of anthropogenic (man-made) uranium."

There were now around 80 uranium particles in all "of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material," the report said.

[Sourcebook note: The IAEA report above does not specify the number of particles.]

[deletia]

The senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the amount was "significant."

"It's not simple contamination by somebody who spent the day at some nuclear facility somewhere and then went to Al-Kibar," the official said.

"It's nuclear material that hasn't been declared and Syria has to explain" how it got there.

[deletia]

Regarding the graphite, the official said analysis of the samples was still underway.

"We didn't find masses of graphite but we found some particles, some traces. We're still analysing the significance of that and whether that would point to nuclear-grade graphite."

[deletia]

UN agency finds new uranium traces at Syria site

By GEORGE JAHN

1 hour ago [Accessed 2009-02-19T21:50Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AP) — U.N. nuclear agency samples taken from a Syrian site suspected of being a secretly built reactor have revealed new traces of processed uranium, the agency reported Thursday.

[deletia]

Both [the Iran and Syria] reports — meant for restricted release Thursday only to the 35 nations of the IAEA board — were obtained by The Associated Press ahead of a board meeting starting March 2 that will have the nuclear activities of the two Mideast nations on its agenda.

The documents paint a generally disheartening picture of the agency's efforts to probe the Iranian and Syrian nuclear programs. Iran says its nuclear activities are peaceful; Damascus denies hiding any nuclear program.

[deletia]

The Syria report noted the refusal by Damascus to allow agency inspectors to make follow-up visits to sites suspected of harboring a secret nuclear program.

The brevity of the reports — the one on Iran ran five pages, the one on Syria was just three — reflected the lack of progress in the probes.

Still, a senior U.N. official who asked to remain anonymous in exchange for commenting on the restricted reports, described as significant the find of new uranium traces from samples taken during a visit in June to the Al Kibar site bombed in 2007 by Israeli jets.

Minute traces of processed uranium from those samples were found late last year. The official said additional analysis had found 40 more uranium particles, for a total of 80.

Syria has suggested the traces came from Israel ordnance used to hit the site but the report said the composition of the uranium made that unlikely. Israel has denied it was the source of the uranium.

The official said experts were also analyzing traces of graphite and stainless steel found around the site, although he cautioned it was too early to say whether they were related to nuclear activity.

Inspectors at the Al Kibar site were known to be looking for graphite, an element in the type of North Korean prototype that the United States says the Syrians were trying to build with help from Pyongyang.

[deletia]



Syria—IAEA Director General's Report

Gordon Duguid
Acting Deputy Department Spokesman, Office of the Spokesman
Public Affairs
Washington, DC

QUESTION TAKEN AT THE FEBRUARY 19, 2009 DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

February 19, 2009

Question: Do you have any comment on the recently released IAEA report on Syria's nuclear program?

Answer: This is the second report by the IAEA relating to Syria's nuclear activities since the Al-Kibar reactor was destroyed in September 2007. The first report was submitted to the Board of Governors in November 2008.

We expect the Board of Governors, during its March 2-6 meeting, to address the mounting evidence and ongoing concerns related to Syria's clandestine nuclear activities noted in the Director General's report. We fully support the IAEA in its investigation and urge the international community to continue insisting that Syria comply with its IAEA obligations and cooperate fully with the IAEA without delay.

In particular, it is imperative that Syria fully cooperate with the IAEA by granting the IAEA unfettered access to any site or information needed for the investigation.

U.S. asks for meeting with Syrian ambassador

Fri Feb 20, 2009 6:38pm EST

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. government has asked for a meeting with Syria's ambassador to discuss concerns including Damascus's possible nuclear program and support for groups that Washington labels as terrorists, a State Department spokesman said Friday.

The request follows a report by U.N. inspectors Thursday that graphite and more uranium traces were found in samples taken from a Syrian site that Washington says was an almost built graphite nuclear reactor destroyed by Israel in November 2007.

The Syrian ambassador to the United States, Imad Mustafa, has been asked to meet the acting head of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department next week, spokesman Gordon Duguid said.

"The meeting is an opportunity for dialogue to discuss our concerns with the Syrians," he said.

"There remain key differences between our two governments, including concerns about Syria's support for terrorist groups and networks, Syria's acquisition of nuclear and non-conventional weaponry, interference in Lebanon and a worsening human rights situation."

Relations between Syria and the United States nosedived after the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, although Syria denies involvement.

Tensions have lingered over Damascus's support for the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement, accusations that Syria allowed Islamist fighters to infiltrate Iraq and suspicions about a secret nuclear program -- which Damascus also denies.

But Syria hopes for a thaw with Washington under new U.S. President Barack Obama. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told a British newspaper this week he hoped for better relations and that Obama would send an ambassador to Syria soon.

The United States withdrew its ambassador under President George W. Bush in 2005 after al-Hariri's assassination.

Senator John Kerry, chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, will visit Syria over the weekend.

(Writing by John Whitesides; Editing by John O'Callaghan)



Israel responds to IAEA reports regarding Iran and Syria

20 Feb 2009

Israel expressed its concerns about Iranian and Syrian nuclear programs.

(Communicated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published two periodic reports yesterday on investigations that the agency is conducting in Iran and Syria.

The report on Iran indicates that the Iranians are continuing to enrich uranium, in violation of a Security Council resolution, while refusing to cooperate with the IAEA. The agency is trying to determine whether Iran's nuclear program is intended for military purposes, as suspected.

The facts detailed in the report are similar to those in previous reports. However, the ramifications, in the face of Iran's continuation of its nuclear program – particularly the stockpiling of enriched uranium, while ignoring the demands of the international community – are more serious. Israel reiterates its call to the international community and its institutions to increase the pressure on Iran to abandon its program, which threatens to achieve nuclear weapon capability.

Regarding the Syrian facility that was apparently built in secret, Israel expressed concern about the report's findings, which include the presence of uranium at the site, indicating that the facility was nuclear. Israel expects the IAEA and its head to continue its impartial investigations, including visits to additional sites that Syria until now has not allowed to be inspected.

These two states operate clandestinely in the nuclear realm in a way that endangers regional and world peace while flagrantly violating their international commitments.

U.S. to prod Syrian envoy on support of terrorism, suspected nuclear program

By Barak Ravid, Haaretz Correspondent

Last update - 02:08 21/02/2009

[EXCERPT]

The State Department is talking with Syria to discuss U.S. allegations that the Arab country supports terror groups and is pursuing nuclear weapons, a department official said Friday.

A meeting with the Syrian ambassador, scheduled for next week at the State Department, will be the first such session since last September and reflects Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's interest in talking directly with Syria and other countries at odds with the United States, spokesman Gordon Duguid said.

"It's her belief that direct engagement with Syria will advance U.S. interests," Duguid said.

Ambassador Imad Moustapha is to meet with Jeffrey D. Feltman, the acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, at Feltman's request, Duguid said. Clinton is not scheduled to participate.

"Our concerns include Syria's support to terrorist groups and networks, Syria's pursuit of nuclear and nonconventional weaponry, interference in Lebanon and a worsening human rights situation," Duguid said.

The spokesman cited the International Atomic Energy Agency's report Thursday that samples taken from a Syrian site suspected of being a secretly built nuclear reactor have revealed new traces of processed uranium.

[deletia]

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2029

TAGS: KNNP PARM IAEA MNUC IR SYR TRGY

SUBJECT: IAEA REPORTS ON IRAN AND SYRIA

CLASSIFIED BY: ISN - C. S. ELIOT KANG, ACTING FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[EXCERPTS]

¶1. (U) This is an action request. See paragraphs 6-9.

SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General (DG) ElBaradei released his latest reports on the status of the IAEA's investigations into Iran and Syria's nuclear programs on 19 February 2009. Both reports conformed to expectations in describing the absence of any meaningful steps by either country to address the serious issues that exist with respect to their nuclear programs.

[deletia]

¶5. (SBU) DG ElBaradei's report on Syria reinforces our conclusion that Syria was engaged in a clandestine effort to construct and operate a nuclear reactor at Al Kibar. The report also helps to confirm that uranium found via environmental samples collected at the site is not naturally occurring, lending credence to the fact that the facility in question was a reactor. Although the report does not categorically dismiss Syria's explanation that the uranium was from Israeli missiles used in the attack on the reactor in September 2007, it suggests that this explanation is highly unlikely. Syria delivered an eleventh-hour letter on 17 February 2009 attempting to demonstrate a degree of cooperation immediately before the report's release. The report notes that the responses in the Syrian letter "were only partial ... and did not address most of the questions raised in the Agency's communications." Importantly, the report also calls on Syria to allow access to other locations and allow inspectors to take samples of the debris removed from Al Kibar as soon as possible, noting that these measures are "essential" for the IAEA to be able complete its assessment.

Action Requests

¶6. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST FOR ALL POSTS: Posts are requested to convey U.S. views regarding the IAEA reports to appropriate host governments. Posts should underscore that these reports demonstrate that neither Iran nor Syria have taken any meaningful steps to cooperate with the IAEA in the past six months. Posts should stress that Syria's refusal to do so only deepens concerns regarding the nature of its clandestine nuclear

activities. With respect to Iran, Posts should emphasize that while Iran has stalled the IAEA's investigation and still refuses to provide the IAEA with requested transparency, its centrifuge program continues to make progress. The net result is that in neither case can the international community have confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of these nuclear programs. For Iran, the UN Security Council has imposed a mandatory requirement that it suspend all proliferation sensitive nuclear activities and cooperate fully with the IAEA. On Iran, we should stress that with international rights, come responsibilities. Iran needs to live up to those responsibilities. We believe that Iran's continued failure to do so is another opportunity lost.

¶7. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST FOR ALL POSTS CONT: With respect to the upcoming 2-6 March 2009 IAEA Board of Governors' meeting, Posts should stress the need for the following from host governments:

- Strong national statements on Iran and call on Iran to impement its international nuclear obligations without delay. Statements should urge Iran to take advantage of this critical opportunity for engagement by addressing the concerns of the international community and underscore the need for full transparency with the IAEA (including Iran's implementation of the Additional Protocol) and cooperation with the IAEA's investigation, as well as suspension of all proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities;

- Strong national statements on Syria and a demand that Syria cooperate with the IAEA's investigation;

- Strengthened statements on Iran and Syria from regional or other groups, e.g., European Union, the Group of 77 and China, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of Latin America and the Carribean; the Africa Group, etc. To the extent possible, Posts should encourage host goverments to instruct their delegations not to accept statements from any group to which they are a member that would downplay the factual reports of the IAEA, or undercut the Agency's ability to obtain the necessary information and access needed to resolve these serious issues; and,

- Board members should support, by vote if necessary, releasing the Syria report to the public. This is essential for the public to appreciate the serious nature of Syria's failure to cooperate with the IAEA.

This report will also demonstrate the level of transparency in IAEA affairs that we believe Syria should manifest in its approach to the IAEA.

¶8. (S) ACTION REQUEST FOR UNVIE: In addition to conveying these messages to local IAEA Missions, UNVIE should continue working to promote support within the IAEA Secretariat and among IAEA Board Members for continuing and expanding the investigation into both Iran and Syria's nuclear activities and pressuring both to cooperate with the respective investigations. Mission is requested to place maximum effort into securing strong national statements demanding Iranian and Syrian cooperation with the IAEA by as many Board members as possible, particularly those in the EU. Mission should also work to support a P5+1 statement on Iran.

Mission's efforts to build support for such statements should begin as soon as possible, and will be facilitated by technical briefings on Iran and Syria's nuclear efforts to Board members in Washington and Vienna the week prior to the Board meeting. These briefings will be provided by State and IC nonproliferation experts. Mission is also requested to ensure that the IAEA Director General's forthcoming report on Syria is made public, including by laying the groundwork for a vote in the Board if necessary. If possible politically and statutorily, Mission should seek the concurrent release of the November 2008 Syria report, which was denied public release by NAM/Arab intervention at the November 2008 Board meeting. Mission should begin coordinating with likeminded Board members at the earliest possible date.

¶9. (S) ACTION REQUEST FOR LONDON, PARIS, MOSCOW, BERLIN, AND BEIJING: In addition to conveying U.S. views regarding the Iran and Syria reports, Posts should stress that the United States believes that the Iran report reinforces the need for a strong P5+1 statement demanding Iran's immediate and full cooperation with the IAEA. Discussions regarding specific texts will be addressed in Vienna and Washington.

POCS AND REPORTING DEADLINE

¶10. (SBU) Mission is requested to report on the status of its efforts in advance of the Board. Richard Nephew (202-647-7680) and Matt Goldstein (202-647-4196) are the Department's POCs for this issue.

CLINTON

Diplomats: Syria puts missile facility on hit site

By GEORGE JAHN

6 hours ago [*Accessed 2009-02-25T14:40Z*]

VIENNA (AP) — Syria's nuclear chief has told the U.N.'s nuclear agency that his nation built a new missile facility on the site of what the U.S. says was a nearly finished nuclear reactor bombed by Israel, diplomats said.

Citing comments by Ibrahim Othman at a closed meeting Tuesday, two diplomats from Western delegations to the International Atomic Energy Agency said the new structure appeared to be a missile control center or an actual launching pad.

The diplomats demanded anonymity for divulging details about what Othman told the agency's 35-nation board.

Israeli warplanes destroyed the site in a remote area of the Syrian desert in September 2007. Israel has not commented on the strike, but Washington subsequently presented intelligence purporting to show that the target was a reactor built with North Korean help that would have been able to produce plutonium once completed.

Syria had previously said only that the site was military in nature and that it was being rebuilt. It has denied secret nuclear activities but has blocked IAEA inspectors from visits beyond an initial inspection to the Al Kibar site.

Environmental samples from that trip have revealed traces of man-made uranium and graphite. But U.N. officials say it is too early to say whether the graphite — a common element in North Korean prototype reactors — had any nuclear applications.

The diplomats quoted Othman as saying that, when IAEA Deputy Director Olli Heinonen visited the site in June, Heinonen was asked whether the Syrians should "put a missile in position" — apparently to demonstrate its present use — with the IAEA official saying no.

One of the diplomats said the briefing was told that the finding of 80 uranium particles in the environmental samples was "significant."

But Othman played down the laboratory results in comments outside the meeting — and denied outright that graphite was found. That denial contradicted comments from U.N. officials familiar with the Syria probe.

"There is no graphite at all," he told reporters. As for the uranium traces, "any analysis has errors," he said. "The smaller the amount the larger the (probability of) error."

One of the two diplomats also said that inside the briefing Othman announced that Syria would no longer accept evidence of apparent nuclear activity resulting from further findings from the samples taken by the agency.

That — and Damascus' continued refusal to allow other visits to the Al Kibar sites and other ones suspected of secret nuclear activity — could cripple the agency's investigative efforts.

Expanding on an IAEA report on the Syria probe circulated to board members earlier this week, agency officials told the meeting that Syria had apparently tried to secretly buy so-called "dual use" materials that can — but do not have to be — part of a nuclear program, said the diplomats.

Among the substances were high-grade graphite — used to control the speed of fission in some reactors — and barium sulfate, a nuclear shielding material. Syria claimed non-nuclear purposes for both substances, the diplomats said.

Israel also has denied assertions by Damascus that the uranium came from Israeli depleted uranium bombs or warheads used to destroy the Al Kibar facility. Depleted uranium is used to harden munitions and increase penetrating power.

Syria: Ex-general criticises Damascus for blocking visit by nuclear watchdog

25 February [2009] 15:54

Damascus, 25 Feb. (AKI) - A retired Syrian general has criticised a decision by the country's Atomic Energy Commission to refuse the United Nations' nuclear watchdog access to inspect the al-Kibar suspected nuclear research centre bombed by Israel in September 2007. Musa al-Zaabi, said the decision by Ibrahim Othman, head of the commission, was a "grave error".

"Western countries and the International Atomic Energy Commission will interpret the Syrian refusal as proof that Syria is hiding something and is working on a banned military programme," Zaabi told Adnkronos International (AKI).

"It would be right and proper for Syria to invite the IAEA, European countries and also the United States to have serious dialogue about this matter."

The former general appealed to Syrian leaders in Damascus to "follow what Iran did with its nuclear programme paving the way for lengthy dialogue."

"There would be nothing bad about Syria asking western countries for technical assistance for a peaceful nuclear programme, if it really wanted to head in this direction," Zaabi said.

Regarding scientific aspects of the programme, he said there was nothing to discuss. "Laboratories, analyses and scientific instruments exist that confirm or deny every doubt and hypothesis, and you cannot be skeptical about these results," he stated.

"It would have been better for Syria to provide the IAEA with responses and realistic proof that would not have given rise to doubts or other accusations," Zaabi said.

Syria has reaffirmed several times that the plant bombed by Israel at al-Kibar in the country's eastern desert was a traditional plant, and denied that it was a nuclear facility under construction.

Last year, the IAEA said a "significant" number of particles of man-made uranium had been found at Al-Kibar.

And in a report last week, the IAEA said more unexplained man-made uranium had turned up in the samples taken from the site and Syria would need to explain how it got there.

An Israeli intelligence operation penetrated the suspected Syrian nuclear programme, which photographs appeared to show had been undertaken with North Korean assistance delivered by sea.

Syria and the IAEA

Published: February 26, 2009

When the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors meets next week, Syria's case will be high on its agenda.

Syria is suspected of having built an undeclared nuclear reactor that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September 2007. The IAEA has found strong evidence to support this accusation but, as yet, has no proof. It has repeatedly asked Syria for greater access on a voluntary basis. Syria has repeatedly refused.

It is time for the atomic energy agency to invoke its most powerful inspection provision, the "special inspection," to make its requests for access legally binding.

Special inspections give the IAEA, when it has a reason, the authority to inspect a country's undeclared sites. Unfortunately, the agency has not tried to invoke this provision since a 1993 request to North Korea, which refused access.

If the IAEA asks for a special inspection, Syria may refuse access. In this case, the Board of Governors would have sufficient grounds to find Syria in noncompliance with its safeguards agreement

Noncompliance would not necessitate the immediate imposition of economic or political sanctions against Syria. But a finding of noncompliance would oblige the board to refer the case to the UN Security Council - although it could delay doing so.

The referral could be "for information purposes only," and not for sanctions, depending on Syria's level of cooperation. If Syria cooperates fully with inspectors, Security Council members could make it clear that Syria will not be sanctioned - even if the suspected site turns out to have been a reactor.

This strategy would make the possibility of consequences for noncooperation more credible without escalating the situation unnecessarily.

Just as important, it would help the IAEA to reassert its right to conduct all necessary inspections and to stop the gradual erosion of its legal and political authority.

For more on this issue, please see www.carnegieendowment.org.

[James Acton, Washington Associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

[Mark Fitzpatrick, London Senior Fellow at International Institute for Strategic Studies](#)

[Pierre Goldschmidt, Brussels former head of the IAEA Department of Safeguards](#)

The IAEA Should Call for a Special Inspection in Syria

James Acton, Mark Fitzpatrick, Pierre Goldschmidt

Proliferation Analysis, February 26, 2009

Published: February 26, 2009

When the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors meets next week, Syria's case will be high on its agenda. Syria is suspected of building, at a site known as Dair Alzour, an undeclared nuclear reactor that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September 2007. The IAEA has found strong evidence to support this accusation but, as yet, no proof. It has repeatedly asked Syria for greater access on a voluntary basis. Syria has repeatedly refused. It is now time for the IAEA to move beyond such voluntary requests and invoke its most powerful inspection provision, the "special inspection," to make its requests for access legally binding. If Syria refuses then the Board should make a formal finding of "non-compliance."

As highlighted in its report of 19 February, the IAEA investigation into Syria has reached something of a dead-end. Inspectors found a number of anthropogenic uranium particles "of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material" but cannot verify whether Syria was conducting nuclear activities at Dair Alzour without more access and information. It is important for Syria to provide the plans for the original building and to answer all of the IAEA's questions promptly. Most crucially, however, inspectors must be able to inspect the three other sites for which the IAEA has intelligence and procurement-related information that suggests a nuclear connection.

As matters currently stand, Syria will succeed in unilaterally and permanently stalling the IAEA investigation by denying access. This situation is unacceptable. To avoid it, the first step is for the IAEA to make its access requests legally binding by invoking its right to conduct a special inspection. Special inspections give the IAEA, when it has a reason, the authority to inspect undeclared sites in a state.

Special inspections ought to be a key element of the IAEA's verification regime but they are not. According to public records, this provision has only been invoked in two cases. In 1992 Romania actually asked to be inspected to build confidence that it had abandoned the Ceausescu regime's nuclear weapons programme. A year later, the IAEA asked for a special inspection in North Korea. North Korea refused, touching off a crisis that left the IAEA hesitant to ask for this access elsewhere—including in additional cases in which it was certainly deserved.

Syria is the textbook definition of a case in which a special inspection is merited. If the IAEA fails to ask for one, it will hand future states suspected of non-compliance an extraordinarily powerful precedent to use in opposing a special inspection request. IAEA officials regularly complain about their lack of legal authority—and rightly so. But, in this instance, they will have only themselves to blame if they let the authority that they do have atrophy.

If the IAEA does ask for a special inspection, Syria may refuse access. In this case the Board of Governors would have sufficient grounds to find Syria in non-compliance with its safeguards agreement because the IAEA would then be "unable to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material" (within the meaning of the agreement "non-diversion" includes the failure to declare nuclear material). Again, if this provision is not used now, it risks becoming unusable.

Unfortunately, in November of last year, while speaking against ceasing technical cooperation on reactor development with Syria, the IAEA Director General seemed to ignore this when he stated that "people and countries are innocent until proven guilty." As eminently fair as this principle is when applied to people, it is not the standard set out in states' comprehensive safeguards agreements—the agreement with the IAEA that all non-nuclear-weapon states party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are obliged to conclude. The principle of "innocent until proven guilty" is dangerous when applied to states because it allows a non-compliant state to avoid its guilt being proven by denying the IAEA access. In contrast, an accused person cannot simply stop a police investigation in the same way.

The limitations of the "innocent until proven guilty" approach have become apparent from recent events in Iran. During the IAEA's six-year long investigation, Iran has frequently failed to provide full and proactive cooperation. Now that the IAEA has turned its attention to alleged activities directly connected with the development of nuclear weapons, Iran's cooperation has almost completely ceased. Indeed, in his last three reports the Director General blamed Iran for the inspectors' inability to make "any substantive progress" on resolving these issues. Yet, Iran has incurred no additional consequences for its lack of cooperation.

Finding Syria in non-compliance, if it refuses a special inspection, would help correct this precedent. It would, however, not necessitate the immediate imposition of economic or political sanctions. Having found Syria in non-compliance the Board would be obliged to refer the case to the Security Council—but it could delay doing so. The referral could be "for information purposes only," and not for sanctions, depending on Syria's cooperation. In particular, if it cooperates fully and proactively with inspectors, Security Council members could make it clear that Syria will not be sanctioned—even if the building at Dair Alzour turns out to have been a reactor. This strategy would make the possibility of consequences for continued non-cooperation more credible without escalating the situation unnecessarily. Just as importantly, it would help the IAEA to reassert its right to conduct all necessary inspections and to stop the gradual erosion of its legal and political authority.

Dr. James M. Acton, associate in the Nonproliferation Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, co-authored *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge for IISS, 2008).

Mark Fitzpatrick, senior fellow for Non-Proliferation at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, authored *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Avoiding Worst-Case Outcome* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge for IISS, 2008).

Dr. Pierre Goldschmidt is nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and former Deputy Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Head of the Department of Safeguards.



Report on Details of Closed Meeting Between IAEA, Syrian Nuclear Energy Chief

Reports from Vienna by Buthayna Abd-al-Rahman and Damascus by Su'ad Garus: **"Question Marks at IAEA After Syria's Announcement on Building a Rocket Site at Al-Kubr Site. Head of Syrian Energy Agency Says Graphite Traces Were Very Small and Could be From the Air"**

Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online

Friday, February 27, 2009 T17:09:38Z

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The Secretariat of the International Atomic Energy Agency has announced that its Board of Trustees will hold its next sessions at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna starting next Monday morning. The Agenda is headed by the North Korean, Iranian, and Syrian nuclear dossiers, but all the indications are that the Syrian dossier will be the one that dominates during deliberations that will have more political than technical dimensions.

Ibrahim Uthman, the head of the Syrian Nuclear Energy Agency, said at a closed session held the day before yesterday by the Agency's Secretariat with the members of the Board of Trustees that Syria had built a platform for launching rockets at Al-Kubr site, in the area of Dir al-Zur. This statement provoked many question marks and reactions.

Al-Sharq al-Awsat has monitored the reaction to Dr Uthman's statement which has raised questions about the real nature of this site, what is taking place in it, and the reasons that prompted Syria to choose it in particular to build a rocket establishment when the site is still subject to international investigations conducted by the IAEA.

It is known that this location was the target of an attack in April 2007 *[sic]* by Israel that claimed it was an almost-finished nuclear installation. The United States provided the IAEA in September *[sic]* with information it claims confirm the Israeli claim and that the site was an almost-finished nuclear installation. Syria has denied all these allegations. It allowed a team of IAEA inspectors to visit the site a single time but would not permit them to repeat it, despite the IAEA's insistence on the necessity of its inspectors visiting the same site as well as three other related sites. A report submitted last week by the IAEA's director-general, Dr Muhammad ElBaradei, said that traces of graphite had been found in the samples obtained by the inspectors during that visit.

Al-Sharq al-Awsat learned from a source who attended the closed session that Dr Ibrahim Uthman told the IAEA's team that visited the site under Olli Heinonen, deputy director-general and head of the safeguards department, that the site was a military site on which a rocket installation was built. The source told Al-Shraq al-Awsat that Dr Uthman did not answer the questions that focused on the type of the rocket installation, the exact date it was built, whether it had been put into operation, and whether Syria possessed a nuclear installation.

Dr Uthman has denied that the quantities of graphite found by the international inspectors were sufficient proof that the building was constructed of that material. He said that "the graphite samples obtained by the IAEA were very small and it cannot be ruled out that they had existed in the air". He said that it might be "mere carbon from ordinary equipment that was used in constructing the site".

The source said in his interview with Al-Sharq al-Awsat that more than one Western diplomat posed questions to the IAEA's secretariat during the meeting on whether the IAEA had managed to secure the rubble of the building after the Israeli attack. He said that the IAEA's reply explained that it managed to obtain samples allowed by Syria and that the agency was still waiting for Syrian authorities to allow it to visit the site a second time.

Al-Sharq al-Awsat learned within the same context that the Iranian delegate, Ambassador Ali Asghar Sultanyah, had rushed to the defense of the Syrian position. He said that Syria was not hiding anything and that other wise it would not have allowed the inspectors to enter its territory at all. For his part, Egypt's Ambassador asked in a statement before the conferees why the West insists that the installation was a nuclear installation built from graphite even though the IAEA has found only a minute quantity of the element.

Ibrahim Uthman rejected the IAEA's interpretation that "the chemical composition of the uranium particles showed it was not from the ordnance Israel used in bombing the installation". He said "this is an explanation we do not accept. When they claim they found 80 particles per half million tons of soil, I do not know how they can use this figure to accuse somebody of building such an installation". Asked whether Syria would allow other visits by the IAEA to other sites, Uthman said: "No. We shall continue cooperating with the IAEA according to the safety procedures agreement we signed, and this agreement allows the IAEA to visit the sole announced nuclear installation, which is an old research reactor".

Al-Sharq al-Awsat could not obtain any comment in Damascus on Uthman's statements because the issue is related to an off-limits military issue in the military institution, according to the stipulations of the Syrian Publicans Law.

(Description of Source: London Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online in Arabic -- Website of influential London-based pan-Arab Saudi daily; editorial line reflects Saudi official stance. URL: <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/>)

Q+A-First U.N. nuclear watchdog meeting under Obama

By Mark Heinrich

Sun Mar 1, 2009 10:54am GMT

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA, March 1 (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog's governing body meets on Monday for the first time since U.S. President Barack Obama took office, a change likely to colour debate on concerns like Iran and Syria.

The following outlines important themes at the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors' week-long session.

[deletia]

A BREAKTHROUGH ON IRAN AND SYRIA?

Not at this meeting. Iran and Syria both deny wrongdoing but have stonewalled the IAEA's requests for documentation and access to draw conclusions. Both seem to be waiting for Obama to show what he has to offer. His policy review will not be finished for at least another month.

[deletia]

IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei and many board members will press Iran and Syria to open up voluntarily to U.N. inspectors to defuse mistrust.

Last week, non-proliferation advocates urged the IAEA to impose a rare, legally-binding "special inspection" on Syria to pin down whether it almost built a secret nuclear reactor before it was wrecked in a 2007 Israeli air raid.

The appeal followed a Feb. 19 inspectors' update on Syria that they had found a "significant" amount of uranium traces in soil samples taken at the site last June and they had not come from munitions Israel used to bomb it.

But an IAEA official said a special inspection, which would give agency sleuths sweeping search powers, would be premature and confrontational at this time and was not on the horizon.

[deletia]



Statements of the Director General
2 March 2009 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

**Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei**

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

The Agency has continued its analysis of all information available to it, including from the 23 June 2008 visit to the Dair Alzour site. Further analysis of the environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site has been carried out, revealing additional particles of uranium which had been produced as a result of chemical processing. These particles, and those identified as a result of the previous analyses, are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. Syria has stated that the origin of the uranium particles was the missiles used to destroy the building. In response to a letter from the Agency, Israel denied that the uranium particles originated in Israel. The Agency's current assessment is that there is a low probability that the uranium was introduced by the use of missiles.

In a letter dated 15 February 2009, Syria reiterated that the destroyed facility, and the current facility, on the Dair Alzour site were military installations and not involved in any nuclear activities. The letter did not address many of the questions raised by the Agency. Syria's responses to some of the Agency's questions were only partial and included information already provided to the Agency.

The Agency expects Syria to provide additional information and supporting documentation about the past use and nature of the building at the Dair Alzour site, and information about procurement activities. Providing additional access to other locations alleged to be related to Dair Alzour would be a welcome sign of Syria's transparency. Such access, together with the sampling of destroyed and salvaged equipment and debris, is essential for the Agency to complete its assessment. I urge Syria to take these measures at the earliest possible date. I also urge Israel and other States that may possess relevant information - including satellite imagery - to make it available to the Agency and to agree to the Agency's sharing of such information with Syria.

US vows strong diplomacy to back IAEA atom probes

2 March 2009

(Reuters)

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA - The United States on Monday promised strong diplomacy with Iran, Syria and North Korea to help the UN nuclear watchdog tackle suspected proliferation challenges posed by the three nations.

The pledge, made at the first International Atomic Energy Agency meeting since US President Barack Obama took office in January, reflected his commitment to engage US adversaries after years of unfruitful isolation policy by George W. Bush.

Obama's challenges include suspected nuclear weapons work in Iran and Syria and their failure to open up to IAEA inspectors, and stalled talks to end North Korea's atom bomb programme.

He has yet to undertake concrete steps, pending the outcome of a sweeping foreign policy review due in a few weeks.

But Washington's IAEA ambassador sketched the principles of the new US approach, citing 'a moment of unparalleled opportunity with a renewed American commitment to the United Nations and multilateral diplomacy'.

Addressing the IAEA's 35-nation board of governors, Gregory Schulte said the United States believed robust diplomacy would strengthen the IAEA's ability to detect nuclear proliferators and encourage cooperation with its investigators.

'We believe that preserving the agency's credibility in implementing NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) safeguards depends on our success in dealing with the immediate challenges, specifically those posed by North Korea, Iran and Syria.'

'The new administration intends to strengthen diplomatic efforts to address each of these challenges,' Schulte said.

'Hence the administration's readiness for direct engagement with Teheran ... Hence the administration using dialogue with Syria to encourage it to cooperate with the IAEA. Hence (our) commitment to the six-party process to pursue the denuclearisation of North Korea.'

This was all part of a heightened US priority to ensure the IAEA 'gets the authority, information, people and technology it needs to do its job', Schulte told the closed-door meeting.

[deletia]

On Syria, IAEA inspectors say enough traces of uranium were found in soil samples taken in a trip to the bombed site granted by Syria last June to constitute a 'significant' find, and satellite pictures revealed a building resembling a reactor.

ElBaradei said Syria repeated in a Feb. 15 letter to the IAEA that the wrecked facility, and another built on top of it, were military installations not involved in nuclear activities.

The letter did not address many of the IAEA's queries, he said, again pressing Syria to back up its denials.

Diplomats close to the IAEA say satellite imagery shows Syria removed such materials and landscaped sites in question to alter their appearance after inspectors asked to see them.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

U.S. Statement on the Nuclear Safety Review for the Year 2008

IAEA Board of Governors Meeting

March 2-6, 2009

Agenda Item 2

Measures to strengthen international cooperation in nuclear, radiation and transport safety and waste management:

Nuclear Safety Review for the Year 2008

EXTRACT FROM U.S. STATEMENT

Gregory L Schulte

Permanent U.S. Representative to the IAEA

Madam Chairwoman,

This is the first meeting of the IAEA Board since the inauguration of President Obama. This is a moment of complex challenge for the IAEA, but also a moment of unparalleled opportunity with a renewed American commitment to the United Nations and multilateral diplomacy. My delegation notes with appreciation the positive interest of Member States in the U.S. Presidential election and in the ongoing adjustment and review of U.S. policies, including many that affect the work of the Agency. I hope, Madame Chairwoman, you will permit me to start my intervention with five points on behalf of the new U.S. Administration.

First, President Obama and his new Administration strongly support the International Atomic Energy Agency in all aspects of its mission. We seek to strengthen the IAEA and to ensure that the Agency gets the authority, information, people, and technology it needs to do its job. Our top priority is the verification role of the Agency, which is essential to creating the confidence that enables countries worldwide to benefit from peaceful use of nuclear technology. This essential verification role will grow as more and more countries invest in nuclear power to provide clean energy for growth and development. Instruments like the Additional Protocol will become increasingly important not just for verification but to build confidence among nations.

Second, we support the important role the IAEA plays in global efforts to help countries adopt the highest standards for nuclear security and protection of nuclear materials. President Obama has identified preventing terrorists from acquiring nuclear and radiological weapons as his number one security priority. The National Nuclear Security Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy is already pursuing a major Global Threat Reduction Initiative to reduce and protect vulnerable nuclear and radiological material located at civilian sites worldwide. We will continue to look to the IAEA for

support in global efforts to secure nuclear materials; to phase out the use of highly enriched uranium in the civil nuclear sector; to strengthen international intelligence and police cooperation to prevent WMD terrorism; and to help build the capacity of governments around the world to prevent the theft or diversion of nuclear materials.

Third, President Obama has expressed strong support for the creation of an IAEA-administered nuclear fuel bank. While in the U.S. Senate, both he and Secretary Clinton supported legislation providing \$50 million to the IAEA in response to the challenge grant from the Nuclear Threat Initiative. The Administration wants to work with the IAEA and Member States to put into place a fuel bank that would allow countries to benefit from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy without increasing the risks of nuclear proliferation. We welcome the initiatives by the Russian Federation and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, as well as by many others.

Fourth, we believe that preserving the Agency's credibility in implementing NPT safeguards depends on our success in dealing with the immediate challenges – specifically those posed by North Korea, Iran, and Syria. The new Administration intends to strengthen diplomatic efforts to address each of these challenges. We must strengthen and revalidate this important Agency rather than allowing those who violate their obligations to discredit it.

Fifth, the new Administration recognizes that the IAEA's essential role in nonproliferation is part of a broader international effort that includes diplomacy and disarmament. While the IAEA must pursue its essential verification role, there is also a role for diplomacy in ensuring the viability of the NPT. Hence, the Administration's readiness for direct engagement with Tehran as part of the international effort to convince Iran's leadership to meet its responsibilities. Hence, the Administration using dialogue with Syria to encourage its leaders to cooperate with the IAEA. Hence, the Administration's commitment to the Six-Party process to pursue the denuclearization of the North Korea.

The new Administration also recognizes that NPT obligations encompass disarmament as well as nonproliferation. President Obama supports the goal of working toward a world without nuclear weapons. His Administration intends to renew America's commitment to disarmament, including dramatic reductions in U.S. and Russian stockpiles of nuclear weapons and material and a verifiable global ban on the production of new nuclear weapons material.

President Obama believes that the best way to reduce global threats and seize global opportunities is to design and implement global solutions. The new administration looks forward to a close working relationship with the IAEA, its Secretariat, and its Member States to advance our common objective of promoting the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technology.

(Statement continues...)



Gordon Duguid
Acting Deputy Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
March 3, 2009 11:11 a.m. EST

[EXCERPT]

MR. DUGUID: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to again lead off today with a brief rundown of Secretary Clinton's meetings on her visit to Israel, and then I'll go to your questions after that.

[deletia]

I also know that many of you have followed her statements earlier today that the State Department will be sending a representative to Damascus as part of her visit to the region, in an effort to look at the comprehensive peace process that we are trying to build there. Senator Mitchell is with the Secretary today and will be with her tomorrow in the West Bank.

With that, I'm ready to go to your questions.

QUESTION: When are – when are they – as part of this trip, they're going to be going to Damascus?

MR. DUGUID: As part of – as a separate trip during this current visit by the Secretary to the region, yes, there will be a two-person team that goes to Damascus. We are finalizing the details today. And as soon as we have more of those, we'll be happy to get that to you.

QUESTION: So in other words, between now and Saturday?

MR. DUGUID: Yes, indeed.

Okay, yes.

QUESTION: Do you expect for Shapiro and Feltman to go with her to Europe?

MR. DUGUID: I do expect that Acting Assistant --

QUESTION: Or will they stay behind?

MR. DUGUID: -- Secretary Feltman and Dan Shapiro will visit Damascus and will be able to calculate their other travel, depending on how the meetings go and how the schedule develops.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know. But I mean, are they going to go with her to Brussels and Geneva?

MR. DUGUID: We don't have the final details yet on --

QUESTION: Right.

MR. DUGUID: -- when they will break off. But as soon as we have those details, we will get them to you.

QUESTION: And Mitchell's not going?

MR. DUGUID: No, sir.

QUESTION: So the Syrian ambassador was right last week when he said the talks here would lead to another round of talks, when the State Department -- when Robert Wood himself -- said there would be no guarantee of further talks.

MR. DUGUID: Well, they're not --

QUESTION: This is very clear.

MR. DUGUID: They're not there yet. We're working on the details to get them there. And this is one effort, on our part, to engage with the Syrians on what productive roles they could play, not only for Middle East peace, but also on Iraq.

Do we want to engage with the Syrians? Yes, we do. Yes, indeed we do. Is this meeting a meeting that will help us see if that process can continue? Yes, it will. But I don't want to predict for you that there will be a series of meetings or that this will become a regular feature. We'll see what this meeting -- next meeting produces, and then we'll go from there.

QUESTION: Are they going to discuss the possibility of restoring a U.S. ambassador to Syria?

MR. DUGUID: Since no decision on that has been made, I can't predict what will come up in the discussions. We'll be talking about a range of bilateral and multilateral issues. But as these discussions go, it's very hard to predict what will and won't come up.

QUESTION: How does it advance U.S. interest not to have an ambassador there?

MR. DUGUID: How does it advance the U.S. interest to put an ambassador in place before we've come to an understanding on what it is we want to work with the Syrians on? The talks have never stopped with Syria. We have had a chargé in place. We have also had discussions here. It's -- it would in a normal relationship be unusual to have -- not have an ambassador in place. We've not had a normal relationship for some time. We're working with the other foreign policy agencies in the U.S. Government to develop a better relationship, or the means for a better relationship with Syria. But this can't be unreciprocated. We have to have some form of moving forward positively before we're going to consider how we're going to staff the embassy there.

QUESTION: So you need something from them before you're going to send an ambassador?

MR. DUGUID: I'm just saying we are looking at our Syria policy right now. We are discussing our relationship with the Syrians. I don't have to go down for you the list of things that we are -- you know, differences that we have with them at the moment. We'll see where these meetings go before we go to a next step.

Evidence mounts of Syrian nuclear cover-up: U.S.

By Mark Heinrich

Wed Mar 4, 2009 11:54am EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - The United States said on Wednesday that U.N. inspectors had found growing evidence of covert nuclear activity in Syria, and European allies said a lack of Syrian transparency demanded utmost scrutiny.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, is looking into U.S. intelligence reports that Syria had almost built a North Korean-designed, nuclear reactor meant to yield bomb-grade plutonium before Israel bombed it in 2007.

Last month, the IAEA said inspectors had found enough traces of uranium in soil samples taken in a trip to the bombed site granted by Syria last June to constitute a "significant" find, and satellite pictures taken before the Israeli bombing revealed a building resembling a reactor.

But the IAEA report said Syria, citing national security reasons, had ignored many agency requests for further on-the-ground access and documentation to back up its assertion that Israel's target was a purely conventional military building.

"This report contributes to the growing evidence of clandestine nuclear activities in Syria," Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, said during a debate by its 35-nation Board of Governors in Vienna.

"We must understand why such (uranium) material -- material not previously declared to the IAEA -- existed in Syria and this can only happen if Syria provides the cooperation requested."

He said it was also essential that Syria allow inspectors to examine debris removed from the bombed facility to an unknown location immediately after Israel's strike.

This applied as well, Schulte said, to three other military sites which satellite pictures showed Syria "sanitized" -- landscaping them and whisking away equipment -- shortly after the IAEA asked to check them out.

[deletia]

In a statement to the closed-door IAEA gathering, the 27-member European Union voiced concern at the "possibility that Syria has not declared all its nuclear installations."

"Any obstacles, unnecessary delays or a lack of cooperation ... undermine the credibility of the agency's verification capabilities. Such cases, therefore, deserve our utmost attention," it said.

Vienna diplomats said Syria had told the IAEA it had built a missile facility on the desert tract hit by Israel, a disclosure apparently meant to reinforce the Syrian refusal to grant more IAEA access on national security grounds.

(Additional reporting by Sylvia Westall, editing by Mark Trevelyan)

Syrian source: Uranium found in bombed facility – Israeli

Published: 03.05.09, 11:53 / Israel News

A diplomatic source in Syria said the facility that was bombed about a year-and-a-half ago "was and will return to be a military facility".

The sources said this in an interview to al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper, and ruled out claims that the facility was a nuclear reactor. "We have nothing to hide. The International Atomic Energy Agency should ask Tel Aviv about the uranium samples that were found, and not Syria – since they came from the Israeli bombings," the source said. (Roe Nahmias)

IAEA Must Probe Israel, Not Syria, on Uranium Traces - Syrian Source

06/03/2009

Vienna, Asharq Al-Awsat - Syria has called on the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] to investigate Israel further regarding the traces of uranium which international inspectors found in the Syrian Dayr al-Zur installation that Israel had destroyed on the pretext that it was a nuclear reactor which Syria was about to complete building.

A Syrian diplomatic source told Asharq Al-Awsat in Vienna yesterday that its country had officially requested the IAEA at the meeting of its board of trustees to ask Tel Aviv and not Damascus about the sources of the uranium traces which Syria asserts were the result of Israeli shells. It added that its country refuted to the conferees the allegations that Dayr al-Zur was a nuclear reactor and reiterated that it was and would remain a military site which Syria is now restoring to its military nature. It pointed out that Syria is demanding the closure of the so-called "Syria's nuclear dossier."

In reply to Asharq Al-Awsat question whether Syria realizes where the denial might lead it to despite the evidence of secret military activity, the source said "Syria is always ready to shoulder the consequences of its actions" and denied again that it has any nuclear activity outside IAEA's control. The official underlined his country's continued cooperation with the IAEA in accordance with the agreements between them and stressed that Syria considers these agreements binding on it. Asked whether Syria can cooperate fully with the IAEA's investigations and therefore win the international community's trust, approval, and assistance as was the case with Libya when it abandoned its undeclared nuclear activity, the Syrian official said his country has nothing to declare and rejects the accusations of secret nuclear activity in whole and parcel and reiterated that Dayr al-Zur was and will return to be a military installation.

U.S. takes tentative steps back into Syria

By Andrea Mitchell, NBC News

Posted: Saturday, **March 07, 2009** 11:33 AM

The United States is engaging Syria again — if tentatively.

A senior American diplomat, briefing reporters by phone from Damascus today, said that his talks with Syrian officials were constructive, comprehensive and lengthy — but that this is only the beginning of engagement. As for specific achievements, the U.S. official — Jeffrey Feltman, acting assistant secretary of state — said, "Let's keep our expectations in check here." He said that no subjects were taboo, but that this was just the start of a process.

Feltman and Dan Shapiro of the National Security Council held talks with Syria's foreign minister and two other officials — but did not see Syria's President Bashar Assad and did not say what the next steps would be.

Today's meetings were the first high-level diplomatic contacts between the U.S. and Syria since the Bush administration cut off relations four years ago in response to the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Feltman said they discussed a broad range of issues — regional and international — as well as bilateral issues and how to move forward. "It is our view that Syria can play an important, constructive role in the region," he said.

Asked about any concrete achievement — and whether the U.S. government is any closer to returning a U.S. ambassador to Damascus or more interested now in supporting the indirect Israeli-Syrian peace talks that the previous administration opposed — Feltman said only that President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton talked about engagement as a way to achieve goals — but "this is part of a process. We'll see how this develops ... the Syrians have concerns about us as well — I'm sure the Syrians will be looking at decisions we make just as we will be looking at decisions they make."

In another departure from Bush policy, he indicated support for eventual resumption of Israeli-Syrian talks: "We want a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace. We do want to see forward momentum on the Israeli-Syrian tract when the two parties are ready for this." Those talks were being brokered through Turkey (where Hillary Clinton is today) but broke off during the resumption of hostilities between Hamas and Israel over Gaza.

Asked about Syria's role in the future of Iraq, Feltman said: "There are areas like this — a stable, unified Iraq — where our interests coincide. This is the kind of subject we can explore. Let's see where our interests intersect."

He also indicated that the U.S. side brought up the subject of North Korea's export of nuclear technology to Syria (a suspected nuclear facility in Syria was leveled in a secret Israeli airstrike two years ago). Specifically, when asked if nonproliferation and nuclear issues involving North Korea were discussed with the Syrians, he said: "We're not going to get into a lot of detail. We're looking to the IAEA for their examination, but our talks were comprehensive."

When asked if they had any plans to meet with Assad — and whether the Syrians want to have a U.S. ambassador back in Damascus before that takes place — Feltman said: "We asked for meetings with the Syrian officials ... We stated we want to come to Damascus. We didn't try to dictate to Damascus who our interlocutors would be."

Asked if there would be any change in the U.S. inclusion of Syria on its list of terrorism-supporting states — and any change in Syria's support for Hezbollah — he said: "Let's keep our expectations in check here. We had a good meeting today — but the differences between our two countries will require more work through conversations. We found a lot of common ground today, there were no subjects that were taboo, but it is unrealistic to expect particular results out of this meeting."

In terms of Hezbollah, Syria has backed the U.N. Security Council resolution that ended the hostilities in the July-August 2006 war, Feltman said that can be the basis of further discussions.

The call was cut off by State Department officials in Washington before he could be asked about Syria's support for Hamas leaders in Gaza — or today's announcement of the planned resignation of a top Palestinian Authority leader, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, whom the U.S. has long hoped would eventually lead a Palestinian unity government.

Syria leader: nuke site hit by Israel built over

The Associated Press

Monday, March 9, 2009

DAMASCUS, Syria: The Syrian president denounced U.S. claims that a Syrian site bombed by Israel two years ago was a nearly finished nuclear reactor, and said in comments published Monday that the location has been built over.

President Bashar Assad's remarks in the Emirates' Al-Khaleej daily confirmed statements made last month by two Western diplomats with the Vienna-based U.N. nuclear watchdog. The diplomats quoted Syrian nuclear chief Ibrahim Othman as telling the International Atomic Energy Agency that Syria built a new missile facility on the bombed site in a remote desert area.

However, Assad didn't elaborate what the new construction was at Al Kibar.

The autocratic Syrian leader's comments appeared to be an effort to close the chapter on the issue of the bombed site amid a recent drive by Damascus for better relations with Washington and the new Obama administration.

The diplomats in Vienna had said the new structure appeared to be a missile control center or an actual launching pad. Syria had previously said only that the site was military in nature and that it was being rebuilt.

Damascus has denied secret nuclear activities but has blocked IAEA inspectors from visits beyond an initial inspection of Al Kibar.

Israeli warplanes destroyed the site in the Syrian desert in Sept. 2007. Israel has not commented on the strike, but months later Washington presented intelligence purporting to show the target was a reactor under construction, built with North Korean help that would have been able to produce plutonium once completed.

In the Monday interview, Assad said that "America justified the bombing eight months later" and questioned why Washington waited so long to announce the alleged evidence.

Syria, Assad said, allowed the IAEA to visit the site shortly after its request last May and the team from the U.N. watchdog arrived in June.

"Have we had any nuclear activities we wouldn't have allowed them to come," Assad was quoted as saying.

Environmental samples from IAEA's trip revealed traces of man-made uranium and graphite but U.N. officials say it's too early to say whether the graphite is a common element in North Korean prototype reactors or had any nuclear applications.

Assad also disputed the uranium find.

"Where did the uranium come from," he asked in the interview. "Under construction means that it was not built yet," he said, implying that there wouldn't have been any uranium traces unless the site was completed.



Syria: Background and U.S. Relations

Jeremy M. Sharp
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

March 11, 2009

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[EXCERPT]

Clandestine Nuclear Program and the IAEA investigation

On September 6, 2007, an Israeli air strike inside Syrian territory destroyed what is now referred to as Al Kibar, a remote desert facility which may have housed a nuclear reactor. On April 24, 2008, U.S. intelligence officials briefed some Members of Congress and provided a background news briefing to the media on the nature of the facility. According to reports in the Washington Post, Syria and North Korea were suspected of collaborating on a secret nuclear program since 1997.¹⁴ Since then, senior North Korean officials and scientists from North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear complex reportedly visited Syria several times before construction began in Syria at Al Kibar, between 2001 and 2003. In the spring of 2007, Israel reportedly provided the Administration with photographs of the interior of the alleged facility still under construction. According to the Washington Post, the "pictures depicted a site similar to the one at Yongbyon, which produces plutonium for nuclear weapons."

In order to stress the imminent danger posed by Syria's actions, senior U.S. intelligence officials repeatedly stressed that Al Kibar was nearly operational at the time of the Israeli strike. U.S. officials were quoted saying that, before the Israeli bombing, Al Kibar was within weeks or months of becoming operational.¹⁵ Others noted that the reactor there would have ultimately produced enough plutonium for one or two bombs within a year of becoming operational.¹⁶ Several days after the intelligence briefings, Japanese public broadcaster NHK, citing South Korean intelligence officials, reported that 10 North Koreans working at Al Kibar had died in the September 2007 air raid and that the dead included officials of the North Korea's communist party unit that exports weapons and military technology and members of the North Korean military unit which made nuclear facilities in the country.¹⁷

For many experts, the Israeli attack has implications that go far beyond Syrian-Israeli relations. Although the veil of secrecy surrounding the attack may reflect U.S. efforts not to derail ongoing Middle East peace negotiations, the attack has been largely seen through the prism of restoring Israeli deterrence at a time when some analysts expect Israel to take action against Iran's uranium enrichment facilities. Though a strike against Iran would be far more difficult than the September 6 bombing or even Israel's strike against the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq in 1981, Israel's bombing may be intended to send a signal to its opponents in the region that it has the will to act, if necessary unilaterally, to stop Iran and others from developing an advanced nuclear weapons program.

In June 2008, U.N. inspectors visited some areas surrounding Al Kibar. In late 2008, the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concluded that the facility had similarities to a nuclear reactor and chemically processed uranium particles were found at the site, but that a final determination could be made until Syria provides "the necessary transparency."¹⁸ In a follow-up report in early 2009, the IAEA said that enough uranium particles had turned up in soil samples to constitute a "significant" find. In response, Syria claims that the uranium particles came from depleted uranium used in Israeli munitions. Syria also claims that the site was a conventional military base, but then disclosed in February 2009 that a new missile facility had been constructed at Al Kibar.¹⁹ According to Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, the IAEA's report "contributes to the growing evidence of clandestine nuclear activities in Syria.... We must understand why such (uranium) material -- material not previously declared to the IAEA -- existed in Syria and this can only happen if Syria provides the cooperation requested."²⁰

¹⁴ "U.S. Details Reactor in Syria," Washington Post, April 25, 2008.

¹⁵ "US Shows Evidence of Alleged Syria-N. Korea Nuke Collaboration," Associated Press, April 24, 2008.

¹⁶ "Hayden: Syrian Site Could Have Produced Fuel for 2 Weapons," Associated Press, April 28, 2008.

¹⁷ "N.Koreans May Have Died in Israel Raid in Syria: NHK," Reuters, April 28, 2008.

¹⁸ Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, November 27, 2008, Vienna, Austria, IAEA Board of Governors.

¹⁹ "Diplomats: Damascus has Built Missile Facility on Suspected Nuclear Site," Associated Press, February 25, 2009.

²⁰ "Evidence Mounts of Syrian Nuclear Cover-Up - U.S.," Reuters, March 4, 2009.

Syria welcomes Obama's overtures

BY ATSUO HIRATA, THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

2009/3/12

DAMASCUS--Syrian President Bashar Assad said Tuesday that U.S. President Barack Obama's government has taken a positive step toward achieving a Middle East breakthrough.

In an exclusive interview with The Asahi Shimbun, Assad said he welcomed Obama's overtures for dialogue with the Muslim world as a sharp break from his predecessor.

Assad said the United States, with its large influence over Israel, has an important role in the region.

"When you have the direct negotiations that should lead to the signing of the (Syria-Israel peace) treaty, this is where you need the arbiter," Assad said in his first interview with a Japanese media organization since Obama took office in January.

Assad also said Obama's announcement that combat duty for U.S. troops in Iraq will end by August 2010 was "essential to have a stable Iraq."

He criticized the George W. Bush administration's attempts to isolate and contain Syria. Assad said fighting by U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan led to confusion in the Middle East because "the previous administration only talked with countries in the region, including Syria, about their interests, regardless of our interests."

Assad said visits to Syria by top U.S. government officials, including Senator John Kerry, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were encouraging.

"You start the dialogue and then through the dialogue you see if you have to change or the other one has to change. ... We can continue the dialogue in order to maybe someday have common ground," Assad said.

Syria remains on the U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism, in part because of support provided by Damascus to the radical Islamic groups Hamas and Hezbollah. Syria is also an ally of Iran.

Assad said Syria would try to persuade Hamas and Hezbollah to enter discussions for a comprehensive peace.

He said to achieve peace, one needs "to have relations with every influential party in every conflict if you want to solve it."

As an example of Syria's influence over Hamas, Assad said Damascus urged Hamas to work with Fatah to form a unified Palestinian government that could then enter peace negotiations with Israel.

Assad defended Iran's right to develop nuclear reactors.

"As a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, (Iran) has the right to have peaceful reactors," Assad said.

When asked whether Syria might serve as a go-between for the United States and Iran, Assad said, "We won't say no, providing that we have a clear framework and realistic objectives to work through in order to succeed."

Assad criticized as a "ploy" the U.S. accusation that a facility in eastern Syria was a nuclear plant developed with the support of North Korea. The accusation was made after Israel bombed the facility in September 2007.

"Why did (the United States) say they have evidence eight months after the date of the bombing?" Assad asked. He added that if the site had been a nuclear reactor, there would have been "radiation and casualties. We didn't have that."

Asked about Japan's role in the Middle East, Assad said, "Japan has a very vital role in development in Syria. But we would like to see more of a Japanese role in the peace issue."

Assad assumed the Syrian presidency in 2000 following the death of his father, Hafez Assad.
(IHT/Asahi: March 12,2009)

'Iran defector tipped off U.S. on Syrian nuclear ambitions'

By The Associated Press

Last update - 20:21 19/03/2009

A top-ranked Iranian defector told the United States that Iran was financing North Korean moves to make Syria into a nuclear weapons power, leading to the Israeli air strike that allegedly destroyed a secret reactor, a report said Thursday.

The article in the Swiss daily Neue Zuercher Zeitung goes into detail about an Iranian connection and fills in gaps about Israel's September 6, 2007, raid that knocked out Syria's nearly completed al-Kabir reactor in the country's eastern desert.

Ali Reza Asghari, a retired general in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards and a former deputy defense minister, changed sides in February 2007 and provided considerable information to the West on Iran's own nuclear program, said the article, written by Hans Rühle, former chief of the planning staff of the German Defense Ministry.

The biggest surprise, however, was his assertion that Iran was financing a secret nuclear project of Syria and North Korea, he said. No one in the American intelligence scene had heard anything of it. And the Israelis who were immediately informed also were completely unaware.

Rühle, who did not identify the sources of his information, publishes and comments on security and nuclear proliferation in different European newspapers and broadcasts and has held prominent roles in German and NATO institutions.

U.S. intelligence had detected North Korean ship deliveries of construction supplies to Syria that started in 2002, and American satellites spotted the construction as early as 2003, but regarded the work as nothing unusual, in part because the Syrians had banned radio and telephones from the site and handled communications solely by messengers - medieval but effective, Rühle said.

Intensive investigation followed by U.S. and Israeli intelligence services until Israel sent a 12-man commando unit in two helicopters to the site in August 2007 to take photographs and soil samples, he said.

"The analysis was conclusive that it was a North Korean-type reactor, a gas graphite model," Rühle said.

Other sources have suggested that the reactor might have been large enough to make about one nuclear weapon's worth of plutonium a year.

Just before the Israeli commando raid, a North Korean ship was intercepted en route to Syria with nuclear fuel rods, underscoring the need for fast action, he said.

On the morning of September 6, 2007, seven Israeli F-15 fighter bombers took off to the north. They flew along the Mediterranean coast, brushed past Turkey and pressed on into Syria. Fifty kilometers (30 miles) from their target they fired 22 rockets at the three identified objects inside the Kibar complex.

"The Syrians were completely surprised. By the time their air defense systems were ready, the Israeli planes were well out of range. The mission was successful, the reactor destroyed," Ruehle said.

"Israel estimates that Iran had paid North Korea between \$1 billion and \$2 billion for the project," Ruehle said.

Israel has refused from the beginning to comment on, confirm or deny the strike, but after a delay of several months Washington presented intelligence purporting to show the target was a reactor being built with North Korean help.

Iranian officials were not available for comment because of a national holiday. In general, Iran has been silent about the Syrian facility bombed by Israel. Syrian officials could not be reached for comment. But Syria has denied the facility was a nuclear plant, saying it was an unused military building. It has also denied any nuclear cooperation with North Korea or Iran.

The International Atomic Energy Agency earlier this year said United Nations inspectors had found processed uranium traces in samples taken from the site.

Syria has suggested the traces came from Israeli ordnance used to hit the site, but the IAEA said the composition of the uranium made that unlikely. Israel has denied it was the source of the uranium.

Syria has told diplomats that it built a missile facility over the ruins of the site.

Wie Iran Syriens Nuklearbewaffnung vorangetrieben hat

Hintergründe der israelischen Aktion gegen den Reaktor von al-Kibar

19. März 2009, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

Von Hans Rühle*

Lange waren die Hintergründe des israelischen Luftangriffs auf den im Bau befindlichen Reaktor von al-Kibar in Syrien im September 2007 unklar. Seit dem Überlaufen eines prominenten iranischen Militärs ist gewiss, dass Teheran im Verbund mit Nordkorea hinter den Bestrebungen Syriens gesteckt hat, in den Besitz von Atomwaffen zu gelangen.

Im Februar 2007 gelang der CIA ein spektakulärer Coup. Der Sicherheitsberater des iranischen Ex-Präsidenten Khatami und langjährige stellvertretende Verteidigungsminister General Ali Reza Askari wechselte die Seiten und stellte sich der CIA zur Verfügung. Die Befragung Askaris brachte eine Fülle neuer Informationen – auch und besonders über das iranische Nuklearprogramm. Die grösste Überraschung allerdings war seine Aussage, Iran finanziere ein geheimes Nuklearprojekt von Syrien und Nordkorea. Niemand in der amerikanischen Geheimdienst-Szene hatte davon je gehört. Und auch die umgehend informierten Israeli waren ahnungslos. Letzteres war umso peinlicher, als Israels Regierung immer behauptet hatte, es gebe in Syrien nichts, was sie nicht wisse. Und nun dies – ein fast betriebsbereiter, von Nordkorea erbauter Gas-Grafit-Reaktor, der nur der Produktion von Plutonium zur Herstellung von Waffen dienen konnte.

Auch Russland hat die Finger drin

Sowohl die USA als auch die Israeli waren davon ausgegangen, dass Syrien keinerlei Interesse an Nuklearwaffen habe. Zwar hatte Syrien Anfang der neunziger Jahre von China einen kleinen Forschungsreaktor erworben, doch der Versuch, einen leistungsfähigeren Forschungsreaktor zu beschaffen, scheiterte. Der Druck aus den USA auf die potenziellen Ausrüster – China, Russland und Argentinien – und die enormen Kosten zwangen die Syrer zur Aufgabe ihrer Pläne. Stattdessen konzentrierte sich die Führung unter Präsident Asad darauf, ihr Potenzial an chemischen Kampfstoffen auszubauen.

Angeleitet von General Anatoli Kunzewitsch, dem Berater des früheren Präsidenten Jelzin für chemische Waffen, gelang es Syrien Ende der neunziger Jahre, sein umfangreiches Potenzial an Sarin durch die Produktion von VX-Gas zu einer auch für Israel gefährlichen Option auszubauen. Ein Versuch des damaligen israelischen Regierungschefs Barak, Präsident Putin zum Stopp der Aktivitäten des russischen Ex-Generals zu bewegen, scheiterte. Erst als Kunzewitsch 2002 bei einem bis heute ungeklärten Flugzeugabsturz ums Leben kam, endete diese Episode russisch-syrischer Kooperation. In die entstandene Lücke sprang umgehend Iran, das fortan das chemische Waffenprogramm einschliesslich der Trägermittel betreute. Nicht zuletzt ging es darum, das syrische Potenzial von rund 100 alten sowjetischen Raketen (SS-21, Scud-B, -C, -D) zu modernisieren.

Der Aufbau einer für Israel existenziell bedrohlichen chemischen Option durch Syrien beherrschte die israelischen Bedrohungsanalysen im Bereich der Massenvernichtungswaffen in vollem Umfang. An anderes wurde nicht gedacht – weil es jenseits der Vorstellungen über Syriens Pläne zur Ausrüstung mit Massenvernichtungswaffen lag. Die Amerikaner wiederum verliessen sich bezüglich Syriens ohne Einschränkung auf die israelischen Erkenntnisse.

Keine gute Figur der Geheimdienste

Die Fixierung auf die Bedrohung durch chemische Waffen bestimmte auch die Aktivitäten des Mossad, der auf vielfältige Weise das syrische Programm zu behindern versuchte. Nach jüngst verfügbar gewordenen israelischen Quellen hatte aber schon im Sommer 2000 für Syrien eine neue Zeit begonnen. Bachar Asad, der im Gegensatz zu seinem Vater den Iranern ohne Vorbehalte gegenüberstand, liess sich mit Iran und Nordkorea auf eine Dreierbeziehung zum Zwecke der Ausrüstung Syriens mit Nuklearwaffen ein. Bereits unmittelbar nach dem Tod des alten Asad im Juni 2000 kam es zu einem ersten Treffen zwischen Syrien und einer nordkoreanischen Delegation, die zum Begräbnis angereist war. Man kam gleich zur Sache und diskutierte über die Möglichkeit, Syrien durch den Aufbau eines von Nordkorea gelieferten Reaktors zur Nuklearmacht aufzurüsten. Weitere Details wurden anlässlich einer Konferenz in Damaskus im Juli 2002 geregelt. Der «Deal», wie er sich schliesslich ergab, sah vor, dass Iran das Geld, Syrien das Territorium und Nordkorea die nukleare Hardware zur Verfügung stellen sollte.

Noch im Jahr 2002 erreichten die ersten Lieferungen aus Nordkorea syrische Häfen – spezielles Baumaterial, aber auch einschlägige Wissenschaftler und Techniker. Ein reger Schiffsverkehr zwischen Nordkorea und Syrien entstand. Zwar registrierten die USA und Israel diese Entwicklung, doch sahen sie keinen Anlass zur Sorge. Dabei hätte spätestens im Herbst 2006 klar sein müssen, dass Ungewöhnliches im Gange war. Damals wurde ein unter panamaischer Flagge fahrendes Schiff, das in Nordkorea beladen worden war, auf seiner Route nach Syrien durch zypriotische Behörden gestoppt und durchsucht. Die Frachtpapiere lauteten auf «meteorologisches Gerät», tatsächlich waren unter anderem 18 mobile militärische Radarsysteme an Bord. Auch wenn diese Radarsysteme im Prinzip unbedenklich waren, hätte der Täuschungsversuch als solcher Anlass zu intensiveren Nachforschungen sein müssen.

Ein «stummes» Projekt

Diese Sorglosigkeit war nur möglich, weil auch die Satellitenaufklärung der USA keinerlei Warnsignale sendete. Zwar registrierte man schon seit 2003 Bautätigkeiten im Gebiet Dir az-Zur im Osten Syriens, doch es schien nichts Aufregendes zu sein. Dies umso weniger, als es bei der Baustelle keinen Funk- oder Telefonverkehr gab. Das Projekt war stumm. Der Grund hierfür lag in der Anordnung der syrischen Regierung, keinerlei technische Mittel zu verwenden, deren Ortung den Zweck des Projekts hätte enthüllen können. Mit anderen Worten: Das Projekt «Reaktor al-Kibar» wurde ausschliesslich über Boten geleitet – mittelalterlich, aber wirksam.

So war es denn kein Wunder, dass Amerikaner und Israeli durch die Enthüllungen von General Askari vom Februar 2007 überrascht wurden. Doch in die Überraschung mischten sich sehr schnell die Zweifel der Geheimdienste, die diesen beruflichen Super-GAU nicht wahrhaben wollten. Es begann eine streng geheime Aktion der Geheimdienste beider Länder, um der Sache auf den Grund zu gehen. Da man wusste, wonach man suchen musste, ergaben sich schnell neue Erkenntnisse, die Askaris Aussage zu belegen schienen. Doch letzte Gewissheit wollte sich nicht einstellen. Da entschloss sich die israelische Führung zu einer riskanten Operation. Mitte August flogen 12 Mann einer Kommando-Einheit in zwei Helikoptern zum Reaktorgelände al-Kibar, nahmen Bodenproben und fotografierten die Anlage. Die Auswertung ergab eindeutig, dass es sich um einen Reaktor nordkoreanischer Bauart handelte.

Da kurz zuvor ein nordkoreanisches Schiff mit nuklearen Brennelementen auf dem Weg nach Syrien überprüft worden war, schien Eile geboten. Am Morgen des 6. September 2007 starteten sieben israelische F-15-Jagdbomber nach Norden. Sie flogen entlang der Mittelmeerküste, streiften die Türkei und drangen nach Syrien ein. 50 Kilometer vor dem Ziel feuerten sie 22 Raketen auf die drei identifizierten Objekte innerhalb des Kibar-Komplexes ab. Die Syrer waren völlig überrascht. Als ihre Luftabwehrsysteme einsatzbereit waren, befanden sich die israelischen Flugzeuge längst ausserhalb ihrer Reichweite. Die Mission war erfolgreich, der Reaktor zerstört.

Samthandschuhe gegenüber Nordkorea

Es dauerte nur wenige Stunden, dann wurde bekannt, Israel sei in den syrischen Luftraum eingedrungen und habe «etwas abgeworfen». Da der syrische Präsident darüber hinaus nur äusserte, nirgendwo sei nennenswerter Schaden entstanden und die syrische Luftabwehr habe die israelischen Jagdbomber zur Flucht gezwungen, blieb die israelische Aktion rätselhaft. Weder die Israeli noch Vertreter ihrer Schutzmacht USA liessen sich zunächst irgendeine Stellungnahme entlocken. Das entsprach einer Vereinbarung, die die beiden Staaten im Vorfeld der Aktion geschlossen hatten. Als Präsident Bush am 20. September anlässlich einer Pressekonferenz mehrmals gefragt wurde, was es mit dieser Aktion der israelischen Luftwaffe auf sich habe, antwortete er immer wieder stereotyp: «Kein Kommentar.»

Bush war offensichtlich daran gelegen, die laufenden Sechs-Parteien-Gespräche über das nordkoreanische Nuklearprogramm nicht zu gefährden, musste er doch befürchten, dass mit der nachgewiesenen Proliferation durch Nordkorea ein Problem zum Verhandlungsgegenstand werden würde, das mit dem Geist der Sechs-Parteien-Gespräche unvereinbar war. Israel spielte das amerikanische Spiel mit, obwohl es eine Reaktion bevorzugt hätte – ein Signal nach Teheran, dass Israel fähig und willens war, keine weitere Nuklearmacht in der Region zuzulassen.

Doch der Versuch, die öffentliche Meinung über den israelischen Angriff zu steuern, scheiterte. Am 23. Oktober wurden erste Artikel in der amerikanischen Presse publiziert. Obwohl die Indizien eindeutiger geworden waren, hielten die Regierungen in Washington und Tel Aviv an ihrer restriktiven Öffentlichkeitsarbeit fest. Doch es bröckelte an allen Ecken und Enden. Am 24. April 2008 schliesslich trat die amerikanische Regierung die Flucht nach vorne an. Ohne Absprache mit Israels Regierung bestätigten amerikanische Geheimdienstmitarbeiter, dass es sich bei dem von Israel zerstörten Objekt um einen Gas-Grafit-Reaktor nordkoreanischer Bauart gehandelt habe, der im September 2007 betriebsbereit gewesen wäre. Nur Stunden danach waren alle Informationen öffentlich.

Die USA hatten bereits gegen Ende 2007 die Vorgänge in al-Kibar vorsichtig-zurückhaltend in die Sechs-Parteien-Gespräche eingeführt. Doch zunächst zeigten die Nordkoreaner keinerlei Bereitschaft, sich auf dieses Thema einzulassen. Dies wiederum veranlasste Präsident Bush Anfang Dezember 2007, in einem Brief an den nordkoreanischen Machthaber Kim Jong Il Aufklärung zu verlangen. Doch die Antwort blieb aus – bis heute. An der Haltung der nordkoreanischen Führung hat sich freilich nichts geändert. Sie lässt sich auf den einfachen Nenner bringen: Geld – möglichst schnell und möglichst viel. Nach israelischen Schätzungen hat Iran das syrische Nuklearprogramm mit Zahlungen von ein bis zwei Milliarden Dollar an Nordkorea finanziert.

Ob es in naher Zukunft zusätzliche Nachfrager für nukleare Hardware aus Nordkorea geben wird, ist eine offene Frage. Der Abschreckungseffekt der israelischen Aktion vom September 2007 wird vermutlich nicht von Dauer sein. Im Übrigen sollte man sich daran erinnern, dass weltweit kein

Experte den geheimen Aufbau eines Plutonium-Brüters durch Nordkorea in Syrien für möglich gehalten hätte. Vergessen sollte man in diesem Zusammenhang auch nicht die Chuzpe der Nordkoreaner, auf der einen Seite Verhandlungen über eine nukleare Abrüstung zu führen und gleichzeitig Syrien zur Nuklearmacht hochzurüsten. Die Geschichte der Proliferation von nuklearer Waffentechnik ist jedenfalls um ein makabres Kapitel angereichert worden.

Iran wird sich kaum abschrecken lassen

Dass die israelische Aktion irgendeine Wirkung auf Iran gehabt hat, ist fraglich. Allenfalls dergestalt, dass Iran seine Luftverteidigungssysteme russischen Ursprungs beschleunigt ausbaut. Dennoch gibt es einen bemerkenswerten Zusammenhang zwischen dem israelischen Angriff auf al-Kibar und der möglichen Option eines Militärschlages gegen das iranische Nuklearprogramm. Alle Experten, die sich mit diesem Szenario befassen, sind sich in einem Punkt einig: Der Angriff würde einen Aufschrei des Entsetzens und massive Proteste im gesamten arabischen Lager auslösen, verbunden mit Racheakten der iranischen Revolutionsgarden und gesteigerten Aktivitäten des islamistischen Terrors.

So plausibel diese Annahme auch sein mag, das Beispiel Syrien mahnt dennoch zur Zurückhaltung: Die Zerstörung des syrischen Nuklearprogramms durch die israelische Luftwaffe ist von der arabischen Welt weitgehend kommentarlos hingenommen worden. Natürlich ist Syrien nicht Iran. Wer aber in der arabischen Welt will wirklich ein nuklear gerüstetes Iran?

* [Der Autor ist ehemaliger Chef des Planungsstabes im deutschen Verteidigungsministerium.](#)

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3689418,00.html>

US: Iran didn't fund Syrian reactor

Published: 03.19.09, 23:31 / Israel News

A US Counterproliferation official denied a report saying Iran had funded a Syrian reactor that was bombed by Israel in 2007.

"There is strong reason to believe that only two countries were involved in building the Syrian covert nuclear reactor at Al Kibar - Syria and North Korea," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. (AP)

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/2228/ripping-off-ronen-bergman>

Ripping Off Ronen Bergman

posted Tuesday **March 24, 2009** under iran, Syria by jeffrey

The blog-o-sphere is all worked up over an op-ed (in German) by Hans Rühle claiming that Iran funded Syria's Al Kibar reactor.

Central to Rühle's stardom is the credence lent to his claims by his former position — he is the “former chief of the planning staff of the German Defense Ministry.” (He is the father of Michael Rühle, a senior NATO official.)

The truth is a little uglier.

First, Rühle left the German Ministry of Defense in 1988. Whatever “inside” information Rühle had dates back more than two decades. His information about Al Kibar, therefore, is second hand. Second, by “second hand,” I mean plagiarized.

Most of Rühle's article comes straight from Ronen Bergman's book *The Secret War with Iran*, mainly the chapter “Ghost Raid.”

Let's take a look.

Here is how Rühle describes the raid against the Al Kibar reactor:

Am Morgen des 6. September 2007 starteten sieben israelische F-15-Jagdbomber nach Norden. Sie flogen entlang der Mittelmeerküste, streiften die Türkei und drangen nach Syrien ein. 50 Kilometer vor dem Ziel feuerten sie 22 Raketen auf die drei identifizierten Objekte innerhalb des Kibar-Komplexes ab. Die Syrer waren völlig überrascht. Als ihre Luftabwehrsysteme einsatzbereit waren, befanden sich die israelischen Flugzeuge längst ausserhalb ihrer Reichweite. Die Mission war erfolgreich, der Reaktor zerstört.

That translates roughly as “On the morning of September 6, 2007 seven Israeli F-15 fighter-bombers started toward the north. They flew along the Mediterranean coast, touched on Turkey and then penetrated Syria. 50 kilometers from the finish, 22 rockets were fired on the three identified objects within the Al Kibar complex. The Syrians were quite surprised. By the time their air defense systems were ready for use, the Israeli aircraft were long beyond their reach. The mission was successful, the reactor was destroyed.”

This is almost word-for-word from Bergman's book:

At 3 a.m. on the morning of Thursday, September 6, seven Israeli air force F-15s took off and headed north over the Mediterranean. ... They flew very low along the Mediterranean coast and then over Turkey, before entering Syrian airspace. At a range of 50 kilometers, they launched twenty-two missiles at the three sites within the nuclear complex.

The Syrians were taken completely by surprise. Their air defense systems only detected the firing of the missiles, leaving no time for the sites to be evacuated.

A few anti-aircraft missiles were dispatched, but only after the planes were long gone. American and Israeli satellites hovering above Syria confirmed that the targets had been destroyed.

There are lots of other examples, like Rühle's description of Ali-Reza Asgari's defection and revelation about the Syrian project mirror's Bergman's, down to certain phrases: "Iran finanziert ein geheimes Nuklearprojekt von Syrien und Nordkorea" (translate) compared with: "Iran was financing a joint nuclear venture launched by North Korea and Syria."

Ruehle also lifted Bergman's description of the commando raid:

Mitte August flogen 12 Mann einer Kommando-Einheit in zwei Helikoptern zum Reaktorgelände al-Kibar, nahmen Bodenproben und fotografierten die Anlage. Die Auswertung ergab eindeutig, dass es sich um einen Reaktor nordkoreanischer Bauart handelte.

Compare that with

As a result, on a cloudy night in mid-August, twelve men from Israel's Sayeret Matkal commando unit were flown into Syria in two helicopters. They did not penetrate the site itself, but took soil samples from beyond the vast concrete apron surrounding it. ... The results provided clear-cut proof of the joint nuclear project.

There are just too many similarities to ignore.

Rühle's apparent plagiarism creates a false "confirmation" of Bergman's account — here is how the Associated Press described the report:

Ruehle, who did not identify the sources of his information, regularly publishes and comments on security and nuclear proliferation in different European newspapers and broadcasts, and he has held prominent roles in German and NATO institutions.

One is naturally encouraged to conclude the Rühle's account is the official Geheimdienst version, filtered through a favorite source.

In the interest of full disclosure, I didn't discover the plagiarism — Bergman is (rightfully) complaining about it to friends and colleagues. Moreover, I can't read German — Josh Pollack, and Google Translate, helped out there.

Comment

[EXCERPT]

Dear Jeffrey,

Although I once vowed never to engage in blogging, the allegations made about my father's handling of the sources for his article on the destruction of the Syrian reactor prompt me to respond.

First, some info for doubting Omar: My father, Hans Rühle, does indeed exist (otherwise, I wouldn't), and he headed the German MoD's Planning Staff from 1982-1988. Volker Rühle is indeed a former German Defense Minister, and, to make matters even more confusing, Lothar Rühl used to be Under Secretary of Defense at around the same period in the 1980s.

On my father's article: One point I would like to clarify here is something that seemed to have been "lost in translation". The news story by AP, which serves as the source for most commentators, contains the wording "Rühle did not identify the sources of his information". However, the German original article reads "... according to Israeli sources that have recently become available ...". This is a small yet significant difference. And the journalists who called my father, from Haaretz to the Wall Street Journal, were told about Bergman's book.

Still, the question remains why my father did not explicitly mention Ronen Bergman's book in his article. My father was fascinated by the chapter "Death Raid" in Bergman's book. He considered the information about the debriefing by General Askari to be among the best-kept secrets of Western intelligence services, including the Mossad. Bergman's publication of this sensitive material raised the question why the Mossad, which must have reviewed and cleared the book before publication, allowed for this chapter to be published. My father, who has a pretty solid experience of handling intelligence matters, drew the conclusion that the Mossad wanted this story to be published. In order to avoid a debate about this point, and after discussions with friends and colleagues, my father finally decided to anonymise the sources – even at the risk of causing misunderstandings.

Since I type my father's handwritten manuscripts, I get to study them quite carefully. In this particular case, the first thought that crossed my mind was not whether Ronen Bergman needed to be explicitly credited (arguably, the reference to "Israeli sources" seemed enough). Rather, I wondered why this story had not received more publicity in the first place. After all, Bergman's book has been out for quite a while. And when John Bolton confirmed some of the information just two days later in the WSJ, in an article that was prompted by the news reports about my father's piece, I realised that my father had struck a chord that Bergman's book, though excellent, didn't.

[Sourcebook comment: John Bolton's Wall Street Journal op-ed of 2009-03-21 is included in Appendix A of this sourcebook.]

Michael Rühle
Brussels, Belgium

— Michael Rühle · Mar 25, 04:57 PM ·

#

Micheal,

thanks very much for the clarification. Does this mean that Bergman's book is the only source your father based his article on? Or does he have any corroborating information?

— Tom · Mar 25, 11:59 PM ·

#

We should thank Michael Rühle for his explanations and ACW for being, once again, THE place for debating nonpro/arms control issues.

Michael's post is interesting in the sense that it reveals what many of us know: that in a world where so much information is published, it is easy to miss an important source. Many people had not read the Bergman book. I, for one had read it, but it took me a while to make the connection with Rühle's father's article. The silver lining in this whole story is that it may bring people to revisit the hypothesis of an Iranian involvement in the project. The question is: why is there so much discrepancy between (1) what Bergman's sources told him and (2) what the US intelligence community say ("we're pretty sure that only the DPRK and Syria were involved").

— scud · Mar 26, 01:26 AM ·

#

Re: Michael Rühle

I never doubted the existence of Mr. Rühle who published the article. What felt strange was that there was one Hans Rühle who popped out of nowhere to write an quite detailed article with supposedly insider information on the topic. Adding to this was his connection the the German MoD, which, after this clarification, has nothing to do with the whole story or his article.

Still, Bergman's book and the Ghost Raid part very much depends on unverifiable sources, and there are several very strange episodes in the book.

My favorite is the supposed mid-1990s Hezb operation in South America, which was prevented by American SFs coming and leaving in C5 Galaxy transporters out of nowhere. (And without any public trace.)

— Omar · Mar 26, 04:26 PM ·

#

> The silver lining in this whole story is that it may bring people to revisit the hypothesis of an Iranian involvement in the project.

I very much agree, as long as we keep it firmly in mind that we're talking about a hypothesis, not an assertion. Although I have doubts about some details of the description of the raid Bergman gives, the really big question he raises is that of Iranian involvement in the alleged/presumed SY/NK plutonium production project.

I'm thoroughly agnostic on this hypothesis at the moment. There's no really good evidence (IMO) for it, but the involvement of an inconvenient third party might — just might — explain some of the very peculiar post-strike behaviors of Israel, Syria and the US that have been much noted.

Iran is certainly the leading candidate for a third party, but one can think of other possibilities. Pakistan is probably second in line, and there are others.

— Allen Thomson · Mar 26, 05:05 PM ·

#

Ronen Bergman's book was my father's only source regarding Iran's involvement in the Syrian-North Korean reactor project. By contrast, regarding the importance of Askari's debriefing on al-Kibar, there exists a pretty strong hint from US intelligence sources. The protocol of the "Background briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria's Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea's involvement" of 24 April 2008 says: "In the spring of last year, we were able to obtain some additional information that made it conclusive". This reference to spring 2007 seems a thinly veiled reference to Askari's debriefing. (http://www.dni.gov/interviews/20080424_interview.pdf)

Although my father used Bergman's book as a source for his article, Iran's involvement in al-Kibar has now been confirmed by John Bolton in his Wall Street Journal piece of 21 March. Reading the article, my father and I both came away with the impression that Bolton is relieved that this specific aspect of the Syrian adventure has now become widely known. Bolton seems to have known about Askari's debriefing, yet he was not allowed to talk about it. Despite Bergman's uncovering of a crucial part of Askari's debriefing, U.S. intelligence services and those of key allies seem bent on keeping the whole briefing secret. The reasons for this appear obvious: Askari must have said many more things that touch upon a host of Middle Eastern issues. Hence, intelligence services have no choice but to continue denying everything related to Askari.

Omar rightly points out that Bergman's book is based on "unverifiable sources". In a Haaretz interview in September 2007, Bergman said that "99,9 per cent" of his book consisted of "non-declassified material". Needless to say, this raises the question as to who is the "author" of what? This dilemma was part of my father's reasoning for not mentioning Bergman's name and referring to "Israeli sources" instead. At the same time, even though my father had some doubts about the accuracy of some parts of Bergman's account, it was clear that the story of al-Kibar could only be told exactly as Bergman had told it – including the details about the commando raid in August and the attack in September. There was simply no point (nor space) in nitpicking.

As for my father's doubts about Bergman's account, there are two in particular. For one, Bergman creates the impression that the commando raid in August was necessary in order to get conclusive evidence about the true nature of al-Kibar. By contrast, the US briefing mentioned above indicates that the information gathered in spring 2007 "included photographs of the interior and the exterior of the building ... showing key features of the reactor". Moreover, these photographs appear to have been taken "handheld", i.e. by people who were on the reactor site. Does one really need even more confirmation?

There are also certain doubts about Bergman's account of the attack on al-Kibar. Bergman creates the impression that the missiles that were released 50 kilometres off al-Kibar were self-guided and hit the target bullseye. However, the much more detailed account of the Sunday Times of 16 September 2007 reports that these missiles were guided to their target by ground-based laser-designators, i.e. by people who were close to the target.

These details appear small, yet their implications are significant. If Israel were to attack Iranian nuclear installations, it would require certain key people to be on-site in Iran. A formidable challenge.

— Michael Ruehle · Mar 27, 02:28 PM ·

#

Correction: The Bergman interview which I am alluding to is from 2008, not 2007

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1019866.html>).

— Michael Rühle · Mar 27, 02:53 PM ·

The Outsider

The Johns Hopkins Magazine

APRIL 2009 | VOL 61 NO 2

[Accessed 2009-03-30]

Eliot Cohen went inside the State Department after having publicly criticized the Bush administration for its handling of the Iraq war. Back at work in academia now, he shares his insights.

Interview by Jeffrey Anderson

Photos of Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln hang on the wall of Eliot A. Cohen's office at the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. A coffee table holds a dish filled with dozens of coins bearing insignia from U.S. and foreign military units Cohen has visited.

What more appropriate furnishings for one of the world's most prominent scholars of military affairs, a proponent of civilian influence on military strategy and tactics, and counselor of the Department of State under former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice from April 2007 to January 2009?

[deletia]

Cohen led State's response on the North Korean nuclear reactor incident in Syria, and counseled Rice on Iraq and Afghanistan, and on the Russian invasion of Georgia.

[deletia]

What was your role in the North Korean nuclear reactor case?

I was part of a process designed to give the principals — secretary of state, secretary of defense, vice president, national security adviser, and ultimately the president — real options. It's a mistake to think that your job is to come up with your own preferred policy and sell it to your boss. I often felt that my job was to make it clear to my boss what the choices were, and to offer my best judgment about the plusses and minuses. In this case the options were: Do you let the Israelis deal with this? Do you try to think about dealing with it militarily? Or do you try some diplomatic option? As [British general] James Wolfe once said about war, it's an option of difficulties.

How would you characterize the outcome?

There were upsides and downsides. Once the Israelis took out the reactor, they did not want to go public right away for fear of igniting a larger war. They thought it would put pressure on the Syrians to retaliate. My feeling is, it would've given us an opportunity to put pressure on both Syria and North Korea.

IAEA split over new chief, Iran, Syria

April 3, 2009 – 2:31am

By GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press Writer

VIENNA (AP) - An ideological split at International Atomic Energy Agency is slowing the search for a new chief at a time the organization tasked with keeping nuclear arms away from rogue states needs a firm hand at the rudder.

The longer the delay, the greater the fear that Iran, and possibly Syria, could forge ahead with allegedly illicit nuclear activities with more impunity.

For months, the IAEA's hands have been tied in its probes of the two nations' nuclear programs as internal bickering and the agency's weak mandate prevent it from taking effective action. The hunt is on for a leader who can help unite the fractious 35-nation board for joint decisions on crucial nonproliferation issues.

But the same North-South divisions that have hobbled the IAEA's investigation of Iran and Syria are encumbering the search for a successor to Mohamed ElBaradei, who steps down as director general in November. The developed world believes tough action is needed to block rogue nations from acquiring nuclear weapons; emerging economies argue that countries like Iran and Syria have a right to develop nuclear programs to help them catch up with the West.

That debate has clouded the process of picking a new leader: Six rounds over two days last week left the ballot split between Japan's Yukiya Amano, a low-key administrator favored by the U.S. and other rich nations, and Abdul Samad Minty, a South African backed by developing countries.

The agency on Monday formally relaunched the leadership race, throwing it open to a new round of nominations from the 35 IAEA board member nations. But any new balloting is at least weeks away, with no guarantee of ending the impasse _ and ElBaradei will increasingly be viewed as a lame-duck leader as he nears the end of his term.

The impression of a rudderless IAEA could further embolden both Iran and Syria.

Most experts agree that Iran recently amassed enough enriched uranium to build a bomb. That adds urgency to efforts to persuade Tehran to give up enrichment. U.S. President Barack Obama is reaching out to Iran and Syria in an effort to break the nuclear impasse: it's a crucial time calling for strong IAEA leadership to support American diplomatic efforts with Tehran and Damascus.

Even before IAEA leadership became an issue, probes of both countries ground to a standstill. With no enforcing powers, the agency was left to ask for cooperation _ refused in both cases.

Iran last year declared an investigation of allegations that it tried to make nuclear weapons closed and continues to expand its enrichment activities despite U.N. Security Council sanctions. Syria repeatedly turns down requests for onsite IAEA visits to locations suspected of sheltering undeclared atomic activities _ including an alleged plutonium producing reactor under construction until it was bombed by Israeli warplanes.

Israeli officials have repeatedly suggested Tehran's nuclear facilities could also be hit if the international community fails to persuade it to stop its nuclear activities.

A weak IAEA could increase support for the strike option, providing grist for hawks in Benjamin Netanyahu's new hard-line government.

"Israel, in bombing the Syrian reactor proved ... that it would never tolerate a nuclear weapon in the hands of a country that calls for Israel's destruction," said Israeli analyst Ronen Bergman, author of "The Secret War with Iran."

The agency is not without clout. Its board referred Iran to the Security Council three years ago for breaching the Nonproliferation Treaty, in a vote supported by more than two-thirds of its members.

But such near unity has been rare since.

Once elected to limited board terms, nonaligned nations led by Cuba, Venezuela and others at odds with the U.S and its allies argue that Iran has a right to uranium enrichment to generate nuclear fuel. They dismiss arguments that Tehran could quickly retool its program to create the fissile core of warheads, depicting them as a cover for attempts to keep nuclear technology in the hands of the rich countries.

Like any country, Iran has a right to enrichment for peaceful nuclear purposes _ and it insists that is all it wants to do. Besides developing countries it often gets tacit support from Russia and China _ both permanent Security Council members who nonetheless court Iran and Syria for strategic and economic reasons.

Such fissures not only call into question whether a consensus candidate can be found once ElBaradei steps down in November. They also raise the issue of whether anyone at the IAEA helm can exert meaningful new agency leverage on Tehran and Damascus.

At the minimum, the IAEA can be the impartial "eyes and ears" overseeing any agreement reached between the U.S. and Tehran and Damascus. In the case of Tehran for instance, its inspectors could verify that the Islamic Republic is honoring any agreement not to expand its uranium enrichment activities.

More ideally, some argue, the board could empower the agency by giving it more authority, agreeing to a special inspection in the case of Syria that Damascus would find politically difficult to refuse. But such moves are unlikely, as long as the North-South split persists.

For now, "the agency can ask questions and declare that questions have not been answered and (try to) send inspectors," said Graham Allison, director of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and assistant secretary of defense under President Bill Clinton. "But if a country wants to stiff the agency, it can."

David Albright, whose Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security tracks suspected secret proliferators, suggested the agency could do nothing more on swaying Iran.

"The IAEA doesn't have a place at the table any more," he said. "It's up to the U.S. now to strengthen its role on Iran."

Still, he said an exceptional candidate with charisma and vision could support Washington in its outreach.

"You'd look to a candidate just like we look to Obama in the United States to get beyond the zero sum game."

<http://totalwonkerr.com/2001/hibbs-on-syria-u-traces>

Hibbs on Syria U Traces

by Joshua Pollack

Apr 18 [2009]

[EXCERPT]

So it turns out that we're just living in James Acton's shadow over here.

Mark Hibbs has details on the uranium oxide traces that the IAEA found in Syria. It's [*] in the the April 6 [2009] issue of NuclearFuel [<http://www.platts.com/Nuclear/Newsletters%20%20Reports/Nuclear%20Fuel/>].

First, it appears that James's view [<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/2106/new-evidence-of-nork-syria-link/>] of the 80+ particles of anthropogenic U found in Syria is shared within the IAEA:

Early this year, a senior UN safeguards official said the IAEA believed that the particles appeared to be NATU that had oxidized (NF, 23 Feb., 5). According to the official, the finding was consistent with the hypothesis the uranium was metallic fuel material for a DPRK-type production reactor.

Second, Hibbs goes on to relate that there's not a great deal of research on the behavior of U particles under various conditions, but it's generally accepted that if they are divided finely enough, they'll oxidize all the way through.

Reading between the lines, it seems that the number of particles found in the swipe samples — now described by Hibbs as numbering close to 100 — is simply too many to be accounted for by cross-contamination. So much for my pet theory. As long as we're not talking about something off-the-wall, like HWR fuel — this was said to be a Magnox reactor, remember? — then in the absence of additional information, it's only reasonable to believe that there was a lot of uranium metal onsite, which was blasted into itty-bitty bits. (That's a technical term.)

Hibbs also offers a great deal of insight into the state of attribution technology for particles of this type. The U.S. has traces of U from North Korea; is it sharing the "fingerprints" with the IAEA for purposes of comparison? We don't know. But that Acton fellow has written [<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/2163/yes-more-on-nork-heu/>] about the North Korea traces.

Lastly, it seems that the Syrian government has refused requests to return to the scene of the swipes to take more samples. Once stung, twice shy. This once again raises the question of when the IAEA will be willing to use its power of special inspections. Any day now, folks!

[deletia]

[*] Syrian Uranium Particles Put IAEA on Frontier of Forensic Knowledge

Where Did The U Metal Come From?

by Joshua Pollack

Apr 24 [2009]

A short while ago, we all learned some new stuff from Mark Hibbs about the uranium oxide particles found in Syria. Long story short, the IAEA has reason to believe they were uranium metal “converted” into oxide by... some event that divided the uranium into fine particles, causing it to scatter and oxidize.

Now let’s go further and assume that this uranium was, prior to its untimely fine division, fuel for a Yongbyon-type Magnox reactor. This raises an obvious question: Where did it come from?

Well, I think we can rule out Lancashire. Instinctively, most of us would say, it came from the Yongbyon fuel fabrication complex in North Korea. It might also have come from a duplicate facility in Syria, although this assumes that quite a lot of stuff could have been built, supplied, and operated undetected.

Ask Dr. Science

The natural place to start is with SIGINT. In February 2008, according to Dr. Siegfried “Sig” Hecker, North Korea had under a quarter of a load of fuel rods — apparently for the infamous 5 MWe reactor that has produced all or essentially all of North Korea’s plutonium — and a full load of uncladded fuel rods for the unfinished 50 MWe reactor.

Is that everything that was supposed to be there? As it turns out, Hibbs has already looked into this question. He asked Hecker and wrote up his answer in the Dec. 18, 2008 issue of Nucleonics Week.

None of the safeguarded fresh uranium fuel produced by North Korea at its Yongbyon nuclear research center for two of its own reactors was diverted to an alleged clandestine reactor project in Syria, a US expert said December 15.

Siegfried Hecker, a director emeritus of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, said in an interview that the fuel, which had been declared to the IAEA, was still at the center when he visited it in February.

OK. So what about the period after the collapse of the Agreed Framework and before the return of inspectors? Is it possible that the complex was put back into operation, making more fuel?

Let’s go back to Hecker’s Feb. 2008 trip report:

The front end of fuel fabrication (Building 1) had been operating making uranium dioxide (UO₂) from uranium ore concentrate right up to the time the facility was shut down on July 15, 2007. The back end was operational with seven conversion furnaces, two casting furnaces, and eight machining lathes. However, the middle part, the fluorination facility, had deteriorated so badly during the freeze (1994 to 2003) that the building has been abandoned (as we were shown in August 2007). However, the DPRK had recently completed alternate fluorination equipment (using dry rather than wet

techniques) in one of the ancillary buildings. However, this was a makeshift operation that has limited throughput potential. It was not put into full operation by the time of the shutdown on July 15.

It sounds as if A) the complex had only limited capacity during the dark period between 2002 and 2007, but B) the North Koreans were operating some (perhaps all) of the parts that worked, and C) they made efforts to reconstitute what wasn't working (fluourination) on an ad hoc basis. This element was not "put into full operation," but that doesn't mean that it produced nothing, either.

How much fresh fuel could these arrangements have created? Enough for the "test assembly" that one of Hibbs's sources suggests Syria might have had at the reactor? It's not really clear, but seems possible. Either way, it raises the question of where the Syrians expected to get a full load of fresh fuel in 2007, when Yongbyon was once again under safeguards. And no, I'm not even going to start speculating about reprocessing facilities.

Anybody Around Here Read Korean?

One way to know what happened at Yongbyon during the dark years would be to scrutinize the operating records of the fuel fabrication complex. There are forensic tests to establish the genuineness of such documents. But according to (you guessed it!) Mark Hibbs in the Jan. 12, 2009 issue of NuclearFuel, these records were not among those provided by North Korea to the United States.

All together now: Hmmm.

So, it's an open question. Any enterprising journalists out there want to take a stab at this one?

Just for fun: Hibbs quotes a "senior UN official" in the Feb. 23, 2007 [*sic; probably 2009*] issue of NuclearFuel as saying that the particles "looked like UO₂," not other oxides. Also, a "Western safeguards official" said that — along with uranium oxide and graphite — there was lots of aluminum and magnesium in the IAEA samples from al-Kibar. That's what Magnox fuel cladding is made of. But it might have come from the soil, too, right?

One thing is clear, at least: the Syrians won't be letting the IAEA back in anytime soon.

Weak U.N. nuclear watchdog "eroding non-proliferation"

By Mark Heinrich

Mon Apr 27, 2009 7:58am EDT

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog has failed to use all its powers or to beef them up if inspectors are obstructed, leaving the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in tatters, a former top agency official says.

The International Atomic Energy Agency seeks to catch covert diversions of nuclear energy into bomb-making and foster peaceful uses of the atom. Exposure of suspect nuclear activity in North Korea, Libya, Iran and Syria over the past decade has shaken the Vienna-based watchdog.

"The (nuclear) non-proliferation regime is increasingly challenged by states that exploit ambiguity in rules and rifts in the international community to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities without fear of reprisal," said Pierre Goldschmidt, who was global head of IAEA inspections in 1999-2005.

"Lax and inconsistent compliance practices threaten non-proliferation efforts by giving some states more leeway for evading rules than should be tolerable in an effective non-proliferation regime," he wrote in a paper for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank.[*]

[deletia]

SPECIAL INSPECTIONS

Goldschmidt said the IAEA should reassert a right to impose mandatory "special inspections" in countries refusing to grant broad access to inspectors to resolve intelligence reports of stealthy work to weaponize nuclear materials.

He cited Syria, where inspectors last June found "significant" uranium traces at a spot alleged by Washington to have been a nascent plutonium-producing reactor before Israel bombed the target to rubble in 2007.

Syria denies the accusations but has also denied IAEA requests for a second visit to the site and to three others, as well as a look at debris from the bombing.

Goldschmidt said the IAEA had not applied a clause in Syria's nuclear safeguards agreement saying the agency could resort to a special inspection, allowing short-notice searches anywhere, if information provided by a country was not deemed "adequate for the agency to fulfill its responsibilities."

He suggested the IAEA looked hapless in repeatedly urging a state to voluntarily open up in response to repeated refusals, as it has been doing with Syria, as well as with Iran.

"If the only consequence is that the (IAEA) director-general reports at each Board meeting that no progress had been made, this will encourage any non-compliant state to adopt similar obstructive tactics," said Goldschmidt.

He urged IAEA governors to temporarily broaden verification powers to get around invocations of "national security" used by Syria and Iran to keep military sites in question off limits.

[deletia]

[] Concrete Steps to Improve the Nonproliferation Regime
Carnegie Paper No. 100, April 2009*

*[http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?
fa=view&id=22943&prog=zgp&proj=znpp](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22943&prog=zgp&proj=znpp)*

Ranking House Intel Republican Doubts Pelosi Claim She Wasn't Briefed On Harsh Interrogations

by RTT Staff Writer

4/27/2009 8:13 PM ET

[EXCERPTS]

The ranking Republican member of the House Intelligence Committee Monday cast doubt on a top Democrat's claims that the Bush Administration never told them harsh interrogation practices were being used.

[deletia]

Hoekstra also rejected Pelosi's claim that she was barred from raising objections to even the possible use of the techniques because of the highly-classified nature of the interrogation program.

"It's a pathetic excuse. She's the ranking member on the intelligence committee," he said. "I'm put into that job because it's my responsibility to protect the equities of the House.

He added, "I'm not just sent in to the room to be a wall flower."

As an example, Hoekstra pointed to a conflict around administration disclosure of what precisely happened surrounding an Israeli air strike on a Syrian site that some believe was being used to develop a nuclear program.

"When we disagreed with the White House's unwillingness to brief people on what happened in Syria when the Israelis took out the alleged nuclear reactor, we got an op-ed piece [*] published," he said.

"We just said we're protesting that this information's not being released. We didn't disclose what it was ... we had to be very careful."

He added, "But the American public was notified that there was a tension between the White House and Congress about the release of classified information."

[] What Happened in Syria?*

By PETER HOEKSTRA and ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

The Wall Street Journal

October 20, 2007; Page A10

Included in this sourcebook



Robert Wood
Acting Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
April 30, 2009

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Is the time right for additional U.S. talks directly in Damascus?

MR. WOOD: Well, you know, we've said that we would be willing to engage Syria in a dialogue and, as I said before, after the previous meetings that were held between Acting Assistant Secretary Feltman and the NSC's Dan Shapiro, that there could very well be additional meetings, you know, future meetings. And so I'm certainly not going to rule that out at this point. I don't have anything more to add in terms of travel, but we'll be happy to let you know should there be a visit coming up in the near future.

But what's important from our standpoint is that Syria play a positive role in this region, and up until now, it hasn't. But this Administration has said it's willing to engage. And if the Syrians are willing to engage as well, hopefully, we'll be able to make some progress. But we'll have to see how things go. But if indeed they are willing to contribute to helping promote a two-state solution, that's something definitely to be welcomed.



Robert Wood
Acting Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
May 4, 2009

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: Robert, do you have anything new regarding Assistant Secretary Feltman's trip to Damascus?

MR. WOOD: No, I don't, Michel. Not at this point.

QUESTION: A follow-up on this. Israeli officials have expressed their concern about the rapprochement between Washington and Damascus, and they consider that there is no justification for this. Do you have any reaction?

MR. WOOD: Well, look, we hope to have a dialogue with Syria about a number of concerns that we have in the region. And we hope that that will result in Syria taking some steps that we want to see. And our interests are the same as Israel's in terms of trying to get Syria to play a much more productive role in the region, to cease from supporting terrorist groups.

So we've got a long way to go before we actually have a good relationship with Syria. As I said, we have a number of outstanding concerns, and hopefully we'll be able to address them as we go along. We think Syria has an opportunity to play a positive role in the region. We encourage it to do so.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/05/121059.htm>



Releases (Other) > Press Releases: 2009 > Press Releases: May 2009

Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman Travel

Robert Wood

Acting Spokesman, Office of the Spokesman

Bureau of Public Affairs

Washington, DC

Acting Assistant Secretary Feltman will travel to Syria today, May 5th, to discuss issues of mutual and regional concern. This trip will further advance the U.S. commitment to direct diplomacy with Syria and continue discussions from his previous trip. Acting Assistant Secretary Feltman will be accompanied by NSC Senior Director Daniel Shapiro

PRN: 2009/419

http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/06/behind_the_scenes_of_the_peres_obama_meeting

Behind the scenes of the Peres-Obama meeting

Thu, 05/07/2009 - 11:22am

[EXCERPT]

The NSC's Shapiro is currently accompanying Jeffrey Feltman, the State Department's acting (and nominated) assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, on their second trip to Damascus, Syria. Sources say that Feltman, a former U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, was mystified by the trip to Damascus being scheduled now, before the June 7 Lebanese elections, and wondered how and where the decision was made. Neither Feltman nor Shapiro responded to a query on the Damascus trip. Asked about the trip Wednesday, State Department spokesman Robert Wood said he had no more details. "We will engage in dialogue when and where we feel it's appropriate," Wood said. "But we think it's time for both countries" -- Syria and Iran -- to "become part of the solution."

Washington Committed to Seeking Syria - Israel Deal

May 7, 2009 Filed at 8:58 a.m. ET

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - The United States told the Syrian government Thursday it was committed to seeking a peace deal between Syria and Israel, a main objective for Damascus in its rapprochement with Washington.

"We conveyed ... President Obama's sincere commitment to pursue Arab-Israeli peace on all tracks, including on the Syrian-Israeli track," senior State Department official Jeffrey Feltman said after meeting Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualeem in the Syrian capital.

The administration of U.S. President Barack Obama started talks with Syria soon after he was inaugurated in January, ending a boycott of several years under his predecessor George W. Bush. Feltman said the two countries still had differences to settle.

Damascus wants the United States to become involved if talks resume, believing this would guarantee any deal would stick.

Indirect talks mediated by Turkey were suspended after Israel's three-week offensive in the Gaza Strip, which ended in mid-January.

Feltman is accompanied by White House official Daniel Shapiro. The two officials were in Damascus in March.

(Reporting by Khaled Yacoub Oweis; editing by Andrew Dobbie)



THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 8, 2009

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1622(d), provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency, unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the Federal Register and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the Federal Register for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency with respect to the actions of the Government of Syria declared in Executive Order 13338 of May 11, 2004, and relied upon for additional steps taken in Executive Order 13399 of April 25, 2006, and Executive Order 13460 of February 13, 2008, is to continue in effect beyond May 11, 2009.

The actions of the Government of Syria in supporting terrorism, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, and undermining U.S. and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to continue in effect the national emergency declared with respect to this threat and to maintain in force the sanctions to address this national emergency.

BARACK OBAMA

THE WHITE HOUSE,
May 7, 2009.

[Sourcebook note: See Certifying Syria's Nuclear Program by Gordon Prather in Appendix A of this sourcebook]



Robert Wood
Acting Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
May 8, 2009

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: If we can go to Syria, President Obama, I believe yesterday [2009-05-07], signed an executive order renewing sanctions that were imposed on Syria, I believe in 2004. Obviously, he does this just as Ambassador Feltman is in – has been in Syria. What does the – and I realize it's a White House decision to renew the sanctions, but I remember when they were first imposed it was briefed out here. What does the renewal of the sanctions mean for your effort to improve and – improve your relationship with Syria and engage with them more?

MR. WOOD: Well, look, the President felt it was necessary to take these measures. These are not new sanctions, and there is still – I think this shows you that we still have some very serious concerns about Syrian behavior and activity in the world. We've said to you before our concerns about what Syria is doing in Iraq, its support for terrorist groups.

We have encouraged the Syrians to play a positive role in the Middle East. We're willing to engage them in a dialogue to try to address not only our concerns, but concerns that they may have. But there's – it's – there's no secret we have some very serious problems with the government in Syria. And we hope to be able to try to work out those differences, but a lot of it is going to be up to Syria. It has – this is another country that has an opportunity to have a different relationship with the international community.

And part of Acting Assistant Secretary's Feltman's trip to the region is trying to get the Syrians to take some steps that will move us toward a better relationship and – but there's a lot that Syria needs to do. But we're willing to engage them and see if they are serious about addressing some of these concerns, so --

QUESTION: But what is the point of, like, this engagement for Syria? I mean, do you think that like, renewing the sanctions at this point – I mean, even as Secretary Feltman was there – is an incentive for Syria to take steps? I mean, don't you think something like, kind of, you know, waiting – waiting to impose an executive order, at least to see if Syria is going to take some steps to renew the executive order?

MR. WOOD: Well, as you know, the President's required by Congress to report on an annual basis on the sanctions. This is something that the President felt we needed to do, and we're certainly well aware --

QUESTION: What kind of a message do you think, though, that that sends to Syria?

MR. WOOD: Well, I think it sends the message that we have some very serious concerns. We still have them about their activity and behavior. And what Jeff Feltman is, you know, in Damascus to talk about is how we can

get Syria to change its behavior and see if it's willing to really engage seriously in a dialogue, be a positive role in the Middle East. Up until now, Syria hasn't played that positive role. So that's --

QUESTION: But you're talking to them specifically this week about trying to play a positive role.

MR. WOOD: Right.

QUESTION: So on one hand, you're asking them to play a positive role. But for them, what they see you doing is imposing what -- is continuing sanctions on them. I mean, what --

MR. WOOD: Well, the sanctions are the law, and the President is required to report on them (inaudible) basis to Congress.

QUESTION: Well, I know but --

MR. WOOD: So that --

QUESTION: Well, it might -- perhaps it might be helpful if you explain that these -- that the executive order was going to expire on Sunday and perhaps you could also talk about --

QUESTION: I know it was going to expire on Sunday.

QUESTION: -- talk about the -- about whether Assistant Secretary Feltman went now, this week, instead of waiting until after he was confirmed in order to explain to the Syrians exactly what was going on with this renewal.

MR. WOOD: Well, Matt, I think you're reading a little bit too much into this. Look, I've already talked about the sanctions and I even added some points on the sanctions. We have very serious concerns about Syrian behavior. I think you all understand that very clearly, and those haven't gone away.

But what we're saying is instead of isolating Syria, we're willing to engage them.

QUESTION: But what is the benefit of the engagement if you're going to continue to -- these sanctions on them?

QUESTION: Can I go actually -- Matt, I'm sorry. Did he explain -- do you know if he explained to them, look, the renewal's coming up, we're going to have to do this?

MR. WOOD: I haven't talked to Jeff, but I'm sure the Syrians are certainly well aware of the executive order and what the President's required to do. And that's the law and the President has to, you know, take the necessary steps. And because we have that law -- the reason for that law is because of activities that the Syrians have engaged in, in the past. We want to try to move forward. And that's why Jeff is out in the region to talk to Syria about -- to find out whether they are really serious about improving relations with the United States and taking some of these steps to address concerns that we have about their behavior in the international realm.

QUESTION: Have they taken any such steps yet?

MR. WOOD: With regard to?

QUESTION: Well, steps in the direction that you want them to take?

MR. WOOD: Well, we need to see. I mean, the Syrians have said a lot of very positive things, but we need to see actions. And as far as I'm aware, they haven't taken any steps that -- at this point that would lead us to

change – to move in another direction right now. We need to see concrete steps from the Syrian Government for us to move in another direction.

QUESTION: Robert --

MR. WOOD: Yes, James.

QUESTION: -- yet, there must have been some steps taken that would have justified a second visit by Feltman and Shapiro.

MR. WOOD: The second visit is to follow up on the good discussions that Jeff Feltman and Dan Shapiro had on that first trip. But that doesn't mean that Syria has addressed all of our concerns. They haven't addressed our concerns. And so, we want to follow up with them to see if they are serious, to go and take additional steps to improve the nature of the relationship and address some of the issues that we have raised.

QUESTION: So, if you say, "take additional steps," that implies some steps have been taken.

MR. WOOD: Well, they have taken some steps previously in terms of being more cooperative with regard to Iraq, but still there is a lot that they can do to better improve the relationship. But our concerns are still there. And that's – but we are interested in having a dialogue with them, as opposed to just isolating them.

QUESTION: How far back in time are you taking us when you refer to steps that they took in Iraq that were positive?

MR. WOOD: I don't have a timeline for you, James. I mean, you can go back and look at the record in terms of --

QUESTION: I'm just asking are we talking in the past month, two months, ten – five years? What did you have in mind?

MR. WOOD: Certainly within the last couple of years, but I don't have a timeline for you.

QUESTION: You're not talking about recent stuff, anyway.

MR. WOOD: I'm not talking about in the last week or – so no.

QUESTION: Right.

MR. WOOD: On Syria?

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. WOOD: Yes.

QUESTION: Ambassador Feltman, in his statement on Syria, said that he will be continuing this dialogue with the Syrians in Washington and in Syria. Is it expected that the Syrian delegation to come here or just the ambassador?

MR. WOOD: I don't know. I – at this point, I don't know. I mean, I think Jeff was just expressing how he sees these visits going on, but I have no idea about a Syrian delegation or its membership. I just – I think it's a little premature to talk about that.

Yes.

Has the Obama-Israel Joint Policy on Iran's Nukes Ruptured?

David Horovitz

Jerusalem Post editor

May 11th 2009

[EXCERPTS]

In his recent book *The Inheritance*, *The New York Times'* chief Washington correspondent David E. Sanger...

... , detailing the global challenges the Bush administration bequeathed to Obama, includes a remarkable passage on Mossad chief Meir Dagan's quiet visit to Washington two years ago, when Israel presented the US intelligence community with incontrovertible evidence that North Korean engineers had almost finished the construction of a nuclear reactor in Syria.

That the US was blithely unaware of this - and had gone to war against a country that turned out not to have nukes, while entirely missing the construction of the nuclear facility next door - was an almighty intelligence failure. While Israel would have been proud of its clear-eyed scoop, it would have been deeply disquieted by America's blindness.

Disquiet turned to dumbfoundedness when the US elected not to act. "The Pentagon developed a plan for a lightning strike," Sanger writes. And he says two senior US officials told him Bush seriously considered it. But ultimately, the US both chose diplomacy itself and urged diplomacy on Israel - "despite the fact that the Syrian reactor project was far more sophisticated than anything Saddam had under way in 2003." It was, as Sanger quotes a senior Israeli official as saying, "laughable logic."

And so Israel, defying the US, took its defense into its own hands, smashed the al-Kibar reactor to smithereens, and - as with Osirak in 1981 - braced for repercussions that didn't come. Presumably, there have been similar quiet visits by the likes of Dagan to Washington where Iran, not Syria, was on the agenda - where Israel was bringing fresh intelligence that underlined the progress and the shortage of time.

But as Sanger quotes a senior American official telling him in the wake of Israel's strike on Syria, the US "had post-Iraq syndrome, and the Israelis had preemption syndrome."

Two traumatized leaderships, taking flawed decisions in the uncertain aftermath of past failures? The depiction is not entirely accurate.

[deletia]

David Horovitz is editor of the *Jerusalem Post*. from *[which]* this article was adapted.

Biological Weapons, Instead Of Nuclear Reactor, Keep Syria Within Axis Of Evil

By David Bedein, Middle East Correspondent

The Philadelphia Bulletin

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

Jerusalem — Syria has reportedly rebuilt the structure that housed the reactor bombed by Israel last year and has turned the site into a facility for manufacturing chemical and biological weapons.

Official sources stated Syria had significantly expanded its biological and chemical weapons program by doing so.

According to a CBS News report, the discovery of the Syrian program was one of the reasons President Barack Obama decided to renew the sanctions against Syria. An American source said [the U.S.] had received information that had altered the situation in U.S.-Syrian relations. After Sunday night's report on CBS, it was clear what this information was.

A senior American intelligence source in Washington told the Israeli media Syria had denied having rebuilt the structure and also denied it was part of its biological and chemical weapons program. American satellite imagery, however, showed unequivocally that Syria was lying.

The discovery of the renewed Syrian biological and chemical weapons program adds to a series of differences of opinion that has left the Syrians and Americans in a deadlock.

Syria's relationship with Iran, arming of Hezbollah and hosting of Hamas and other terror groups greatly troubles the Obama administration.

As a result, Mr. Obama announced a change in his Syria policy after his two envoys returned to Washington on Sunday.

The envoys went to Syria with the new intelligence showing the site that formerly housed the nuclear reactor had been restored and had become a structure housing an expanded chemical and biological weapons program.

Syria, however, denied the existence of the new program at the facility despite being shown the satellite footage, which was the straw that broke the camel's back.

After Mr. Obama consulted with his advisers, he reached the conclusion that Syria had not done anything to justify removing the sanctions.

"The concerns we had about Syria's actions have not changed, so renewing the sanctions was the right thing to do," a senior White House source told the Voice of Israel Radio.

[Sourcebook notes: As of the date of this sourcebook, the CBS News report mentioned above has not been located. A visit by "two envoys", Jeffrey Feltman and Daniel Shapiro, took place Wednesday, 2009-05-06 through Thursday, 2009-05-07, the same day President Obama signed the sanctions extension order.]

UNCLASSIFIED

**Unclassified Report to Congress
on the Acquisition of Technology
Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction
and Advanced Conventional Munitions,
Covering 1 January to 31 December 2008**

[EXCERPTS]

The Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis hereby submits this report in response to a congressionally directed action in Section 721 of the FY 1997 Intelligence Authorization Act,

CIA's Weapons Intelligence, Nonproliferation, and Arms Control Center (WINPAC) drafted this report. The National Intelligence Council reviewed and coordinated it within the Intelligence Community (IC).

Syria

Nuclear

Syria—despite being a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Party with full-scope IAEA safeguards—was engaged for more than a decade in a covert nuclear program with North Korean assistance. The program involved construction of a nuclear reactor at Al Kibar without informing the IAEA and while taking measures to preserve the site's secrecy. We assess the reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. The reactor was destroyed in September 2007, before it became operational, and Syria went to great lengths to try to eradicate evidence of its existence. The covert nature of the program, the characteristics of the reactor, and Syria's extreme efforts to deny and destroy evidence of the reactor after its destruction are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear applications.

IAEA inspectors visited Syria between 22 and 24 June 2008 and took environmental samples at the Al Kibar site. The IAEA reported to the November 2008 Board of Governors that analysis of the Al Kibar environmental samples revealed a significant number of chemically processed natural uranium particles. The report also noted the Agency's assessment that the features of the Al Kibar building were similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site, but stated that the IAEA could not exclude the possibility that the building was intended for non-nuclear use. The IAEA is continuing its investigation of Syria's nuclear file.

North Korea

North Korea's relationships with Iran and Syria remain strong. North Korea provided assistance to Syria's covert nuclear effort starting in the late 1990s and retains the potential for exporting nuclear materials or technology.

SPIEGEL INTERVIEW WITH MOHAMED ELBARADEI

'It Was Others Who Failed'

05/18/2009 06:37 PM

Mohamed ElBaradei, 66, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), discusses the record of his term in office, his bitter struggle with the Bush administration and the dangers that new nuclear powers pose.

[EXCERPT]

[deletia]

SPIEGEL: The Israelis accuse you of partisanship because you have sharply criticized the government in Jerusalem for the bombing attack on a Syrian military facility in September 2007.

ElBaradei: What the Israelis did was a violation of international law. If the Israelis and the Americans had information about an illegal nuclear facility, they should have notified us immediately. The fact is that I only learned about it long after the strike was completed. And when everything was over, we were supposed to head out and search for evidence in the rubble -- a virtually impossible task.

SPIEGEL: But your inspectors did travel to Syria, and they did find suspicious evidence.

ElBaradei: Yes, traces of uranium. Where they came from is unclear. There are still questions. Syria is not giving us the transparency we require.

SPIEGEL: Isn't it an eternal cat-and-mouse game, like the one we are seeing once again in North Korea, which expelled your inspectors in April?

ElBaradei: North Korea is obsessed by the fear that the Americans want to topple their regime militarily. As far back as 1992, the foreign minister in Pyongyang gave me a two-hour lecture on how much the Americans had it in for North Korea. Their obsession was only reinforced when George W. Bush placed North Korea on his "Axis of Evil" in 2002. Pyongyang decided then to embark on the road to the bomb.

[deletia]

U.S. Tries to Line Up U.N. Rebuke

By JAY SOLOMON, PETER SPIEGEL and JOE LAURIA

MAY 27, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration Tuesday sought to gain Russian and Chinese support for a strong United Nations rebuke of North Korea and potential new economic sanctions over its Monday test of a nuclear device.

U.N. diplomats said measures could include new asset freezes on North Korean companies believed to be involved in the country's nuclear program. Renewed efforts to inspect cargo going into North Korea could also form part of a U.N. resolution.

[deletia]

A widening sanctions regime, U.S. officials said, would also likely target North Korean firms directly involved in Pyongyang's nuclear program, including Nomchongang Trading Co. **U.S. officials believe Nomchongang cooperated with Syria in starting construction on a nuclear reactor that Israel destroyed in a 2007 bombing raid.** U.S. officials also said there were indications that Nomchongang had sought to sell nuclear technologies to Myanmar.

[deletia]

Tests Point to Spread of Weapons Trade

By JAY SOLOMON

MAY 29, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON -- Signs of growth in North Korea's nuclear program and the country's increasing isolation are renewing fears about Pyongyang's ability and need to smuggle weapons of mass destruction around the world, said U.S. and United Nations officials.

North Korea's arms trade has focused on Iran and Syria, countries Washington views as state sponsors of terrorism, as well as Libya. Officials say North Korean arms have also been sold to nations allied with the U.S., such as Egypt and Pakistan, and to the military regime in Myanmar.

[deletia]

U.S. and Asian counterproliferation officials say Pyongyang has developed sophisticated smuggling networks in the Middle East and Asia in recent years. North Korea has worked with Asian criminal gangs to move narcotics and counterfeit currency globally, it ships contraband using Cypriot and Cambodian flagged carriers, and falsifies export documents, the officials say.

In August, the U.S. worked with India to block a North Korean Air Koryo jet from flying to Iran from Myanmar on the belief it was carrying missile components; the intercepted jet flew back to Pyongyang. A diplomat at Myanmar's U.N. mission declined to comment Wednesday. Iran has in the past declined to discuss any allegations of arms deals with North Korea. The U.S. also blocked a Syrian cargo plane from landing in Pyongyang in 2007, due to similar concerns.

[deletia]

In 2007, Israeli jets bombed a Syrian industrial facility on the Euphrates River that U.S. intelligence officials subsequently described as a nascent nuclear reactor being built by North Koreans. The U.N.'s atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, has reported that soil samples taken at the site showed large traces of processed uranium. Syria denied it is developing a nuclear program.

A North Korean state-owned company, Nomchongang Trading Co., was the principal facilitator for the Syrian project, according to former U.S. officials. The company's chief, Yun Ho Jin, worked during the 1990s as a senior diplomat at North Korea's mission at the IAEA, where he developed an understanding of the global procurement system, according to U.S. and U.N. officials. Mr. Yun and Nomchongang couldn't be reached to comment.

Nomchongang had offices in Syria, according to the former U.S. officials. "Nomchongang was the operating interest in the Syrian sale," said Dennis Wilder, who served as President George W. Bush's top Asia adviser until January. "It was the arm of the North Korean government dealing with nuclear issues."

U.S. and Asian officials said Nomchongang was also detected selling equipment to Myanmar that could be used for a nuclear program. Exchanges between senior North Korean and Myanmar military officers have increased, these officials say. Myanmar may be seeking to replicate North Korea's weapons development as a deterrent to Western pressure, the officials say.

—Peter Spiegel contributed to this article.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

Israeli Reaction To North Korea: 'We Told You So'

By David Bedein, Middle East Correspondent

Monday, June 01, 2009

[EXCERPT]

Jerusalem — From Israel's perspective, North Korea's nuclear test, conducted Monday, was almost old news. Although the world was shocked when the news broke, Israeli security and Foreign Ministry officials could have said: "We told you so."

Sources in the Israeli security establishment say they have been reporting on the connections between North Korea and Iran since the mid-1990s, when they started warning that North Korean technology was behind Iran's Shahab missile. North Korean military, missile and nuclear experts have roamed the planet, mainly in the Middle East, seeking to sell their technologies to the highest bidder.

"And two years ago we reported — and backed it up with documentation — that North Korea was building Syria a nuclear reactor, and after we told them, we also attacked and destroyed it, to make sure that the threat was removed," the sources said.

From Israel's perspective, this is an existential issue: If the Americans blink, that will be sensed very clearly, and it will tell North Korea that it can continue to go about its nuclear weapons business. The North Korean developments likely will lead to Syria gaining improved missile technology and Iran accelerating its nuclear program.

Another senior Israeli official angrily chastised the United States for its lack of action after it learned North Korea was helping Syria build a nuclear reactor.

"What did the Americans do with all that? Not much," the official said. "The Syrian reactor ought to have taught them that North Korea had lied throughout the entire affair, but Washington nevertheless preferred to persevere with its critical dialogue.

"The result of that is that the missiles were fired, the tests continued. Yesterday was a resounding slap on the cheek, which ostensibly is supposed to indicate to all of us that the time has come for the administration either to sober up, or for us to despair of it."

[deletia]

David Bedein can be reached at bedein@thebulletin.us



Board of Governors

GOV/2009/36

Date: 5 June 2009

Restricted Distribution

Original: English

For official use only

Item 6(f) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2009/33)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. On 19 February 2009, the Director General reported to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (GOV/2009/9). The Board requested the Director General to keep it informed of developments, as appropriate. This report covers relevant developments since that date.

A. Chronology of Events

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria destroyed by Israel in September 2007 had been a nuclear reactor.

3. As indicated in the Director General's previous report, analysis of the environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site during the visit of Agency inspectors revealed a significant number of anthropogenic natural uranium particles (i.e. produced as a result of chemical processing) which indicated that the uranium was of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. Syria has stated that the origin of the uranium particles was the missiles used to destroy the building (GOV/2008/60, para. 8; GOV/2009/9, para. 2).

4. As part of its efforts to confirm Syria's assertions about the possible source of uranium particles found at Dair Alzour, the Agency, in a letter dated 13 March 2009, provided Syria with the results of additional analyses of the environmental samples. The Agency also reiterated its request that Syria provide further access to the Dair Alzour site (including the water treatment plant at the site), and any other locations where the debris from the building and equipment, and any salvaged equipment removed from Dair Alzour, had been and/or was currently located, so that the Agency could take samples of, and environmental samples from, these items and materials. The Agency also reiterated its earlier request that Syria share the results of any assessments that it may have performed regarding the materials used during, or resulting from, the bombing.

5. In a letter dated 21 April 2009, the Agency provided comments to Syria on the statements made by Syria in its letter of 15 February 2009 regarding alleged efforts by Syrian entities to procure materials and equipment which could support the construction of a nuclear reactor. While expressing appreciation for Syria's efforts to answer some of the issues raised in earlier correspondence, the Agency informed Syria that its responses were only partial and did not address most of the questions.

The Agency requested further clarification and supporting documentation in relation to the functions of the destroyed and currently existing installations at the Dair Alzour site, as well as the other locations alleged to be related to Dair Alzour, and in relation to procurement activities. The Agency reiterated its 13 March 2009 request for information related to Syria's assertion about the origin of the uranium particles found at Dair Alzour.

6. In a letter dated 18 May 2009, the Agency informed Syria that anthropogenic natural uranium particles had been found in environmental samples taken in 2008 from the hot cells of the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) facility in Damascus. In a letter dated 1 June 2009, Syria responded to the Agency's request for an explanation concerning the presence and origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the MNSR. In a letter to Syria dated 5 June 2009, the Agency followed up on Syria's explanation.

7. In a letter to Israel dated 20 May 2009, following up on Israel's letter of 24 December 2008, the Agency requested that Israel provide specific information concerning its statements about whether the munitions used in the destruction of the building at Dair Alzour could have been the source of the uranium particles found on the site.

8. In letters to the Agency, one dated 12 May 2009 and one dated 17 April 2009, received on 19 and 20 May 2009, respectively, Syria, inter alia, questioned the correctness of certain statements contained in reports, technical briefings and communications of the Agency.

9. In a letter dated 24 May 2009, Syria responded to the Agency's letter of 21 April 2009. Syria, inter alia, reiterated its earlier statements concerning the nature of the Dair Alzour installations, the water pumping infrastructure and procurement activities, and its statements regarding cooperation with entities from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The letter did not include any of the supporting documentation requested by the Agency.

10. In a letter dated 4 June 2009, the Agency responded to the concerns expressed by Syria in the three letters received by the Agency in May 2009. The Agency also reaffirmed the correctness of its statements and communications and provided comments on the points raised by Syria. The Agency reiterated its request that Syria provide, as a matter of transparency, information and supporting documentation about the past use and nature of the building at the Dair Alzour site, and information about the procurement activities, as well as access to other locations alleged to be related to Dair Alzour.

B. Agency Verification

11. The Agency has continued to investigate the allegations concerning the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site. The information provided by Syria to date does not enable the Agency to determine the nature of the facility.

12. Since May 2008, the Agency has requested to have substantive discussions with Syria on this matter and has offered to share all of its satellite imagery, and imagery provided by other Member States. Syria has thus far declined to accept this offer.

13. As indicated in the Director General's last report (GOV/2009/9, para. 7), the Agency has assessed that there is a low probability that the uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour site were introduced by use of the

missiles used to destroy the building on that site. Since that report, no progress has been made in substantiating Syria's explanation. The Agency is continuing with its assessment of the origin of the uranium.

14. In a letter dated 15 February 2009 responding to the Agency's letter of 3 July 2008, Syria provided information regarding the procurement of certain equipment and materials, specifically the water pumping equipment observed at the Dair Alzour site, a large quantity of graphite and large quantities of barium sulphate (GOV/2009/9, para. 4). Syria indicated that the procurement efforts were civilian and non-nuclear in nature and related, respectively, to civil water purification, the domestic Syrian steel industry and shielding material for radiation therapy centres. Syria provided further clarifications in its letter dated 24 May 2009. Based on the information currently available to the Agency, it is not in a position to confirm these explanations and, in its letter of 4 June 2009, requested further clarification from Syria.

15. In its letters dated 3 July 2008 and 21 April 2009, the Agency had requested information and clarification regarding allegations of activities of an import/export company from the DPRK with an office in Syria, and regarding cooperation between nuclear scientists from Syria and the DPRK. Syria provided explanations in its letters of 15 February 2009 and 24 May 2009 and denied the allegations. The Agency is assessing Syria's response.

16. The Agency has reiterated its request for information concerning three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site (GOV/2008/60, para. 7). Syria has not yet responded to the Agency's requests for access to these sites as a transparency measure.

17. In May 2009, the Agency received the results of the analysis of routine environmental samples taken in August 2008 at the MNSR in Damascus. The results showed the presence of particles of anthropogenic natural uranium, of a type not declared at the facility, inside the hot cells and from associated equipment. On 1 June 2009, Syria provided a response to the Agency's request for an explanation concerning the presence and origin of these particles. In its response, Syria provided information about the use of the hot cells and the presence of natural uranium, but did not address the presence and origin of the anthropogenic uranium. In its letter of 5 June 2009, the Agency wrote to Syria following up on its response. The existence of a possible connection between these particles and those found at the Dair Alzour site requires further analysis by the Agency.

C. Summary

18. The presence of the uranium particles at the Dair Alzour site, the imagery of the site available to the Agency and certain procurement activities remain to be clarified. The information provided by Syria to date does not adequately support its assertions about the nature of the site. In order for the Agency to complete its assessment, Syria needs to be more cooperative and transparent.

19. The anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the MNSR facility are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. The presence and origin of such particles, as well as those found at the Dair Alzour site, needs to be understood by the Agency.

20. The Director General urges Syria to provide at an early date additional information and supporting documentation, access to other locations alleged to be related to the Dair Alzour site and access to relevant locations for the sampling of destroyed and salvaged equipment and debris. As has previously been indicated to Syria, the Agency expresses its readiness to work out with Syria modalities for managed access that would enable Syria to protect sensitive and confidential information that is not relevant to the Agency's mandate, while enabling the Agency to perform its verification mission. It is clearly in Syria's interest to render to the Agency the necessary cooperation and transparency if it wishes the Agency to be able to corroborate its assertion about the nature of the Dair Alzour site. The Director General equally calls on Israel to cooperate with the Agency in its investigation. The Director General also calls on other States that may possess relevant information to make such information available to the Agency and to agree to the Agency's sharing of such information with Syria.

These measures would assist the Agency in establishing the facts and making progress in its verification mandate.

21. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

No progress on Iran, Syria nuclear dossiers: top UN official

By Simon Morgan

2 days ago [Accessed 2009-06-08T14:55Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (AFP) — The UN atomic watchdog has not made any progress in its probe into the alleged illicit nuclear activities in Iran and Syria, a senior official close to the agency said Friday.

"On Iran, there has been very little progress," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "And for Syria, it's the same thing."

[deletia]

In a separate report on Syria, the IAEA said its inspectors found uranium particles at a research reactor near Damascus that would not normally be expected there and had asked Syria to explain how they got there.

Inspectors had found "anthropogenic natural uranium particles in environmental samples taken in 2008 from the hot cells of the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) facility in Damascus," the report said.

It was not the type of uranium that would normally be expected to be found at this kind of reactor, a senior official close to the IAEA said on condition of anonymity.

The IAEA has been investigating allegations of illicit nuclear work by Syria since last year.

The United States alleges that a remote desert site -- known alternatively as Dair Alzour or Al-Kibar -- was an undeclared nuclear reactor until it was bombed by Israeli planes in September 2007.

The IAEA has said that the building bore some of the characteristics of a nuclear facility and UN inspectors had also detected "significant" traces of man-made uranium at that site, too, as yet unexplained by Damascus.

But it was too early to say whether the uranium particles at Dair Alzour were connected in any way to those found at the research reactor, the official said.

Syria has claimed the uranium at Dair Alzour came from the Israeli bombs, but the watchdog has more or less ruled out that interpretation.



Israel's reaction to IAEA reports about Iran and Syria

7 Jun 2009

Israel calls for firmer measures by the IAEA and the international community

(Communicated by the MFA Spokesperson)

Over the weekend, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published the Agency's latest reports on its investigations in Iran and Syria.

The report on Iran again contains serious findings of increased uranium enrichment in Iran, in violation of Security Council resolutions, as well as other activities that could be connected to a military nuclear program. The report also emphasizes the IAEA's inability to carry out full and effective monitoring in Iran due to that country's continued lack of cooperation. These findings demonstrate that the international community, no more than Israel, cannot place its trust in IAEA monitoring in Iran. Accordingly, what is needed from the international community is immediate and determined action to ensure that Iran will not be able to produce nuclear weapons. The weakness currently displayed by the international community allows a country like North Korea to pursue a policy of defiance, and Iran is an attentive student of this policy.

Regarding Syria, the report details many suspicious findings as well as Syria's unresponsiveness to the Agency's demand to visit the various sites and to provide answers to disturbing issues. This situation reinforces suspicions that Syria is trying to blur evidence of secret nuclear activity that took place at Dir a-Zur in eastern Syria. The Agency should condemn Syria for hiding the facts pertaining to this activity.

The IAEA Director General has so far refrained from using all the means at his disposal to investigate Syria. Israel calls upon him to conduct an investigation free from political considerations and bias, and also to demand that North Korea, which is mentioned in the report, cooperate in the investigation.

IAEA: Der Standard Interview with Mohamed ElBaradei

with Gudrun Harrer

[EXCERPTS]

Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency since 1997, will leave his job in autumn. In an interview with Gudrun Harrer, the Egyptian lawyer speaks about the challenges for the Agency and the hopes for change in the Middle East inspired by US President Barack Obama.

[deletia]

STANDARD: Obama has announced that the US will contribute more to the IAEA budget. What can he do to strengthen the Agency's role as the institution responsible for non-proliferation and safeguards? It sometimes seems under threat, there is a lack of trust. For example, Israel took the issue of a suspected Syrian reactor in its own hands and bombed it.

ELBARADEI: As I said, there has been a lot of cynicism. Part of that is the erosion of international law. When Israel bombed the Syrian facility - whatever it was - very few people spoke against it or expressed their concern about a clear violation of international law. I was one of them, Switzerland was another. But not a single EU country spoke against it. I told them: "You cannot apply international law selectively. If you want to have credibility, if you want to talk about Iran, about North Korea, rules of international law and non-proliferation, you cannot pick and choose. You have to have the same standard applied to every situation whether it is your foe or your friend". That is part of the kind of erosion of our system of governance at a global level, which was always supported at least to a certain extent by certain rules of international law, and that also is eroding. If you see anyone referring to international law it is becoming like a luxury. Now all the talk is about the immediate interest.

STANDARD: However, your report on Syria from last week confirmed that there are open questions which Syria has to clarify. For some this would support Israel's decision.

ELBARADEI: If there was really a concern for proliferation, Israel and the Americans at that time - they had the information for one year and they kept the information for 6 months after they bombed. We only got it 6 months after the bombing. If they really were concerned they should have come to us. We would have established in a clear-cut manner whether this was a reactor or not a reactor by going there. Right now we are assigned an impossible task: to try to verify what was there. This is not the way. If you have an institution, make use of it. They have not made use of it. They are sitting outside the regime altogether but they are trying to make full use of it. And they don't understand that by having the nuclear programme... they think it does not threaten... well if you go to any part of the Arab or the Moslem world they look at it in a different light. They see it is a programme that is threatening them.

**Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei,
15 June 2009**

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

The Agency has continued to investigate allegations concerning the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site in Syria. Regrettably, the limited information and access provided by Syria to date have not enabled the Agency to determine the nature of the destroyed facility, nor made it possible for us to corroborate Syria's assertions in that regard. In addition to the particles of anthropogenic natural uranium (i.e. produced as a result of chemical processing) found in environmental samples taken from the Dair Alzour site, anthropogenic natural uranium particles were also found in samples taken in 2008 from the hot cells of the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor facility in Damascus. The Agency needs to understand the presence and origin of the uranium particles found at both sites, which are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material.

I again urge Syria to be fully cooperative and transparent, to provide the additional information and documentation requested by the Agency and to grant access to other locations, including those relevant for the sampling of destroyed and salvaged equipment and debris from the Dair Alzour site. In the absence of an additional protocol with Syria, the Agency's right of routine access to information and locations is circumscribed. However, I believe it would be clearly in Syria's interests, if it wishes the Agency to corroborate its assertions, to provide the full transparency required to enable us to clarify all allegations and come to an early conclusion. We are ready to discuss with Syria any modalities for access to relevant sites that would ensure that confidential information is protected while enabling the Agency to perform its verification work.

I also call upon Israel to share with the Agency all the information which led it to use force against the Syrian facility without giving the Agency the opportunity to verify the nature of the facility before it was destroyed. I make a similar request to all other States which may have relevant information that could help the Agency to complete its assessment.

U.S. to Confront, Not Board, North Korean Ships

By DAVID E. SANGER

Published: June 16, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration will order the Navy to hail and request permission to inspect North Korean ships at sea suspected of carrying arms or nuclear technology, but will not board them by force, senior administration officials said Monday.

[deletia]

American officials believe that previous North Korean shipments of nuclear technology and missiles have gone undetected. The North Koreans were deeply involved in the construction of a reactor in Syria until September 2007, when the reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air raid. But no ships or aircraft carrying parts for that reactor were ever found.

Will Offshore Searches Slow North Korean Nukes?

By Mark Thompson / Washington

Wednesday, Jun. 17, 2009

[EXCERPT]

But Pentagon officials also acknowledge their track record on monitoring North Korea shipping leaves something to be desired. Pyongyang played a major role in the development of a nuclear reactor that Syria was building until the Israeli air force bombed it into rubble in 2007. U.S. intelligence never has been able to identify what North Korean ships, if any, were involved in its construction. Which raises a troubling notion: North Korea's nuclear know-how may be able to elude even the tightest naval noose.



Statements of the Director General

17 June 2009 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

Intervention on Non-Proliferation Issues at IAEA Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei

[EXCERPT]

Here I would like to talk about Syria. If Syria wants to prove that the allegations are not accurate, the best thing it can do is to be fully transparent. We are ready to work with any modality to protect Syria's confidential military and non-military information, as we are ready to do with every country. But it is in every country's interest, if it is clean, to work with us through transparency measures, if needed. I deplored Israel for not giving us a chance to verify this facility before it was destroyed. Not many of you did. I did, and I continue to do so because we lost a very important opportunity. However, Syria also has an obligation now to allow us to verify that this was not a reactor. This is our obligation. I hope that Syria will not continue to stick to strict legalities because that means the issues will remain on our agenda.

Israel accuses IAEA chief of bias on Syria

By GEORGE JAHN

3 hours ago [Accessed 2009-06-18T14:33Z]

VIENNA (AP) — Israel bluntly accused the head of the U.N. atomic agency of political bias Thursday in his probe of Syria's nuclear program, in an unusual direct attack on the agency chief.

The comments by Israel Michael, Israel's chief delegate to the International Atomic Energy Agency, briefly lifted the diplomatic curtain shrouding the agency and revealed the tensions surrounding Middle East issues that often pit Israel — and the U.S., its chief Western backer — against Islamic IAEA member nations.

While diplomats from nations allied with Israel occasionally suggest there is IAEA bias in favor of Iran and Syria — the two Mideast nations being probed by the agency — they do so only on condition of anonymity, in keeping with diplomatic convention that dictates that U.N agencies and its heads are above the political fray.

Syria became the subject of an IAEA probe after Israel jets destroyed what the U.S. says was a nearly finished nuclear reactor built with North Korean help that was configured to produce plutonium — one of the substances used in nuclear warheads.

Syria denies hiding nuclear activities but has blocked the IAEA's probe into the allegations, refusing to allow U.N. nuclear inspectors follow-up visits beyond one last year and declining to provide satisfactory explanations for unusual finds of traces of uranium.

Damascus alleges that Israel used bombs or missiles containing depleted uranium — which hardens metal and allows it to penetrate deeper — in attacking the site. That, says Syria, accounts for one instance of the uranium traces.

But IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei has said that is unlikely, and Israel has repeatedly told the IAEA it did not use such ordnance — something Michaeli repeated in his comments Thursday to the IAEA's 35-nation board.

"Israel has responded ... in good faith" to the allegations, he said, in comments to the closed meeting made available to The Associated Press. "Therefore, the repeated call by the director general on Israel to cooperate with this investigation is redundant.

"Had the director general wished for further information from Israel, he would have not refused to meet with Israeli officials and refrained from publicly lashing (out) at Israel.

"Israel calls on the director general to avoid political bias in dealing with the Syrian file."

ElBaradei has repeatedly criticized the Israeli attack, saying it complicated the chances of success of his agency's probe.

Diplomats first told the AP that ElBaradei was boycotting requests for meetings with Israel officials earlier this year. The agency back then refused to comment.

IAEA chief, Israel lock horns over Syria

18/06/2009 11:12 VIENNA, June 18

(AFP)

UN watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei sparred with an Israeli envoy Thursday after being accused of bias in the handling of an investigation into Syria's nuclear activities, diplomats said.

The United States meanwhile accused Syria of obstructing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) probe into allegations that it was building a secret nuclear reactor at a site that was bombed by Israeli jets in September 2007.

Israeli ambassador Israel Michaeli accused ElBaradei during a debate on Syria at a meeting of the IAEA's 35-member board.

Michaeli urged ElBaradei, an Egyptian, "to avoid political bias in dealing with Syria's nuclear file."

ElBaradei has frequently hit out at Israel for not informing the IAEA of its concerns about the suspect site in Syria before bombing it.

"Israel has responded timely and in good faith to the question addressed to it regarding the possible origin on the uranium particles, traced in the site of the nuclear reactor in Dair Alzour," Michaeli said in remarks, a copy of which was obtained by AFP.

Traces of uranium were found at the site -- known alternatively as Dair Alzour or Al-Kibar -- which Damascus claims came from the Israeli bombs that razed the building.

"Therefore the repeated calls by the director general on Israel to cooperate with this investigation is redundant," the envoy added, accusing ElBaradei of "publicly bashing at Israel."

The IAEA chief was angered by Michaeli's remarks, according to the diplomat and retorted that Israel's position was "totally distorted".

"We're not behaving selectively but across the board. We're implementing the international law. When Israel bombed what was claimed to be a nuclear facility, it was not only hampering our work, but it was a clear violation of international law," ElBaradei said.

"You, sir, your action is deplored (sic) by not allowing us to do what we're supposed to do under international law," the IAEA chief said.

"You're not even a member of the regime to tell us what to do," ElBaradei said, referring to Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

"We would appreciate it if you stopped preaching to us."

Syria was the main focus of debate on the fourth day of the IAEA meeting.

The United States accused Syria of obstructing the IAEA's probe.

"Over one year has passed since the IAEA began investigating Syria's clandestine nuclear activities related to the destroyed reactor at Dair Alzour," said US deputy chief of mission, Geoffrey Pyatt.

"Regrettably, Syria has not used this time to resolve the lingering questions about the reactor and the associated facilities... Instead, the agency's list of questions is growing," Pyatt said.

Syria had "chosen to hinder the agency's efforts, he said.

Damascus denies the allegations and claims the site was a disused military facility.

It has only allowed IAEA inspectors to visit the site once, and has since turned down requests for follow-up inspections and access to other sites.

The IAEA has said the building bore some characteristics of a nuclear facility and that UN inspectors had detected "significant" traces of man-made uranium at that site, as yet unexplained by Damascus.

In its latest report, the IAEA revealed that inspectors had now found uranium particles at a second site -- a research reactor near Damascus -- that would not normally be expected there.

It was too early to say whether the uranium particles at the two sites were in any connected, according to the IAEA.

The agency has more or less ruled out Syria's claim that the uranium at Dair Alzour came from the Israeli bombs.

"We must understand why the material -- material that was not previously declared to the IAEA -- was detected at two facilities in Syria, one of which was being constructed clandestinely." US diplomat Pyatt said.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/epa/article/ALeqM5h71kxz1ywn_tcu5gzk_rJ-vE9CnA

Siria recibe las críticas de UE y EEUU por su falta de cooperación con el OIEA

Por Agencia EFE

18/06/2009

Viena, 18 jun (EFE).- Siria recibió hoy en el seno de la Junta de Gobernadores del Organismo Internacional de Energía Atómica (OIEA) duras críticas de la Unión Europea (UE) y de Estados Unidos por su falta de cooperación en la investigación de sus presuntas actividades nucleares.

La UE expresó su "profunda preocupación" de que la información entregada hasta ahora por Damasco al OIEA no ha esclarecido el origen de la instalación de Al Kibar, bombardeada por Israel en septiembre de 2007.

Estados Unidos asegura que Siria estaba construyendo en ese lugar un reactor nuclear con asistencia de técnicos norcoreanos.

Los inspectores del OIEA visitaron Al Kibar en junio del año pasado y encontraron huellas de uranio producido artificialmente y no declarado previamente por el país árabe.

El OIEA considera que es "poco probable" que ese material proceda de las bombas usadas por la aviación israelí, como asegura Siria.

Además, la UE destacó ante la Junta que los inspectores del organismo detectaron en una visita de rutina a un laboratorio en Damasco otras huellas de uranio, similares a las de Al Kibar, aunque no se sabe si estos dos hallazgos están relacionados.

Por eso, la UE sigue "seriamente preocupada sobre la posibilidad de que Siria no haya declarado todas sus instalaciones nucleares, de acuerdo a sus obligaciones bajo el acuerdo de salvaguardas (controles) con el OIEA".

Siria asegura que la instalación bombardeada por Israel era sólo un complejo militar convencional y se niega a otorgar acceso a los inspectores a otros lugares posiblemente relacionados.

La delegación de EEUU se unió a las críticas lanzadas por los europeos y manifestó que Siria "ha decidido entorpecer los esfuerzos del OIEA al negarse a permitir el acceso que el organismo considera necesario para seguir adelante con su verificación".

Asimismo, EEUU dijo que la "lista de preguntas del OIEA está creciendo", por lo que instó a Siria "a cooperar con el organismo plenamente y sin retraso".

Israel se expresó en contra la gestión del director general del OIEA, Mohamed El Baradei, al que acusó de no ser parcial en su investigación el caso sirio.

Ante el pleno de la Junta, el delegado israelí, Israel Michaeli, acusó al responsable máximo del OIEA de haberse negado hasta ahora a reunirse con funcionarios hebreos, lo que demostraría que no tiene interés en conseguir más información sobre Al Kibar

En su más reciente informe sobre Siria, El Baradei critica la falta de transparencia del país árabe al tiempo que insta a Israel y a Estados Unidos a ofrecer más información sobre porqué creen que en Al Kibar se estaba construyendo un reactor nuclear no declarado.

EIBaradei, Israel clash over Syria atom probe "bias"

By Mark Heinrich

Jun 18 2009 11:24AM EDT

VIENNA (Reuters) - Israel accused the U.N. nuclear watchdog chief on Thursday of political bias in his probe into allegations of a secret Syrian atomic site, and he shot back that Israel's position was "totally distorted."

The International Atomic Energy Agency has sought to clarify U.S. intelligence reports saying Syria almost completed a reactor of North Korean design that could have yielded plutonium for atom bombs, before Israel bombed it to pieces in 2007.

IAEA head Mohamed EIBaradei has rebuked Syria for withholding documentation and access needed for inspectors to draw conclusions. But he has also criticized Israel for not alerting the IAEA before destroying the site, which he said has made it almost impossible to establish the truth.

Those tensions boiled over into rare fireworks on the floor of an IAEA board of governors meeting when Israel's envoy accused EIBaradei of making "redundant" demands and showing bias by making repeated calls on Israel to produce more evidence.

He said Israel had answered the only relevant IAEA question put to it by stating that uranium traces found at the bombed site did not come from Israeli munitions that hit it.

"Therefore the repeated call by the director general on Israel to cooperate with this investigation is redundant," Ambassador Israel Michaeli told the 35-nation governing board.

"Had (EIBaradei) wished for further information from Israel, he would have not refused to meet with Israeli officials, and (would have) refrained from publicly lashing at Israel.

"Israel calls on (EIBaradei) to avoid political bias in dealing with the Syrian file," said Michaeli.

Moreover, he said, EIBaradei had not used all "measures in his capacity" to make Syria open up to the investigation.

He was alluding to "special inspections," a rarely used, coercive tool that IAEA officials have told Reuters would be premature and counterproductive in Syria's case.

"DISTORTED"

EIBaradei, departing from normal diplomatic reserve in public, called Michaeli's stance "totally distorted" and Israel's failure to elaborate on what it knew about Syria was "almost an insult to our investigative process."

Looking straight at Michaeli, EIBaradei told him Israel's air strike had prevented the IAEA from carrying out its mandate to verify suspicions of nuclear proliferation in member states.

"You, sir, mentioned that Syria should be deplored and condemned (by us). But Israel, with its action, is (to be) deplored by not allowing us to do what we are supposed to do under international law," he said.

"You say we refrain from using tools. Israel is not even a member of the (non-proliferation) regime to tell us what to do. We would appreciate you stop preaching to us how we can do our jobs. We are using all tools available to us."

Israel is one of only three countries outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty and is believed to have an undeclared nuclear arsenal, the only one in the Middle East.

"You (Israel) cannot sit on the fence, making use of the system without being accountable ... I will continue to ask your government ... what information led you to circumvent the IAEA process," ElBaradei said.

"To say I am biased -- I won't dignify that with a response."

The IAEA agrees the uranium traces' origin was not Israeli and not part of Syria's declared inventory. Neither, it says, were similar uranium particles found later at a Damascus research reactor known to the IAEA and inspected once a year.

Syrian envoy Ibrahim Othman dismissed the second find on Thursday, telling IAEA governors it was a vestige of innocuous neutron experiments by physics students. A senior U.N. official told Reuters that Syria's explanations remained unsatisfactory.

ElBaradei, an Egyptian, will retire later this year after 12 years in office during which critics in Israel and the United States suggested he was "soft" on alleged nuclear proliferators.

ElBaradei denied that and suggested Israel's atomic might has added to Middle East instability by spurring others, like Iran, Israel's arch-enemy, to seek nuclear weapons capability.

(Additional reporting by Sylvia Westall; Editing by Charles Dick)

Syria: Damascus vows to work with nuclear watchdog

[EXCERPT]

Vienna, 19 June [2009] (AKI) - A Syrian government representative on Friday [2009-06-19] reiterated that the site bombed by Israel in 2007 is not a nuclear facility and said Damascus would cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Al-Kiber military facility that was attacked by Israel back in 2007 is by no means used in nuclear activities," said Syria's representative at the IAEA, Ibrahim Othman during a media conference.

Othman, however, said that Israel should undergo an IAEA investigation to ensure the region was free of nuclear weapons.

Israel neither acknowledges nor denies having nuclear weapons. However it is believed that Israel's nuclear arsenal contains between 80 and 200 weapons.

According to Othman, the Syrian Research Centre's nuclear plant is not capable of enriching uranium as it only has a capability of 30 kilowatts.

In line with Syria's 2006 agreement with the IAEA, the plant was being supervised by the agency, Othman added.

He also said the plant is used for neutron activation and other research that are not related to nuclear energy.

Syria to cooperate with IAEA

19th Jun 2009, 05:07 am.

Damascus (UNN) Syrian will cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team scheduled to arrive in Syria soon, Syrian representative at IAEA Ibrahim Othman said on Friday.

"Al-Kiber military facility that was attacked by Israel back in 2007 is in no means used in nuclear activities," Othman said, commenting on IAEA Watchdog Chief Mohamed El-Baradei' remarks.

In a press statement, he said that Israel should undergo an IAEA investigation as well, to ensure that the region was nuclear-free.

Israel should have filed a complaint with the IAEA to see if Syria is actually enriching uranium instead of throwing accusations at Damascus, he said.

The nuclear power plant of the Syrian Research Center is not capable of enriching uranium as it is with a capability of 30 kilowatt, he said, adding that in line with Syria's 2006 agreement with the IAEA, the plant was being supervised by the agency.

The plant is used for neutron activation and other researches that are not related to nuclear energy./UNN

Ian Kelly
Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
June 24, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

QUESTION: Can you confirm that you decided to send an ambassador again in Syria and Venezuela?

MR. KELLY: I do have something for you on that. As you know, we're prepared to move forward with Syria to advance our interests through direct and continuing dialogue. Of course, you know that we continue to have concerns about Syria's role in this region. And we think one way to address those concerns is to have an ambassador in Damascus. So yesterday, we informed the Syrian charge d'affaires in Washington, and our charge d'affaires in Damascus informed the ministry of foreign affairs in Damascus of the Administration's decision to return an ambassador to Syria.

And this decision reflects the Administration's recognition of the important role Syria plays in the region. And of course, we hope that they will continue to play such a constructive role to promote peace and stability in the region.

You know, of course, that Acting Assistant Secretary Feltman and his NSC colleague Shapiro made several trips to Damascus, as did Senator Mitchell. And this is part of a natural evolution of our reengagement with Syria.

QUESTION: You said several trips. There were only two; correct?

MR. KELLY: Two, yeah. I meant two.

[deletia]

QUESTION: And is any thought being given to delisting Syria from the State Department's list of nations that sponsor terrorism?

MR. KELLY: No, not that I'm aware of.

[deletia]

QUESTION: If I can go back to Syria. Is the – did the situation in Iran help to take the decision to send somebody back to Damascus (inaudible)?

MR. KELLY: As I said before, I think this is just the natural culmination of an evolution of our reengagement with Syria.

QUESTION: There is no link whatsoever?

MR. KELLY: I'm not aware that there was any influence of the very dramatic situation going on in Iran.

[deletia]

QUESTION: On Syria, I just wanted to – Syria, just to finish up. If I'm not mistaken, you said that you hope that Syria will continue to play a constructive role?

MR. KELLY: Yeah.

QUESTION: Has it been playing a constructive role so far?

MR. KELLY: Well, without going into too much detail, I think you've seen some comments from people like General Odierno. I know that they have played a positive role in addressing some of our very real concerns about foreign fighters crossing from Syria. We've had some good discussions with them in those four different visits that we had to Damascus – the two visits, the Feltman/Shapiro delegation, the Mitchell visit, and then you had a CENTCOM visit as well. So yeah, I think that's a fair assessment.

QUESTION: Was there also a visit by another assistant secretary of state in connection with scouting locations for a new embassy in Damascus?

MR. KELLY: I'm not sure about that.

QUESTION: Could you take that as a question, please?

MR. KELLY: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: Didn't Eric Boswell travel there about – a couple of months ago to check out the security situation in --

MR. KELLY: Yeah. It's ringing bells, but let me get back to you. I mean, we're scouting locations for a lot of different embassies.



State Designation of North Korean Nuclear Entity

Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC

June 30, 2009

The U.S. Department of State today targeted North Korea's nuclear proliferation network by designating Namchongang Trading Corporation (NCG) under Executive Order 13382. E.O. 13382 is an authority aimed at freezing the assets of proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their supporters, and at isolating them from the U.S. financial and commercial systems. Entities designated under E.O. 13382 are prohibited from engaging in all transactions with any U.S. person and are subject to a U.S. asset freeze.

NCG is a North Korean nuclear-related company in Pyongyang. It has been involved in the purchase of aluminum tubes and other equipment specifically suitable for a uranium enrichment program since the late 1990s.

The Department of the Treasury also today designated Hong Kong Electronics, located in Kish Island, Iran, for providing support to North Korea's Tanchon Commercial Bank (Tanchon) and Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID). Tanchon and KOMID were designated by the United States under E.O. 13382 on June 28, 2005 and the UN Security Council under Resolution 1718 on April 24, 2009.

North Korea's April 5, 2009 launch of a Taepo Dong-2 (TD-2) missile and May 25, 2009 nuclear test demonstrate a need for continued vigilance with respect to North Korea's activities of proliferation concern. The designations add to continuing U.S. efforts to prevent North Korean entities of proliferation concern from accessing financial and commercial markets that could aid the regime's efforts to develop nuclear weapons and the missiles capable of delivering them.

For additional information on the Department of the Treasury's designation of Hong Kong Electronics, please see: www.treasury.gov/press.

PRN: 2009/664

[See sourcebook entry for 2008-05-11 for association of Namchongang Trading Corporation with Syrian nuclear work.]

<http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/gary-samore-address/>

On Thursday, 9th July 2009, Gary Samore, Special Assistant to the President and White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction, Proliferation, and Terrorism spoke on “The Obama Administration’s arms control and non-proliferation strategy”.

In February, Dr Gary Samore took up his duties to coordinate US government-wide efforts to combat weapons of mass destruction proliferation. As “Nonproliferation Czar,” Samore is a member of the National Security Council staff and his portfolio includes everything from nuclear and conventional arms control to threat reduction to nuclear terrorism.

<http://www.armscontrolverification.org/>

Gary Samore at IISS

Thursday, 9 July 2009

Gary Samore today visited the IISS where he gave a spirited and forceful talk on the Obama Administration's priorities over the coming year. I'll try to type up my notes in a way that doesn't completely distort everything he said.

A began by stating an underlying assumption that is today guiding White House policy on non-proliferation and disarmament. Namely that proper containment of states wanting to cheat on their obligations under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty cannot be attained unless the regime is strengthened. The belief of the Administration is also that once the regime is shored up, it will be easier to deter or contain future cheaters.

[deletia]

He also encouraged the IAEA to use more of the authority that they already have, by for instance pushing for special inspections in Syria.

[Sourcebook note and transcript: The remark concerning IAEA inspection of Syria comes at minute 30:40 – 31:00 in a video of the Q&A session following Dr. Samore's talk (<http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/gary-samore-address/watch-the-qa-session/>):

“The one other thing I would say on, you know, the IAEA, they already have a lot of inspection authority which sometimes isn't always used. In the case of Syria, for example, it seems to me there's a very strong grounds [sic] on which to seek a special inspection to investigate the extremely credible reports that Syria was pursuing a secret nuclear reactor project. And, you know, I hope that the IAEA decides to use the full extent of its authority.”]

U.N. Sanctions Key Players in North Korea Weapons Program

By JOE LAURIA and JAY SOLOMON

JULY 17, 2009

[EXCERPT]

A United Nations Security Council committee sanctioned five companies and five individuals from North Korea for taking part in nuclear and missile programs and the international spread of nuclear technology.

U.S. officials said the companies are key nodes in North Korea's weapons business and overall financial system.

The U.S. expressed confidence that Thursday's measures would help slow North Korea's progress in its nuclear-weapons and ballistic-missile programs as well as its proliferation efforts.

"We are pleased with the new international sanctions agreed upon today in response to North Korea's nuclear tests and recent missile activity," said Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. "These new designations ... will serve to constrain North Korea from engaging in transactions or activities that could fund its WMD [weapons of mass destruction] or proliferation activities."

The five companies named will have their assets frozen and will be blocked from doing any foreign business. The individuals named also will have their assets frozen and won't be allowed to enter nations that comply with the sanctions.

Officials said they hope that by blacklisting a few key North Korean firms, Pyongyang's ability to conduct financial transactions internationally could be severely restricted.

The U.S. had initially proposed 15 companies to be sanctioned, but after negotiations, primarily with China, the list was reduced to five. A U.S. official said Washington was satisfied with the reduced number. U.S. and U.K. officials said they had no evidence that China was a trading partner with any of the 10 companies it ruled out.

North Korea carried out its second nuclear-weapons test on May 25 and fired seven ballistic missiles over the Independence Day weekend. A Security Council resolution passed last month gave authority to countries to monitor and inspect suspect cargo ships. It also gave the Security Council committee the authority to name individuals and companies, as it did Thursday.

U.S. officials say one of the blacklisted companies, Namchongang Trading Corp., a subsidiary of North Korea's General Bureau of Atomic Energy, played a central role in Syria's alleged efforts to build a nuclear reactor along the Euphrates River. Syria denied it had a nuclear program. Israeli warplanes destroyed the site in late 2007.

"Namchongang's proliferation activities are of grave concern given the DPRK's past proliferation activities," the committee said, referring to North Korea by its formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The company's director, Yun Ho Jin, was among the individuals sanctioned. Mr. Yun served as a senior North Korean diplomat at the International Atomic Energy Agency during the 1990s, according to U.S. officials. It wasn't possible to reach him for comment.

[deletia]

Write to Joe Lauria at newseditor@wsj.com and Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com



Security Council

SC/9708

16 July 2009

SECURITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE DETERMINES ENTITIES, GOODS, INDIVIDUALS SUBJECT TO MEASURES

IMPOSED ON DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA BY RESOLUTIONS 1718 (2006)

On 16 July 2009, pursuant to paragraph 24 of resolution 1874 (2009), the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) designated entities; determined goods; and designated individuals to be subject to the measures imposed in paragraph 8 of resolution 1718 (2006) as follows:

A) **Entities** designated to be subject to the measures imposed in paragraph 8(d) of resolution 1718 (2006):

1. NAMCHONGANG TRADING CORPORATION

· **Description:** Namchongang is a Democratic People's Republic of Korea trading company subordinate to the General Bureau of Atomic Energy (GBAE). Namchongang has been involved in the procurement of Japanese-origin vacuum pumps that were identified at a Democratic People's Republic of Korea nuclear facility, as well as nuclear-related procurement associated with a German individual. It has further been involved in the purchase of aluminium tubes and other equipment specifically suitable for a uranium enrichment programme from the late 1990s. Its representative is a former diplomat who served as Democratic People's Republic of Korea's representative for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities in 2007. Namchongang's proliferation activities are of grave concern given the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's past proliferation activities.

· **Location:** Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

· **A.K.A.:** NCG; NAMCHONGANG TRADING; NAM CHON GANG CORPORATION; NOMCHONGANG TRADING CO.; NAM CHONG GAN TRADING CORPORATION

2. HONG KONG ELECTRONICS

· **Description:** owned or controlled by, or acts or purports to act for or on behalf of Tanchon Commercial Bank and KOMID. Hong Kong Electronics has transferred millions of dollars of proliferation-related funds on behalf of Tanchon Commercial Bank and KOMID (both designated by the Committee in April 2009) since 2007. Hong Kong Electronics has facilitated the movement of money from Iran to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on behalf of KOMID.

· **Location:** Sanaee St., Kish Island, Iran.

· **A.K.A.:** HONG KONG ELECTRONICS KISH CO.

3. KOREA HYOKSIN TRADING CORPORATION

- Description: a Democratic People's Republic of Korea company based in Pyongyang that is subordinate to Korea Ryonbong General Corporation (designated by the Committee in April 2009) and is involved in the development of weapons of mass destruction.
- Location: Rakwon-dong, Pothonggang District, Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea.
- A.K.A.: KOREA HYOKSIN EXPORT AND IMPORT CORPORATION

4. General Bureau of Atomic Energy (GBAE)

- Description: The GBAE is responsible for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme, which includes the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Centre and its 5 MWe (25 MWt) plutonium production research reactor, as well as its fuel fabrication and reprocessing facilities. The GBAE has held nuclear-related meetings and discussions with the International Atomic Energy Agency. GBAE is the primary Democratic People's Republic of Korea Government agency that oversees nuclear programmes, including the operation of the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Centre.
- Location: Haeudong, Pyongchen District, Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea.
- A.K.A.: General Department of Atomic Energy (GDAE)

5. Korean Tangun Trading Corporation

- Description: Korea Tangun Trading Corporation is subordinate to Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Second Academy of Natural Sciences and is primarily responsible for the procurement of commodities and technologies to support Democratic People's Republic of Korea's defence research and development programmes, including, but not limited to, weapons of mass destruction and delivery system programmes and procurement, including materials that are controlled or prohibited under relevant multilateral control regimes.
- Location: Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

B) **Goods** determined to be subject to the measures imposed in paragraph 8(a)(ii) of resolution 1718 (2006):

- 1) "Graphite designed or specified for use in Electrical Discharge Machining (EDM) machines"
- 2) "Para-aramid fiber (Kevlar and other Kevlar-like), filament and tape"

C) **Individuals** designated to be subject to the measures imposed in paragraphs 8 (d) and (e) of resolution 1718 (2006):

1. Yun Ho-jin: Director of Namchongang Trading Corporation; oversees the import of items needed for the uranium enrichment programme. (Additional information: born 13 October 1944; also known as Yun Ho-chin)

2. Ri Je-son: Director of the General Bureau of Atomic Energy (GBAE), chief agency directing Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme; facilitates several nuclear endeavours including GB AE's management of Yongbyon Nuclear Research Centre and Namchongang Trading Corporation. (Additional information: born 1938; also known as Ri Che-son)

3. Hwang Sok-hwa: Director in the General Bureau of Atomic Energy (GBAE); involved in Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear programme; as Chief of the Scientific Guidance Bureau in the GB AE, served on the Science Committee inside the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research.

4. Ri Hong-sop: Former director, Yongbyon Nuclear Research Centre, oversaw three core facilities that assist in the production of weapons-grade plutonium: the Fuel Fabrication Facility, the Nuclear Reactor, and the Reprocessing Plant. (Additional information: born 1940)

5. Han Yu-ro: Director of Korea Ryongaksan General Trading Corporation; involved in Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ballistic missile programme.

The lists of entities, goods and individuals are available on the Committee's website <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1718/index.shtml>.

US military team in Syria for security talks

by Staff Writers
Damascus (AFP)
Aug 12, 2009

A senior American military delegation arrived in Syria on Wednesday for talks on regional security, the second such visit in nearly two months, a US diplomatic source said.

Major General Michael Moeller of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) is heading the delegation which also includes Frederic Hof, the deputy to US Middle East special envoy George Mitchell who was in Damascus on July 26.

"The focus is on continuing dialogue concerning opportunities for cooperation on regional security matters," the US source said, without elaborating.

A US military delegation held talks with Syrian officials in Damascus in June -- the first visit of its kind since 2004 -- pro-government media and the American embassy said at the time.

Al-Watan newspaper said the June 13 visit came "at the request of the Americans" and focused on "ways to begin cooperation on security matters between the two parties in Iraq." However, the US embassy did not mention Iraq.

"Several similar requests in previous years were rejected by Syria because of the absence of the necessary political will for such cooperation," Al-Watan said.

Since coming to office in January, US President Barack Obama has moved cautiously to improve relations with Syria, mindful of its influential role in the region.

Mitchell has been on two trips to Damascus in recent weeks to meet President Bashar al-Assad, most recently on July 26 when their talks focused on efforts to relaunch the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Mitchell is the highest-ranking US official to visit Syria since Obama took office, and his trip was preceded by several delegations, including lawmakers.

US-Syrian relations were strained under the administration of former US president George W. Bush, amid charges by Washington that Syria was interfering in Lebanon and allowing fighters to infiltrate into Iraq.

On June 24 Washington announced its decision to send an ambassador back to Damascus to replace the envoy who was recalled in 2005 after the assassination in Beirut of Lebanon's former prime minister Rafiq Hariri.

The killing was widely blamed on Syria although Damascus has steadfastly denied any involvement.



Strengthening the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime: A Blueprint for Progress

Susan F. Burk

Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation

Geneva Center for Security Policy

Geneva, Switzerland

August 12, 2009

(As prepared remarks)

[EXCERPT]

Introduction

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you this evening on the subject of strengthening the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. This is an objective that the Obama Administration has embraced as one of its highest priorities, and we are engaged in an ambitious effort to address proliferation challenges and opportunities to strengthen the global regime. Being ambitious means the way ahead will be difficult, but there is little of value that comes easily, and we have opportunities now to make real progress if all states work together to take advantage of them.

Let me start with a review of the challenges we are facing today within the nonproliferation regime. Then, to address the way forward, I will use the three pillars of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, or NPT, as the structure for describing various measures the United States believes the international community has available to buttress the NPT and the broader regime.

Challenges

For years, membership in the NPT grew steadily, and with it a certain complacency about the strength of the Treaty, except – for some – regarding the pace of nuclear disarmament by the nuclear weapon state parties – the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China. In part, this was because to the best of anyone’s knowledge, the non-nuclear weapon states party to the NPT were meeting their obligations; there was nothing to talk about.

But this complacency was shattered with the 1991 discovery of Iraq’s clandestine nuclear activities during the first Gulf War, in violation of the NPT. This, coupled with the declaration by the IAEA in 1993 that they were unable to verify the exclusively peaceful use of nuclear material in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), leading it to announce its plans to withdraw from the Treaty, further signaled the need for States Parties to pay attention to issues of compliance.

More recent developments underline the gravity of the nonproliferation challenge today. We have witnessed growing commercial availability of sensitive nuclear technology, as demonstrated by the activities earlier this decade of the global criminal network led by A.Q. Khan; North Korea’s announced withdrawal from the NPT, even as it pursued a nuclear weapons program; the difficulties in bringing either North Korea or Iran into compliance with the NPT, even after their violations had been discovered and formally reported by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); and the limitations of international safeguards exposed, for example, by the construction of a covert nuclear reactor in Syria.

All of which leads to a final challenge which is the perception on the part of some that the NPT is approaching collapse and that further proliferation is inevitable; we must simply learn to live with it. This is a view that is wrong and must be refuted.

[deletia]



Public Discussion on

**"Strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime:
A Blueprint for Progress"**

Ambassador Susan F. Burk

Special Representative of the US President for Nuclear Nonproliferation

Chair

Ambassador Jürg Streuli

Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Conference on Disarmament and
Member of the Foundation Council of the GCSP

President Obama has been advocating for nuclear disarmament since his speech in Prague last April. He laid out an extensive arms control plan whereby the US would ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and promote an early negotiation of a verifiable Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). He and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, have also undertaken to look into further reductions of their nations' nuclear arsenals. Thus, the United States has placed a high priority on strengthening the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in cooperation with the other State Parties through a treaty review that is balanced between its three pillars. Ambassador Burk, as the Permanent Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation, has a leading role in preparing the May 2010 NPT Review Conference. This is her first visit to Geneva since assuming her new position and it will offer an interesting opportunity for an engaging discussion.

Wednesday 12 August 2009
18:30 - 20:00

A light cocktail will be served at 18:00 in the GCSP reception area

Registration Closed

Sergio Vieira de Mello Auditorium
Geneva Centre for Security Policy
2nd floor, WMO/OMM Building
Avenue de la Paix 7bis
(identity document required to enter the venue)



Board of Governors

GOV/2009/56
Date: 28 August 2009

Restricted Distribution
Original: English

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Item 6(e) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2009/58)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. On 5 June 2009, the Director General reported to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (GOV/2009/36). The Board requested the Director General to keep it informed of developments, as appropriate. This report covers relevant developments since that date.
2. As the Board will recall, on 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that, in May of that year, the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria destroyed by Israel in September 2007 had been a nuclear reactor. That information further alleged that the reactor was under construction but not operational at the time of its destruction, and that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).
3. The Agency visited the site on 23 June 2008, during which time, inter alia, environmental samples were taken. Analysis of the samples indicated the presence of particles of anthropogenic¹ natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. Syria has maintained that the building was destroyed by Israel and had been a military non-nuclear installation, and that Syria has not had nuclear cooperation with the DPRK (GOV/2009/36, para. 15). Syria has also stated that the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles was the munitions used to destroy the building. In this context, Israel has not responded to the Agency's 20 May 2009 request for specific information needed to confirm whether the munitions used in the destruction of the building could have been the source of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles (GOV/2009/36, para. 7).
4. The Agency has repeatedly requested to have substantive discussions with Syria on the nature of the destroyed building, and to share with Syria satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency. Syria has thus far declined to have such discussions. While the Agency has continued its verification activities, its ability to confirm Syria's explanation regarding the past nature of the destroyed building at the site (GOV/2008/60, para. 1) is severely impeded because Syria has not provided sufficient access to information, locations, equipment or materials.

¹ "Anthropogenic" refers to material that has been produced as a result of chemical processing.

5. As reported in the previous report to the Board of Governors, in a letter dated 4 June 2009, the Agency requested further clarification from Syria regarding the purpose of water pumping equipment seen at the Dair Alzour site, and the procurement of large quantities of graphite and barium sulphate, which Syria has stated were acquired for civilian and non-nuclear related uses (GOV/2009/36, para. 14). The Agency reiterated its request in a letter dated 23 July 2009. In a letter dated 13 August 2009, Syria responded to the Agency's letter of 4 June 2009, inter alia, reaffirming its earlier statements concerning the destroyed building and the Dair Alzour site infrastructure. Syria added that the October 2007 cancellation of the remaining supply of barium sulphate was unrelated to the destruction of the building at the Dair Alzour site. With the limited information provided by Syria, the Agency is not in a position to confirm Syria's statements regarding the purpose of the procurement of this equipment and material.

6. As indicated in the Director General's February 2009 report (GOV/2009/9, para. 7), the Agency has assessed that there is a low probability that the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in samples taken from the Dair Alzour site were introduced by use of the missiles used to destroy the building on that site as asserted by Syria. In its 4 June 2009 letter, and again in its 23 July 2009 letter, the Agency requested access to the locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment may have been and/or are located, for the purpose of taking samples and assessing the nature of the building (GOV/2009/36, para. 4).

7. In the letters dated 4 June 2009 and 23 July 2009, the Agency also reminded Syria of its earlier request for access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site, suggesting that modalities be agreed in advance with Syria for the protection of any sensitive information related to the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations.

8. In its letter dated 13 August 2009, Syria also stated that the destroyed building had been under construction at the time of the bombing and, hence, could not have been the source of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles collected in the environmental samples. Syria also added that due to the disposal of the debris from the site, it was impossible to meet the Agency's request for access to the debris as the Agency's request had been made more than a year after the destruction of the building by Israel.

9. In that same letter, Syria stated that it had provided all the information it had regarding the questions raised by the Agency concerning the Dair Alzour site and that it did not accept that the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in the environmental samples could be considered undeclared nuclear material. Syria also reiterated that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency. Syria emphasised its resolve to continue its cooperation with the Agency in accordance with its Safeguards Agreement and the Agency's Statute, provided that "this cooperation never infringes on the confidentiality of its defence capabilities, its sovereignty and its national security". The Agency is continuing its assessment of the information provided by Syria.

10. In relation to the presence of anthropogenic natural uranium particles at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in Damascus (GOV/2009/36, para. 17), Syria provided additional explanations about the possible origin of the particles in a letter dated 8 June 2009. In that letter, Syria stated its view that the natural uranium particles had resulted from the accumulation of sample and reference materials used in neutron activation analysis. In support of its statement, Syria provided a list of standard reference materials used in those activities and some information on a related shielded transport container.

11. On 8 July 2009, the Agency performed a physical inventory verification (PIV) at the MNSR during which environmental samples were taken, as well as samples from the materials which Syria stated were the source of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles. The Agency is awaiting the results of the analyses of the samples.

Summary

12. Syria has cooperated with the Agency in its verification activities at the MNSR. The Agency is currently analysing samples taken at the MNSR.

13. Syria has not yet provided the necessary cooperation to permit the Agency to determine the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in samples taken at the Dair Alzour site. Syria also did not cooperate with the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site and to determine what, if any, functional relationship existed between the Dair Alzour site and three other locations or to substantiate Syria's claims regarding certain procurement efforts and its alleged foreign nuclear cooperation.

14. Syria has asserted that, in accordance with its Safeguards Agreement, it is under no obligation to provide further information concerning the Dair Alzour site or the other locations because of their military nature not related to any nuclear activities. However, as the Agency has previously explained to Syria, there is no limitation in comprehensive Safeguards Agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The fact that the Agency has found particles of nuclear material of a type which is not in the declared inventory of Syria underscores the need to pursue this matter.

15. The Director General urges Syria to cooperate with the Agency in its verification activities so that, in accordance with its mandate under Syria's Safeguards Agreement, the Agency is able to ensure that safeguards are applied to all source and special fissionable material in all peaceful nuclear activities. Recognizing Syria's concerns about the sensitivity of certain information and locations, the Director General urges Syria to engage with the Agency to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to such information and locations to enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting Syria's sensitive military and other information at relevant locations. The Director General also calls on other States, including Israel, which may possess information relevant to the Agency's verification, including information which may have led them to conclude that the installation in question at the Dair Alzour site had been a nuclear reactor, to make such information available to the Agency.

16. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hdpMc2EqR9sCSwjZ0XmXsJs9T8WA>

Little progress in Syrian nuclear probe: UN official

(AFP)

19 hours ago [Retrieved 20090829T15:30Z]

[EXCERPT]

VIENNA, Austria — The UN atomic watchdog has been unable to make much progress in its investigation into alleged illicit nuclear activities in Syria, a senior UN official said Friday.

"There's not much progress, if anything," the official said in response to a new report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on its probe into allegations that Damascus had been building a covert nuclear reactor at a remote desert site until it was bombed by Israeli planes in September 2007.

[deletia]



Statements of the Director General

7 September 2009 | Vienna, Austria
IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

The Agency has continued to investigate allegations concerning the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site in Syria.

Syria has cooperated with the Agency in its verification activities at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor in Damascus. However, Syria has not yet provided the necessary cooperation to permit the Agency to determine the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in samples taken at the Dair Alzour site. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency to enable the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site, nor has it provided the required access to information, locations, equipment or materials.

I urge Syria to cooperate with the Agency in its verification activities related to the nature of the Dair Alzour site. It is in Syria's interest to enable the Agency to corroborate its statements. I also call on other States which may possess information relevant to the Agency's verification to make such information available to the Agency.

Israeli official doubts Syria's clout on Hezbollah

Tue Sep 8, 2009 4:37pm EDT

[EXCERPTS]

JERUSALEM, Sept 8 (Reuters) - Syria may not be able to curb Lebanon's Hezbollah guerrillas, a senior Israeli official said on Tuesday, casting doubt on the feasibility of a long-standing Israeli condition for a peace deal with Damascus.

Syria, which pursued indirect negotiations with Israel last year, rejected the demand that it distance itself from Hezbollah and Iran. Syria, for its part, wants an Israeli undertaking to return the occupied Golan Heights. Israel has balked at this.

Amos Gilad, a top adviser to Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak, told an international security conference at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Centre that Iran's influence over Shi'ite Hezbollah appeared to be far greater than that of neighbouring Syria.

[deletia]

The prospect of renewed cross-border rocket salvos by Hezbollah could impact on any plan by Israel to attack Iran pre-emptively. Iran, which denies seeking the bomb, has vowed widespread retaliation should its nuclear facilities be struck. Assumed to have the Middle East's only atomic arsenal, Israel bombed a Syrian site in 2007 which the CIA described as a secret nuclear reactor. Damascus denied having such a facility.

"There is no nuclear threat to Israel right now because Libya gave up its nuclear programme (in 2003)," Gilad said. Syria, we can say, also has given up its (nuclear) option, involuntarily. Iran does not have it yet."

(Writing by Dan Williams, Editing by Myra MacDonald)



Statement by EU Presidency to IAEA Board of Governors - Syria (09/09/2009)

Swedish Presidency of the EU

LOCATION Vienna

SPEAKER EU Presidency

EVENT IAEA Board of Governors

DATE 09/09/2009

The EU Presidency issued a statement on Syria during the IAEA Board of Governors meeting in Vienna.

Implementation of the NPT-safeguards agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Madam Chair,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. [The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,[1] the Countries of the Stabilization and Association process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia associate themselves with this statement].

2. The European Union thanks the Director General for his report on the Implementation of NPT-safeguards in Syria (document GOV/2009/56).

3. The EU notes that Syria has cooperated with the IAEA in its verification activities at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor in Damascus and awaits with interest the IAEA's assessment of the results of the samples taken there in July.

4. However, the EU remains concerned about the fact that Syria has still not provided the IAEA with all the additional information and supporting documentation about the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour site, nor allowed access to all the locations requested by the Agency. Syria has also failed to engage in substantive discussions with the IAEA concerning the structure of the destroyed building and certain apparently nuclear related procurement activities.

The EU shares the Director General's position that, in this situation, the declared military nature of the Dair Alzour site does not preclude further investigations by the Agency.

5. The EU agrees with the Agency about the necessity to establish the origin of the particles of nuclear material of a type which is not in Syria's declared inventory. In the absence of the necessary co-operation with the IAEA the completeness and correctness of Syria's declarations under its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement would clearly remain in doubt.

6. The EU therefore calls upon Syria to cooperate with the Agency to establish modalities which will allow IAEA access to relevant information and locations while protecting sensitive military information.

7. Safeguards Agreements should be implemented in full. It is the obligation of each state with a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement in force to declare all its nuclear installations and material and to report on any new nuclear facility to the Agency once the decision on its construction is taken.

8. The EU calls upon Syria to provide the IAEA with all the information and documentation requested by the Agency. The EU also calls upon Syria to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol as soon as possible as a means to strengthen the confidence of the international community about the peaceful nature of Syria's nuclear activities.

9. Finally, Madam Chair, the EU joins the Director General in calling upon other states, which may possess information relevant the verification of Syria's Safeguards Agreement, to provide the Agency with all such information.

Thank you, Madam Chair

[1] Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

Schulte: Syria may have more nuke sites

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Sep 10, 2009 15:25 | Updated Sep 11, 2009 7:54

[EXCERPT]

Syria may be operating more nuclear sites, apart from the reactor at Deir Azour which was bombed by Israel on September 6, 2007 in what came to be known as Operation Orchard, former US envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Gregory Schulte told Channel 10 Thursday evening *[2009-09-10]*.

"I think there were other activities that gave us concern, that gave the IAEA concern... IAEA inspectors actually asked to go to a number of other sites, and the Syrians wouldn't let them go there; they claimed they were military sites. They claimed the uranium particles that the inspectors found at the destroyed reactor came from Israeli bombs," Schulte said.

In the past, the Syrian accusation was brushed aside both by the IAEA and Israel, as the uranium used to strengthen the metal of shells is of a different type than the uranium used in producing nuclear energy.

Schulte went on to criticize the conduct of Mohammed ElBaradei, the Egyptian-born outgoing IAEA chief who has been accused by Israel many times of being biased.

"I tell you Mohammed ElBaradei was not happy ... he was mad at Israel, he was mad at the United States; he didn't express any discontent about Syria," he said.

Schulte added that ElBaradei issued a statement following Operation Orchard, "where he sort of deplored Israel's unilateral action, he deplored the late provision of intelligence which was a direct slap at the United States."

[deletia]

'Nuclear-free zone impossible in anti-Israel Mideast'

By Yossi Melman and Zvi Bar'el, Haaretz Correspondents and Haaretz Service

Last update - 20:27 15/09/2009

The chairman of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission on Tuesday told the international community that a nuclear-free Middle East requires a change in regional attitude toward Israel.

In an address to the International Atomic Energy Association in Vienna, Shaul Chorev emphasized Israel's stance that it was prepared in principle to commit to a Middle East free of nuclear weapons.

Chorev also reiterated that Israel has repeatedly asserted it would not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region.

"It is our vision and policy to establish the Middle East as a mutually verifiable zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery," Chorev told delegates.

While Israel firmly supports control of nuclear arms, said Chorev, such a move cannot be imposed on the Middle East from the outside.

"It is the firm view and the policy of Israel, that the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is based on the absolute duty of each state not to abuse this right," said Chorev.

"As the international community has accepted and recognized in other regions, the establishment of such a zone can only emanate from within the region," he said.

Chorev stressed that in order for the Middle East to function as a nuclear-free zone, the Arab states in the region needed to alter that approach to Israel.

"Progress toward realizing this vision cannot be made without a fundamental change in regional circumstances, including a significant transformation in the attitude of states in the region toward Israel," he said.

"The constant efforts by member states in the region to single out the State of Israel in blatantly anti-Israel resolutions in this General Conference is a clear reflection of such hostile attitude.

He also emphasized that many states that are party to the international non-proliferation treaty have violated their commitments. "The most widely recognized cases of non-compliance with legally binding non-proliferation obligations have occurred in the Middle East, by states that are parties to the NPT.

"Grave and overt violations by Iran and Syria had been detected and then formally reported by the IAEA," he added. "The Agency's investigations in these two countries have been hampered by a continued lack of cooperation, denial of access and efforts to conceal and mislead the inspectors."

Chorev promised that Israel was following these developments with "profound concern" and would "assist the international community in its efforts to prevent dangerous proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the abuse of the right to peaceful nuclear energy."

"The activities of these countries that breach their international commitments and obligations must be met with concrete and immediate international measures," he said. "Violations cannot go unpunished."

During Chorev's address, representatives every Arab state save Jordan and Egypt walked out of the auditorium.



Swedish Presidency of the European Union

EU Statement at the IAEA 53rd General Conference

Published
17 September
10:35

[EXCERPTS]

Statement by Sweden on behalf of the European Union by State Secretary Åsa-Britt Karlsson. International Atomic Energy Agency 2009 General Conference 53rd Session, Vienna

Madam President,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova associate themselves with this statement.

[deletia]

Syria

15. The EU continues to be concerned about the possibility that Syria has not declared all its nuclear material and installations, which calls into question the completeness and correctness of Syria's declarations under its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement. The EU calls upon Syria to provide IAEA with all the information and supporting documentation, as well as with access to all relevant sites, as requested by the Agency. The EU also calls upon Syria to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol as soon as possible as a means to strengthen the confidence of the international community about the peaceful nature of Syria's nuclear activities.

[deletia]

Iran President: We have no need for nuclear weapons

By Reuters and AP

Last update - 11:50 18/09/2009

[EXCERPT]

Meanwhile Thursday, IAEA member states agreed to call for a Middle East free of nuclear arms, with more countries supporting the resolution than last year.

At the IAEA's annual general conference, 103 countries voted in favor, none against. Only four abstained - including the United States and Israel. Last year, 13 countries abstained on a similar resolution.

Consensus on the resolution was reached only after an indirect reference to Iran and Syria was included in Egypt's draft text.

A deal was reached in discussions in the last days involving Egypt, Israel, Sweden - holding the current European Union presidency - and the United States, according to diplomats.

Alluding to Iran and Syria, the final text of the adopted resolution called on all states in the Middle East to "to cooperate fully with the IAEA within the framework of their respective obligations."

The IAEA said in a recent report that it has made no headway in confirming whether Iran conducted research related to nuclear weapons in the past.

The Vienna-based nuclear agency has also been trying in vain to get more access to Syria, in order to verify whether a site bombed by Israel in 2007 was indeed a secret nuclear reactor under construction.

"We are very pleased with the agreed approach reflected here today in the discussions that we've had on this issue this week," U.S. ambassador Glyn Davies said.

<http://en.trend.az/news/politics/foreign/1548073.html>

US Ambassador to IAEA dissatisfied with level of cooperation with Iran (INTERVIEW)

28.09.2009 09:00

US Ambassador to IAEA dissatisfied with level of cooperation with Iran (INTERVIEW)

Azerbaijan, Baku, Sept. 26

Trend News, E.Ostapenko, T.Konyayeva/

The United States Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Glyn Davies spoke with Trend News Persian Desk in an exclusive interview.

[EXCERPT]

Q: Before this, Egypt and Syria gave the information on the traces of enriched uranium to the IAEA. Are the discussions and investigations of this matter still kept going?

A: The IAEA has issued four reports relating to Syria's nuclear activities since the Al-Kibar reactor was destroyed in September 2007.

While we cannot discuss the report in detail, the IAEA Director General makes clear that Syria has unfortunately chosen to continue to deny the Agency the access and cooperation necessary to address its outstanding questions about Syria's nuclear activities.

It has been over a year since Syria allowed a one-time visit of IAEA inspectors to the al Kibar site and has yet to provide any access to additional suspected sites. Syria has also not yet allowed Agency inspectors access to the debris and equipment removed from al Kibar.

For the Agency to answer the multiple outstanding questions related to scope of Syria's clandestine nuclear activities, it is essential that Syria fully cooperate with the IAEA, including by granting inspectors access to the Al-Kibar facility and other suspected sites.

This access is important regardless of the results of the follow-up inspection at the separate declared facility.

As for Egypt, we expect and have every confidence that any questions that may have arisen will be addressed as appropriate by the IAEA and Egypt.



Mikdad continues his meetings with US officials on aspects of bolstering Syria-US dialogue

Sep 30, 2009

Washington DC, (SANA) – Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Fayssal Mikdad continued on Wednesday [2009-09-30] his meetings in Washington as he held talks at the White House with Deputy National Security Advisor to the US President Thomas Donilon on aspects of bolstering the current dialogue between Syria and the US aiming at developing bilateral relations between the two countries, in addition to several regional issues.

Dr. Mikdad also completed his talks at the US State Department where he met Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Geoffrey Feltman where they discussed issues of mutual interest.

Earlier, the Deputy Foreign Minister met at the Congress headquarters United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Vice Chairman Alcee Hastings and Deputy National Security Advisor to the Vice President Brian McKeon.

The meetings were attended by Syria's Ambassador in Washington Dr. Imad Mustafa.

Dr. Mikdad began on Tuesday an official visit to the US capital Washington DC upon the invitation of the US Department of State. He discussed with Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Jacob J. Lew the bilateral relations and means for developing them, in addition to discussing regional issues of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey D. Feltman. A plenary meeting followed, attended by representatives of various US departments and agencies. The meeting dealt with bilateral relations between the two countries and how to address them.

Dr. Mikdad also met with a group of US Congress figures that included Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Howard Berman, member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Ted Kaufman, and Congressman Nick Rahall.

H. Sabbagh/ Fadi Allafi /Kh. Aridi



Remarks at the United States Institute of Peace

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Renaissance Mayflower Hotel
Washington, DC
October 21, 2009

[EXCERPT]

[deletia]

The International Atomic Energy Agency doesn't have the tools or authority to carry out its mission effectively. We saw this in the institution's failure to detect Iran's covert enrichment plant and Syria's reactor project. Illicit state and non-state proliferation networks are engaging in sensitive nuclear trade and circumventing laws designed to protect us against the export and import of nuclear materials.

[deletia]

Enhancing the IAEA's capabilities to verify whether states are engaging in illicit nuclear activity is essential to strengthening the nonproliferation regime. The IAEA's additional protocol, which allows for more aggressive, short-notice inspections should be made universal, through concerted efforts to persuade key holdout states to join.

Our experience with Iraq's nuclear program before the 1991 Gulf War showed that the IAEA's rights and resources needed upgrading. The additional protocol is the embodiment of those lessons. A failure to make this protocol the global standard means the world will have failed to heed the lessons of history at our collective peril. The IAEA should make full use of existing verification authorities, including special inspections. But it should also be given new authorities, including the ability to investigate suspected nuclear weapons-related activities even when no nuclear materials are present. And if we expect the IAEA to be a bulwark of the nonproliferation regime, we must give it the resources necessary to do the job.

Improving the IAEA's ability to detect safeguard violations is not enough. Potential violators must know that if they are caught, they will pay a high price. That is certainly not the case today. Despite American efforts, the international community's record of enforcing compliance in recent years is unacceptable. Compliance mechanisms and procedures must be improved. We should consider adopting automatic penalties for violation of safeguards agreements; for example, suspending all international nuclear cooperation, or IAEA technical cooperation projects until compliance has been restored.



October 21, 2009

Press Release

On responding to Secretary Clinton's remarks at the USIP

In response to Secretary Clinton's remarks today at the United States Institute of Peace, we would like to stress that first, Syria is a signatory to the NPT and has abided by all its obligations under this treaty, regardless of the false accusations leveled by some circles. Second, while we verifiably have no nuclear weapons, Israel boasts the largest nuclear weapons arsenal per capita in the world and obstinately refuses to sign the NPT while the US turns a blind eye.

Still, we commend Secretary Clinton's, and indeed the Obama administration's, commitment to bolstering the NPT and working on achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. In this spirit, and in accordance with the administration's vision, we call on the US to adopt the tabled UN resolution introduced by Syria in 2003 that declares the Middle East, in its entirety, a region free of weapons of mass destruction. As a region mired by tension, this step would set a great example for the world and would act as a building block for the administration's broader vision of a world free of WMDs. We also call on the administration to follow its own commitment and vision by exerting pressure on its ally Israel to join the ranks of the world and sign the NPT. Pushing to bolster the NPT while allowing a major ally to avoid it, is a double standard that will undermine the US's nonproliferation efforts in our region in particular, and the world as a whole.

Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic, Washington D.C.

Clinton cites nuke worry; panel fears bio attack

By ROBERT BURNS - AP National Security Writer

Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON -- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday warned of dire consequences from the spread of nuclear weapons, while a special U.S. panel asserted that the more worrisome and urgent threat is terrorists attacking the United States or its allies with biological weapons.

In a speech outlining the Obama administration's nuclear arms agenda, Clinton cited a range of troubling trends abroad, including a failure to stop North Korea from developing a nuclear bomb and weakness in the United Nations agency that is responsible for monitoring nuclear programs worldwide.

[deletia]

Clinton also lamented the failure of the IAEA to detect what Washington insists was a nuclear reactor in Syria, which was destroyed in a 2007 Israeli airstrike, as well as a recently revealed uranium-enrichment facility that Iran had kept secret for some years.

"The IAEA should make full use of existing verification authorities, including special inspections," she said. "But it should also be given new authorities, including the ability to investigate suspected nuclear weapons-related activities even when no nuclear materials are present. And if we expect the IAEA to be a bulwark of the nonproliferation regime, we must also give it the resources necessary to do its job."

The Syrian Embassy in Washington issued a statement in response to Clinton's speech, asserting that it has abided by all its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, "regardless of the false accusations leveled by some circles."

The Syrians also commended Clinton's push for bolstering the non-proliferation treaty and for declaring a goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. But it said the U.S. efforts are undermined by its unwillingness to push Israel to sign the treaty, even though Israel allegedly has a substantial nuclear arsenal.

The Next Steps on Nonproliferation

BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

OCTOBER 28, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

In an age of pressing global challenges, none threatens our nation or our world as urgently as the possible spread of nuclear weapons. The United States has a special responsibility to meet this challenge, and under President Obama, we seek to lead the international community in minimizing these dangers and reinvigorating the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Recent developments underscore the threat. The international community failed to prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. Iran continues to ignore resolutions from the U.N. Security Council demanding that it suspend its enrichment activities and live up to its international obligations. Too much of the world's nuclear material remains vulnerable to theft or diversion, even as illicit state and nonstate networks engage in sensitive nuclear trade. **And as we saw with the failure to detect Iran's covert enrichment plant and Syria's reactor project, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) doesn't have the tools to carry out its verification mission effectively.**

[deletia]

To be effective, the international nonproliferation regime must have teeth. **The United States supports enhancing the IAEA's verification authorities and resources so it can perform its mission effectively.** And we should consider automatic penalties for violations of safeguards agreements, such as suspending all IAEA technical cooperation until compliance has been restored. Potential violators must know full well that they will be caught and that they will pay a high price for failing to live up to their obligations.



Board of Governors

GOV/2009/75

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Item 4(d) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2009/73, Add.1 and Add.2)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. On 28 August 2009, the Director General reported to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (GOV/2009/56). This report covers relevant developments since that date.

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that in May of that year the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor (GOV/2009/56, para. 2). Syria has maintained that the building was a military non-nuclear installation.

3. The Agency has repeatedly requested to have substantive discussions with Syria on the nature of the destroyed building, and to discuss with Syria relevant satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency. Syria has declined to have such discussions. In a letter dated 23 October 2009, the Agency repeated its requests for information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site, and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian activities (GOV/2009/36, para. 14). The Agency also reiterated its request for access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building. The Agency also requested access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are located. In that letter, the Agency also offered to engage with Syria to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and three other locations allegedly functionally-related to the Dair Alzour site, to enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information which Syria considers to be sensitive.

4. Analysis of the samples taken in June 2008 at the Dair Alzour site indicated the presence of particles of anthropogenic¹ natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. Syria has stated that the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles was the missiles used to destroy the building. The Agency has assessed, based on the isotopic and chemical composition and the morphology of the particles, that there is a low probability that the source of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles was the use of missiles (GOV/2009/9, para. 7). In its 23 October 2009 letter, the Agency once more reiterated its request that Syria share any information it may have to support its statement. To date, Syria has not provided any information to this effect. In this context, Israel has not responded to the Agency's request of 20 May 2009 for specific information on the contents of the munitions used to destroy the building (GOV/2009/36, para. 7).

5. In its 23 October 2009 letter, the Agency also responded to Syria's assertions² that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement, and that the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour site do not constitute undeclared nuclear material. The Agency indicated that the Safeguards Agreement between Syria and the Agency places no limitation on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The Agency also indicated that the presence at the Dair Alzour site of particles of anthropogenic natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory gives rise to questions about the correctness and completeness of Syria's declaration, which the Agency is obliged to pursue.

6. In relation to the presence of anthropogenic natural uranium particles at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in samples taken there in August 2008 (GOV/2009/36, para. 17), Syria has stated that the presence of natural uranium particles resulted from the accumulation of samples and reference materials used in neutron activation analysis (GOV/2009/56, para. 10). In a letter dated 13 October 2009, the Agency provided Syria with the results from additional samples it had taken during the July 2009 physical inventory verification at the MNSR. The results also showed the presence of anthropogenic natural uranium particles at a number of locations and on certain equipment. However, the results did not indicate the presence of anthropogenic natural uranium particles in either the standard reference materials or on the shielded transport container which Syria had indicated as possible sources of the uranium particles. In light of these results, the Agency requested to meet with Syria to discuss the matter further.

7. In a meeting held on 2 November 2009 in Vienna, Syria was provided with further detailed information concerning the results of the analysis of the environmental samples from the MNSR. At that meeting, Syria identified other possible sources of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles, including domestically produced yellowcake and small quantities of imported, but previously undeclared, commercial uranyl nitrate. Syria also provided a document to support its explanation for the presence of the uranyl nitrate at the MNSR.

8. In a letter to Syria dated 5 November 2009, the Agency announced its intention to carry out an inspection at the MNSR on 17 November 2009 for the purposes of taking samples of the yellowcake and the uranyl nitrate and taking environmental samples at the locations where the materials are stored and where they were used. The Agency also requested that Syria provide information concerning the yellowcake, the uranyl nitrate and any other uranium-containing materials which may have been the source of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles.

Summary

9. Essentially, no progress has been made since the last report to clarify any of the outstanding issues relevant to the implementation of safeguards.

10. Syria has not yet provided the cooperation necessary to permit the Agency to determine the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in samples taken at the Dair Alzour site. Syria has also not

provided information or access that would allow the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building on the Dair Alzour site, or to determine if, as alleged, any functional relationship existed between that site and three other locations. Nor has Syria substantiated its claims regarding certain procurement efforts that, in the Agency's view, could support the construction of a reactor. The Agency will continue its verification activities to confirm Syria's statements within the authority available to it and subject to the cooperation provided by Syria.

11. The results of the environmental sampling at the MNSR confirm the presence of particles of anthropogenic natural uranium of a type not in Syria's declared inventory. The results do not support Syria's earlier explanation for the origin and presence of the particles. The Agency is investigating Syria's explanation discussed at the 2 November 2009 meeting for the presence of the particles and has announced its intention to carry out an inspection at the MNSR on 17 November 2009.

12. The Director General urges Syria to cooperate with the Agency in its verification activities so that, in accordance with its mandate under Syria's Safeguards Agreement, the Agency is able to ensure that safeguards are applied to all source and special fissionable material subject to that Agreement. Recognizing Syria's concerns about the sensitivity of certain information and locations, the Director General also urges Syria to engage with the Agency to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to such information and locations that will enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information considered by Syria as sensitive. The Director General also calls on other States, including Israel, which may possess information relevant to the Agency's verification, including information which may have led them to conclude that the installation in question at the Dair Alzour site had been a nuclear reactor, to make such information available to the Agency.

13. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ "Anthropogenic" refers to material that has been produced as a result of chemical processing.

² Communicated in Syria's letter to the Agency dated 13 August 2009, see GOV/2009/56, paras 8, 9.

IAEA wants to inspect three secret Syrian nuclear sites

DEBKAFfile Special Report

November 16, 2009, 10:53 PM (GMT+02:00)

The new IAEA report on Iran's formerly secret uranium enrichment site at Fordo near Qom also includes a section on Syria and a demand to inspect suspicious sites there too. The inspectors clearly suspect Both Tehran and Damascus of concealing from the UN nuclear watchdog secret facilities related to nuclear weapons production. Monday, Nov. 16, the seven-page IAEA inspectors' report on their October visit to Fordo stated clearly that Tehran's belated declaration of its uranium enrichment site suggested that more secret sites remained to be discovered in Iran.

With regard to Syria, IAEA inspectors are to visit Damascus on Tuesday, Nov. 17, for clarifications of the conflicting explanations Syria has offered for uranium traces. They will also insist on making return visits to three military sites which Damascus has so far refused, following information received by the agency of clandestine "nuclear activity" there. DEBKAFfile's intelligence sources reveal that Israel hit one of three at the same time as its air force bombed the unfinished plutonium plant at Dair Alzour in 2007, although this was never admitted by Israel or Syria.

The nuclear watchdog wants a close survey of this site because it is certain the ground would yield up important clues to Syria covert nuclear weapons program. Permission has been denied for a visit there as well as a request to visit to the Euphrates River's west bank opposite the bombed plant.

The Assad regime has claimed the uranium particles discovered near Damascus could have come from domestically produced "yellow cake" or imports of commercial uranyl nitrate undeclared to the IAEA. The Syrians also said they could have come from reference materials or from a transport container.

The report pointed out that the uranium traces found did not fit these explanations; nor could they be traced to Syria's declared inventory.



Ian Kelly
Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
November 17, 2009

[EXCERPT]

MR. KELLY:

Yeah, Andy.

QUESTION: I have a sort of ancillary question back on the IAEA report. We've had your reaction to the Iran section of that report. I'm wondering if you have any reaction to the Syria section of that report, where they talk about --

MR. KELLY: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- deep suspicions about Syria's activities.

MR. KELLY: Right. Right. If you just give me a second here, I do. Yeah, this is the fifth report by the IAEA relating to Syria's nuclear activities since the Al Kibar reactor was destroyed in 2007. In the report, the IAEA makes clear that Syria unfortunately has not made any credible explanations that clarify the true nature and scope of its clandestine nuclear activities. The IAEA has again had to report that Syria is refusing to cooperate fully with the IAEA and has failed to account for the undeclared manmade uranium found at two sites. We believe that Syria must uphold its international obligations, including providing access to any site or information requested. And we again reiterate our full support for the IAEA's investigation.

QUESTION: What does the U.S. think should be the next step if Syria doesn't uphold its international obligations?

MR. KELLY: Well, I think it will depend on what their response is to it. We'll continue to consult with our partners in the IAEA about next steps in light of their -- in light of the serious nature of the findings in this report and in the previous reports. But I think whatever we do, will have to be in consultation with our partners and allies.

QUESTION: Well, what would be an adequate response, in your view, from the Syrians? I mean, are you looking for them to say, yes, you've caught us, we were working with the North Koreans and the Iranians secretly to build a reactor? Is that what you want them to say?

MR. KELLY: No, we want them to open up what the IAEA is asking them to open up in terms of access to sites and access to information. I'm not asking for any --

QUESTION: But haven't --

MR. KELLY: -- declaration necessarily.

QUESTION: Well, you said that they have not made any credible explanation yet of this.

MR. KELLY: Yeah, that's what we want – a credible explanation.

QUESTION: Well, is a credible explanation “Yes, we were colluding with the North Koreans and the Iranians to do this secretly?”

MR. KELLY: Well, I – (laughter) – a credible explanation will be allowing full access to what they're doing.

QUESTION: Have they not allowed access?

MR. KELLY: No, not to everything that the IAEA has asked for.

IAEA revisits Syria reactor in uranium traces probe

Wed Nov 18, 2009 3:45am IST

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. inspectors revisited a Damascus nuclear research reactor on Tuesday [2009-11-17] to take more swipe samples after judging Syria's initial explanation for uranium traces found there to be doubtful.

An International Atomic Energy Agency official confirmed inspectors were at the site a day after an IAEA report said tests of samples taken in August 2008 showed the traces did not come from Syria's declared nuclear inventory, as it maintained.

The report also said Syria was still blocking follow-up IAEA access to a desert site of what U.S. intelligence reports said was a nascent, North Korean-designed nuclear reactor geared to yield atomic bomb fuel, before Israel bombed it in 2007.

The Vienna-based IAEA has been checking whether there could be a link between the Damascus and Dair Alzour sites since discovering mysterious particles of processed uranium at both.

Some analysts have said the findings raised the question of whether Syria used some natural uranium intended for the alleged reactor at Dair Alzour in tests applicable to learning how to separate out bomb-grade plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

Syria, an ally of Iran which is under IAEA investigation over nuclear proliferation suspicions, has denied ever having an atom bomb programme and has said the intelligence is fabricated.

Syria told the IAEA earlier this month that the traces at the Damascus site could have come from domestically-produced uranium concentrate known as "yellow cake", or from imports of commercial uranyl nitrate which it had not declared to the IAEA.

Tuesday's inspector trip aimed to verify that assertion.

Syria at first told the IAEA that the traces found last year came with contaminated equipment used at the site, but IAEA test results did not stand up this explanation, and the particles could not be traced to Syria's declared inventory.

"They have (now) acknowledged doing experiments with natural uranium compounds, some originating from yellow cake which they have got from their own facility or laboratory," a senior official close to the IAEA said.

IAEA inspectors examined the desert Dair Alzour site in June 2008 but Syria has barred renewed access and also not let them visit three military sites, whose appearance was altered by landscaping after the IAEA first asked to check them.

"No progress has been made since the last report to clarify any of the outstanding issues," Monday's agency report said.

(Writing by Mark Heinrich; Editing by Dominic Evans)

Shimon Peres
President of Israel

Published: 23 November 2009 [Accessed 2009-11-22T1835Z]

[EXCERPT]

Q. If the focus turns to missiles, wouldn't that shift the agenda to containment or deterrence, rather than prevention?

A. Not at all. It's just another option to consider in a layered approach to this international problem. Since it is the policy of the United States to prevent a nuclear-capable Iran, why should Israel have a separate policy? On this, we and many other countries in the region and beyond see eye to eye. Now is the time for tests to see if negotiations will bear fruit.

If not, you can't try indefinitely to rely only on the political approach. Our first choice is to see the U.S. president succeed in his efforts. But at some point, you have to say we tried. If diplomacy fails, we'll have to move on to Plan B.

Q. Are you referring to military strikes akin to the 1981 operation in Iraq and the 2007 action in Syria?

A. There's a difference between those two operations and what we're facing in Iran. The reactor in Iraq didn't concern the world as such, nor do I think the attack on the Syrians was a world problem. These were local problems. I think Israel must be very careful not to monopolize a global problem and make it our own. The options that exist globally are wider and more varied than the options that are under proposal in Israel.

Syrian Atomic Energy Agency chief: "our country fully cooperated with IAEA"

By Abdelwaheb El Gueyed (with photos)

Date : 11/25/2009

VIENNA, Nov 24 (KUNA) -- Chief of the Syrian Atomic Energy Agency Dr. Ibrahim Othman asserted Tuesday [2009-11-24] that his country is fully cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) by the virtue of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the safeguards system applied by IAEA to member states.

Othman said in an interview with Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the IAEA's Technical Cooperation committee meeting of the IAEA, that his country will continue with its approach of cooperation.

However, he stressed that this will not by any means be at the expense of disclosing "our military positions or threatening our national security," adding that the IAEA's general director Dr. Mohammad El-Baradei has said that he realized the Syrian concerns regarding the sensitivity of some information and sites inside the county.

Othman that his country has offered to the IAEA all what can be offered of documents and assistance, adding that the last visit paid the IAEA inspectors was paid through an agreement between the UN nuclear watchdog and Damascus.

They inspected the "Mensr" reactor near the capital, Damascus, and carried out the necessary studies, he said, expressing his belief that this was quite different from what is circulated by media and what is also mentioned by the Vienna-based IAEA's report.

Responding to a question on his evaluation to what is mentioned in the report, Othman said Syria voiced reservations because the information in the report was not verified by Syria.

He added that the agency did not allow Syria to discuss and verify contents of the report, deeming that the IAEA report highlighted a one side of the issue and not the whole truth.

Othman went on to say that his country has repeatedly declared that the Syrian site bombed by Israel in Dir Al-Zour in 2007 was and still a military one, and consequently it is meaningless for the inspectors to ask to visit it again.

In this regard, the Syrian nuclear watchdog agency has reviewed the facilities offered by his country to the IAEA inspectors according to its signed agreement with the IAEA, said Othman.

He added that Damascus has granted the them enough time and full freedom to inspect and take samples, besides making interviews with the people they want without any restrictions. (end) amg.af KUNA 242115 Nov 09NNNN



Statements of the Director General

26 November 2009 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei

[EXCERPT]

Nuclear Verification

[deletia]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Essentially no progress has been made since my last report in clarifying the outstanding issues relevant to the implementation of safeguards in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Syria has not provided the cooperation necessary to permit the Agency to determine the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found in samples taken at the Dair Alzour site. Nor has Syria provided information or access that would allow the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building on that site.

The Agency is investigating whether particles of anthropogenic natural uranium of a type not in Syria's declared inventory, detected at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in Damascus in July, may be due to experiments Syria says it carried out at the MNSR with materials containing uranium. The materials and certain experiments should have been reported earlier to the Agency. The Agency took additional samples at the reactor on 17 November, the results of which we await.

The Agency will continue its efforts to verify Syria's statements within the authority available to it. Without Syria's cooperation, or access to information that may be available to other States, including Israel, the Agency will not be able to progress much further in its verification efforts.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/ehud-olmert-still-dreams-of-peace/story-e6frg6so-1225804745744>

Ehud Olmert still dreams of peace

Greg Sheridan, Foreign editor

From: The Australian

November 28, 2009 12:00A [Accessed 2009-11-27T19:00Z]

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

In Sydney this week, I conducted, perhaps, the longest interview and discussion Olmert has undertaken with any media since leaving office in March after more than three years as prime minister.

[deletia]

For 90 minutes in the boardroom of Sydney's Park Hyatt, and then over a relaxed lunch with his wife, Aliza, at Circular Quay, Olmert talked with remarkable frankness about the military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon, the historic peace deal he offered the Palestinians, President Barack Obama's Middle East policy and the options for action against Iran.

[deletia]

Olmert believes that the Syria track is perhaps the only peace process open to Israel in the immediate future, and that the time has come for direct Israel-Syria negotiations.

But if Syria is willing to make peace, I ask Olmert, how come it was building, with North Korean help, a nuclear reactor which Israel, under Olmert, bombed to obliteration? "I am saying nothing about that."

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091129/FOREIGN/711289942/1011/NEWS>

Damascus shrugs off nuclear rebuke

Phil Sands, Foreign Correspondent

Last Updated: November 28. 2009 8:34PM UAE / November 28. 2009 4:34PM GMT

DAMASCUS // If the latest rebuke by the United Nations nuclear watchdog against Syria caused any alarm in Damascus, the authorities here are certainly not showing it.

On Thursday Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said Syria was not fully co-operating with his investigation into uranium particles, found in the eastern desert at a site that Israel and the US claim was a secret nuclear reactor.

Syria insists that the facility, which was destroyed in an Israeli air strike more than two years ago, was a conventional military base and that any uranium found there must have come from Israel's bombs.

In his statement to the IAEA's board of directors in Vienna, Mr ElBaradei said Damascus had "not provided the co-operation necessary" to support its claim, either through documents or by granting access for follow-up inspections.

In addition to the bombed site, the UN team say they found particles of uranium at Syria's small nuclear research lab that are not in its declared inventory. The neutron reactor has been authorised by the UN, but under the terms of its operation, Damascus should inform the IAEA of any new experiments undertaken, something that had not been done.

These new and unexpected uranium traces are currently being tested, Mr ElBaradei said.

Nonetheless Syria, which has consistently claimed its innocence, clearly feels it has little to fear from the IAEA.

"The UN cannot just say 'we will visit this site, or we will go to that place', they do not have the power under international law," said an official from the ruling Baath party, on condition of anonymity. Smartly dressed in a well-cut suit and red tie, he appeared unperturbed by the ongoing nuclear controversy.

IAEA inspectors would certainly not be given permission to carry out new searches for evidence on Syrian military bases, he said. They had been allowed one set of inspections and, as far as Syria was concerned, that meant it had fully met its obligation to co-operate.

"These are issues of sovereignty and self-determination," the Baathist insisted. "It's a question of dignity."

Syria has not forgotten how supposedly independent UN weapons inspectors in Iraq during the 1990s were, in fact, reporting back to western intelligence agencies, something Damascus – still at war with Israel – does not want to let happen in its case.

The well-dressed Baathist said Syria was wary of any Iraq-style conspiracy designed to justify military action by its enemies. "We all know what happened in Saddam Hussein's case," he said. "There were fabricated claims he had weapons of mass destruction when he had nothing. But by the time the truth was known, the Americans had already invaded."

In his comments, Mr ElBaradei was also critical of Israel and the US, both of which have claimed to have evidence of a covert Syrian nuclear programme. That evidence, if it exists, has not been shared with the United Nations, Mr ElBaradei said.

“When there is talk about transparency, let it come from all sides,” said the Baathist. “Let us be honest, this is not some impartial or apolitical situation, there are double standards here and bad intentions aimed towards us.

“If we are talking about illegal nuclear weapons programmes, why aren’t IAEA inspectors going into Israel to check? They have 200 nuclear warheads and no one says anything about that. Where are the inspectors?”

“Here is Syria’s position: We support the idea of a nuclear weapons free Middle East. Let that be the goal of the international community.”

Mr ElBaradei long ago made clear his frustrations that, in launching a unilateral attack on the Syrian site rather than going through formal – and peaceful – inspection channels, Israel had effectively made it impossible to ever know the truth about the alleged nuclear programme.

The bombs demolished most of whatever was there and Syria, insisting that it will not compromise national security by allowing inspectors to go wherever they please, has made sure that the remains cannot be more thoroughly examined.

As a result, claims of a Syrian nuclear programme are unlikely to be either proven or disproved.

Given that the US and Europe are already re-engaging with Damascus after years of diplomatic isolation, and given that the West is far more concerned about Iran’s nuclear ambitions, Syria’s sense is that its own nuclear controversy is already fading away.

It is a conclusion that was essentially confirmed by Mr ElBaradei, who appeared to signal that his investigation had run its course and was now almost certainly futile.

“The agency will continue its efforts to verify Syria’s statements within the authority available to it,” he said.

“Without Syria’s co-operation, or access to information that may be available to other States, including Israel, the agency will not be able to progress much further in its verification efforts.”

So, if the Baath party member in Damascus was not acting alarmed, it is because he saw no cause to be. Syria is apparently sure, not without reason, that this matter is now all but finished with.

psands@thenational.ae

Report: IAEA experts visited Syria nuclear site

Roe Nahmias

Published: 11.30.09, 14:41 / Israel News

[Sourcebook comment: This report may be a conflation of the IAEA visits to the research reactor near Damascus on 2009-11-17 and to the al-Kibar site on 2008-06-23.]

A delegation of International Atomic Energy Agency experts traveled to Syria and visited the al-Kibar nuclear site that was bombed by Israel in 2007, Qatari newspaper al-Watan reported on Monday.

According to the report, the delegation's members took soil samples from the site to try and locate the origin on the uranium found there. Damascus told the experts that the traces of uranium found at the site were remnants from the Israeli strike in the area.

In mid-November, the IAEA inspectors visited a nuclear site in Damascus to examine uranium residue found in the state, and the explanation provided for the residue was unsatisfactory.

A UN spokesperson said that the inspectors visited the facility following suspicious findings uncovered during the composition of a secret report.

Some analysts have said the findings raise the question of whether Syria used some natural uranium intended for the alleged reactor at Dir a-Zur for tests applicable to learning how to separate out bomb-grade plutonium from spent nuclear fuel. Syria in the past has denied such allegations.

Last February, it was reported that UN inspectors discovered traces of uranium and graphite in samples taken from the site Washington says was a secret graphite nuclear reactor.

Furthermore the IAEA said that the uranium found at the site is unlikely to have come from Israeli missiles that bombed it.

The IAEA wrote in a report that its "current assessment is that there is a low probability that the uranium was introduced by the use of missiles."

It was the first disclosure that graphite particles had turned up and a senior UN official said the discovery of additional uranium traces was a "significant" find, while stressing an IAEA investigation of Syria remained inconclusive.

US embassy cables: Iran hid full reactor plans from nuclear inspectors

Sunday 28 November 2010 18.14 GMT

Wednesday, 02 December 2009, 17:17

SECRET SECTION 01 OF 05 UNVIE VIENNA 000540

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EO 12958 DECL: 12/01/2019

TAGS PREL, KNNP, AORC, IR, SY, KN, IN

SUBJECT: STAFFDEL KESSLER EXAMINES IRAN, SYRIA, AND

MULTILATERAL VIENNA'S FRUSTRATING NAM DYNAMIC

REF: EMBASSY VIENNA 1450

Classified By: Mark Scheland, Counselor for Nuclear Policy; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[EXCERPTS]

1. (S) Summary: HFAC staffers Richard Kessler and David Fite received from IAEA Secretariat November 10 information on the Iran case that tracked with the tone of the subsequent Director General's reporting on Iran to the Board of Governors. The STAFFDEL heard that contact with Iran over "possible military dimensions" of the nuclear program was at an "absolute stalemate." According to Safeguards regional division director Herman Nackaerts, IAEA inspectors' first visit to the enrichment facility under construction near Qom had run predictably but without extraordinary responsiveness on Iran's part; the Secretariat was still trying to understand the motivation to build the plant as now designed. Nackaerts described the frustrating limitations of Iran's cooperation with the Agency, and the STAFFDEL deduced that Iranian officials held back because they were uncertain about what lines of inquiry the IAEA was best equipped to exploit. Questioning then-DG ElBaradei's remark to media that the Agency had found "nothing to worry about" in Qom, STAFFDEL asked if the Secretariat would report on how it judged the plant did or did not fit into Iran's publicly explained nuclear program. Nackaerts expressed appreciation for the precision and usefulness of U.S.-supplied information in the Qom case and generally.

2. (C) Summary contd.: On Syria, Nackaerts said the Secretariat had told Damascus its first explanation for the presence of anthropogenic uranium at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor was not credible. Further, the Secretariat still could not yet present the case for how what was being built at Dair Alzour fit in as "part of a Syrian program or part of someone else's program." On DPRK, IAEA/EXPO's Tariq Rauf said the IAEA, when it could, would ultimately have to "go back to the early 1990s" to reconstruct accountability of plutonium and could not accept a "political" compromise setting material "off to the side." To get to a finding of "no diversion" would take several years and extensive resources and forensics.

[deletia]

Syria Stalemate

9. (SBU) The Syria case, Nackaerts said, was starting to look like Iran in that the government provided "good cooperation" on some areas but presented a "stalemate" on others. The Secretariat challenged Syria's proposed explanation for the presence of uranium at Dair Alzour/Al Kibar (i.e., that Israeli depleted uranium munitions

could be the source), but the inquiry was at a roadblock. Syrian officials had been told their first explanation for anthropogenic uranium at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) was not credible, and the Agency had inquired what nuclear material Syria could have had that was not previously declared. Overall, the IAEA still "did not understand" (meaning, it could not yet present the solid case for) how Dair Alzour fit in as part of a Syrian nuclear program "or part of someone else's program."

[deletia]

20. (U) STAFFDEL did not review this report.

DAVIES

US to focus on uranium findings in Syria - evidence of Iranian proliferation

DEBKAFfile Exclusive Report

December 6, 2009, 9:00 AM (GMT+02:00)

A senior official in the Obama administration described the UN nuclear watchdog inspectors' discovery of traces of highly processed plutonium [*sic*] at the bombed Syrian-North Korean facility at Dir a-Zur as a "smoking gun" - evidence of Iran's covert nuclear activities and proliferation, DEBKAFfile's Washington sources report.

It was confirmed by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in their Nov. 30 visit to the site which was demolished by Israel in September 2007.

Obama administration sources are confident that with this information of Iranian violations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, even Russia and China will have to endorse stiff new sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The soil samples the inspectors collected at their last visit to Dir a-Zur confirmed an earlier discovery of uranium used in separating out bomb-grade plutonium from spent nuclear fuel which the US believes was supplied by Iran. Those experiments were clearly further along than previously assessed.

The same traces were found at the Syrian nuclear research reactor near Damascus.

Washington intends to present these findings as solid evidence of the tie-in between the Syrian and Iranian military nuclear programs, together with proofs of Tehran's direct involvement in the planning and construction of the demolished Syria reactor.

Iran will also be shown to have supplied Syria with the nuclear materials and technology for its operation as part of its own program to attain a nuclear weapons capability.

The US will use this body of evidence to demonstrate Iran has been in grave breach of its NPT obligations since 2007. This week, officials in Tehran said their government has no plans to abdicate from the treaty.

According to DEBKAFfile's Washington sources, the Obama administration may decide to plant the information in the US and world media before making a formal presentation.

Last Thursday, Dec. 3, Iran's national security council director Saeed Jalili visited Damascus for urgent consultations with Syrian leaders on fending off the coming American assault on its nuclear program based on the evidence of Syria covert nuclear activities. His party included members of Iran's nuclear energy commission who helped build the Syria's North Korean reactor.

Jalili and Syrian president Bashar Assad spent several hours discussing how to respond to the forthcoming American revelations.

Their talks were violently interrupted by the bomb blast on an Iranian pilgrim bus in central Damascus. Official figures have not been released but the number of dead is believed to be fifteen Iranians with many more injured. Assad ordered Syrian officials on the spot to claim the blast was an accident and not an act of terror. Both sides assumed that the hand behind the attack had advance knowledge of the Iranian-Syrian conference and was bent on sabotaging it.

U.S. Girds for Talks in North Korea

By JAY SOLOMON

DECEMBER 7, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama's special representative to North Korea is set to hold his first bilateral meetings with Pyongyang this week, in the administration's highest-level dialogue with the country to date.

But signs that the communist state may be prepared to return to international disarmament negotiations were overshadowed by U.S. concerns that it could seek new conditions to the talks.

Stephen Bosworth, a career diplomat and negotiator, was expected to arrive in Pyongyang on Tuesday for two days of meetings, with the goal of persuading North Korea to rejoin talks aimed at getting it to give up its nuclear-weapons program.

[deletia]

U.S. officials said they didn't know who Mr. Bosworth would meet during his trip. Kim Jong Il hasn't directly engaged Washington on the nuclear issue, though he did discuss it with former President Bill Clinton in August.

The Obama administration is interested in learning about North Korea's economy in light of Pyongyang's decision to revalue its currency last week. U.S. officials also said they'll continue to push for information on North Korea's alleged support for the nuclear programs of Syria and Myanmar.

Hirano urges Syria to allay suspicions over nuke development

Dec 8 09:48 AM US/Eastern

TOKYO, Dec. 8 (AP) - (Kyodo)—Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano urged Syria on Tuesday [2009-12-08] to make efforts to dispel international suspicion over the country's nuclear development program in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

The government's top spokesman made the request during a meeting with Abdullah al-Dardari, Syria's deputy prime minister for economic affairs, at the prime minister's office in Tokyo, according to the ministry.

In their half-hour meeting, al-Dardari responded that Syria fully supports the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the ministry said.

The Syrian minister traveled to Japan to attend a ministerial session of the first Japan-Arab Economic Forum in Tokyo on Monday.

Posted : Wed, 09 Dec 2009 16:22:04 GMT

Damascus - Iranian Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi, speaking in Damascus, on Wednesday hailed Syrian-Iranian defence ties as a "deterrent" against Israeli "threats," Iranian media reported. "Promotion of defence ties (between) Iran and Syria is a deterrent factor against the Zionist regime's threats which target nations of the region," Iran's official ISNA news agency quoted Vahidi as saying after his meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The meeting, which a statement from the Syrian presidency said also included Syria's top military commanders, came three days after Syria hosted Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili.

"The enemy's aim is to threaten the region's security and plunder its reserves, but the two countries have always prevented accomplishment of (this) evil aim," Vahidi reportedly said Wednesday.

The minister also held meetings with representatives of the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah and with representatives of Palestinian groups living in exile in Damascus, the Syrian presidency's statement noted.

<http://world.brunei.fm/2009/12/13/iran-needs-more-nuclear-stations-says-mottaki/>

IRAN NEEDS MORE NUCLEAR STATIONS – SAYS MOTTAKI

MANAMA,

Dec 13 [2009]

(NNN-KUNA) –Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Saturday Tehran needed to move ahead with its nuclear program, noting the Islamic Republic’s need to build 10-15 nuclear reactor for the generation of power.

“Iran needs between 10 and 15 nuclear stations to generate electricity ... and We are now building one station in collaboration with Syria,” Mottaki said in a speech before the 6th Manama Dialogue.

Meanwhile, Mottaki said anew Iran was ready to establish security cooperation with the Arab Gulf countries, while rejecting the foreign military presence in the area.

“Iran, as the common neighbor for all countries in the region, has announced readiness to strengthen collective and comprehensive cooperation with the regional countries particularly in the security field,” he said.

Mottaki said the Manama Dialogue was a good opportunity to redefine regional security.

Report: N. Korea resumes military aid to Syria

Yitzhak Benhorin

Published: 02.02.10, 18:44 / Israel News

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON – The Pyongyang-Damascus axis is back in order. For the first time since the Syrian reactor was bombed in September 2007, North Korea has renewed its supply of sensitive military technology to Damascus, according to a report Tuesday in Japanese business newspaper, Nikkei.

Western intelligence sources told the newspaper that North Korea is aiding Syria in the production of maraging steel, which is extremely durable at high heats and pressure. It is typically used in missile skins, ballistic warheads, and gas centrifuges critical in the uranium enrichment process. Its durability and malleability makes it ideal to for creating thin missile skins capable of carrying heavier payloads.

The West and Japan restrict the export of maraging steel.

According to the report, a production line for the material was built at the military factory in the city of Homs, in northern Syria.

North Korea, in defiance of the West, does not restrict its export of the special nickel-alloy steel, and has supplied Syria with a melting furnace and molding tools necessary for making the steels at their Homs plant.

The report reveals that North Korean experts are training Syrian engineers how to produce the specialized steel. Sources told the newspaper that the production line will be complete if equipment for handling waste and for chemical tests and other analyses are supplied.

[deletia]

N Korea, Syria Resume Military Cooperation: Sources

By KEN MORIYASU

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

(The Nikkei Feb. 1 morning edition)

TOKYO (Nikkei)--After a hiatus of several years, North Korea is once again providing sensitive military technology to Syria, Western intelligence sources say.

According to the sources, North Korea is helping Syria build a production line for a superalloy that can be used in missile skins, chemical warheads and gas centrifuges, a vital component in the uranium enrichment process.

The production line for maraging steel, a nickel-iron alloy of extremely high strength and malleability, is apparently being added to Syria's existing military factory in the western city of Homs.

Japan and many Western nations restrict the export of maraging steel. But North Korea has already provided melting furnaces and molding tools needed to make the steel to the Homs plant, where North Korean experts are training local engineers on its production, the sources said.

If equipment for handling waste, and for chemical analysis and other tests are delivered, the production line will be complete, they added.

Maraging steel is commonly used for aircraft engines. The material's strength and malleability also allow it to be formed into thinner rocket and missile skins that can carry heavier payloads.

Military assistance has long been North Korea's primary source of foreign currency. The country is believed to have been helping Syria build a nuclear reactor in 2007, until the facility was bombed by Israel.

In the wake of the Israeli air strike, it was thought that North Korea and Syria were no longer working together. But with the apparent maraging steel project, it seems that bilateral military cooperation is back.

**Annual Threat Assessment of the
US Intelligence Community
for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence**



Dennis C. Blair
Director of National Intelligence
February 2, 2010

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

US INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY
ANNUAL THREAT ASSESSMENT

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

[EXERPTS]

Chairman Feinstein, Vice Chairman Bond, Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to offer the Intelligence Community's assessment of threats to US national security. I am pleased to be accompanied today by the Directors of the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research.

[deletia]

North Korean WMD and Missile Programs

Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programs pose a serious threat to the security environment in East Asia. North Korea's export of ballistic missiles and associated materials to several countries including Iran and Pakistan, and its assistance to Syria in the construction of a nuclear reactor, exposed in 2007, illustrate the reach of the North's proliferation activities.

Despite the Six-Party October 3, 2007 Second Phase Actions agreement in which North Korea reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how we remain alert to the possibility North Korea could again export nuclear technology.

[deletia]

Syria

[deletia]

- Damascus remains generally uncooperative with the IAEA investigation of its covert nuclear efforts following the destruction of its secret nuclear reactor in September 2007. Syria also maintains a chemical weapons programs and an active missile program, with some missiles that can reach 700 kilometers.

[deletia]



Remarks on Middle East Peace Following Meeting With Syrian President Dr. Bashar al-Assad

William J. Burns

Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Damascus, Syria

February 17, 2010

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I'm here to convey President Obama's continuing interest in building better relations with Syria based upon mutual interest and mutual respect. Syria plays an important role in the Middle East and this is a moment in which both Syria and the United States, despite our differences, have a stake in exploring ways in which we might cooperate. I had quite productive and extensive discussions with President Assad. We talked candidly about areas in which we disagree, but also identified areas of common ground on which we can build. The White House announced yesterday that Robert Ford will be the next American ambassador to Syria if he is confirmed by the U.S. Senate. That is a clear sign, after five years without an American ambassador in Damascus, of America's readiness to improve relations, and to cooperate in the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis with progress on all tracks of the peace process and in the pursuit of regional peace and stability. To deepen our dialogue as we move forward, Ambassador Dan Benjamin, the State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism, will remain here for another day of meetings. I have no illusions about the challenges on the road ahead, but my meeting with President Assad leaves me hopeful that we can make progress together in the interests of both of our countries. Thank you very much.



Board of Governors

GOV/2010/11
Date: 18 February 2010

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Item 6(d) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2010/1)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

A. Introduction

1. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that in April of that year the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor. Satellite imagery available to the Agency showed that, by the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.¹

2. The Agency was provided with access to the site on 23 June 2008, at which time it was permitted to take environmental samples.² While it cannot be excluded that the destroyed building was intended for non-nuclear use, the Agency has assessed that the features of the building and the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites.³ The Agency has also assessed that the water pumping equipment seen by it at the Dair Alzour site, and the procurement by Syria of large quantities of graphite and barium sulphate, all of which Syria has stated were acquired for civilian and non-nuclear related uses, could support the construction of a reactor (GOV/2009/36, para. 14).

3. Syria has maintained that the destroyed building was a military non-nuclear installation. The information and access provided by Syria to date has not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building or to substantiate Syria's claims regarding the procurement efforts for civilian, non-nuclear uses.

4. Analysis of the samples taken in June 2008 at the Dair Alzour site indicated the presence of particles of anthropogenic⁴ natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. Syria has stated that the origin of these particles was the missiles used to destroy the building. The Agency has assessed that there is a low probability that the source of these particles was the use of missiles.⁵ The presence of such

particles points to the possibility of nuclear related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning the nature of the destroyed building. Syria has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for the origin and presence of these particles. In this context, information yet to be provided by Israel might be helpful in clarifying the matter.⁶

5. The Agency has repeatedly requested Syria to have substantive discussions with it on the nature of the destroyed building, and to discuss relevant satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency. In a letter dated 7 January 2010, the Agency reminded Syria of its repeated requests for:

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or is now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site itself and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

6. The Agency has, on several occasions, offered to engage with Syria to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations. Such access would enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information which Syria considers to be sensitive.

7. Since the time of the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, Syria has declined to have substantive discussions with the Agency, has not provided any detailed information in response to the Agency's requests and has not agreed to the Agency's requests for further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to the three other locations of interest to the Agency in connection with its investigation.

8. Syria has also maintained its position that, due to the disposal of the debris from the Dair Alzour site, it was impossible to grant the Agency's request for access to it as the Agency's request had been made more than a year after the destruction of the building. Based on the discussions held in June 2008 in Damascus and other information available to the Agency, the Agency has continued to request access to the debris from the destroyed building and any salvaged equipment from the Dair Alzour site.

9. In relation to the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) (GOV/2009/36, para. 17), Syria's initial explanations for the presence of the particles were that they had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container. These explanations were not supported by the results of subsequent sampling carried out by the Agency at the MNSR (GOV/2009/75, para. 6). In a meeting held on 2 November 2009 in Vienna, Syria suggested that the particles may have originated from other materials present at the MNSR, specifically quantities of yellowcake produced at a pilot phosphoric acid purification plant at Homs⁷, previously undeclared uranyl nitrate compounds derived from the yellowcake and/or small quantities of previously undeclared imported uranyl nitrate materials (GOV/2009/75, para. 7).

10. The possibility of a link between the particles found at the MNSR and those found at the Dair Alzour site requires further sampling and analysis by the Agency. The Agency also needs to determine whether the use of the natural uranium compounds at the MNSR may be relevant to allegations concerning one of the three other locations and whether experiments may have been performed with the larger quantities of yellowcake produced at the Homs plant.⁸

B. Verification Activities

11. On 17 November 2009, during an inspection at the MNSR, the Agency provided Syria with a letter, dated 13 November 2009, in which it listed experimental activities carried out with nuclear material which, according to open sources, had been performed in Syria and which could be of relevance in determining the origin of the particles found at the MNSR. In the letter, the Agency requested access to the persons involved in those activities and to detailed information regarding the nuclear material and equipment used in the experiments. Syria made one of the requested persons available during the inspection and discussions were held on the experimental activities. Following up on Syria's statements concerning nuclear material at the MNSR (para. 9), samples were taken from yellowcake and uranyl nitrate compounds present at the MNSR. Environmental samples were also taken from equipment and locations at the MNSR associated with experimentation involving uranium-containing materials. In a letter to the Agency dated 6 December 2009, Syria provided limited information about some of the nuclear material observed at the MNSR. However, Syria did not address the Agency's concerns regarding the origin and presence of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found there.

12. In a letter dated 7 January 2010, the Agency requested confirmation of the quantities of nuclear material observed at the MNSR, the complete reporting of all nuclear material, detailed information regarding the use of uranium-containing nuclear material and updates to the design information.

13. In a letter dated 21 January 2010, the Agency provided Syria with the results of the samples taken during the 17 November 2009 inspection. While the results confirmed the characteristics of the material as declared by Syria, the Agency informed Syria that further clarification regarding the presence and use of anthropogenic natural uranium at the MNSR was necessary, and proposed that a meeting be held in Damascus on 8 and 9 February 2010 to discuss these issues.

14. In a letter dated 10 February 2010, Syria declined the Agency's request for the meeting, indicating that, in the light of the information provided in the same letter, it could be planned for a later stage. The information Syria provided does not clarify the presence and use of anthropogenic natural uranium at the MNSR. The Agency is planning an inspection at the MNSR to be performed on 23 February 2010 to verify nuclear material at the MNSR and examine relevant source documents related to the experiments indicated above.

C. Assessment and Next Steps

15. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites since the previous report to the Board of Governors.

16. Syria has provided some additional information concerning the presence and use of the anthropogenic natural uranium at the MNSR. However, Syria has not yet provided a full explanation of the activities and experiments involving nuclear material conducted at the MNSR that may have been the source of the particles found there. Therefore, further clarification from Syria is necessary in order to resolve this issue and to help exclude any possible link between the particles found at the MNSR and those found at the Dair Alzour site. Additionally, Syria is required to provide complete reporting of all nuclear material in Syria and to provide the Agency with access to all relevant documentation. The Agency has requested Syria's cooperation in these respects.

17. Since the November 2009 inspection, Syria has not fully cooperated with the Agency to facilitate the resolution of the issues concerning the MNSR. Syria has also not provided design information concerning the irradiation of uranium at the MNSR or met its nuclear material reporting obligations under the Safeguards Agreement (INFCIRC/407).

18. At both the Dair Alzour and MNSR sites, the Agency has found particles of anthropogenic natural uranium. Given that Syria has no reported inventory of natural uranium, this calls into question the completeness and correctness of Syria's declarations concerning nuclear material and facilities.

19. The Director General urges Syria to engage with the Agency on the above issues so that, in accordance with its mandate under Syria's Safeguards Agreement, the Agency is able to confirm that all nuclear material in Syria is in peaceful activities. For both the Dair Alzour and the MNSR sites, given the passage of time and the possible degradation of information, the Agency requests Syria to provide prompt access to all relevant information for the verification of Syria's declarations. The Director General is ready to agree with Syria on the necessary modalities for managed access to information and locations that will enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information considered by Syria as sensitive.

20. The Director General also urges Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement which will facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.

21. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ GOV/OR.1206, para. 26 and GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

² GOV/2008/60, para. 4.

³ GOV/2008/60, paras 10 and 11.

⁴ "Anthropogenic" refers to material that has been produced as a result of chemical processing.

⁵ GOV/2009/9, para. 7.

⁶ GOV/2009/36, para. 7.

⁷ A pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid was constructed and commissioned in 1997 at Homs, Syria, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the IAEA. Yellowcake was produced as a by-product of the purification process.

⁸ During a July 2004 visit to the Homs phosphoric acid purification pilot plant, Agency inspectors observed some hundreds of kilograms of yellowcake.

IAEA suspects Syrian nuclear activity at bombed site

Mark Heinrich

VIENNA

Thu Feb 18, 2010 4:47pm EST

VIENNA (Reuters) - Uranium particles found at a Syrian desert complex bombed to ruin by Israel in 2007 point to possible covert nuclear activity at the site, the U.N. atomic watchdog said Thursday.

It was the first time the International Atomic Energy Agency lent public support to Western suspicions that Israel's target was a nascent nuclear reactor that Washington said was North Korean in design and geared to making weapons-grade plutonium.

Previous IAEA reports on its two-year investigation into the affair, impeded by a lack of Syrian cooperation, said only that the uranium particles raised concern because they did not come from Syria's declared inventory.

"The presence of such particles points to the possibility of nuclear-related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning the nature of the destroyed building," said the confidential report by new IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano, obtained by Reuters.

"Syria has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for the origin and presence of these particles," he wrote, dismissing Damascus's contention that the traces came with munitions used by Israel to wreck the complex.

In what analysts called another departure from predecessor Mohamed ElBaradei, Amano prodded Syria to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which permits unfettered inspections beyond declared nuclear site to ferret out any covert atomic activity.

SYRIAN STONEWALL

U.N. inspectors examined the site at Dair Alzour in June 2008 but Syria has barred renewed access and also not let them visit three military sites, whose appearance was altered by landscaping after the IAEA first asked to check them.

The Vienna-based IAEA has also been checking whether there could be a link between the particles uncovered at Dair Alzour and similar unexplained traces detected in swipe samples taken at a Damascus nuclear research reactor later in 2008.

The report said Syria had refused a meeting in Damascus last month to address the issue. But inspectors now planned to visit the research reactor on February 23 to take more test samples and examine "relevant source documents related to the experiments."

Some analysts say the Damascus findings raised the question whether Syria used some natural uranium intended for the alleged reactor at Dair Alzour in tests applicable to learning how to separate out bomb-grade plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

Syria, an ally of Iran which is under IAEA investigation over nuclear proliferation suspicions, has denied ever having an atom bomb program and has said the intelligence is fabricated.

"Syria has not cooperated with the agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it," said the U.N. watchdog report.

"As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress toward resolving the outstanding issues."

The issue, along with the IAEA's hardening concern about a possible covert Iranian nuclear weapons program, will be on the agenda of the first of four quarterly meetings by the IAEA's 35-nation board of governors starting on March 1.

(Editing by Jon Hemming)



Philip J. Crowley
Assistant Secretary
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
February 19, 2010

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: The IAEA also made a report on Syria, which you guys have noted. It says that Syria isn't giving any cooperation to IAEA either. So – and yet, in the case of Syria, they're – they're getting an ambassador, they just had a visit by Mr. Burns. Why this holding out of hands to Syria which is equally in contravention of the IAEA, and getting more tough on Iran?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, we – I mean, we remain concerned about Syria's nuclear activity. They have not explained what was happening at the Al-Kibar reactor. It's refused to cooperate with the IAEA or account for chemically processed uranium found at two sites. We're not putting an ambassador into Damascus as a favor to Syria; we're putting an ambassador in Damascus so we can have the kind of direct conversation and engagement that we think is necessary in the region in the 21st century. We are going to have an ambassador there who will engage Syria on the full range of issues, those areas where we think there's opportunity for cooperation and those areas where we have concerns about Syria's ongoing activity, whether it's unexplained nuclear activity, whether it's support of terrorism, whether it's the presence of extremist groups in Damascus, whether it's unhelpful activity that Syria is engaged in with respect to Iraq.

On the – at the same time, we will have conversations with Syria about its own intentions as part of the peace process and whether it's willing to engage Israel constructively and move – make progress on that track of the peace process towards the comprehensive peace that we seek in the Middle East.

So we're not – we're not engage – returning an ambassador there as a favor; we're returning an ambassador because we think it's in the United States interest to have an ambassador in place who can have an ongoing daily conversation with Syrian officials and help them understand what we think about what is happening in the region and the bilateral relationships and multilateral relationships that we think are vitally important and serve our interest in the region.

QUESTION: But if Syria continues to stonewall the IAEA, would the U.S. then support continuing down the pressure track on the Syrian case and talk about new sanctions on Syria?

MR. CROWLEY: A lot of "ifs" in that question.

Syria dismisses IAEA call for more inspectors access

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Saturday, February 20, 2010; 10:48 AM

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - Syria dismissed on Saturday an International Atomic Energy Agency recommendation to allow its inspectors unrestrained access, days after the agency said a bombed Syrian complex could have been a nuclear site.

An IAEA report said on Thursday [2010-02-19] that Uranium particles found at a Syrian complex destroyed by an Israeli air raid in 2007 suggest the possibility of covert nuclear activity at the site.

The report, by new IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano, prodded Syria to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which permits unfettered inspections beyond a declared nuclear site to check out any covert atomic activity.

"We are committed to the non-proliferation agreement between the agency and Syria and we (only) allow inspectors to come according to this agreement," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said.

"We will not allow anything beyond the agreement because Syria does not have a military nuclear program. Syria is not obliged to open its other sites to inspectors," Moualem said after meeting his Austrian counterpart Michael Spindelegger.

Moualem did not address the findings of the latest IAEA report on Syria and repeated Syria's position that its nuclear activities are peaceful and related mostly to medicine.

SUSPICIONS

The United States said the site bombed by Israeli warplanes three years ago at al Kubar, around 60 km (37 miles) west of the city of Deir al-Zor, was a North Korean designed nuclear reactor geared to making weapons-grade plutonium.

The IAEA report lent public support for the first time to the U.S. assessment.

"Unlike Israel, our program is peaceful," Moualem said, referring to the Arab view that Israel has a massive nuclear arsenal that contributes to Middle East instability.

Previous IAEA reports on its investigation into Kubar said lack of Syrian cooperation impeded the investigation.

U.N. inspectors examined the site in June 2008 but Syrian authorities has barred them access since and did not let them visit three military sites.

The IAEA has also been checking whether there could be a link between the particles uncovered at Kubar and similar traces detected in swipe samples taken at a Damascus nuclear research reactor later in 2008.

The report said Syria had refused a meeting in Damascus last month to address the issue. But inspectors now planned to visit the research reactor on February 23.

Syria, is an ally of Iran, which is under IAEA investigation over its nuclear facilities. Moualem said Western proposals for fresh U.N. sanctions on Iran were counterproductive.

"We do not think sanctions will solve the issue," he said. "They will complicated the chances for a constructive dialogue between Iran and the West."

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said on during a visit to Syria on Saturday that world powers would have to take new action against Iran if Tehran made no further gestures.

(Editing by Jon Hemming)



Local News /

Feb 22, 2010 - 09:25 AM

Damascus, (SANA)- The meeting of President Bashar al-Assad with Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger on Saturday [2010-02-20] dealt with bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and the development they are witnessing following reciprocal visits by a number of officials from both countries, particularly the recent visit to Syria by Austrian Chancellor Werner Fyammann.

[deletia]

Answering a question on whether Syria has a nuclear program, [Syrian Foreign Minister] al-Moallem said "Syria doesn't have a military nuclear program, but it uses the nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, particularly in the field of nuclear medicine and this activity is done under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)."

He added "We are committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Safeguards Agreement signed between Syria and the IAEA... We allow the inspectors according to this agreement to come and watch the activities done in this regard."

He went on to say "As for the IAEA other demands that don't come in the framework of the Safeguards Agreement, we don't allow going beyond the Safeguards Agreement, consequently we are not obliged to open our other sites to inspectors... Our activity is peaceful contrary to what Israel possess, and our activity is supervised by the IAEA."

[deletia]

Defence minister cautiously optimistic about Lebanon mission

22. 02. 10. - 12:00

Social Democratic (SPÖ) Defence Minister Norbert Darabos is cautiously optimistic about Austrian participation in the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Darabos said on Saturday: "I have nothing against participation in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon", but cautioned that "I will not allow myself to be pressured since a positive decision will entail large expenses."

People's Party (ÖVP) Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger had said on Saturday following his return from a week-long visit to the Middle East that he was "quite positive" about participation in UNIFIL and a decision would be made in the very near future.

[deletia]

Spindelegger, who concluded his Middle East tour Saturday in Damascus, Syria, called on the Syrian government to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), based in Vienna.

The minister said uranium found in the ruins of the Syrian facility in Dair Alzour after its bombing by Israel in 2007 might have meant Syria had been engaging in secret nuclear activity.

Spindelegger told Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during their meeting that Iran needed to realise the international community's patience with regard to its nuclear programme was coming to an end.

[deletia]

UK RESPONSE: SYRIA AT MARCH IAEA MEETING

Passed to the Telegraph by WikiLeaks 9:04PM GMT 04 Feb 2011

Ref ID: 10LONDON444

Date: 2/25/2010 17:11

Origin: Embassy London

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN

Destination: 10SECSTATE16530

Header: VZCZCXYZ0001RR RUEHWEBDE RUEHLO #0444
0561711ZNY CCCCC ZZHR 251711Z FEB 10FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5088
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1076
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0371
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0410

Tags: PARM, PREL, IAEA, SY, IR, TU, UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 000444 NOFORN SIPDIS STATE FOR
ISN/RA - R. NEPHEW AND J. DANIEL
E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2020
TAGS: PARM, PREL, IAEA, SY, IR, TU, UK
SUBJECT: UK RESPONSE: SYRIA AT MARCH IAEA MEETING
REF: SECSTATE 16530

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin Quinville for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C/NF) Poloffs delivered reftel demarche to Duncan Johnson, Regional Issues Desk Officer in the Counter-Proliferation Department (CPD) of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and Victoria Dunne, Syria and Lebanon Desk Officer in the Middle East and North Africa Department of the FCO, on February 25. Johnson and Dunne said that the UK shared U.S. concerns about Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA and about the message that Syria's defiance sent to other potential proliferators, including Iran.

2.(C/NF) Johnson noted that though this was the IAEA's sixth report on Syria, no real progress had yet been made on convincing Syria to cooperate with the IAEA. Johnson said that from a counter-proliferation perspective, it was worrying that a country could defy the IAEA in this way, and Dunne questioned what precedent Syria's example set for dealing with Iran. Johnson said that DG Amano's recent meetings with Foreign Secretary Miliband and Foreign Policy Adviser to No. 10 Simon McDonald indicated that while Amano realizes Syria is a concern, Amano's top priority is Iran; Dunne said that the UK was concerned that Amano's focus on Iran could lead to neglect of the Syria issue.

3. (C/NF) Johnson said that the UK was responding to the situation in three ways. First, together with EU Partners it is issuing a "fairly strong" statement at the Board of Governors meeting that calls for Syria to comply with IAEA requests and "does not lift the pressure" on Syria. (Note: The FCO passed Poloffs a confidential copy of the statement that we will email to NEA and ISN. End Note.) Second, it is raising the issue *bilaterally* when UK ministers meet with their Syrian counterparts (and Dunne noted that the UK welcomed recent U.S. rapprochement with Syria as well). Third, it is seeking intermediary countries to pass messages to the Syrians; an example is Turkey, who the UK last year successfully lobbied to intervene with Syria.

4. (C/NF) Johnson said that the UK's "higher objective" was to push the Syrians away from Iran, and noted that there was, at times, conflict between that goal and the goal of Syrian cooperation with the IAEA. On the issue of special inspections, Johnson said that the UK was "not at the moment" pushing this idea.

Middle East Nuclear-Free Zone -----

5. (C/NF) Johnson said that FCO Director-General of Defence and Intelligence Mariot Leslie recently spoke with Under Secretary Tauscher about a Russian proposal for a conference on a Middle East Nuclear-Free Zone. Johnson said that the UK viewed the Russian proposal as a possible way forward on the Syria issue, among others, and asked for U.S. views on this proposal. Visit London's Classified Website: XXXXXXXXXXXX ed_Kingdom

SUSMAN

Syria turns down U.N. nuclear watchdog inspection

Thu Feb 25, 2010 3:12am IST

VIENNA, Feb 24 (Reuters) - Syria has turned down a planned visit to a research reactor in Damascus by U.N. nuclear inspectors trying to shed light on possible covert atomic activity in the country, diplomats said on Wednesday.

Syria told the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a letter that the visit could not take place due to preparations for the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors meeting, which starts on Monday.

The letter was dated Feb. 18, the same day as the IAEA issued its latest report on Syria, but reached the agency on Tuesday, a diplomat close to the IAEA said. This did not give the agency enough warning as it had planned the inspection also for Tuesday.

Syria, an ally of Iran which is under IAEA investigation over nuclear proliferation suspicions, has denied ever having an atom bomb programme.

[deletia]

The agency is investigating whether there could be a link between the *[al Kibar]* bombed site and the reactor in Damascus. It had wanted to examine "relevant source documents related to the experiments" at the reactor on its visit this week.

IAEA officials told diplomats from member states on Wednesday that countries could suggest alternative dates for inspection visits if there were scheduling problems and that they were working with Syria to find a solution, diplomats said.

(Reporting by Sylvia Westall; Editing by Mark Heinrich/David Stamp)



Taken Question: Meeting Between Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Feltman and Ambassador Moustapha

Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC

Question Taken at the February 26, 2010 Daily Press Briefing
February 26, 2010

Question: Was Syrian Ambassador Moustapha summoned to the State Department today? What was discussed and what was the outcome of the meeting?

Answer: Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman asked Ambassador Moustapha to come to a meeting today at the State Department. This was their first opportunity to discuss next steps after Under Secretary Burns' visit to Damascus on February 17. The meeting was part of our ongoing efforts to engage with the Syrian government in a candid, direct manner on issues of mutual concern.

N. Korea provided raw uranium to Syria in 2007: sources

(Mainichi Japan) February 28, 2010

TOKYO (Kyodo) -- North Korea provided about 45 tons of "yellowcake" uranium to Syria in September 2007 for production of fuel for an undeclared nuclear reactor, diplomatic and military sources knowledgeable on North Korean issues said Saturday [2010-02-27].

But the shipment was followed shortly by an Israeli air strike targeting the reactor and the uranium involved is believed to have been transferred to Iran around last summer, according to a Western diplomatic source.

The move highlights North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities, leaving open the possibility that Iran would use the yellowcake for covert uranium enrichment. But a Middle East military source has said that Syria may have returned the yellowcake to North Korea in the wake of the air strike.

U.N. Security Council resolutions ban North Korea from exporting nuclear-related materials and prohibit all member countries from procuring such items from the reclusive communist country.

David Albright, president of the U.S.-based Institute for Science and International Security, said 89 to 130 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium could be produced if 45 tons of yellowcake is further processed into uranium hexafluoride and is enriched.

"In any case, 45 tons of yellowcake is enough for several nuclear bombs," Albright said in a written response to Kyodo News.

Such an amount of yellowcake is equivalent to making 5,500 nuclear fuel rods for the type of 5,000-kilowatt graphite-moderated experimental reactor in North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear complex, on which Syria is believed to be modeling its own reactor. Plutonium, another material used for nuclear weapons, can be extracted from spent fuel rods.

U.S. officials have said the Syrian reactor had been close to becoming operational when it was destroyed by the Israeli strike.

It remains unclear whether there was a facility designed to create nuclear fuel rods or a reprocessing plant in Syria. But U.S. government officials say the head of North Korea's nuclear reactor fuel manufacturing plant in Yongbyon had visited Syria.

The diplomatic source said that the cargo of the yellowcake left North Korea's Nampo and passed through China's Dalian and Shanghai before reaching the port of Tartus in Syria on Sept. 2, 2007.

Israel noticed the move beforehand -- a factor that led the country to launch the air strike on Syria on Sept. 6.

The diplomatic source said Iran provided financial support for the construction of the Syrian nuclear reactor. Iran asked Syria to hand over the yellowcake after the strike, and the source said it is highly likely that the material was transferred to Iran via Turkey.

Iran is believed to be close to exhausting its yellowcake stockpiles reserved for its nuclear program and is seeking supplies from abroad.

North Korea, meanwhile, has abundant natural uranium resources which can be processed into nuclear fuel rods. It is also believed to be capable of making uranium hexafluoride for enrichment.

The United States and a number of European countries are wary that the North's resources and technologies may be used for secret nuclear development programs in Iran and other countries for the purpose of earning foreign currency.

In September last year, it was revealed that Iran was secretly constructing a second uranium enrichment plant.

"Iran might want a secret source of uranium or uranium hexafluoride for a parallel enrichment program, since the uranium hexafluoride produced at Esfahan is safeguarded by the International Atomic Energy Agency," Albright said, referring to a uranium conversion facility in the central city.

Some experts think that North Korea may refrain from exporting nuclear-related materials as it is seeking dialogue with the United States, which aims to prevent North Korea from engaging in nuclear-proliferation activities.

However, Pyongyang was once supporting Syria in its nuclear reactor construction program when the six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing the North were being held. Given such a track record, a high-level South Korean official said, "There are no taboos for the North."



IAEA Director General Addresses Board

1 March 2010

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano opened a busy Board of Governors meeting in Vienna, Austria with an introductory statement.

His statement dealt with nuclear energy, nuclear safety and security, cancer control, nuclear verification and safeguards, as well as management and budget issues.

[[EXCERPTS]

Nuclear Verification and Safeguards

[deletia]

Syria: "As my report on the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic shows, Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and other locations. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites since the previous report to the Board of Governors. It would be helpful if Israel shared with the Agency any relevant information which it may possess. Full cooperation is also needed from Syria to facilitate the resolution of issues concerning the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor."

During the approximately three days of meetings, the Board of Governors will consider measures to strengthen international cooperation in nuclear, radiation, transport and waste safety, and strengthening the Agency's activities related to nuclear science, technology and applications.

Reports by the Director General on the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and on the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, will also be discussed.

At the end of the opening morning session of the Board of Governors, the Director General briefed the press on issues relating to nuclear verification and safeguards as well as cancer control.

See Story Resources for more information.

By Sasha Henriques, IAEA Division of Public Information



Philip J. Crowley
Assistant Secretary
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
March 1, 2010

[EXCERPT]

QUESTION: How do you assess the meeting that Assistant Secretary Feltman has had on Friday with the Syrian ambassador, and what about the timing of this meeting that came one day after the Syrian-Iranian summit in Damascus?

MR. CROWLEY: Well, I would point it in a slightly different direction. It came several days after an important visit to Damascus by Under Secretary Bill Burns. It was the first opportunity for Assistant Secretary Jeff Feltman to follow up on the particulars that were discussed as part of that visit. And Syria's relations with Iran is one of those items that is a part of our ongoing discussion with Syria. We want to see Syria play a more constructive role in the region. We also want – to the extent that it has the ability to talk to Iran directly, we want to make sure that Syria's communicating to Iran its concerns about its role in the region and the direction, the nature of its nuclear ambitions. So – but the primary purpose for having the Syrian ambassador in was to just kind of follow up on that meeting in Damascus and chart the way forward.

QUESTION: Have they discussed the statements made by President Assad?

MR. CROWLEY: It wouldn't surprise me.

QUESTION: Was Ambassador Ford in the meeting?

MR. CROWLEY: I don't know. It's a good question. I --

QUESTION: Can you get back to us on that?

MR. CROWLEY: Has he been confirmed? I don't think he's been confirmed --

QUESTION: Well, he wasn't in the meeting?

MR. CROWLEY: If he's not confirmed, he wouldn't be in the meeting. That would be a – no, I – I know from – until you're confirmed, you're not in business meetings.

US, EU, urge Syria to drop nuclear secrecy

By GEORGE JAHN , 03.04.10, 09:10 AM EST

VIENNA -- Fiercely backed by allied Iran, Syria on Thursday [2010-03-04] denied hiding nuclear activities from the world and said Israel was the source of suspicious uranium particles found at a Syrian desert complex bombed two years ago by the Jewish state.

The Syrian and Iranian comments to the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors came in response to Western demands that Damascus stop stonewalling IAEA attempts to investigate suspicions that it ran covert nuclear programs - some with possible weapons applications.

While Iran remains the main focus of the board, Syria's refusal to allow IAEA inspectors into the country for follow-up visit to sites possibly linked to secret nuclear work was the principal theme of Thursday's closed board meeting.

A recent IAEA report prepared for the board said for the first time that uranium particles found at the desert facility destroyed by Israeli warplanes in September 2007 indicate possible covert nuclear activities at the site. The finding lent backing to Western allegations that the bombed target was a nearly completed nuclear reactor that Washington says was of North Korean design and meant to making weapons-grade plutonium.

Syria has put forward several explanations for the source of the uranium at the bomb site and of uranium traces found at its Damascus research reactor that IAEA inspectors say would not normally be found at such a facility. One Syrian suggestion - that Israeli munitions used to bomb the desert location contained depleted uranium - has been all but ruled out by the agency.

Delegates inside the meeting told The Associated Press that Bassam Al-Sabbag, Syria's chief IAEA delegate offered a new theory Thursday, suggesting that Israel had dropped uranium particles from the air after the bombing to implicate his country.

Separately, Iranian chief delegate Ali Asghar Soltanieh said Israel - not Syria - should be criticized at the meeting, describing the bombing of the Dair Alzour desert site as "an aggressive act, committed by the Zionist Regime." He accused the US and its allies of making an issue of "a few uranium particles."

But the U.S and the European Union said the onus was on Syria to disprove suspicions by cooperating with the agency.

[deletia]

"Over the past two years, we have noticed a troubling pattern in Syria's behavior," Chief U.S. delegate Glyn Davies told the meeting. "The more evidence the agency uncovers that Syria was engaged in serious safeguards violations, the more Syria has tried to actively hinder the agency's investigation."

On behalf of the EU, Spanish chief delegate Jose Luis Rosello expressed deep regret that Syria "has not been cooperative and transparent with the agency."

Associated Press writers Noura Maan and Alexander Mueller contributed to this report.

Syria hints Israel planted nuclear traces on its territory

Last update - 18:57 04/03/2010

By News Agencies

[EXCERPTS]

Syria suggested on Thursday that Israel dropped uranium particles onto Syrian soil from the air to make it look as if a covert nuclear weapons plant was being built there, diplomats at a United Nations nuclear watchdog meeting said.

[deletia]

In a closed-door debate by the IAEA's 35-nation board of governors, Syria reiterated its assertion that the uranium traces came with munitions Israel used to destroy the complex.

IAEA head inspector Olli Heinonen replied that the chemical composition, size, shape and distribution of the traces made it extremely unlikely they were a type of uranium sometimes used in munitions as a hardening agent, diplomats present said.

Rather, he said, they were traces of processed uranium - which after further treatment could be used for nuclear fuel.

In response, Syrian Ambassador Bassam al-Sabbagh suggested Israel might have contaminated the site with uranium particles dropped by air during or right after the air strike, participants in the meeting told Reuters.

"The IAEA should verify the nature of the material dropped by Israel ... There were planes that overflowed the site and we don't know what it was they dropped. I'm not just talking about munitions," Sabbagh was quoted by diplomats as saying.

Western diplomats dismissed his remarks as another twist in Syrian efforts to deflect the IAEA probe without addressing the substance of UN and Western concerns.

"It's part of a pretty weak defense by Syria," said a European Union diplomat, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity.

"I don't think (most delegations) took this seriously," said another diplomat.

Asked about that, a senior UN official familiar with Syria's dossier said: "The best solution would be to let the IAEA take samples from the debris to establish the facts, as the IAEA reports on this have indicated."

[deletia]

The UN watchdog's governors took no action on Syria pending further efforts by inspectors to gain access.

U.S., European and other Western delegates urged Syria to cooperate fully with the IAEA inquiry, while Iran said it was Israel, not Syria, that should be in the agency's dock.

"The core of the problem is an aggressive act committed by the Zionist regime," Iranian Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said. He blamed Western powers for the IAEA focusing "on the minor issue of a few uranium particles".

Iran wants IAEA to switch concern to Israel

Fri, 05 Mar 2010 18:36:50 GMT

Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has urged the top nuclear body to switch its focus from Syria's atomic work to Israel's nuclear arsenal as the main cause for concern.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh read out a statement in the Thursday meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors on the implementation of the Safeguards Agreements in Syria.

In the statement, Soltanieh said that Iran was "deeply concerned" about the IAEA's verification measures which, he said have shifted focus from Israel's nuclear work as the main source of problem to "secondary technical" issues.

"The core problem is, in fact, the Zionist regime of Israel's offensive against Syria which is a blatant violation of the UN Charter and the international law including the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency," Fars News Agency quoted Soltanieh as saying on Thursday.

In September 2007, Israeli warplanes destroyed Syria's al-Kibar military site blaming the country for harboring a nuclear reactor there, a claim rejected by Syria.

Soltanieh then accused Israel and its allies of having engaged the IAEA in a made-up scenario by raising "false claims" against Syria.

"Meanwhile, those member states who cry foul over Syria [s nuclear work] have turned a blind eye to the Israeli regime's nuclear arsenal, which poses a serious threat to both regional and global peace and security," he said.

An IAEA report by Director General Yukiya Amano said in February that uranium particles found at the Syrian complex suggest the possibility of covert nuclear activity at the site.

In response to the report, Syria said that unlike Israel, it was "committed to the non-proliferation agreement," reiterating that its nuclear work is totally peaceful.

Israel, the world's sixth largest nuclear weapons power, maintains a policy known as "nuclear ambiguity" and continues to remain outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.



**STATEMENT OF ROBERT FORD
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
MARCH 16, 2010**

[EXCERPTS]

Especially at a time when the Middle East confronts increasing regional tensions, we must be talking every day and every week with top-level officials who have influence and decision-making authority. They need to hear directly from us, not from the media or third-party intermediaries, what are our bottom lines and the potential costs to them – and to the region – of their miscalculations. If confirmed, unfiltered straight talk with the Syrian government will be my mission priority.

And I am under no illusions as to the nature of the challenge I will face if confirmed;

[deletia]

And while we urge countries in the region to comply with their obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and their obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, the Syrians have so far refused to provide the IAEA access and information necessary to resolve the concerns about Syria's nuclear activities.

[deletia]

PolicyWatch #1649: Special Forum Report

Too Little, Too Late? Nuclear Security and the Middle East

Featuring Gregory Schulte, George Perkovich, and Simon Henderson

April 6, 2010

On April 5, 2010, Gregory Schulte, George Perkovich, and Simon Henderson addressed a special Policy Forum luncheon at The Washington Institute to discuss the implications of regional nuclear proliferation in the context of the April 12-13 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington. Ambassador Schulte, who served as U.S. representative at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna from 2005 to 2009, is a senior visiting fellow at the National Defense University's Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Dr. Perkovich is vice president for studies and director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Mr. Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Gulf and Energy Policy Program at The Washington Institute. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

Note: The opinions expressed in Ambassador Schulte's presentation are his own and not necessarily those of the National Defense University or the U.S. government.

[Sourcebook note and transcript: at 9 minutes 25 seconds into Amb. Schulte's audio presentation he provides an example of the surprises that can occur: "Remember how, more recently, Syria built a nuclear reactor in the desert -- with no one noticing for at least five years."]

IAEA inspects Syria reactor in uranium traces probe

Tuesday, April 6, 2010; 1:08 PM [*Accessed 2010-04-06T18:50Z*]

VIENNA (Reuters) - U.N. inspectors have been able to revisit a Damascus nuclear research reactor as part of a probe into possible covert atomic activity in Syria, diplomats said on Tuesday.

But Syria continues to deny inspectors follow-up access to a desert site where Israel bombed a building in 2007 which U.S. intelligence reports said was a nascent, North Korean-designed nuclear reactor geared to yield atomic bomb fuel.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency has been checking whether there could be a link between the Damascus reactor and the bombed Dair Alzour site after discovering unexplained particles of processed uranium at both.

Syria turned down a planned IAEA inspection of the Damascus reactor in February, saying it was too busy with preparations for an IAEA Board of Governors meeting. But inspectors have now been allowed to examine the site.

"They visited Damascus only," a diplomat close to the IAEA said. The nuclear watchdog's next report on Syria is due toward the end of May.

Syria, an ally of Iran which is under investigation over nuclear proliferation suspicions, has denied ever having an atom bomb programme.

But in his February report on Syria, new IAEA chief Yukiya Amano gave independent support to Western suspicions for the first time by saying the uranium traces found in a 2008 visit by inspectors pointed to nuclear-related activity on the ground.

Syria's envoy to the IAEA has suggested Israel dropped uranium particles on to its soil to make it look as if a covert nuclear weapons plant was being built, an explanation which has been treated with skepticism by Western diplomats.

The IAEA wants to re-examine the desert site so it can take samples from rubble removed immediately after the air strike.

The agency has also been seeking access to three other Syrian sites under military control whose look was altered by landscaping after inspectors asked for access.

Israel is widely believed to be the only Middle East state to possess nuclear weapons, although it maintains public ambiguity about its capability.

(Reporting by Sylvia Westall, editing by Paul Taylor)

Some Still Doubt Nuclear Terror Threat, Former U.S. Envoy Says

By Lee Michael Katz

Special to Global Security Newswire

Friday, April 9, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON -- Even as the United States and other nations have pressed the issue in recent years, there have been doubts within the international community about the immediacy of the threat posed by nuclear terrorism, according to a former U.S. envoy to the United Nations' nuclear watchdog (see GSN, April 8).

Gregory Schulte for years worked alongside diplomats at the International Atomic Energy Agency who "weren't convinced nuclear terrorism was real, that terrorists could actually get their hands on a nuclear weapon or even a dirty bomb. So, they tended to dismiss the threat," he said in an exclusive interview with Global Security Newswire.

[deletia]

Q: Do you think IAEA technical assessments on Iran were politicized?

Schulte: It became a political football.

I recently read the two reports by the new director general, on Iran and Syria. And I have been reading IAEA reports now for five years. These were refreshingly forthright and honest. It was clear to me they hadn't gone through the painful political editing process that previous reports went through. There was often an effort to remove words or adjectives that would be seen as critical towards Iran. There was often an attempt to suppress concerns that were put forward by the IAEA inspectors.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the previous director general, added to the politics of this. The reports became politicized because the director general didn't want to be too confrontational with Iran. I think that undercut both the credibility and the effectiveness of the organization.

I'm very pleased to see Yukiya Amano, the new director general, is bringing the IAEA back to its core technical mission.

[deletia]

Q: What are the other challenges faced by the IAEA and the NPT regime?

Schulte: For us to strengthen the IAEA and the NPT regime, we really need to focus in three areas. First, we have to improve the capability of the IAEA and the international community to detect violations, to detect clandestine nuclear activities. We're not real good at it.

Take the example of the covert reactor that Syria was building with North Korean help. You know, the United States didn't detect this facility, which was cleverly disguised. We didn't detect it for years. The IAEA never detected it. That's not the fault of the IAEA's inspectors. It's just that Syria wasn't living up to its obligations to report it. Look at the clandestine weaponization efforts the Iranians had under way and perhaps still do. The IAEA didn't detect those until they were provided information on them. So detecting clandestine programs is a real challenge.

And if we're going to dissuade other countries from pursuing nuclear weapons, at a minimum they have to understand they could be caught. And this means national intelligence communities have to work to do better. We need to look at how can we strengthen the IAEA inspectors. The Department of Energy has an initiative under way to try to get them better technology to help in characterizing and tracking down nuclear material. That's very important.

[deletia]

Q: The reported Syrian nuclear reactor, which Syria denies, was bombed by Israel in 2007. Is Syria telling the truth? (see GSN, April 7) Is it cooperating with IAEA inspectors?

Schulte: Syria would like to bury the IAEA investigation the same way that Syrian bulldozers buried the remains of the reactor after Israel bombed it. They started with a cover-up and the denial. Then they proceeded to complete noncooperation.

After the site was bombed, they carted away the wreckage and built a new building on top. Only then did they allow IAEA inspectors to come, hoping that inspectors would find nothing. Well, IAEA inspectors found something. They found a bunch of chemically processed uranium particles that couldn't be explained. The latest report by the IAEA director general makes it clear the inspectors assumed it was a reactor. It says it has all the characteristics of a nuclear reactor site -- and it doesn't accept any of Syria's explanations.

Syria has stopped all of its cooperation, and it's hoping that the investigation will go away. But I don't think it will.

Q: What is North Korea's involvement in Syria, if any? And with proliferation elsewhere?

Schulte: The Syrian case is really more about North Korea than it is about Syria. We talk about the IAEA investigation of Syria because the covert reactor was being built in Syria, but who provided the designs? Who provided the expertise? Who perhaps even provided resources and financing for it? The North Koreans.

When the possibility of this reactor first emerged, the IAEA inspectors were somewhat dismissive because they said, 'well, you know, Syria doesn't have the expertise or the resources to build a nuclear reactor.' But it quickly became apparent they got that expertise and resources from North Korea. So, North Korean involvement in designing a reactor very much like their reactor at Yongbyon, which as we know, produced plutonium for their nuclear weapons, is quite troubling indeed.

It illustrates that North Korea is prepared not only to engage and trade in missile systems and other conventional armaments as we've seen, but they're also ready to sell nuclear technology. That has to worry us, because if North Korea's going to sell nuclear technology to Syria, where else might they do it? Are they going to sell it to Burma? To Venezuela? Are they going to sell it to anyone who's ready to purchase this?

[deletia]



Statement to 2010 Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano

3 May 2010 | New York, USA

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

At present, the Agency is working to resolve important safeguards implementation issues in three States.

[deletia]

As far as Syria is concerned, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving questions related to the nature of the Dair Alzour site destroyed by Israel and other locations. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in this regard. I continue to request Syria to engage with the Agency on all outstanding issues.

[deletia]

CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY
WITH RESPECT TO SYRIA

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

NOTIFICATION THAT THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO SYRIA, ORIGINALLY DECLARED ON MAY 11, 2004, BY EXECUTIVE ORDER 13338, IS TO CONTINUE IN EFFECT BEYOND MAY 11, 2010, PURSUANT TO 50 U.S.C. 1622(d)



MAY 5, 2010.—Message and accompanying papers referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1622(d), provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency, unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the Federal Register and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the Federal Register for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency with respect to the actions of the Government of Syria declared in Executive Order 13338 of May 11, 2004, and relied upon for additional steps taken in Executive Order 13399 of April 25, 2006, and Executive Order 13460 of February 13, 2008, is to continue in effect beyond May 11, 2010.

While the Syrian government has made some progress in suppressing foreign fighter networks infiltrating suicide bombers into Iraq, its actions and policies, including continuing support for terrorist organizations and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to continue in effect the national emergency declared with respect to this threat and to maintain in force the sanctions to address this national emergency. As we have communicated to the Syrian government directly, Syrian actions will determine whether this national emergency is renewed or terminated in the future.

BARACK OBAMA.

THE WHITE HOUSE, May 3, 2010.

NOTICE
CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO
THE ACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA

On May 11, 2004, pursuant to his authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 50 U.S.C. 1701–1706, and the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, Public Law 108–175, the President issued Executive Order 13338, in which he declared a national emergency with respect to the actions of the Government of Syria. To deal with this national emergency, Executive Order 13338 authorized the blocking of property of certain persons and prohibited the exportation or re-exportation of certain goods to Syria. On April 25, 2006, and February 13, 2008, the President issued Executive Order 13399 and Executive Order 13460, respectively, to take additional steps with respect to this national emergency.

The President took these actions to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by the actions of the Government of Syria in supporting terrorism, maintaining its then existing occupation of Lebanon, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, and undermining U.S. and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.

While the Syrian government has made some progress in suppressing networks of foreign fighters bound for Iraq, its actions and policies, including continuing support for terrorist organizations and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. As a result, the national emergency declared on May 11, 2004, and the measures adopted on that date, on April 25, 2006, in Executive Order 13399, and on February 13, 2008, in Executive Order 13460, to deal with that emergency must continue in effect beyond May 11, 2010. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1622(d), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency declared with respect to certain actions of the Government of Syria. The United States will consider changes in the policies and actions of the Government of Syria in determining whether to continue or terminate this national emergency in the future and would welcome progress by the Government of Syria on these matters.

This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress.

BARACK OBAMA.

THE WHITE HOUSE, May 3, 2010.

UN experts say NKorea is exporting nuke technology

By EDITH M. LEDERER (AP)

14 hours ago [Accessed 2010-05-28T21:00Z]

UNITED NATIONS — North Korea is exporting nuclear and ballistic missile technology and using multiple intermediaries, shell companies and overseas criminal networks to circumvent U.N. sanctions, U.N. experts said in a report obtained by The Associated Press.

The seven-member panel monitoring the implementation of sanctions against North Korea said its research indicates that Pyongyang is involved in banned nuclear and ballistic activities in Iran, Syria and Myanmar. It called for further study of these suspected activities and urged all countries to try to prevent them.

The 47-page report, obtained late Thursday by AP, and a lengthy annex document sanctions violations reported by U.N. member states, including four cases involving arms exports and two seizures of luxury goods by Italy — two yachts and high-end recording and video equipment. The report also details the broad range of techniques that North Korea is using to try to evade sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council after its two nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009.

Council diplomats discussed the report by the experts from Britain, Japan, the United States, France, South Korea, Russia and China at a closed-door meeting on Thursday.

Its release happened to coincide with heightened tensions between North Korea and South Korea over the March sinking of a South Korean navy ship which killed 46 sailors. The council is waiting for South Korea to decide what action it wants the U.N.'s most powerful body to take in response to the sinking, which a multinational investigation determined was caused by a North Korean torpedo.

The panel of experts said there is general agreement that the U.N. embargoes on nuclear and ballistic missile related items and technology, on arms exports and imports except light weapons, and on luxury goods, are having an impact.

But it said the list of eight entities and five individuals currently subject to an asset freeze and travel ban seriously understates those known to be engaged in banned activities and called for additional names to be added. It noted that North Korea moved quickly to have other companies take over activities of the eight banned entities.

The experts said an analysis of the four North Korean attempts to illegally export arms revealed that Pyongyang used "a number of masking techniques" to avoid sanctions. They include providing false descriptions and mislabeling of the contents of shipping containers, falsifying the manifest and information about the origin and destination of the goods, "and use of multiple layers of intermediaries, shell companies, and financial institutions," the panel said.

It noted that a chartered jet intercepted in Thailand in December carrying 35 tons of conventional weapons including surface-to-air missiles from North Korea was owned by a company in the United Arab Emirates, registered in Georgia, leased to a shell company registered in New Zealand and then chartered to another shell company registered in Hong Kong — which may have been an attempt to mask its destination.

North Korea is also concealing arms exports by shipping components in kits for assembly overseas, the experts said.

As one example, the panel said it learned after North Korean military equipment was seized at Durban harbor in South Africa that scores of technicians from the North had gone to the Republic of Congo, where the equipment was to have been assembled.

The experts called for "extra vigilance" at the first overseas port handling North Korean cargo and close monitoring of airplanes flying from the North, saying Pyongyang is believed to use air cargo "to handle high valued and sensitive arms exports."

While North Korea maintains a wide network of trade offices which do legitimate business as well as most of the country's illicit trade and covert acquisitions, the panel said Pyongyang "has also established links with overseas criminal networks to carry out these activities, including the transportation and distribution of illicit and smuggled cargoes."

This may also include goods related to weapons of mass destruction and arms, it added.

Under council resolutions, all countries are required to submit reports on what they are doing to implement sanctions but as of April 30 the panel said it had still not heard from 112 of the 192 U.N. member states — including 51 in Africa, 28 in Asia, and 25 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

While no country reported on nuclear or ballistic missile-related imports or exports from North Korea since the second sanctions resolution was adopted last June, the panel said it reviewed several U.S. and French government assessments, reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency, research papers and media reports indicating Pyongyang's continuing involvement in such activities.

These reports indicate North Korea "has continued to provide missiles, components, and technology to certain countries including Iran and Syria ... (and) has provided assistance for a nuclear program in Syria, including the design and construction of a thermal reactor at Dair Alzour," the panel said.

Syria denied the allegations in a letter to the IAEA, but the U.N. nuclear agency is still trying to obtain reports on the site and its activities, the panel said.

The experts said they are also looking into "suspicious activity in Myanmar," including activities of Namchongang Trading, one of the companies subject to U.N. sanctions, and reports that Japan in June 2009 arrested three individuals for attempting to illegally export a magnetometer — which measures magnetic fields — to Myanmar via Malaysia allegedly under the direction of a company known to be associated with illicit procurement for North Korea's nuclear and military programs. The company was not identified.

Board of Governors

GOV/2010/29

Date: 31 May 2010

Restricted Distribution

Original: English

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Item 7(f) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2010/22)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. On 18 February 2010, the Director General reported to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) (GOV/2010/11). This report covers developments since that date.

A. The Dair Alzour Site

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor. The information further alleged that the reactor was under construction but not operational at the time of its destruction, and that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). By the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.¹ Syria has maintained that the destroyed building was a nonnuclear military installation and that it had had no nuclear related cooperation with the DPRK.² While it cannot be excluded that the destroyed building was intended for non-nuclear use, the Agency has assessed that the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate cooling are similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites.³ While Syria has indicated that its efforts to procure pumping equipment and large quantities of barite and graphite were civilian and non-nuclear in nature, the Agency has assessed that these items could also support the construction of a nuclear reactor.⁴

3. The Agency was provided with access to the site on 23 June 2008, at which time it was permitted to take environmental samples but was not provided with the requested access to documentation relevant to the destroyed building and other buildings, or to debris and equipment from the destroyed building.⁵ Analysis of the samples indicated the presence of particles of anthropogenic⁶ natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. The Agency has assessed that there is a low probability that the particles originated from the missiles used to destroy the building, as was claimed by Syria.⁷ The presence of such uranium particles points to the possibility of nuclear related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning

the nature of the destroyed building. Syria has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for the origin and presence of these particles. In this context, information yet to be provided by Israel might be helpful in clarifying the matter.⁸

4. As indicated in previous reports, Syria made a number of statements concerning the Dair Alzour site, the three other locations allegedly functionally related to it, the procurement activities referred to above and the alleged foreign assistance. The statements are limited in detail and no documentation has been provided to support them. Syria has also maintained its position that, due to the disposal of the debris from the Dair Alzour site, it is impossible to grant the Agency's request for access to the debris. The information and access provided by Syria to date have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building, or to substantiate Syria's claims regarding its procurement efforts.

5. The Agency has repeatedly requested that Syria have substantive discussions with it on the nature of the destroyed building, and discuss relevant satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency. Since the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, Syria has declined to engage substantively with the Agency in this regard. Furthermore, Syria has maintained that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency.⁹ In this regard, the Agency has previously explained to Syria that there is no limitation in comprehensive safeguards agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. In a letter dated 17 March 2010, the Agency reminded Syria of its repeated requests for:

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

6. The Agency has, on several occasions, offered to engage with Syria to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations. Such access is essential to enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information which Syria considers to be sensitive. Given the passage of time and the possible degradation of information, the Agency requests Syria to provide prompt access to all relevant information. The Agency remains ready to discuss with Syria the necessary modalities for managed access.

B. Activities at the MNSR Site

7. Particles of anthropogenic uranium of a type not included in Syria's reported inventory were found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in 2008 and in 2009. Syria's initial explanations in June 2009 that the particles had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container were not supported by the results of sampling carried out by the Agency.¹⁰

8. In the course of the Agency's investigation into the origin and presence of the uranium particles at the MNSR, Syria suggested in November 2009 that they may have originated from yellowcake produced domestically at the Homs phosphoric acid purification plant, and from a small quantity of imported depleted uranyl nitrate.¹¹

9. A physical inventory verification (PIV) was undertaken at the MNSR on 31 March 2010. During the PIV, Syria provided the Agency with information concerning previously unreported activities involving the conversion of yellowcake to uranyl nitrate. Syria stated that the conversion activities involved tens of grams of nuclear material and had taken place in 2004 at the MNSR. Syria explained that the conversion activities had been performed in order to produce natural uranyl nitrate for comparison with depleted uranyl nitrate in irradiation experiments at the MNSR.

10. During the PIV, Syria presented approximately 1 kg of yellowcake which it stated had been produced at Homs, and small quantities of uranyl nitrate powders and solutions. Syria provided the Agency with access to samples which it stated had been irradiated during experiments at the MNSR. Syria also provided the Agency with copies of documentation said to be related to the conversion activities. Syria submitted to the Agency updated design information for the MNSR in a letter dated 11 April 2009 and draft inventory change reports concerning the newly declared material. In a letter to Syria dated 23 April 2010, the Agency requested further information concerning documentation and information provided during the PIV. In a letter dated 10 May 2010, Syria provided additional information. The Agency is awaiting the results of the analysis of samples taken during the PIV.

11. Further assessment of Syria's declarations concerning the conversion activities, the related experiments and the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles is ongoing.

C. Summary

12. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites. Furthermore, with time, some of the necessary information may deteriorate or be lost entirely. The Director General urges Syria to cooperate with the Agency on these issues in a timely manner.

13. Syria has provided information on previously unreported uranium conversion and irradiation activities at the MNSR and additional explanations concerning the presence of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles at the MNSR. Subsequently, Syria submitted draft inventory change reports concerning the newly declared nuclear material. The information provided by Syria is still being assessed.

14. The Director General also urges Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which will further facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.

15. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ GOV/OR.1206, para. 26 and GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

² GOV/2008/60, para. 1 and GOV/2009/36, para. 15.

³ GOV/2008/60, paras 10 and 11.

⁴ GOV/2009/36, para. 14.

⁵ GOV/2008/60, para. 4.

⁶ "Anthropogenic" refers to material that has been produced as a result of chemical processing.

⁷ GOV/2009/9, para. 7.

⁸ GOV/2009/36, para. 7.

⁹ GOV/2009/56, para. 9.

¹⁰ GOV/2009/75, para. 6.

¹¹ GOV/2010/11, para. 9.



7 June 2010 | Vienna, Austria
IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to Board of Governors

by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano

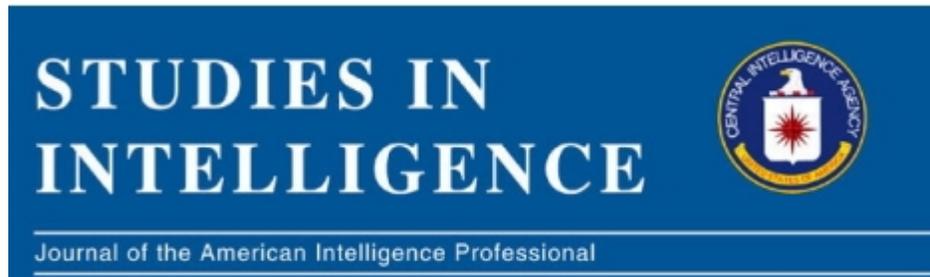
[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

As my report on Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic shows, Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and some other locations. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites. It would also be helpful if Israel shared with the Agency any relevant information which it may possess in this regard.

Since my last report, the Agency has performed a physical inventory verification at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) with Syria's cooperation. Syria has provided information on previously unreported laboratory-scale uranium conversion and irradiation activities at the MNSR and additional explanations concerning the presence of anthropogenic natural uranium particles. Syria subsequently submitted inventory change reports concerning the newly declared nuclear material. The information provided by Syria is still being assessed.

I urge Syria to cooperate with the Agency on all issues in a timely manner and to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement to enable the Agency to verify the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.



Reflections on Service

A Conversation with Former CIA Director Michael Hayden

Mark Mansfield

Studies in Intelligence

Volume 54, Number 2 (June 2010)

[EXCERPTS]

Former CIA Director Michael Hayden—known for making good, efficient use of his time—has kept a brisk schedule since leaving office in February 2009 after a nearly three-year tenure at the CIA. In addition to being a principal at the Chertoff Group, a security consulting firm founded by former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, he serves as distinguished visiting professor at George Mason University’s School of Public Policy, writes and speaks publicly about intelligence and national security, travels frequently, and still finds the time—and marshals the energy—to train for 10K runs with his wife Jeanine.

Now that he has been out of government for well over a year, I wanted to ask him to reflect on his years at CIA—the accomplishments, the challenges he faced, and the positions he took on some controversial issues, including the detention and interrogation program.

On a lovely morning this spring, I had an opportunity to get together for breakfast with Hayden at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, where he had just arrived to address a large group of corporate executives about leadership. (I am currently serving as the CIA’s officer-in-residence at the nearby University of Miami.)

Hayden spent the better part of an hour discussing his years at CIA. Following are excerpts from our discussion.—MM

[deletia]

[Mansfield:] You strongly advocated publicly disclosing the role intelligence played in detecting the nuclear reactor in Syria. Why did you advocate this?

[Hayden:] It was a very complex political problem. First of all, when we became aware of it, it became very important to keep it secret. Arguably secret, because it had to be dealt with in a way that didn’t create a war in the Middle East. And the more public it became, the more difficult it would be for the Syrians to act responsibly. So no question that it needed to be kept secret.

But after a time, after the facility had been destroyed, there were two lines working—because you had two bad actors here, the Syrians and the North Koreans. With the Syrians, you needed to keep it secret, otherwise they

might do something stupid if they were publicly embarrassed. With the North Koreans on the other hand, we were moving in the direction of a new arrangement with regard to things “nuclear,” including proliferation. And so, the fact that we knew the North Koreans had done this very egregious thing, I felt would undercut the confidence in the treaty when, sooner or later, it became more visible, more known, more public. So we had this line with the Syrians where you’ve got to keep it secret, but that was fading over time. Conversely, with the North Koreans, the imperative to make it public was growing over time, as we were getting to a firm agreement. I think the lines crossed about the first of the year—remember it was discovered largely in April [2007] and destroyed in September [2007]. By about December or January [2008], I think that’s when it’s crossed. So we at the Agency became very strong advocates for making it public. But in an intelligence process way, we knew that we had only told a few members of Congress, and the legitimacy for keeping it closely held was eroding as we got further away from the destruction of the facility, and therefore from any likely Syrian reaction. We had an additional impulse to tell Congress.

Report to the [UN] Security Council from the
Panel of Experts established
Pursuant to Resolution 1874 (2009)¹
Final Version

[EXCERPTS]

I. Executive Summary

1. On 12 June 2009, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1874 (2009) in which it requested the Secretary-General to establish a Panel of Experts mandated to: gather, examine and analyze information regarding the implementation of the measures imposed by the Council in resolutions 1718 (2006) and 1874 (2009), in particular incidents of non-compliance; make recommendations on actions the Council, the Committee or Member States may consider to improve implementation of those measures; and, assist the 1718 Committee in carrying out its functions.

[deletia]

59. Nevertheless, the Panel of Experts has reviewed several government assessments,²⁴ IAEA reports²⁵, research papers and media reports indicating continuing DPRK involvement in nuclear and ballistic missile related activities in certain other countries including Iran, Syria and Myanmar. A number of government and private experts with whom members of the Panel of Experts have spoken also expressed concern that the DPRK has the capability as well as the propensity to provide nuclear and ballistic missiles-related equipment, facilities, technical advice to and through clients overseas.

60. Evidence provided in these reports indicates that the DPRK has continued to provide missiles, components, and technology to certain countries including Iran and Syria since the imposition of these measures. The Panel of Experts has also reviewed government issued reports indicating that the DPRK has provided assistance for a nuclear programme in Syria, including the design and construction of a thermal reactor at Dair Alzour. The IAEA is still attempting to obtain updated reports concerning the current status of this site and the activities involved.²⁶

61. The Panel of Experts is also looking into suspicious activity in Myanmar including activities there of Namchongang Trading (NCG), a 1718 Committee designated entity, and reports that Japan, in June 2009, arrested three individuals for attempting to illegally export a magnetometer to Myanmar via Malaysia, allegedly under the direction of a company known to be associated with illicit procurement for DPRK nuclear and military programmes.

62. The Panel of Experts believes that the information referred to paragraphs 59 to 61 merits the close attention of Member States with regard to the implementation and enforcement of the Security Council measures. Further study with regard to these suspected activities will be conducted by the Panel in order to develop a more thorough understanding of the facts. The Panel will seek the cooperation of relevant organizations, including the IAEA, in this regard.

¹ The views expressed in this report are exclusively those of Panel of Experts and do not represent those of any others unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ Reference is made to the Press Briefing by Dr. Mathew J. Burrows, US National Intelligence Council (NIC) Counselor and Director of the Analysis and Production Staff, 24 March 2010,

<www.dni.gov/interviews/20100324_interview.pdf>, as well as the Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria's Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea's Involvement, 24 April 2008,

<www.dni.gov/interviews/20080424_interview.pdf>. Reference is also made to concerns expressed in the French White Paper on Defence and National Security, June 2008, regarding continuing military cooperation between DPRK and other countries in the ballistic missile field, <www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/livre_blanc_tome1_partie1.pdf>.

²⁵ Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement on the Syrian Arab Republic, GOV/2010/11, 18 February 2010.

²⁶ In a letter to the IAEA dated 24 May 2009, Syria denied these allegations but provided no supporting documentation concerning the facilities in question. In its last report on Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, the IAEA underlines that Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 regarding the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site. (See paragraph 15 of Gov/2010/11 of 18 February 2010). See also Statement to 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) made by IAEA Director General, Yukiya Amano, 3 May 2010.

[deletia]

72. The Government of the Republic of Korea informed the 1718 Committee on 13 October 2009 that the relevant authorities of the Republic of Korea inspected at the port of Busan a container ship flying the Panama flag with the name of MSC Rachele, owned by Mediterranean Shipping Company, a Swiss firm, and found that four containers were filled with working protective garments which were deemed to have military utility for chemical protection. The Republic of Korea authorities further indicated that their investigation had revealed that the shipment of the four containers in question had originated in the port of Nampo, DPRK, and were shipped on or about 11 September 2009 to Dalian, China. In Dalian the containers were placed on board the MSC Rachele. The intended recipient of the goods was declared as the Environmental Study Center in Syria. The Government of Syria disavowed the shipment. In December 2009, the Panel was given an information briefing from ROK officials and experts on the case and the nature of the goods. The Panel was also able to physically examine the goods in the port of Busan. Based on the information provided and expertise of the Panel, it concluded that these goods would primarily have military application in the protection against certain chemical agents.³¹

³¹ It was noted by some experts that these goods could also be used for civil purposes.

[deletia]

109. The DPRK relies heavily on overseas branches of its banks and on their correspondent accounts to handle surreptitious transactions. This scenario is exemplified by the activities of Korea Kwangson Banking Corporation (KKBC), which continues to maintain overseas branches. KKBC has repeatedly been involved in transactions for and on behalf of the entities designated by 1718 Committee including Tanchon Commercial Bank⁵⁵, the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID), Korea Hyoksin Trading Corporation and Korea Ryonbong General Corporation. According to information provided to the Panel of Experts, KKBC has handled several transactions involving millions of dollars directly related to transactions conducted between the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID) and Myanmar.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ See U.S. Treasury Department Designation Statement contained in Document TG 260 dated 11 August 2009.

[deletia]

XII. Recommendations

[deletia]

Interdiction

9) The Panel of Experts has expressed concern that certain countries such as Syria, Iran, Myanmar, continue to be associated with the DPRK in regard to proscribed activities and believes that special attention should be taken by all Member States to inhibit such activities. Further study should be conducted by the Panel of Experts, and by the Committee, for a more thorough understanding of such activities. Cooperation with other relevant international organization including the IAEA should be sought in this regard.



US Ambassador to IAEA Glyn Davies on Iran's Nuclear Program, Sanctions

Telephone interview with US Ambassador to the IAEA Glyn Davies, by Manal Lutfi; in Vienna; date not given: "US Ambassador to IAEA: Iran Wants Negotiations Over 'Shape of Table' - We Want Negotiations Over Issues; IAEA Ambassador to Al-Sharq al-Awsat: Syria's Cooperation With IAEA Insufficient, We Are Convinced Syria Working Illegally With North Korea"

Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online

Tuesday, July 13, 2010 T12:11:18Z

Journal Code: 1431 Language: ENGLISH Record Type: FULLTEXT

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[EXCERPT]

(Lutfi) Regarding Syria, how do you assess the current Syrian cooperation with the IAEA?

(Davies) The Syrian cooperation with the IAEA is insufficient. The problem is that they allowed the IAEA to inspect the Dayr al-Zawr reactor one time a while ago and the IAEA came up with more questions than answers about what is going on there. Syria says there was no nuclear reactor there and the agency said: we have found evidence of activities that you said had not taken place. Our position vis-a-vis Syria was: if you were not violating the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, then why do you not allow IAEA inspectors into the Dayr al-Zawr location? Let the inspectors do their work at that location and talk to engineers and scientists at the location. This is when Syria started going around in circles and denying any secret activities. However, America will not let the matter go. America insists that Syria fulfill its international nuclear non-proliferation duties and it must respond to the IAEA questions.

(Lutfi) Do you suspect a link between the Dayr al-Zawr reactor and Syrian-Iranian cooperation?

(Davies) I do not think this is where the problem lies. We have no information in this regard. However, the problem here is North Korea's role in building the Dayr al-Zawr reactor. We are convinced that Syria is working illegally with North Korea to circumvent the nuclear non-proliferation system. There are some very important questions, especially for the region if a country suddenly and secretly starts to cooperate with a rogue state, that is North Korea, which has withdrawn from the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty in a secret effort to acquire nuclear capabilities. This will lead to a series of questions toward Syria over the reason why they are doing it secretly.

(Description of Source: London Al-Sharq al-Awsat Online in Arabic -- Website of influential London-based pan-Arab Saudi daily; editorial line reflects Saudi official stance. URL: <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/>)

**ADHERENCE TO AND COMPLIANCE
WITH
ARMS CONTROL, NONPROLIFERATION,
AND
DISARMAMENT AGREEMENTS
AND COMMITMENTS**



July 2010
Prepared by the U.S. Department of State

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of Verification, Compliance, and Implementation

Released July 2010

[EXCERPT]

SYRIA

FINDING

Syria failed to declare and provide design information to the IAEA for the construction of the reactor at Al Kibar. Therefore, it failed to meet its obligations pursuant to modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements to its Safeguards Agreement. Moreover, the reactor's apparent purpose was the clandestine production of plutonium for non-peaceful activities.

BACKGROUND

Until September 2007, Syria was building a covert nuclear reactor at Al Kibar in Syria's eastern desert that would have been capable of producing plutonium. The reactor was destroyed on September 6, 2007, before it became operational. The reactor's intended purpose was apparently the production of plutonium, because the reactor was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.

Syria is an NPT Party that has implemented a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA. However, Syria failed to declare and provide design information to the IAEA for the construction of the reactor at Al Kibar. Following the reactor's destruction, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and to destroy evidence of what had existed at the site. On October 10, 2007, Syria conducted a controlled demolition of the reactor debris and promptly began removing equipment and debris from the site. By December 2007, Syria had constructed a large building over the location where the reactor once stood. Despite repeated requests by the IAEA, Syria did not allow inspectors to visit the site until June 2008. As of the release of this Report, Syria continued to reject IAEA requests for follow-up visits to the site and other suspected facilities.

The IAEA has continued to investigate concerns regarding the nature of the former facility at Al Kibar. The IAEA Director General's introductory statements to the September and November 2008 IAEA Board of Governors meetings noted that environmental samples were taken from the site during a June 2008 IAEA visit, and that the samples "revealed a significant number of natural uranium particles, which had been produced as a result of chemical processing."²³ The Director General's November 2008 statement also noted that the features of the building in question, along with the availability of adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, were similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site. In these 2008 statements, the Director General urged Syria to show maximum cooperation and transparency and to provide all the information needed by the IAEA to complete its assessment.²⁴

Compliance Discussions

In April 2008, the United States provided information to the IAEA indicating that the installation destroyed in September 2007 at Al Kibar was a nuclear reactor being constructed with North Korean assistance. Nuclear verification in Syria has remained an unresolved IAEA issue, with many countries expressing concerns about Syria's nuclear related activities. The United States and several other countries have urged the Syrian Government to demonstrate transparency and cooperate fully with the IAEA to address all outstanding questions about Syria's clandestine nuclear activities.

Syria has continued to reject concerns regarding its past activities at Al Kibar. It has stated that the Al Kibar site was a military site and was not involved in any nuclear activities. It has further stated that its cooperation with the IAEA would not be at the expense of military or national security.

COMPLIANCE ANALYSIS

That Syria clandestinely built a nuclear reactor, apparently intended for plutonium production, without providing any information to the IAEA indicates that Syria was likely pursuing a non-peaceful nuclear program. Furthermore, Syria's actions in razing the site of the destroyed reactor to remove all evidence of its existence, its denial of the construction of the reactor, and its continuing failure to demonstrate transparency and cooperation with the IAEA's investigation of this and related sites lend further credence to this conclusion regarding the intended purpose of the reactor. Finally, that Syria failed to report early design information on the reactor means it failed to meet its obligations pursuant to Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements under its Safeguards Agreement.

²³ The IAEA Director General's introductory statement to the Board of Governors meeting in June 2009 noted that similar particles of chemically processed natural uranium were detected in environmental samples taken from the Al Kibar site (during the June 2008 visit) and from the hot cells of the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor facility in Damascus in 2008. The IAEA sought to understand the presence and origin of the uranium particles found at both sites, which are of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material.

²⁴ In an introductory statement to the March 2009 IAEA Board of Governors meeting, the IAEA Director General indicated that additional access to other locations alleged to be related to the Al Kibar site, together with the sampling of destroyed and salvaged equipment and debris, was essential for the IAEA to complete its assessment. In an introductory statement to

the June 2009 IAEA Board of Governors meeting, the Director General noted that “[r]egrettably, the limited information and access provided by Syria to date have not enabled the Agency to determine the nature of the destroyed facility, nor made it possible for us to corroborate Syria’s assertions in that regard.”

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jJSeIycx9qHmJzJxTaK1rZmyLAigD9HC2KR00>

US official: Nuclear inspection in Syria possible

By DAVID STRINGER (AP)

1 hour ago [Accessed 2010-08-03T16:00Z]

[EXCERPT]

LONDON — The U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency will likely consider a special inspection of Syria to answer nagging questions over its nuclear activities, the U.S. ambassador to the organization said Tuesday [2010-08-03].

Glyn Davies said a number of countries on the IAEA's board of governors support plans to invoke the rarely used sanction.

Like Iran, Syria is suspected of hiding weapons-related nuclear activities and has blocked access to a suspected nuclear site destroyed by Israeli warplanes in September 2007.

"We need to keep the focus very much on Iran — but stay tuned on Syria, because Syria I think would love to just stave off any serious action to get to the bottom of what they were doing," Davies told reporters in London.

A recent IAEA report said that uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour desert facility indicate possible covert nuclear activities. The finding supported Western allegations that the bombed target was a nearly completed nuclear reactor which the U.S. alleges was of North Korean design and intended to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

Agency experts inspected Dair Alzour in June 2008, but have since been barred from revisiting.

"Because Syria has stonewalled for years ... the number of questions have continued to accumulate about what it is Syria was up to," Davies said.

He said there was a growing consensus among nations on the IAEA board that the issue must be addressed.

"A number of countries are beginning to ask questions about whether it might not be time to use that instrument of a special inspection, so that the agency can go in — or at least go to Damascus," Davies said.

Davies acknowledged that a special inspection — a sanction under which the IAEA's requests for access are made legally binding — had not been authorized for many years.

The Carnegie Endowment For International Peace claims records show the provision has been used only twice — in 1992 to inspect Romania's suspected nuclear weapons program and in 1993, when North Korea refused inspectors access to facilities.

Syria denies allegations it has been helped by Iran and North Korea in developing a covert nuclear weapons program. However, a recent IAEA report said Syria had acknowledged it carried out some small-scale nuclear experiments it had previously not owned up to.

Davies said that upcoming meetings are likely to be dominated by work to encourage Iran to return to negotiations over its alleged nuclear weapons program, but added that Syria would probably be discussed before the year's end.

"We are not going to postpone this indefinitely, we can't. The agency needs to do its duty, and needs to get answers to these questions and certainly a special inspection is one of the tools that's available — so that's something that needs to be considered and looked at," he said.

U.S. Considers Push for U.N. Action in Syria

By JAY SOLOMON

AUGUST 6, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON—The Obama administration is considering pressing the United Nations to pursue a "special inspection" of alleged Syrian nuclear sites, a senior U.S. official said Thursday [2010-08-05], a move that could leave Damascus facing a Security Council reprimand if it doesn't comply.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, has repeatedly rebuked Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government in recent months for denying IAEA inspectors unhindered access to as many as five sites potentially tied to a covert nuclear-weapons program.

Syria's alleged nuclear work has complicated an outreach campaign by President Barack Obama's administration, which seeks to build stronger relations with Mr. Assad's government in an effort to counter Iranian influence in the region.

U.S. officials said Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA poses a major threat to the global campaign to contain nuclear weapons. But Washington wants to make sure a special inspection is the best tool to gain Damascus's cooperation and to maintain international unity, they say.

The IAEA's director general, under U.N. guidelines, has the authority to call for a special inspection of suspect facilities in any member country feared to be violating its commitment not to pursue atomic weapons. If the country rejects the IAEA's request, the agency can refer the case to the U.N. Security Council as an act of noncompliance, potentially triggering sanctions.

"At some point, you do need to make a decision and find a way forward. That point is coming with Syria," said Glyn Davies, the U.S. ambassador to the IAEA.

Mr. Davies said the U.S. didn't expect an imminent IAEA push for a special inspection. But he said a number of IAEA member states are likely to examine the issue in the fall when the agency convenes its annual general conference and its quarterly Board of Governors meetings.

U.S. officials say a request could lead to a drawn-out diplomatic process that could split the IAEA's 35-member board. Officials fear that if Syria rejects a special inspection, the international community might not have the unity to push through substantial penalties in response, as has often been the case with Iran.

[deletia]

U.N. officials have said they would like to visit at least three other sites that may have been connected to a broader nuclear-weapons program.

"It's been years since the IAEA had its one crack at this. And it came away with more questions than answers," said Mr. Davies.

[deletia]

Adib al-Alam Gathered Info on Alleged Syrian Nuclear Reactor Site, Report

Beirut, 31 Aug 10, 08:05

Lebanese Mossad agent Adib al-Alam has gathered information on an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor site in Deir al-Zour that Israel bombed in September 2007, a security source told al-Liwaa newspaper.

The daily quoted sources as saying that former security services officer Brig. Gen. al-Alam transferred the info to Israel without specifying the nature of the data.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in May that Syria "provided the Agency with information concerning previously unreported uranium conversion and irradiation activities" at a small research reactor in Damascus.

However, Damascus is still refusing to cooperate over allegations that it was building a secret nuclear reactor with North Korea's help in Deir al-Zour, the IAEA said in a four-page report.

The IAEA has been investigating the allegations since 2008 and has already said that the building bore some of the characteristics of a nuclear facility.

<http://www.aliwaa.com/default.aspx?NewsID=193970>

مصدر أمني يكشف لـ <اللواء> دور أديب العلم في ضرب المنشأة السورية عام 2007

اللواء> - خاص: علمت <اللواء> من مصدر أمني رفيع أن العميل أديب العلم لعب دوراً في جمع المعلومات حول المنشأة السورية في دير الزور < التي قصفها الطيران الحربي الإسرائيلي في أيلول من العام 2007 بزعم إنها منشأة نووية كانت تعمل دمشق على تطويرها بالتعاون مع بيون يانغ وتؤكد المصادر ان العلم نقل المعلومات إلى إسرائيل من دون ان يُحدّد طبيعة هذه المعلومات او الدور الذي لعبته في الضربة التي وجهتها إسرائيل الى المفاعل المفترض

الوكالة الدولية للطاقة الذرية التي لا تزال تطالب بدخول المنشأة تتهم دمشق بإعاقة هذا المطلب كما جاء في تقريرها في أيار الماضي. وكانت سوريا سمحت لمفتشي الوكالة بدخول المنشأة في العام 2008

وكانت تقارير استخباراتية أميركية ذكرت ان المنشأة التي استهدفتها إسرائيل معدة لانتاج البلوتونيوم في سياق التحضير لانتاج قنبلة نووية ويرجح متابعون للملف النووي السوري ان تلجأ واشنطن إلى التصعيد من خلال حث الوكالة على إخضاع سوريا إلى طلب تفتيش الزامي خاص يتيح للوكالة أن تزور أي مكان يختاره خبراءها بعد وقت قصير من اعلام السلطات السورية بذلك

كما يضع هذا الاجراء الوكالة الدولية في موقع اقوى للتفتيش في مواقع تتعدى المنشآت النووية المعلنة



Board of Governors

GOV/2010/47

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Item 7(e) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2010/38)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. This is the report of the Director General to the Board of Governors on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic¹ (Syria); it includes developments since the last report was issued in May 2010.²

A. The Dair Alzour Site

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor. The information further alleged that the reactor was under construction but not operational at the time of its destruction, and that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). By the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.³

3. Syria has maintained, since May 2008, that the destroyed building was a non-nuclear military installation and that it had had no nuclear related cooperation with the DPRK.⁴ While it cannot be excluded that the destroyed building was intended for non-nuclear use, the Agency has assessed that the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites.⁵ While Syria has indicated that its efforts to procure pumping equipment and large quantities of graphite were civilian and non-nuclear in nature, the Agency has assessed that these items could also support the construction of a nuclear reactor.⁶

4. As described in the Director General's report GOV/2009/36, Syria has made a number of statements regarding the purpose of the procurement of large quantities of barite.⁷ These statements are not supported by the information available to the Agency, in particular with respect to the stated end use for the barite. In letters dated 4 June 2009 and 23 October 2009, the Agency requested that Syria provide access to project documentation and plans related to relevant activities to allow the Agency to confirm Syria's statements. Syria has not yet responded to these requests.

5. As indicated in previous reports, the Agency was provided with access to the Dair Alzour site on 23 June 2008, at which time it was permitted to take environmental samples but was not provided with the requested access to documentation relevant to the destroyed building and other buildings, or to debris and equipment from the destroyed building.⁸ Analysis of the samples indicated the presence of particles of anthropogenic⁹ natural uranium of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material. The Agency has assessed that the probability the particles originated from the missiles used to destroy the building is low.¹⁰ According to the Agency's current assessment, there is also a low probability that the particles were introduced by aerial dispersion from aircraft involved in the destruction of the building due to, inter alia, the particles' pattern of distribution among the sampling locations. The presence of such uranium particles points to the possibility of nuclear related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning the nature of the destroyed building. Syria has yet to provide a satisfactory explanation for the origin and presence of these particles. In this context, information yet to be provided by Israel might be helpful in clarifying the matter.¹¹

6. Syria has previously made a number of statements concerning the destruction of the building¹², the Dair Alzour site, the three other locations¹³ allegedly functionally related to it, the procurement activities referred to above and the alleged foreign assistance. The statements are limited in detail and no documentation has been provided by Syria to support them. Syria has also maintained its position that, due to the disposal of the debris from the Dair Alzour site, it is impossible to grant the Agency's request for access to the debris. The information and access provided by Syria to date have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building, or to substantiate Syria's claims regarding its procurement efforts.

7. The Agency has repeatedly requested that Syria have substantive discussions with it on the nature of the destroyed building, and discuss relevant satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency. Since the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, Syria has declined to engage substantively with the Agency in this regard. Furthermore, Syria has maintained that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency.¹⁴ In this regard, the Agency has previously explained to Syria that there is no limitation in comprehensive safeguards agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The Agency has made repeated requests to Syria for:¹⁵

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

8. The Agency has repeatedly proposed to Syria the establishment of the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations. Such access is essential to enable the Agency to establish the facts and make progress in its verification, while protecting military and other information which Syria considers to be sensitive. In view of Syria's reluctance to engage with the Agency on this matter and the continuing degradation of information with the passage of time, the Agency requests that Syria increase its cooperation and provide prompt access to all relevant information and locations as requested by the Agency.

B. Activities at the MNSR Site

9. As previously reported, particles of anthropogenic uranium of a type not included in Syria's reported inventory were found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in 2008 and in 2009. Syria's initial explanations in June 2009 that the particles had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container were not supported by the results of sampling carried out by the Agency.¹⁶

10. Syria has since then explained that the anthropogenic particles originated from previously unreported activities related to the production of uranyl nitrate performed at the MNSR, using yellowcake material produced at Homs¹⁷. Syria further explained that the purified uranyl nitrate was then used along with imported depleted uranyl nitrate in irradiation experiments at the MNSR. During the March 2010 physical inventory verification (PIV) at the MNSR, the Agency was provided with access to the location and material which Syria stated had been used in the production of uranyl nitrate and irradiation activities at the MNSR, where the Agency took a number of samples. The Agency was also provided with access to some supporting documentation.¹⁸ In a letter dated 30 June 2010, Syria submitted inventory change reports for the newly declared material shown to the Agency during the PIV. In a letter dated 16 August 2010, the Agency provided Syria with the results of the analysis of samples taken during the March 2010 PIV and requested discussions with Syria concerning inconsistencies and questions raised by those results.

11. Information in publicly available scientific publications indicates the past use of nuclear material in experiments and the possible presence of additional unreported nuclear material in Syria. The experiments described in the publications are not included in the activities which Syria has declared as having occurred at the MNSR.

12. In a letter to Syria dated 20 August 2010, the Agency requested access to the Homs phosphoric acid purification plant and its associated buildings for the purpose of determining the extent of any uranium processing activities and nuclear material at the plant.

13. During a meeting in Vienna on 3 September 2010, the Agency provided Syria with additional information concerning the results of the samples taken during the March 2010 PIV, discussions were held regarding the above issues and agreement was reached on a plan of action for resolving the Agency's questions and for addressing the Agency's request for access to the plant at Homs.

14. The Agency remains engaged with Syria to clarify the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles. Conclusions will only be possible once the Agency has exhausted its investigations on the material and activities at the MNSR site and related locations.

C. Summary

15. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

16. With the passage of time, some of the necessary information concerning the Dair Alzour site is further deteriorating or has been lost entirely. After two years of investigations constrained by Syria's lack of cooperation, it is critical that Syria positively engage with the Agency on these issues without further delay.

17. Syria has provided information on previously unreported uranyl nitrate production and irradiation activities at the MNSR and additional explanations concerning the presence of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles at the MNSR. More recently, it has submitted inventory change reports concerning the newly declared nuclear

material. The Agency has provided Syria with the results of the PIV sampling and met with Syria to discuss the outstanding issues concerning the MNSR, the other uranium experiments and the possible presence of additional unreported nuclear material in Syria. Agreement was reached on a plan of action for addressing these issues.

18. The Director General urges Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which would further facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.

19. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ INFCIRC/407.

² GOV/2010/29 (31May 2010).

³ GOV/OR.1206, para. 26 and GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

⁴ GOV/2008/60, para. 1 and GOV/2009/36, para. 15.

⁵ GOV/2008/60, paras 10 and 11.

⁶ GOV/2009/36, para. 14.

⁷ GOV/2009/36, para. 14.

⁸ GOV/2008/60, para. 4.

⁹ "Anthropogenic" refers to material that has been produced as a result of chemical processing.

¹⁰ GOV/2009/9, para. 7.

¹¹ GOV/2009/36, para. 7.

¹² UN Document A/61/1041-S/2007/537, 10 September 2007; the Syrian President's 1 October 2007 interview with the BBC, "Assad sets conference conditions"; GOV/2008/60, para. 1; GOV/2009/56, para. 9.

¹³ GOV/2008/60, paras 3 and 14.

¹⁴ GOV/2009/56, para. 9 and GOV/2008/60, para. 14.

¹⁵ GOV/2010/29, para. 5.

¹⁶ GOV/2009/75, para. 6.

¹⁷ A pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid was constructed and commissioned in 1997 at Homs, Syria, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the IAEA. Yellowcake was produced as a by-product of the purification process.

¹⁸ GOV/2010/29, para. 10.

France calls on Syria to show more “transparency” over its nuclear activities

iloubnan.info

September 08, 2010

BEIRUT – In a report issued this week, the IAEA pointed out to Syria and its refusal to allow the agency’s inspectors to enter a site liable to shelter the country’s nuclear activities. Asked about France’s stance in this regard during a press conference, the French Foreign Affairs and European minister spokesperson said, “The report of the Agency’s general Manager will be studied during the next Council of Governors set to start on September 13. It tackles the recent IAEA-Syria developments according to the general warrantee agreement concluded by Syria. However, there still some pending issues, namely regarding the nature of Dair Alzour site”.

"France backs all Agency's check-up activities", the spokesperson recalled, "and calls on Syria to show necessary concrete cooperation and transparency in order to shed the light on its past and current nuclear activities".

France calls on Syria to cooperate with IAEA inspectors

By JPOST.COM STAFF

09/08/2010 22:18

France on Wednesday [2010-09-08] called on Syria to show more transparency in its dealings with the International Atomic Energy Agency concerning its the site of a suspected nuclear reactor it was allegedly building before it was destroyed in an Israeli air strike. The IAEA issued a report earlier this week claiming that Syria had refused to allow agency inspectors to visit the site.

"[The IAEA report] tackles the recent IAEA-Syria developments according to the general warranty agreement concluded by Syria. However, there are still some pending issues, namely regarding the nature of the Dair Alzour site," said a French foreign ministry spokesperson. "France backs all IAEA check-up activities and calls on Syria to show the concrete cooperation and transparency needed to shed light on its past and current nuclear activities."

On Tuesday [2010-09-07], the US representative to the IAEA said that the organization may consider a special inspection of Syria to answer nagging questions over its nuclear activities.

Glyn Davies said a number of countries on the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors support plans to invoke the rarely used sanction.

Like Iran, Syria is suspected of hiding weapons-related nuclear activities and has blocked access to a suspected nuclear site destroyed by Israeli warplanes in September 2007.

"We need to keep the focus very much on Iran — but stay tuned on Syria, because Syria I think would love to just stave off any serious action to get to the bottom of what they were doing," Davies told reporters in London.

A recent IAEA report said that uranium particles found at the Dair Alzour desert facility indicate possible covert nuclear activities. The finding supported Western allegations that the bombed target was a nearly completed nuclear reactor which the US alleges was of North Korean design and intended to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

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IAEA technical justification session on Iran, Syria convened

IRNA

08 September 2010

[EXCERPTS]

Vienna - Technical Justification session of IAEA on agency chief's reports on Iran and Syria was convened Wednesday [2010-09-08] evening at agency's headquarters here. Iran's ambassador to the agency, Ali-Asghar Soltaniyeh said in an exclusive interview with IRNA after the end of the session, "At this justification session that is normally convened before the IAEA Board of Governors Session the Deputy Secretary General of the agency presents explanations based on the Secretary General's reports and then he replies to the questions that are raised respectively."

[deletia]

Referring to the agency's report on Syria's nuclear program at the justification session, he said, "We also pointed out that the agency's demands of Syria regarding various issues, including information on purchases, or entry into military zones, are quite contradictory with the articles of the NPT, and should not have been posed."

The Iranian envoy reiterated, "In case of Syria issue, the main source of concern is the Zionist regime's attack against a country, and keeping in mind the IAEA report, regarding the observed technical information and the seen pollutions, definitely the source of them is the missiles shot by the Zionists against the Syrian site, which calls for sample taking from the missile launcher in Israel."

Soltaniyeh pointed out that that the agency has not in case of Syria performed its major and technical responsibilities, adding, "The agency should sport the source of the pollutions and instead of inserting pressure against Damascus regarding presentation of information that is quite unnecessary, it should heed its real and technical responsibilities."

He reiterated, "At the justification session we also declared that the member countries at the agency are not responsible for presenting information about their purchases at all and the agency, too, is not allowed to deal with the military zones the same way that it treats the non-military regions."

Soltaniyeh reiterated, "Countries' legal responsibilities and commitments should be surveyed restrictedly within the framework of the agency's documents and regulations."

Nuclear Scrutiny to Turn to Israel

By JAY SOLOMON

SEPTEMBER 11, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON—*Arab states are preparing to press for far greater United Nations controls over Israel's nuclear program, in a move that could complicate the Obama administration's broader nonproliferation campaign and Middle East peace drive.*

Beginning Monday, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, will hold two sets of meetings in Vienna aimed at strengthening international efforts to stanch the spread of atomic weapons.

Arab diplomats say they are preparing to use the conferences—for the second consecutive year—to pass a resolution through the IAEA's member states aimed at bringing Israel's nuclear program under tighter international controls.

The resolution seeks to pressure Israel into signing the U.N.'s principal counterproliferation document, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and to place Israel's nuclear assets under IAEA safeguards. A similar resolution passed last year.

Israel is believed to be the only Middle East country to possess atomic weapons. Its government neither confirms nor denies their existence.

The U.S. has already begun trying to head off the Arab initiative, according to American and Arab diplomats, due to concerns it will distract from the conferences' focus on the proliferation cases of Iran and Syria.

[deletia]

U.S. officials also said the Arab-led resolution could also cause Israel to reject any participation in a planned 2012 conference aimed at establishing a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction.

"Another resolution singling out Israel and ignoring proliferation issues like Iran and Syria would seriously diminish the chances for convening a 2012 meeting," said Glyn Davies, the U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, in an interview.

[deletia]

U.S. and European officials said they plan on using the IAEA meetings to intensify pressure on Iran and Syria.

The IAEA issued new reports this week that reprimanded both Tehran and Damascus for continuing to deny U.N. inspectors access to sites alleged to be involved in covert nuclear work. The IAEA particularly criticized Iran's decision to deny two U.N. staff any future entrance to the country. Washington fears Tehran is increasingly shutting down monitoring of its nuclear sites, as its ramps up the production of nuclear fuel.

Mr. Davies has said the U.S. and its allies might push in coming months for the IAEA to conduct a "special inspection" of Syria's alleged nuclear infrastructure. Such a measure would compel Damascus to comply with Mr. Amano's requests or risk facing a U.N. Security Council censure, if not sanctions. Iran was hit with its fourth round of sanctions in June for its defiance of the U.N.

Israeli warplanes in 2007 destroyed a facility near the eastern Syrian town of Dair Alzour that the U.S. believes was a nearly operational nuclear reactor built in cooperation with North Korea. A subsequent IAEA visit to the site found significant traces of natural uranium. And in its most recent report, the agency detailed what it said were unreported experiments conducted by Syria that could be utilized to produce nuclear fuel.

This month, Syria and the IAEA agreed to an action plan that would allow U.N. monitors greater access to Damascus's research reactor, where the experiments were held. But Syria has continued to deny the IAEA any new visits to the site destroyed by the Israelis two years ago, or to make available officials and documents related to the facility.

"It's important for the agency ... to resolve all questions about the scope of Syria's undeclared nuclear activities," said Mr. Davies. "Ultimately the issue is gaining unfettered IAEA access to the Dair Alzour site, which we are confident was a secret nuclear reactor."

Syria denies it was developing a nuclear reactor. And Syrian officials said the IAEA won't be allowed to visit sites that have military purposes.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com



Statements of the Director General

13 September 2010 | Vienna, Austria

IAEA Board of Governors

Introductory Statement to Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

As my report on Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic shows, Syria has declined to engage substantively with the Agency in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and some other locations. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

It is critical that Syria positively engage with the Agency on all of these issues without further delay.

During a meeting between Syria and the Agency on 3 September 2010, agreement was reached on a plan of action for resolving the Agency's questions concerning the results of samples taken at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in Damascus. The Agency remains engaged with Syria to clarify the origin of anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the MNSR.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iuJW1HOJVXVtdjf4udX62OMoNBsgD9I90P9G0>

US: time may come for special nuke probe of Syria

By GEORGE JAHN (AP)

2 hours ago [Accessed 2010-09-16T15:15Z]

VIENNA — A U.S. envoy on Thursday suggested time was running out for Syria to cooperate with a U.N. atomic agency probe of alleged secret nuclear activities before the agency invokes its seldom-used authority to call for a special inspection — a possible prelude to U.N. Security Council involvement.

Rising to Syria's defense, a senior Iranian diplomat accused the organization — the International Atomic Energy Agency — of harassing Syria by leveling false allegations in collusion with Israel and its allies.

The two officials spoke as the 35-nation atomic agency board meeting turned its attention from the agency's probe of Iran's nuclear activities to suspicions that Syria has a hidden nuclear program.

Israeli warplanes bombed what the U.S. says was a nearly finished nuclear reactor three years ago, launching an agency investigation. After an initial visit to the site, agency inspectors have not been allowed to return — or visit other suspect sites — and the agency's chief, Yukiya Amano, says Syria's lack of cooperation could mean that information sought by the agency could be lost with the passage of time.

Iranian envoy Ali Asghar Soltanieh told the board that Israel's attack is the real issue and Syria has become targeted by a "vicious circle of endless questions and allegations."

Syria denies hiding nuclear activities.

But Glyn Davies, the chief U.S. delegate to the agency, told the meeting that, unless Syria ends its stonewalling, the IAEA must increasingly "consider all available measures and authorities to pursue the verification assurances the international community seeks" — diplomatic language for a special inspection.

Only twice has the atomic agency ever called for or carried out a special inspection, which gives it authority for countrywide inspections of known or suspect nuclear activities.

Romania asked to be inspected in 1992 to show that the post-communist government had no nuclear-weapons aspirations. A year later, the agency asked for a special inspection in North Korea — a request turned down by the country, which continued with its secret development of nuclear weapons.

Refusal by Syria to allow a special inspection would allow the board to refer the issue to the U.N. Security Council, which then could issue a reprimand, pass a resolution demanding compliance and ultimately pass the kind of sanctions Iran is now under for refusing to heed demands to curb nuclear activities that could be used both to generate energy or make weapons.



Statements of the Director General

20 September 2010 | Vienna, Austria

Statement to Fifty-Fourth Regular Session of IAEA General Conference 2010 by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano

[EXCERPT]

Nuclear Verification

Turning now to nuclear verification, at the start of my term, I expressed the hope that the milestone of 100 additional protocols in force would soon be achieved. The number now stands at 102. This is an encouraging development. The additional protocol is an essential tool for the Agency to be able to provide credible assurance not only that declared nuclear material is not being diverted from peaceful uses, but also that there are no undeclared nuclear material and activities in States with comprehensive safeguards agreements. I strongly hope that all remaining States will conclude additional protocols as soon as possible.

I also ask the 18 States without NPT safeguards agreements in force to bring such agreements into force without delay, and call on States with small quantities protocols that have not yet done so to amend or rescind their protocols.

We have realigned the management of the Agency's laboratories, creating a new Office of Safeguards Analytical Services within the Department of Safeguards. Construction of the Clean Laboratory extension at Seibersdorf started in June. The ultra sensitive mass spectrometer has been procured and the first factory tests were successfully completed. Agency staff are now undergoing training at the factory. The new Clean Laboratory is expected to be fully operational in the first half of 2011.

As far as the new Nuclear Material Laboratory is concerned, we hope to award a construction contract in December so that work can start in July 2011. Despite extra budgetary contributions by several Member States, for which I am deeply grateful, we still need additional funding to complete this project.

To help better understand future verification challenges, the Agency will in November host its traditional international safeguards symposium. The event will bring together technical experts from the IAEA, Member States, the nuclear industry and other bodies to share information and exchange views on the best technical responses to the changes taking place in the field of nuclear verification.

I have continued to report regularly to the Board of Governors on implementation of Agency safeguards, including in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic, which have been on the Board's agenda. My basic approach has been that all safeguards agreements between Member States and the Agency, and other relevant obligations, should be implemented fully.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

STATEMENT

National Statement to the IAEA General Conference

Dr. Steven Chu

United States Secretary of Energy

September 20, 2010

Vienna, Austria

[EXCERPT]

Strengthening Nonproliferation and International Safeguards

The second area I want to discuss is strengthening nonproliferation safeguards to increase the security of nuclear material around the world.

As noted at the 8th NPT Review Conference, the IAEA safeguards system is facing a growing imbalance between workload and resources. New facilities require safeguards and technologies require updating, yet the IAEA safeguards budget has remained relatively static. The United States supports a significant increase in the IAEA's Regular Budget.

At the U.S. Department of Energy we have also undertaken a major effort called the Next Generation Safeguards Initiative to identify technology gaps and solutions, train new experts, and develop new concepts and approaches to improve international safeguards.

Further, the IAEA has stated that it needs the measures of the Additional Protocol to assure compliance with a safeguards agreement. Therefore, I urge all countries that have not yet done so to conclude an Additional Protocol with the Agency without delay.

For countries that do not adhere to their safeguards commitments there must be real and timely consequences. We support the IAEA in its efforts to resolve outstanding concerns related to the nuclear programs in Iran and Syria and we encourage the Agency to make full use of existing authorities. North Korea also continues to present a challenge to nonproliferation efforts and needs to comply with international obligations.

The U.S. hopes all states will focus on meeting their essential international nuclear verification obligations, rather than criticize the IAEA's effort to effectively implement its legal mandate under Agency safeguard agreements.

Iran, the NAM, and Amano

By mark *[Hibbs]*

21 September 2010

[EXCERPTS]

Since 1985 I have spent two years and four months of my life in Vienna—not bad if you consider that I never have owned or rented a flat there. I’m right now halfway through another Vienna stay with one week down, and one week to go.

A lot of those two-plus years went by in corridors of the A and B buildings at the Vienna International Center where the IAEA has its headquarters. That was also true last week... and so after five days of IAEA board deliberations beginning 9/13, and one more week to go at this year’s General Conference, here’s the essential thumbnail at half-time:

[deletia]

- * Amano’s deliberate post-election courtship with the NAM doesn’t look like it is paying off.

- * Bush and ElBaradei are both history, but as of the end of this week, NAM-Western Group atmospherics at the IAEA haven’t improved under Obama.

- * Amano’s September IAEA report on Iran was much tougher than it looked at first glance and was given credit for, as specific objections raised by Iran and the NAM clearly bore out last week.

- * The NAM and the Arab group tabled their fateful copycat resolution (from 2009) on Israel’s nuclear capabilities to the IAEA General Conference next week.

- * Board antics underscored that an IAEA special inspection request to Syria is off the table for Amano.

- * The US and Western group are between a rock (the Arabs/ NAM) and a hard place (Israel) if they want to prepare an alternative GC resolution this week to the NAM on Israel one drafted in July. The P-5’s commitment to holding a Middle East disarmament conference in 2012 has put them there.

[deletia]

Passion Play

This third of four annual quarterly board meetings last week was a curtain raiser to the GC (one ambassador told me it was a “passion play”) convening in Boardroom A in the M Building inside IAEA HQ on 9/13. Monday and Tuesday were spent on less-controversial items which had to be dealt with to get them onto the agenda of the GC the week thereafter. But Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were spent on the rest of the agenda—Iran, Syria, Israel, the Middle East—and it didn’t take long for bloodletting to begin.

[deletia]

On Thursday and into Friday, the war of words continued on Syria and Middle East issues, with Arab Group and NAM states accusing Amano and the IAEA secretariat of trying to deceive them concerning the latitude which the IAEA’s statute provides Amano in reporting to the board on Israel’s nuclear capabilities.

[deletia]

After concluding the war of words on Iran, the board moved to Syria. A few pithy statements were made—in particular one by Belgium—about the lack of Syrian willingness to cooperate with the IAEA to arrive at a

“managed access” solution to permit IAEA inspectors to view sites proposed by the US as possible hosting evidence of clandestine nuclear activity by Syria. The Syrian response was firm: no cooperation on managed access, on account of Syria’s objections that any access would compromise the country’s national security. That, with the exception of an impassioned plea by Sudan, on behalf of the Arab Group, to take Syria at its word, was the end of the discussion about Syria’s nuclear program. As I had suggested on the eve of the board meeting elsewhere a request for a special inspection in Syria, or a resolution to that effect by the board, would be a non-starter, and with Sudan in there slugging it out on Syria’s behalf, it was.

[deletia]

[COMMENTS]

[deletia]

Allen Thomson | September 22, 2010

Mark, since my particular hobbyhorse is the story of the alleged (and former) plutonium production reactor in Syria, what is your take on the current state of play? It looks to me as if Syria has successfully stonewalled the IAEA and that the matter will eventually be forgotten.

Do you see any further measures the IAEA or others, like the US, could take to bring clarity to the matter?

[deletia]

mark | September 22, 2010

Allen, it would appear that Syria is being successful. The statement on their behalf by Sudan threw the gauntlet down to the DG. There are good reasons why the USG people in technical meetings back home and over here have raised the issue of information continuity. There are people here in Vienna who have been here a long time who say that the problem is that the IAEA never institutionalized the special inspection provision over the last five decades. The last one called for was 16 years ago. It is seen as an exceptional event. Had the IAEA called for such inspections in member states with a certain periodicity—so this argument goes—the current IAEA administration would have more confidence. Bottom line is that Amano cannot force Syria to do it and the climate in this place since Sept 2007 when the attack was carried out does not favor doing this. There is an unusual climate of political risk avoidance. Board members know that it is not up to them to call for a special inspection but is up to the DG alone. The board can urge him to do it in a resolution, but given the current state of affairs, and especially the validation of Syrian and Iranian positions in the NAM and the unique receptivity to them by the DGO, it would be folly to bet that the situation in Syria will change without a considerable demonstration of political will in Vienna which frankly I just don’t see.

Syria denies stonewalling UN atomic probe

(AFP) – 2 hours ago [*Accessed 2010-09-22T18:40Z*]

VIENNA — Syria denied Wednesday that it was not cooperating with a UN atomic watchdog probe into alleged illicit nuclear activities, insisting it had answered all the agency's questions.

"I would like to assure you that Syria was and still is committed to cooperation with the agency," Syria's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Bassam Sabbagh, told the body's annual general conference being held here this week.

"Syria has supplied the agency with information and with the necessary replies to all their queries and this was sufficient to verify the nature of this site," he said.

Syria is accused of building a covert nuclear reactor at a remote desert site called Dair Alzour with the help of North Korea until it was bombed by Israel in September 2007.

Damascus allowed IAEA inspectors to visit the site once in 2008, but has refused to permit any follow-up visits.

The IAEA has said the building bore some of the characteristics of a nuclear facility and UN inspectors also detected "significant" traces of man-made uranium at that site.

But these have not yet been explained by Damascus.

The IAEA also requested access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to Dair Alzour, also so far to no avail.

In his latest update on the probe, circulated to member states earlier this month, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano complained that time was pressing in the two-year investigation because some of the information concerning Dair Alzour was "further deteriorating or has been lost entirely".

"I would like to point out that Syria has allowed the agency's team to visit the site of the destroyed building in Dair Alzour in 2008. It also allowed this team free mobility and allowed them to obtain samples without any obstruction," Syrian ambassador Sabbagh said Wednesday.

U.S. Woos Syria in Mideast Peace Push

Foreign Minister Says Direct Talks With Israel Hinge on Border Issue

By JAY SOLOMON

SEPTEMBER 27, 2010

NEW YORK—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton intensified American efforts to woo Syria into backing the U.S.'s Middle East strategy, holding her first direct meeting with her Syrian counterpart in a bid to find common ground on Iran, Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli dispute.

But Damascus's top diplomat, Walid Moallem, in an hourlong interview Monday [2010-09-27], voiced opposition to many of the Obama administration's top regional initiatives, and expressed skepticism about the prospects for renewed Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

Mr. Moallem said Damascus would oppose United Nations efforts to issue indictments to support the U.N. investigation into the 2005 murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a crime some Lebanese officials have blamed on Syria.

The Syrian diplomat ruled out any further cooperation with a U.N. probe into evidence that Damascus had been covertly developing a nuclear reactor along the Euphrates River before Israeli jets bombed the site in 2007.

Mr. Moallem said the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, discredited itself last week by failing to approve an Arab-led initiative that seeks to place Israel's nuclear infrastructure under IAEA safeguards.

"It is discredited, the agency," Mr. Moallem, 69 years old, said in the interview in a mid-Manhattan hotel. "It shows how much politics is inside their work. But more, it shows double-standard policies."

Damascus has for years denied any role in Mr. Hariri's death, as well as accusations that it was seeking to develop nuclear weapons in cooperation with North Korea.

Senior U.S. officials have increasingly sought to engage Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a bid to gain Damascus's support on a range of Mideast issues, as well as to weaken its strategic alliance with Iran. Syria and Iran partner closely in arming and financing the main Arab groups fighting Israel— Hamas in the Palestinian territories and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Syria also has close ties to many of the political factions currently seeking to form a new Iraqi government.

U.S. officials believe a resumption of direct Israeli-Syria talks over the status of the Golan Heights region—a process that broke down in 2000—could diminish Syrian support for Hamas and underpin the separate Israeli-Palestinian peace track.

State Department spokesman, P.J. Crowley, said later Monday Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Moallem discussed a range of regional issues and that Mrs. Clinton "expressed her commitment to securing a comprehensive peace." Mr. Crowley said Syria's foreign minister voiced his own government's interest in peace talks and that Washington and Damascus "would explore ways to move the process further."

Still, Mr. Moallem said he believed a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace would be doomed without Israel's commitment to first freezing any new construction in disputed territories. He said any direct talks between Syria and Israel could begin only after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu committed to restoring the Jewish state's borders with Syria to the pre-June 4, 1967, lines. "So the land is ours. And it's not up for negotiation," Mr. Moallem said.

The Syrian foreign minister stressed that following such a commitment on the Golan, Damascus would be prepared to discuss joint security and water arrangements, as well as normalization of diplomatic ties, with Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu's government has said it won't enter into talks with Syria that have preconditions. Israel also says Syria has been transferring increasingly sophisticated long-range missiles to Hezbollah, a charge Mr. Moallem denied.

Lebanon remains an issue of tension between Washington and Damascus. The U.S. has strongly voiced its support for the U.N. completing its investigation into Mr. Hariri's murder, as well as trying those indicted for the crime at a U.N. court in The Hague.

Mr. Moallem alleged Monday that the U.N.'s work in Lebanon has been irredeemably "politicized" and that Damascus has received word that members of Hezbollah were soon to be formally charged with the murder. He said that such developments risked plunging Lebanon into a new round of sectarian strife and that the U.N.'s investigation should be replaced by a purely Lebanese investigation to ensure fair treatment.

"We are convinced that a condemnation of the prosecutor of this court against Hezbollah will be a factor of disturbance in Lebanon," Mr. Moallem said.

The U.S. and Syria also could clash diplomatically this fall over the nuclear-proliferation issue, as the Obama administration has indicated it would press for the IAEA to have the powers to launch a "special investigation" of Syria's alleged nuclear infrastructure.

Such a move, if pursued by the IAEA's director general, could result in Syria facing a U.N. Security Council censure, and possibly sanctions, if it doesn't comply with the agency's requests for documents and visiting rights.

Mr. Moallem said Syria, as a signatory to the U.N.'s Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, would continue to allow the IAEA to visit Damascus's research reactor, which is included in his country's formal cooperation agreement with the U.N. body. But he said the IAEA wouldn't be allowed to return to the Euphrates site.

"They know that this case is baseless," Mr. Moallem said. "Of course, to have a nuclear program, a military one, we need to invest billions of billions of dollars. We are not advocating a race for nuclear weapons in the region, on the contrary."

The Syrian diplomat said Mr. Assad has grown disappointed with the pace and scope of President Barack Obama's administration's effort to rebuild ties with Syria over the past 18 months.

The White House's special envoy to Syria, George Mitchell, has visited Damascus and outlined ways that pervasive American sanctions on the Middle East country could be eased to facilitate high-tech trade and the shipment of spare parts for airplanes, according to U.S. officials. But so far, Mr. Moallem said, these steps have had little impact inside Syria.

"Until today—nothing," he said.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

“The U.S. Mission to the UN in Vienna: Current Goals and the Road Ahead”

Remarks by Ambassador Glyn Davies to
The Austro-American Society

This event was organized in cooperation with
Webster University
Austro-American Society
American Chamber of Commerce in Vienna

Vienna, Austria
Wednesday, October 27, 6:30 p.m.

[EXCERPT]

Current Threat to Global Nuclear Security: Iran

But the world remains a dangerous place. And a few countries reject our call to move toward a world without nuclear bombs. North Korea, Syria and Iran are the states of greatest concern. And at a time when the overwhelming majority of nations is working together to reduce the threats posed by nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation, the biggest current threat to global nuclear security is Iran.

UN nuclear agency mulls more "special inspections"

By Fredrik Dahl

Mon Nov 1, 2010 4:58pm GMT

VIENNA, Nov 1 (Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog signalled on Monday it wanted to use its "special inspection" powers more often, something the United States has suggested could be invoked in the case of Syria.

The International Atomic Energy Agency last resorted to such a prerogative in 1993 in North Korea, which still withheld access and later developed nuclear bomb capacity in secret.

"It is a normal tool that we should be able to use more frequently," Herman Nackaerts, the IAEA's deputy director general in charge of inspections, told a news conference.

He said the U.N. body wanted to look at ways to "lower the threshold" for deploying such missions but he declined to discuss specific states whose activities it is probing.

Washington's envoy to the IAEA said earlier this year a "number of countries" were beginning to ask whether it was time to invoke the special inspection tool to give the IAEA the authority to look anywhere necessary in Syria at short notice.

It has been over two years since the IAEA was allowed to visit a desert site in Syria where secret nuclear activity may have taken place before it was bombed by Israel in 2007.

U.S. intelligence reports have said it was a nascent North Korean-designed reactor geared to produce bomb fuel. Syria, an ally of Iran, denies ever having an atomic bomb programme.

PLUTONIUM REACTOR?

But Damascus is unlikely to agree to a special inspection and diplomats and analysts believe the IAEA will refrain from escalating the dispute at a time of rising tension with Iran, which the West suspects of seeking nuclear weapons.

If Syria were to reject a possible request for such an inspection, the IAEA board could vote to refer the issue to the U.N. Security Council, as it did with Iran four years ago.

In September, an IAEA report said Syria's refusal to allow U.N. inspectors access to the site, known as Dair Alzour, was endangering potential evidence in the investigation.

Nackaerts' predecessor, Olli Heinonen, suggested in an interview with an Israeli newspaper published last month he believed a special inspection was merited for Syria.

"If it was a nuclear reactor, it would have been...the first time that an IAEA member state was constructing a plutonium reactor on such a large scale," he told Israel's Haaretz daily.

Nackaerts said the IAEA wanted to see if special inspections could become more of a routine tool.

"This type of inspection has become very difficult to use and so the threshold has become very high," he said.

"I think we should change that so that we don't necessarily have to have a major issue of non-compliance (with IAEA rules) before we can start thinking of using it."

Syria's case has been overshadowed by the more high-profile dispute over Iran's nuclear activity. Tehran rejects Western accusations its programme has military aims.

One important difference between the two, diplomats say, is that Iran's work is still going on while the Syrian site was destroyed.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich)



UNITED STATES MISSION TO
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**

Verification Challenges for the Future

Ambassador Glyn T. Davies
Permanent U.S. representative to the IAEA
and the United Nations Office in Vienna

November 4, 2010

Vienna International Centre, Vienna, Austria

Thank you all for coming today. And I'd like to thank Laura for her introduction. The last time I saw Laura was also at a table, of a sort . . . she was decked out as a table at a Halloween party, wearing a huge platform around her neck to make the table top. That did not stop her from dancing, I would note. I was dressed as the Mad Hatter, which my wife tells me is befitting of my personality.

I'm grateful to the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management and Marco for inviting me to speak and arranging our luncheon, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to talk with you about challenges that the IAEA faces, particularly verification challenges, and how we think Member States can help the IAEA overcome those challenges.

The United States is committed to ensuring that the International Atomic Energy agency has the necessary resources and support to carry out its mission in all three pillars of its work - safeguards and verification, safety and security, and the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. "Resources and support" can mean a lot of things – financial contributions, collaboration and cooperation between technical experts, lobbying for agreement among Member States on initiatives that seek to strengthen the safeguards regime, sharing information with the Agency and other Member States on particular issues of concern, and advocacy for legal authorities to fulfill the Agency's mission.

In order to meet the Agency's needs, the United States dedicates a lot of time and effort to evaluating how well our shared goals for a strong Agency are being met. This should come as no surprise given our long track record of support for the IAEA and given President Obama's Prague agenda. Although it might be easy to interpret U.S. efforts to support strong IAEA verification as relating mainly to the ongoing issues of concern in Iran, Syria, and the DPRK, that same U.S. support for a strong safeguards regime is central to creating the conditions necessary for bringing to fruition a world free from nuclear weapons. Such a world would require the strongest possible international verification assurances.

It is in that context that I'd like to talk with you today about challenges that the U.S. sees for the IAEA. In particular I'd like to talk about safeguards and verification challenges, but I will also touch briefly on nuclear safety and security, and on promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Safeguards and Verification Challenges

First, safeguards and verification –

Strengthening the international safeguards system is a key element of the U.S. non-proliferation policy agenda. President Obama called for more resources and authority to strengthen international inspections in his April 2009 Prague speech. While the Agency is working hard to fulfill its mandate to ensure the effective verification of nuclear materials and activities, there are growing challenges, among them: the global expansion of nuclear activities, the growth in the scope of information available, and the lack of cooperation by states that obscure necessary information and refuse to meet their safeguards obligations.

While we support the continued expansion in the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, that expansion is not without cost. The global expansion of nuclear activities challenges the Agency's ability to provide confidence that nuclear material, technologies, and expertise are not being diverted to weapon programs. The expanding use nuclear power means the Agency must monitor more facilities and nuclear material requiring safeguards verification. At the same time that the Agency is contending with increased numbers, it must also develop the means to cope with advancing technologies and next generation nuclear facilities.

And as nuclear activities increase, more and more information becomes available to the IAEA, especially as the IAEA is now called upon to provide assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear activities in addition to verifying the non-diversion of declared nuclear material. The Agency must be able to obtain and assess information from countries' own declarations, inspection results, open sources including satellite imagery, and other sources. It is a demanding task to keep up with the growing quantity of data available, and the changing technologies for obtaining that data. The Agency must ensure that it can effectively evaluate all the information about a country as a whole to reach timely and credible conclusions about that country's nuclear material and activities. It is in light of this challenge that I understand much discussion is being generated this week at the Safeguards Symposium in support of the Agency's effort to transform the safeguards regime into a system that takes full account of all of information, rather than relying on criteria that stem only from a state's description of its declared stockpile of nuclear material.

It is not just the significant expansion of nuclear programs that challenges the Agency's verification abilities. As we all know, countries of concern - that is, countries for which the IAEA has found credible reason to doubt the correctness and completeness of their declarations - still present serious verification challenges to the Agency. If a Member State does not uphold its commitments to, and cooperate transparently with, the IAEA, Agency verification that its programs are peacefully intended becomes next to impossible, and the only recourse under the safeguards agreement is to report such cases to the UN Security Council. The IAEA began adopting strengthened measures for safeguards implementation in the 1990s based on lessons learned from Iraq, the DPRK, Libya, and Iran, but significant challenges still remain. Nowhere is that more evident than with Iran.

Verification Challenge: Iran

At a time when the overwhelming majority of nations is working together to reduce the threats posed by nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation, the biggest current threat to global nuclear security is Iran. Why is that so? It is not because the United States is targeting Iran for political purposes, as my esteemed colleague from Iran so often asserts in meetings here in Vienna. No - Iran is a threat because it is not upholding its commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and refuses to allow the IAEA to verify that its nuclear program is peaceful. Moreover, Tehran has threatened to wipe out at least one other member of the United Nations.

The lengthening list of Iran's violations of its obligations under its safeguards agreement and UN Security Council resolutions, its heated, rhetoric, and its refusal to address international concerns, undermine Iran's claim that there is nothing to worry about with Iran's nuclear program. We heard during the opening session of the Symposium some arguments why we should not believe Iran's intentions include the manufacture of nuclear weapons. However, as the IAEA -- including former Director General ElBaradei -- has said on many occasions, it is not the IAEA's job to judge intentions, but to verify nuclear programs. Whatever Iran's intentions, its actions vis-à-vis the IAEA appear to be consistent with hiding a nuclear weapons program. In fact, Iran's recent

actions imply it has heightened its long-term campaign to undercut the effectiveness of safeguards implementation. Since 2003, the IAEA has reported 30 times on Iran's failure to comply with its IAEA Safeguards Agreement and, since 2006, it has reported 20 times on Iran's failure to comply with the UN Security Council requirement to suspend its uranium enrichment- and heavy water-related activities.

In blatant violation of its UN and IAEA obligations, Iran is expanding and escalating some of its most proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, such as the continued production of near twenty percent enriched uranium. The Director General noted in September that Iran still refuses to provide the Agency with the information it needs to fully understand the purpose of the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant near Qom and the chronology of its construction. The Director General's most recent report on Iran also expresses the Agency's concern with Iran's latest objection to certain designated IAEA inspectors in Iran, which the Director General reported "hampers the inspection process and thereby detracts from the Agency's capability to implement effective and efficient safeguards in Iran." In addition, Iran remains the only state with significant nuclear activities that refuses to acknowledge its legal obligations under the modified Code 3.1 of its Safeguards Agreement, which requires Iran to declare nuclear facilities to the IAEA as soon as it takes a national decision to build them. This, despite the fact that Iran's leaders have announced publicly that they have decided to build several additional nuclear fuel cycle facilities, including uranium enrichment plants.

Verification Challenge: Syria

While Iran may present the biggest verification challenge for the safeguards regime, it is not the only one. The Agency's efforts to investigate Syria's nuclear program have been hindered for too long by Syria's refusal to allow the Agency to conduct its mandated verification role. The Secretariat's most recent report on Syria - and its previous seven reports - indicate that the IAEA continues to attempt to verify credible information indicating that Syria, with assistance from the DPRK, was developing a clandestine nuclear program with no evident civilian purpose, the centerpiece of which was a reactor suited for plutonium production and little else. Syria, however, refuses to cooperate by allowing the IAEA the access its inspectors say they need.

The international community does not yet know the full scope of Syria's clandestine nuclear activities, and, as the IAEA has reported, any information related to Syria's clandestine nuclear activities is deteriorating or has been lost entirely due to Syria's refusal to cooperate. The unwillingness of Syria to allow the IAEA to conclude its investigation about the existence of clandestine nuclear facilities in Syria is part of a growing threat to the credibility of the safeguards regime.

It is URGENT AND ESSENTIAL that Syria provide access without further delay to all requested sites, information, personnel, and material, so the Agency can make progress in its efforts to verify that all nuclear material and activities in Syria are exclusively for peaceful purposes. Absent clear action by Syria to cooperate fully with the IAEA, we are rapidly approaching a situation where the Board and the Secretariat must consider all available measures and authorities to pursue the verification assurances the international community seeks.

Overcoming Safeguards and Verification Challenges

So, given the host of challenges that the IAEA faces in the realm of safeguards and verification, what can Member States do to make sure that the IAEA can successfully overcome those challenges? How can the Agency contend with ever-increasing nuclear activities and information, and address countries which are less transparent than they should be?

We must enhance the Agency's ability to detect undeclared nuclear activities. The Additional Protocol provides the IAEA the tools it needs to establish confidence about the absence of undeclared nuclear activities by providing additional access to people, information, and locations, and for short-notice inspections. 102 states to date have brought an Additional Protocol into force. That demonstrates significant progress, but more work needs to be done to make the Protocol universal. The Agency must also fully exercise its legal authorities,

including special inspections, so that such inspections are understood to be in order in cases where the IAEA finds routine inspections insufficient.

As to strengthening safeguards methodologies, the United States fully supports the Agency's ongoing efforts, with essential support from Member States, to continue the transition to safeguards implementation that is fully informed by all relevant information available to the Agency. In a similar vein, we fully support measures to strengthen national systems of accounting and control.

The United States is working to achieve these goals in a number of ways. The U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration launched the Next Generation Safeguards Initiative in 2008 to develop the policies, concepts, technologies, expertise, and international safeguards infrastructure necessary to strengthen and sustain the safeguards system as it evolves to meet new challenges. As the presentation by Assistant Deputy Administrator Mark Whitney this week described, while this program has a domestic focus, it is also a resource for supporting the international safeguards system directly. And through the U.S. Support Program to IAEA Safeguards, we provide assistance through the development of technologies and expertise, including on research and development projects the Agency is not suited to pursue and cannot afford. We are constantly looking to deepen the positive impact of our Support Program for Safeguards and urge other Member States to do the same.

Challenges to Safety and Security

While I have focused today on safeguards and verification challenges, I would be remiss if I did not mention challenges to the other, equally-important pillars: safety and security, and promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The expansion of nuclear power poses not only safeguards and verification challenges, but also challenges the implementation of safety and security measures. The Agency plays a crucial role in assisting Member States with their national efforts to establish the necessary physical protection and regulatory structures, and to ensure that adequate safety and security measures are in place. Nuclear power programs demand rigorous nuclear safety, security and regulatory structures for reliable and responsible operation. Existing facilities require continuous evaluation and improvement, and new facilities need the advice and expertise gained from past experience.

In order to continue to lead efforts to advise states and provide the most current expertise to Member States, the Agency is finalizing its Nuclear Security Series, including the recommendations on the physical protection of nuclear material and nuclear facilities contained in Revision 5 of INFCIRC/225. The Nuclear Security Series is an important and valuable set of documents. They create consistent, agreed-upon norms available to all Member States.

In addition to actively supporting the Agency's drafting and review of the Nuclear Security Series, the U.S. supports the Agency as it strives to provide high-quality training, missions, and upgrades to Member States. We continue to promote the entry into force of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. We support the establishment of more national Nuclear Security Support Centers. And we continue to coordinate with multilateral and bilateral nuclear security-related initiatives, among them UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

Challenges to Promoting the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy

Finally, on promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy -

To support the pursuit of nuclear power, the IAEA must provide significant assistance to States to help build the necessary infrastructure, institutional capacities, and human resources to administer reliable nuclear power

programs. Finding the funds to support new nuclear energy programs, particularly in developing countries, is a perennial problem.

The United States has recently made a significant effort to energize the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. At the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, Secretary Clinton announced that the U.S. will make a contribution of \$50 million over the next five years for a new Peaceful Uses Initiative. The U.S. contribution will be applied to IAEA projects supporting nuclear power infrastructure development, food security, water resources management, and human health in a broad selection of countries, including Indonesia, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Thailand, Vietnam, Yemen, Ethiopia, Paraguay, Ghana, and Azerbaijan. In fact, I will be travelling to Indonesia and Vietnam in a few weeks to visit some Technical Cooperation projects there to witness firsthand how Agency peaceful uses activities are making a difference in people's lives.

As we move forward in funding projects through the Peaceful Uses Initiative, we hope that other countries will join us in supporting this effort to expand the IAEA's ability to provide Member States with access to the peaceful applications of nuclear energy. President Obama has challenged nations to raise an additional \$50 million by 2015 for the Peaceful Uses Initiative. In September the Japanese Ambassador announced that Japan has requested \$3.5 million for a contribution to the Peaceful Uses Initiative to be included in the Japanese budget for the next fiscal year.

Conclusion

So, having given you a sketch of some of the challenges we see the IAEA facing, I'd like to circle back for a moment and conclude where I began by telling you why we think it's important for Member States to support the IAEA as it works to overcome those challenges.

President Obama has made a significant commitment to reducing the threats posed by nuclear weapons. In April of 2009, in Prague, he made a strong, straightforward statement of principle: "I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."

That commitment has intensified U.S. efforts to counter the spread of nuclear weapons and reduce the threat posed by those weapons that still exist. These efforts include reaffirming the NPT, supporting the creation of an international fuel bank so that countries can access peaceful power, establishing the Peaceful Uses Initiative, trying to engage Iran and address other noncompliance issues, and importantly to our discussion today, ensuring that the International Atomic Energy Agency has the resources, support, and authorities it needs.

We must ensure that the Agency is equipped with the right tools to meet and overcome the ever-increasing challenges it faces. The expansion of nuclear activities, the development of new technologies, and the behavior of noncompliant Member States add to the perpetual problems of too few resources and a growing desire among Member States for increased access to nuclear technologies. In this context the importance of the IAEA as an independent verifier and as a clearinghouse for peaceful nuclear technology has grown substantially. It is in our interest and to our benefit to lend as much support as we can to the Agency as it seeks to surmount the many challenges before it.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions and comments.

Bush: Olmert asked me to bomb suspected Syria nuclear plant

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By Reuters

Former United States President George W. Bush wrote in his new memoirs that he considered ordering a U.S. military strike against a suspected Syrian nuclear facility at Israel's request in 2007, but ultimately opted against it, Reuters revealed on Friday.

Israel eventually destroyed the facility, which Syria denied was aimed at developing a nuclear weapons capability.

In his memoir, "Decision Points," to hit bookstores Tuesday, Bush says shortly after he received an intelligence report about a "suspicious, well-hidden facility in the eastern desert of Syria," he spoke by phone with former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"George, I'm asking you to bomb the compound," Olmert told Bush, according to the book, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters.

Bush says he discussed options with his national security team. A bombing mission was considered "but bombing a sovereign country with no warning or announced justification would create severe blowback," he writes.

A covert raid was discussed but it was considered too risky to slip a team in and out of Syria undetected.

Bush received an intelligence assessment from then-CIA Director Mike Hayden, who reported that analysts had high confidence the plant housed a nuclear reactor, but low confidence of a Syrian nuclear weapons program.

Bush says he told Olmert, "I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it's a weapons program."

Bush had ordered the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 based on intelligence that said Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, which were never found.

Olmert was disappointed at Bush's decision to recommend a strategy of using diplomacy backed up by the threat of force to deal with Syria over the facility.

"Your strategy is very disturbing to me," Olmert told Bush, according to the book.

Bush denies charges that arose at the time that he had given a "green light" for Israel to attack the installation.

"Prime Minister Olmert hadn't asked for a green light, and I hadn't given one. He had done what he believed was necessary to protect Israel," Bush writes.

Bush writes that Olmert's "execution of the strike" against the Syrian compound made up for the confidence he had lost in the Israelis during their 2006 war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Bush feels was bungled.

PolicyWatch #1715

The Case for an Immediate IAEA Special Inspection in Syria

By Olli Heinonen

November 5, 2010

A key option for inspectors of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the world body charged with stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, is a "special inspection" an intrusive visit made when the IAEA judges the information provided by a state to be inadequate. But The IAEA is reluctant to use such inspections, even though, in the case of Syria, circumstances cry out for one. This reluctance challenges the authority and credibility of the agency, its board of governors (made up of the representatives of thirty-five of its member states), and the ultimate guardian of the world nuclear order, the United Nations Security Council.

Background

Since 1970, the IAEA has been responsible for inspecting the nuclear facilities of states that have signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to make sure that nuclear material is not diverted from peaceful activities to nuclear weapons programs. This does not mean, however, that over the course of the last forty years, all issues relating to these so-called "safeguard" missions have been clarified and the necessary policies and practices established.

The IAEA verification system has evolved over time to meet the new challenges posed by the spread of nuclear weapons. The agency's tools are inspections, reports of its findings to its board, and, if it deems necessary, referral of cases of concern to the UN Security Council. Until the early 1990s, the system focused on checking the correctness of a member state's declarations, that is, confirming that declared nuclear material had not been diverted. Since then, the system has also focused on detecting undeclared nuclear material and activities. The combination of these two objectives better serves the intent of Article III.1 of the NPT, which sets the goal of "preventing diversion of nuclear energy . . . to nuclear weapons."

It is important to note that the NPT uses the word "preventing," which means that the verification system must be designed to work so that alarms are triggered before the actual diversion takes place or a mushroom cloud appears.

After the safeguards system was revamped to detect undeclared activities, North Korea, Iran, South Korea, Egypt, Libya, and Syria failed to meet the reporting requirements under their safeguards agreements. The cases of South Korea and Libya were resolved with the cooperation of the states, and the case of Iran is being dealt with by the UN Security Council. The Egyptian case, relating to the presence of highly enriched uranium particles, has yet to be resolved.

Use of Special Inspections

Special inspections have been attempted only twice. The first case was in post-communist Romania in 1992, when the IAEA was asked to verify unreported plutonium separation experiments conducted during the Ceausescu regime. The affair did not make headlines; the request for inspection came in May 1992, the IAEA's director general reported the results in September 1992, and no special reports were issued.

The media focused much greater attention on the case of North Korea, where the IAEA requested a special inspection in 1993 but was refused the necessary access by Pyongyang. Subsequently referred to the UN Security Council, the case is being handled in a lengthy process that is still unfinished. Indeed, North Korea has since carried out two nuclear tests, one in 2006 and one in 2009.

Defining "Special" to Mean "Rare"

Before the 1992 and 1993 special inspection cases, the IAEA board had been strengthening the safeguards system, whose limitations had become apparent after Saddam Hussein's clandestine nuclear weapons program was discovered in Iraq following the expulsion of his forces from Kuwait. The role of special inspections was discussed, and one of the outcomes was the decision that a special inspection should be carried out "in rare occasions only." This definition has led some to consider special inspections as a good theoretical option, but one that never needs to be used.

This is a fallacy premised on the fact that a great majority of NPT signatory states duly fulfill their reporting obligations, cooperate with the IAEA, and comply with their obligations. Under such circumstances, there is no need for a special inspection, and consequently, such an event is indeed rare. But the decision of the IAEA board should not be taken to mean that such an inspection should be a rare event, but rather, that it should be used when needed.

The IAEA Secretariat should, therefore, use its rights fully to meet the spirit of the NPT by preventing the diversion of nuclear energy technologies and material to nuclear weapons. This is the agency's obligation; its secretariat should use all the tools at its disposal in a timely manner to fulfill its mandate. The special inspection is no exception; it should be used when there is an impasse, and challenges should not be allowed to persist and become increasingly complicated. Special inspections should not be treated lightly, but when they make it possible to clarify the picture or to remove inconsistencies, the world community must not shy away from them.

The IAEA could have invoked the provisions of a special inspection in the cases of South Korea and Libya. But it received the necessary cooperation from the inspected parties, had access to all sites, persons, and information requested, and was therefore able to fulfill its mandate to ensure that all nuclear material in those states was for peaceful use only.

In the case of Syria, however, the IAEA has reached a point where a special inspection is warranted at Deir Al-Zour (destroyed in a reported Israeli air strike in 2007) and other locations that could be functionally related to it or that may have information useful for clarifying what was going on there. The IAEA found uranium particles at the site, and satellite imagery and procurement information point toward possible construction of a nuclear reactor there. If it was a nuclear reactor, this would have been the first time that an IAEA member state and an NPT signatory constructed a plutonium production reactor on such a scale without reporting it to the IAEA. Together with official Syrian reluctance to give the agency access to relevant information, persons, equipment, and sites, the resulting situation calls for the use of full inspection rights to ensure that all nuclear material in Syria is for peaceful purposes.

If the world nuclear order is to be maintained and sanctuary for future nuclear proliferators prevented, the international community should expect nothing less than that the IAEA will use all its inspection rights in Syria, including a special inspection, now.

Olli Heinonen, a senior fellow at the Belfer Center at Harvard University, was formerly deputy director-general and head of the department of safeguards at the International Atomic Energy Agency.

A Conversation with Yukiya Amano

Speaker: Yukiya Amano, Director General, IAEA

Presider: Albert Carnesale, Chancellor Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

November 9, 2010, New York

Council on Foreign Relations

[EXCERPTS]

CARNESALE: And in Iran, of course, we worry not only about the declared facilities and what they might be used for, but what might be covert facilities that we don't know about.

And we're hardly comforted about what happened in Syria. Syria, it appears that the entire system failed. U.S. intelligence didn't seem to know there was a reactor there. The international community didn't seem to know there was a reactor there. Israeli intelligence seemed to figure out that there was a reactor under construction there.

I wonder if you can tell us -- because, again, you had a similar thing to say about Syria, that they too were not cooperating, and you've been unable to make progress on resolving the outstanding issues. What is the status now in Syria? Do we know? Does the IAEA -- has it confirmed that a nuclear reactor was under construction? What is the current situation?

AMANO: Okay. Let me explain just a little bit about the background, and I'll come back to where we stand now and -- where we stand now.

The question that was addressed to me is related to the site in the desert called Deir ez-Zor site. At the beginning it was very unfamiliar, but now I remember this word -- Deir ez-Zor site.

Deir ez-Zor site is a facility, then, in the desert, and it was bombarded and destroyed in 2007. After several months, this issue was brought to our attention, then the allegation that it was in fact a nuclear reactor.

My predecessor, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, asked access to the site, and in 2008 inspectors visited there. What we saw is that the facility was destroyed, the ground was cleared, the remaining building was repainted. We could collect the samples, and we brought it back.

Later, after analyzing them, the samples, we found that they are the particles of man-made uranium. But up to today, we cannot identify what is the origin.

Later I succeeded this issue, and I -- I'm keeping on requesting Syria to give us access to the site of Deir ez-Zor and some other site. But as you mentioned, Syria has not given us access, and therefore we cannot make progress.

What is the status? What is our thinking? Judging from the information that we have, we think it is possible or quite possible that it was a reactor. Why we couldn't find it? Why international -- other countries could not discover it? I think that far as we are concerned, the absence of additional protocol was a serious disadvantage. If we had -- if we had additional protocol, we could have asked as a right to visit the site and could have been able to have some information. But that may be after-thinking. Additional protocol should have been quite useful to clarify on that issue.

What I'm doing now is to continue to ask Syria to accept inspectors at the site, to the site of Deir ez-Zor and other sites. For the future option, I'm open.

CARNESALE: Why not -- if it's true if you had the additional protocol, you could have had such an inspection, what about a special inspection now? You have the authority for a special inspection. What about a special inspection in Syria?

AMANO: Special inspection is one of the tools specified in the IAEA comprehensive safeguards. It was used -- it was called for twice, in case of North Korea and Romania. Romania was a special case, but the typical case was North Korea. But North Korea did not accept it, and the matter was reported to the Security Council.

In Syria, special inspection is, of course, one of the options. But for now, I am continuing to request Syria to provide us access -- with access to continue to do that for now. For the future, as I said, I am open.

[deletia]

CARNESALE: Other questions? Sir, right there.

QUESTIONER: I'm Michael Adler, from the Wilson Center. Hi, Mr. Amano.

You -- Mr. Amano, you said that you were open towards moving more strongly against Syria. What does that mean? The United States is pressing very strongly for special inspections. Do you expect that this will come up at the November board? And would you advocate special inspections?

And just one question about Iran, if I may. Do you find -- there seems to be an increased atmosphere of confrontation at the IAEA, especially between you and the Iranian ambassador. Do you think that is -- how do you explain that? And do you think that is hindering at all the effectiveness of your ability to work in Iran, especially after what happened with the two inspectors who were asked to leave?

CARNESALE: I should mention that I should have said one question to a person -- but I'm sure you would have been creative enough to make it sound like one question. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead.

AMANO: (Laughs.) The first question was on -- I'm not --

CARNESALE: Special inspections.

AMANO: Oh, special inspections. Special inspections. I didn't say that I will take a (stronger position/strong opposition ?) on Syria. What I said is that there has not been progress, but for now I keep on asking Syria to accept our inspectors at the site of Deir ez-Zor and other locations. And when I am asked about special inspections for the future, I am open.

Special inspection is one of the tools, but there are other tools, and we need to think well. Nothing has been decided. Nothing has been decided, except that for now I continue to seek access to that Deir ez-Zor site and other locations. Nothing has been decided and I am open does not mean that I have called for special inspection in December. I don't think so.

[deletia]

QUESTIONER: (Off mike.) Mr. Amano, on Syria, could you tell us, under what circumstances could it follow in its ally Iran's footsteps and end up at the Security Council, possibly being sanctioned for not allowing your inspectors into the country?

AMANO: For now, I'm saying that I'm asking Syria to accept inspectors' visits to the Deir site and others. It's some -- not appropriate to discuss about Security Council -- report to the Security Council.

QUESTIONER: But you mentioned other -- (off mike) --

AMANO: Oh. If I misled you, I'm terribly sorry. I did not mean that I reported to the secretary about -- by no means.

QUESTIONER: (Off mike) --

AMANO: The -- for example, we have to -- I did not want to get into too much in details, so I focused on Deir ez-Zor site. But we have another site at -- near Damascus, on research reactor, and we have sent down our teams. We've got some new declarations. And we are discussing with them. So our dialogue, inspection, is the normal way, and I am pursuing this route now.



Board of Governors

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Item 6(d) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2010/57 and Add.1)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. This report of the Director General to the Board of Governors is on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic¹ (Syria); it includes developments since the last report was issued in September 2010.²

A. The Dair Alzour Site

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor. The information further alleged that the reactor was under construction but not operational at the time of its destruction, and that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). By the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.³

3. Syria has maintained, since May 2008, that the destroyed building was a non-nuclear military installation and that Syria had had no nuclear related cooperation with the DPRK.⁴ While it cannot be excluded that the destroyed building was intended for non-nuclear use, the Agency has assessed that the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites.⁵ While Syria has indicated that its efforts to procure pumping equipment and large quantities of graphite and barite were civilian and non-nuclear in nature, the Agency has assessed that these items could also support the construction of a nuclear reactor.⁶ Additionally, Syria's statements concerning the end use of the barite, which was purchased by the Syrian Arab Republic Atomic Energy Commission (AECS), are not consistent with other information available to the Agency. Syria has also maintained that the particles of anthropogenic natural uranium found in samples taken during the Agency's June 2008 visit to the Dair Alzour site originated from the missiles used to destroy the building.⁷

4. As indicated in previous reports, the Agency has assessed that the probability that the particles originated from the missiles used to destroy the building is low. The Agency also assessed that there is a low probability that the

particles were introduced by aerial dispersion. The presence of such uranium particles points to the possibility of nuclear related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning the nature of the destroyed building. Syria has yet to provide satisfactory explanations for the origin and presence of these particles.⁸ In this context, information yet to be provided by Israel might be helpful in clarifying the matter.⁹

5. Syria's statements concerning the nature of the destroyed building, the Dair Alzour site, the three other locations allegedly functionally related to it, the procurement activities referred to above and the alleged foreign assistance are limited in detail and no supporting documentation has been provided by Syria. The information and access provided by Syria to date have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building. Since the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, the Agency has made repeated requests to Syria for:

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

6. Syria has maintained that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and three other locations allegedly functionally related to Dair Alzour, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency.¹⁰ The Agency has explained to Syria that there is no limitation in comprehensive safeguards agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The Agency has repeatedly offered to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations.

7. Syria has not engaged substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site since the Agency's June 2008 visit and, since August 2009, has not responded to the issues noted in paragraph 5. The Agency continues to request Syria to provide access to the information, material, equipment and locations previously indicated by the Agency.

B. Activities at Other Locations in Syria

8. As previously reported, particles of anthropogenic uranium of a type not included in Syria's reported inventory were found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in 2008 and in 2009. Syria's initial explanations in June 2009 that the particles had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container were not supported by the results of sampling carried out by the Agency.¹¹ During the November 2009 inspection, Syria explained that the anthropogenic particles had originated from previously unreported activities performed at the MNSR related to the preparation of tens of grams of uranyl nitrate using yellowcake produced at Homs.¹² At the March 2010 physical inventory verification (PIV), another small quantity of undeclared uranyl nitrate was found at the MNSR. Syria explained that the unreported activities had taken place in a different location in the MNSR than previously declared to the Agency.¹³ As reported earlier, Syria submitted inventory change reports in June 2010 for the newly declared material shown to the Agency during the PIV. However, inconsistencies between Syria's declarations and the Agency's findings remained unresolved.

9. During a meeting on 3 September 2010, agreement was reached with Syria on a plan of action for resolving these inconsistencies. The plan included actions relating to:

- the amount and types of nuclear material used in the preparation of uranyl nitrate, the irradiation activities at the MNSR and the processes used;
- scientific publications by the AECS that indicate uranium conversion experiments different from those declared by Syria to have occurred at the MNSR;
- information indicating the presence of nuclear material under the control of the Waste Management Department of the AECS but not part of Syria's declared inventory; and
- access to Homs for the purpose of determining the extent of any uranium processing activities and nuclear material at that location.

10. In a letter dated 9 September 2010, the Agency provided Syria with a detailed request for clarification concerning inconsistencies regarding the amounts and types of nuclear material involved in the preparation of the uranyl nitrate. In response, Syria sent two letters to the Agency dated 28 October 2010; these did not clarify the issues identified in the Agency's letter and the plan of action. In addition, the letters appear to have added further inconsistencies concerning the preparation of the uranyl nitrate and subsequent irradiation activities.

11. In a letter dated 13 September 2010, the Agency provided Syria with a list of the locations to be accessed and the activities to be performed during the visit to Homs. In its letter of 29 October 2010, the AECS responded that the pilot plant in Homs and the activities being carried out there are not subject to Syria's Safeguards Agreement with the Agency and that further aspects of the Agency's request for access needed to be discussed and clarified with the Agency before the AECS is able to request permission for the visit.

12. In a letter to the Agency, dated 28 October 2010, with respect to the nuclear material inventory under the control of the Waste Management Department of the AECS, Syria acknowledged the presence of some of the nuclear material previously identified by the Agency and conveyed that the material and related documents will be available for Agency verification in March/April 2011. In a letter dated 12 November 2010, the Agency reminded Syria to provide the necessary inventory change report concerning this nuclear material and reiterated its request that Syria provide information on other nuclear material identified by the Agency in earlier letters.¹⁴

13. In two letters dated 12 November 2010 and during a meeting in Vienna on 15 November 2010, the Agency provided Syria with assessments of the information contained in Syria's October 2010 letters and explained why further clarifications were necessary. During that meeting, Syria reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the MNSR issues within the scope of its Safeguards Agreement, to respond to the Agency's questions concerning inconsistencies, and to discuss with the Agency its earlier requests for access to the pilot plant at Homs. The Agency also reiterated the importance of a prompt and positive reaction from Syria on these issues.

C. Summary

14. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

15. With the passage of time, some of the information concerning the Dair Alzour site is further deteriorating or has been lost entirely. It is critical, therefore, that Syria actively cooperate with the Agency on these unresolved safeguards implementation issues without further delay.

16. Concerning the MNSR, Syria's responses to date, under the agreed plan of action, do not resolve the inconsistencies identified by the Agency. Conclusions about the source of the uranium particles at the MNSR will only be possible once Syria has provided clarification regarding outstanding inconsistencies.

17. The Director General urges Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which would further facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.

18. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ INFCIRC/407.

² GOV/2010/47 (6 September 2010).

³ GOV/OR.1206, para. 26 and GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

⁴ GOV/2008/60, para. 1 and GOV/2009/36, para. 15.

⁵ GOV/2008/60, paras 10 and 11.

⁶ GOV/2009/36, para. 14.

⁷ GOV/2008/60, para. 8.

⁸ GOV/2010/47, para. 5.

⁹ GOV/2009/36, para. 7.

¹⁰ GOV/2009/56, para. 9 and GOV/2008/60, para. 14.

¹¹ GOV/2009/75, para. 6.

¹² A pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid was constructed and commissioned in 1997 at Homs, Syria, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the IAEA. Yellowcake was also produced as a result of the acid purification process. During a July 2004 visit to the Homs phosphoric acid purification plant, Agency inspectors observed some hundreds of kilograms of yellowcake.

¹³ GOV/2010/47, para. 10.

¹⁴ The Agency previously sent letters to Syria, dated 14 May 2010 and 29 July 2010, regarding the possible presence of undeclared nuclear material at waste management facilities under the control the AECS. Syria responded, in letters dated 23 May 2010 and 15 August 2010, that no such material was present and that its declared inventory was complete.

U.N. nuclear agency makes little progress in Syria

By Julia Damianova, Los Angeles Times

November 26, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

The United States is about to push for so-called special inspections in Syria by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, a rarely used tool to seek access in a country that otherwise denies entry to sensitive sites, diplomats familiar with the issue say.

After a report Tuesday from the International Atomic Energy Agency that showed no substantial progress in its investigation of Syria's nuclear activities, Western countries may start to play hardball by implementing the rarely used procedure, the diplomats told The Times this week.

"The United States wants to bring up the subject of special inspections in Syria at the IAEA Board of Governors in December," said a European diplomat who asked to remain unnamed because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Countries that are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty may be subject to special inspections if the agency decides that the information obtained in routine visits is not adequate to fulfill its duties, which include watching for signs that a country may be trying to obtain nuclear weapons.

Currently, a reactor in Damascus is the only Syrian nuclear facility under international watch, and the agency needs the country's permission to visit any other location.

[deletia]

Western diplomats following the case are frustrated by what they describe as Syria's intransigence.

"The new IAEA report on Syria seems to be similar to the one from September, showing no progress in the agency's investigation," said one diplomat in Vienna who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Another diplomat familiar with the issue said patience with Syria's lack of cooperation is wearing thin and that the country may now be ripe for the special inspections procedure.

Damianova is a special correspondent.



Berman Condemns Syria's Obstruction of International Inspections of its Nuclear Activities

Monday, November 29, 2010

Washington, DC – Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, today condemned Syria's continued efforts to block the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to investigate its illicit nuclear activities, as recently revealed by the IAEA Secretary General in a report to the organization.

"Syria continues to defy the world and is violating its obligations to prove that all its nuclear-related activities are peaceful. The IAEA Secretary General should immediately demand a special inspection of Syria's activities regarding its illicit and covert construction of a nuclear reactor and other suspicious activities. If Syria refuses, the IAEA Board of Governors should refer Syria's non-compliance with its safeguards obligations to the UN Security Council."

Syrien unter Atomwaffenverdacht

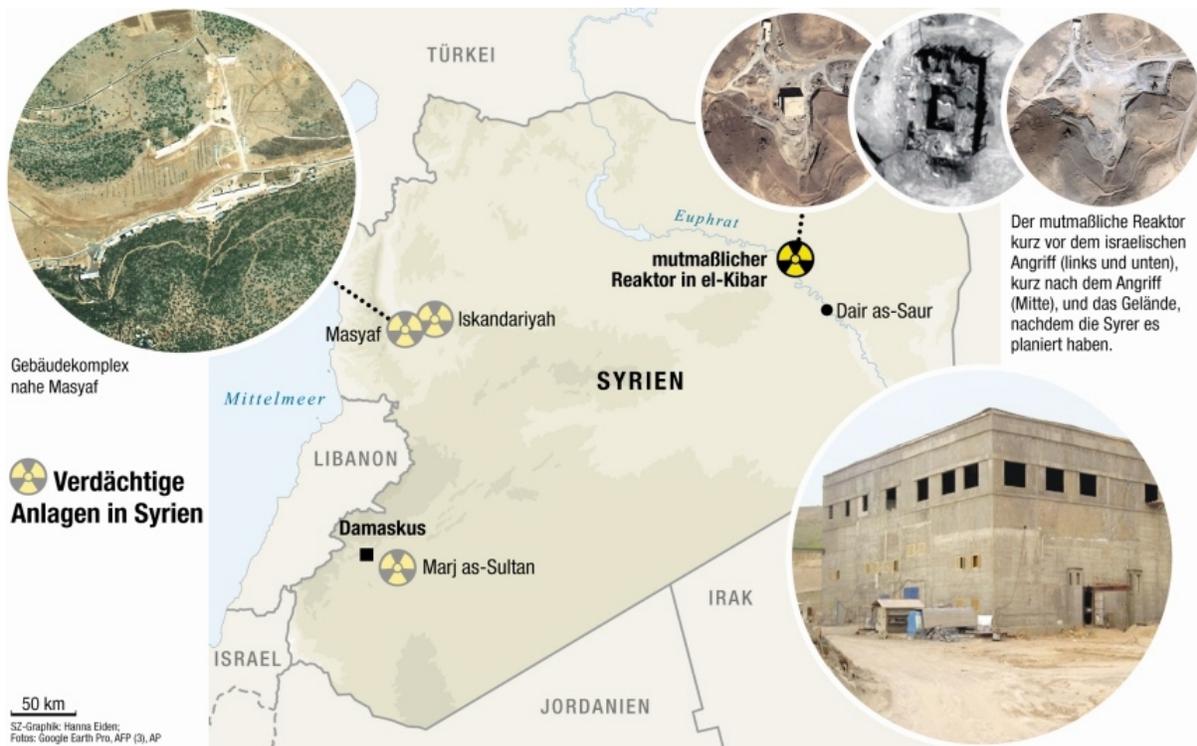
Rätselhafte Erdarbeiten

Von Paul-Anton Krüger

02.12.2010, 09:28 2010-12-02 09:28:05

Die Atomenergiebehörde IAEA hat neue Hinweise auf ein geheimes Nuklearprogramm in Syrien. Das Land will weder dazu Stellung nehmen - noch lässt es Kontrollen zu.

Gegen Mitternacht vom 5. auf den 6. September 2007 greifen mindestens vier israelische F-15 I Kampfflugzeuge ein mysteriöses, würfelförmiges Gebäude in Syrien an. Es steht am Ufer des Euphrat; die nächste größere Stadt, 30 Kilometer entfernt, ist Dair as-Saur. Ihr Name taucht in Dokumenten der Internationalen Atomenergiebehörde (IAEA) auf, wenn es um den Reaktor geht, den Syrien angeblich mit Hilfe aus Nordkorea in dem Quader gebaut hat, versteckt in einem Tal, das von dem Strom abgeht.



Verdächtige Anlagen in Syrien. Links: ein Gebäudekomplex nahe Masyaf. Rechts: Der mutmaßliche Reaktor kurz vor dem israelischen Angriff (links und unten), kurz nach dem Angriff (Mitte), und das Gelände, nachdem die Syrer es planiert haben. (© SZ: Hanna Eiden, Fotos: Google Earth, AFP, AP)

Laut einem Briefing des US-Auslandsgeheimdienstes CIA von Ende April 2008 wäre der auch unter dem Namen der nahen Ortschaft el-Kibar geläufige Reaktor gut geeignet gewesen, Plutonium zu erzeugen - aus dem sich Atomwaffen bauen ließen. Für andere Zwecke dagegen taugt die Technik aus den Fünfzigern kaum. Die CIA führte eine Videopräsentation vor mit unscharfen Satellitenbildern. Per Computeranimation blendete sie

ein, wo welche Komponenten des Reaktors vor der Zerstörung gewesen sein sollen, der eine verkleinerte Kopie des nordkoreanischen Modells aus dem Atomzentrum Yongbyon sei. Zudem legte sie Fotos vor, die das Gebäude aus der Nähe zeigen oder gar den Innenraum. Der Reaktor sei kurz vor der Inbetriebnahme gestanden, hieß es, aber noch nicht mit Brennstäben bestückt gewesen.

Heute, mehr als drei Jahre nach dem Bombardement, ist kaum mehr bekannt als damals, ja die Rätsel wurden mit der Zeit eher größer. Der frühere US-Präsident George W. Bush hat jüngst in seinen Memoiren enthüllt, dass sich die CIA vor dem Angriff zwar recht sicher war, dass Syrien in el-Kibar einen Reaktor baute, aber kaum Anhaltspunkte dafür sah, dass es in dem Land "ein aktives Nuklearwaffenprogramm" gab. Manche Geheimdienstler in Europa sind da lieber noch vorsichtiger und sprechen nur von einem "angeblichen Reaktor", auch wenn sie die CIA-Präsentation für "plausibel" halten. Ihnen fehlen harte Beweise, ebenso wie der IAEA. Gefragt, wie sicher er sei, einen Reaktor vor sich zu haben, antwortete ein hoher UN-Diplomat im Sommer nur lapidar, die IAEA habe "genug Material, um Fragen zu stellen".

Den Schutt des angeblichen "ungenutzten Militärgebäudes" schafften die Syrer zwar eilig beiseite und planierten das Gelände gründlich. Dennoch fand im Juni 2008 ein IAEA-Team unter dem früheren Chefinspektor Olli Heinonen in el-Kibar Spuren von Uran, das von Menschen hergestellt worden war. Zudem erhielt die IAEA über einen Mitgliedstaat Satellitenbilder kommerzieller Anbieter aus der Zeit direkt nach dem Angriff, die aussagekräftiger sein dürften als die von der CIA präsentierten. Allerdings sind diese Aufnahmen auf dem Markt nicht zu bekommen, weil der unbekannte Auftraggeber - vielleicht Israel - sie exklusiv gekauft hat. Die IAEA kann daher ihre Echtheit nicht unabhängig verifizieren.

Syrien hat immer beteuert, nie ein geheimes Atomprogramm betrieben oder einen Reaktor gebaut zu haben. Das Uran stamme von den israelischen Waffen, erklärte Damaskus. Doch das wies die IAEA nach Analyse der Partikel als unwahrscheinlich zurück. Seither weigert sich Damaskus, darüber zu diskutieren - genauso wie über die Satellitenbilder. Zudem verwehrt es den Kontrolleuren eine zweite Inspektion in el-Kibar und den Zugang zu den Trümmern des zerbombten Gebäudes. Aber auch Israel schweigt eisern. "Wir werden das nie kommentieren", bekräftigte jüngst zur Zeit des Angriffs amtierende Premier Ehud Olmert die offizielle Position.

So schleppt sich die Untersuchung des Falls seit Juni 2008 ergebnislos hin und "entwickelt sich zunehmend zu einem ernsthaften Glaubwürdigkeitsproblem für die Behörde", wie ein hoher westlicher Diplomat am Sitz der IAEA in Wien zugesteht - schließlich steht ein schwerer Verstoß gegen den Atomwaffensperrvertrag im Raum, über den die IAEA wacht.

Die Nuklear-Inspektoren haben "genug Material, um Fragen zu stellen"

Als Schlüssel zu Fortschritten bei der Aufklärung sieht die IAEA offenbar drei weitere Einrichtungen, die "in funktioneller Verbindung" mit dem mutmaßlichen Reaktor stehen sollen - und anders als dieser noch existieren. Dabei haben die Inspektoren bislang weder offengelegt, um welche Anlagen es sich handelt, noch welche Funktion sie haben oder was sie verdächtig erscheinen lässt.

Nach Informationen der Süddeutschen Zeitung werden sie bei der IAEA intern als Marj as-Sultan, Masyaf und Iskandariayah bezeichnet, wiederum abgeleitet von nahe gelegenen Städten. Das unabhängige Institute for Science and International Security in Washington (Isis) hat diese Orte identifiziert und auf Satellitenbildern einen Gebäudekomplex bei Masyaf ausfindig gemacht, bei dem es sich höchstwahrscheinlich um eines der verdächtigen Objekte handelt. Es befindet sich möglicherweise in oder unmittelbar neben einem Militärstützpunkt - genau mit dieser Begründung verwehrt Syrien der IAEA den Zugang zu den drei Orten. In Wien heißt es, die Syrer fürchteten eine fishing expedition - dass die IAEA von den USA vorgeschickt werde, um Militäranlagen auszuspähen. Denn die Nukleardetektive waren durch einen Tipp der US-Geheimdienste auf die Einrichtungen aufmerksam geworden.

Die IAEA hat Hinweise, darunter Satellitenfotos, dass zwischen den drei Orten und dem Quader am Euphrat Material hin- und hertransportiert wurde. Ein hoher westlicher Diplomat in Wien sagte, mindestens eine der Anlagen könnte "in Zusammenhang mit der Brennstoffproduktion" stehen. Es gebe aber "keine Hinweise auf sensible Aktivitäten", also Urananreicherung oder Wiederaufarbeitung; Prozesse, die zum Bau von Atomwaffen nötig sind. Der Reaktortyp wird zwar mit Uran betrieben, das nicht angereichert ist. Doch wo das Uran hätte herkommen sollen und wo daraus später das Plutonium für die Bombe abgetrennt werden sollte, zu diesen zentralen Fragen gibt es allenfalls plausible Vermutungen.

Unklar ist auch, ob Trümmer, die wertvolle Spuren bergen könnten, an den drei Orten gelagert wurden. Als wären die Hunderte Lastwagenladungen vom Erdboden verschwunden, will niemand Informationen darüber haben, wo der Schutt geblieben ist. Die nur wenige Kilometer von el-Kibar auf der anderen Seite des Euphrat gelegene Salzmine al-Tibni, die Syrien 1998 auf ihre Eignung als Lager für radioaktiven Müll untersucht hat, gilt der IAEA als unwahrscheinlich. Der frühere IAEA-Inspektor Robert Kelley hatte sie jüngst in einer Analyse von Satellitenbildern für das renommierte Magazin Jane's Intelligence Review mit dem Reaktor in Verbindung gebracht.

Aufnahmen aus dem Orbit zeigen aber, dass Syrien an den drei verdächtigen Orten Erdarbeiten vornahm und große Container entfernte, nachdem die IAEA Zugang verlangt hatte. Das kann Zufall sein, hat aber kaum dazu beigetragen, den Verdacht auszuräumen. Zudem heißt es in Diplomatentreisen, habe die IAEA etliche Monate darauf verwendet, einen Plan für Inspektionen dort zu entwickeln, der es Syrien erlauben sollte, etwaige Militärgeheimnisse zu wahren - allein der Aufwand zeigt, wie groß das Interesse der Inspektoren ist. Indes, Damaskus bündelte auch diesen Vorschlag ab.

Hatten westliche Diplomaten in Wien noch vor einem Jahr beschwichtigt, der Reaktor sei ja zerstört, daher habe die Sache keine hohe Dringlichkeit, bringt etwa US-Botschafter Glyn Davies seit ein paar Monaten sogenannte Sonder-Inspektionen ins Spiel, eines der schärfsten Mittel, das die Wiener Atombehörde hat, um Kontrollen durchzusetzen. IAEA-Chef Yukiya Amano, der diese Inspektionen vorschlagen müsste, hat zwar schon von "einer Option, für die ich in der Zukunft offen bin" gesprochen, noch aber zögert er. Es liegt ein hohes Risiko in diesem Weg: Zum einen braucht es dafür eine Mehrheit im Gouverneursrat der IAEA, und etliche der dort vertretenen 35 Länder sind alles andere als erpicht auf eine Eskalation. Zum anderen, wie ein Diplomat zu bedenken gibt: "Was ist, wenn sie am Ende gar nichts finden?"



For Immediate Release

December 2, 2010

Fortenberry Leads Call for Comprehensive Inspections in Syria's Nuclear Program

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Fortenberry, along with seven other leading Members of Congress, today called on the President to urge the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to conduct special comprehensive nuclear inspections in Syria. Concern stems from Syria's clandestine construction of an alleged nuclear reactor intended to produce weapons-usable plutonium near the town of Al-Kibar. According to news reports, this facility, which was likely built with North Korean assistance, was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in September 2007.

"Syria is obligated by international law to engage in nuclear activities that are completely open and transparent," Fortenberry said. "Given the strong evidence suggesting Syria's covert attempts to build a nuclear reactor that could further a nuclear weapons program, Syria should immediately allow international inspectors unfettered access to its nuclear program, and allay concerns that it may still be engaging in undeclared nuclear activities."

Fortenberry's letter to the President comes as the nations that comprise the IAEA's governing board meet this week in Vienna, Austria. Signatories to the letter include Congressman Edward Markey (D-MA), Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Congressman Ed Royce (R-CA), Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA), Senator John Ensign (R-NV), and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (ID-CT).

High-ranking IAEA officials share international concerns that Syria may be concealing nuclear materials and equipment that could be used to obtain nuclear weapons capability. Under international treaties and agreements, Syria is required to declare nuclear activities so that the IAEA can ensure that these activities are used for exclusively peaceful purposes.

The Fortenberry letter also urges the President to use existing legal authorities to impose sanctions on Syrian individuals and entities that received illicit North Korean assistance. The letter notes that the President used these same authorities in August 2010 to sanction North Korean individuals and entities that provided illicit assistance to Syria's weapons of mass destruction program.

Fortenberry, who co-chairs the Congressional Nuclear Security Caucus, is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Oversight and Government Reform National Security Subcommittee.



Director General Addresses December Board of Governors Meeting

2 December 2010

IAEA Board of Governors

[EXCERPTS]

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano opened today's meeting of the Board of Governors with a statement that covered a number of issues including technical cooperation, nuclear energy, nuclear verification and assurance of supply of nuclear fuel.

[deletia]

Nuclear Verification

[deletia]

Syrian Arab Republic

"Concerning the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and some other locations. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

I wrote a letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic on 18 November 2010 to request the Government to provide the Agency with prompt access to relevant information and locations related to Dair Alzour. I also requested Syria's cooperation regarding the Agency's verification activities in general."

Special Reports

Syria's Assad plays the security card

Published: Dec. 2, 2010 at 3:49 PM

[EXCERPTS]

CAIRO, Dec. 2 (UPI) -- Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has resisted U.S. efforts to pry his regime away from its strategic alliance with Iran, but he seems to be conducting discreet diplomacy with Western Europe and with China.

In recent weeks Assad has dispatched his security chiefs to London, Paris and Rome to share intelligence on terrorist groups, according to Intelligence Online, a Paris-based Web site that covers global security affairs.

[deletia]

But while all this was going on, Assad was also apparently taking care of business with a different set of diplomatic partners to the east -- which may turn out to be more important than his dealings in the West.

He sent Maj. Gen. Bassam Merhej, identified as director of Assad's security and military bureau, to Beijing Nov. 23.

"His real destination was probably Pyongyang, with whom Syria has a nuclear cooperation program," Intelligence Online reported.

That program suffered a major setback Sept. 6, 2007, when the Israeli air force destroyed a nuclear reactor being built by North Korea at al-Kibar in eastern Syria on the Euphrates River.

Merhej is reported to have replaced Maj. Gen. Mohammed Suleiman, who was assassinated Aug. 2, 2008.

Merhej was accompanied by Col. Jihad Shehadeh of the army's Corps of Engineers, who has been seconded to the Center for Scientific Study and Research, which is involved in Syria's nuclear program, Intelligence Online said.

He was also accompanied by an Iranian, identified as Ali Zadeh, officially the cultural attache at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus but "in reality in charge of logistics for the Iranian nuclear program in Syria."

[Sourcebook note. Google News excerpts:

EUROPE / SYRIA - Bashar al-Assad's shadow diplomacy

Dec 2, 2010 ... Two Iranians were also with them, the engineer Mohammed Mutawakkili and Ali Zadeh, who is officially the Iranian cultural attaché in Syria but in reality is in charge of logistics for the Iranian nuclear programme in the country.

www.intelligenceonline.com/.../bashar-al-assad-s-shadow-diplomacy;86463831-ART

Syria tells U.N. atom body: focus on Israel, not us

By Sylvia Westall and Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Fri Dec 3, 2010 12:13pm EST

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA (Reuters) - Syria dismissed on Friday calls to grant U.N. nuclear inspectors prompt access to the remains of a suspected nuclear site bombed to rubble by Israel, saying they should focus their investigation on the Jewish state instead.

Damascus's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Washington's suggestion that the IAEA could seek broader inspection powers to enable it to examine sites in Syria was "nonsense" and he did not believe it was likely.

"I think it is an agenda which some countries are pursuing," Bassam Al-Sabbagh told Reuters on the sidelines of a meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board. "It is the time for dialogue and cooperation which is going on between Syria and the agency."

[deletia]

Washington hinted again on Friday that the IAEA may need to consider invoking its "special inspection" mechanism to give it authority to look anywhere necessary in Syria at short notice if Damascus did not cooperate with the agency's requests.

"Absent that cooperation, the United States believes the (IAEA) board will have little choice but to consider appropriate action," U.S. envoy Glyn Davies said. He said countries needed to take steps in the coming months to "preserve the credibility of the IAEA and the international safeguards regime."

SPECIAL INSPECTION?

[deletia]

Amano said on Thursday he had urged Syria in a letter to provide his inspectors with prompt access to Dair Alzour, which Damascus says is a non-nuclear military site.

But Al-Sabbagh said the IAEA should turn its attention to Israeli sites. Syria has suggested the uranium traces came with Israeli munitions used in the attack.

The IAEA says it is unlikely that they were of a type of uranium sometimes used in munitions as a hardening agent.

"I think it is time now for the agency to visit the Israeli sites which were used for preparations for the attack ... it is time for the agency to move on the Israeli side," he said, when asked if Syria would grant the IAEA's request for access.

Arab states as well as Iran say Israel poses a threat to regional stability, with its presumed atomic arsenal -- the only Middle East country to have such arms. Israel neither confirms nor denies it has nuclear weapons.

Highlighting growing Western frustration, the European Union told the IAEA meeting it had "deep concern" over Syria's stance.

The IAEA has struggled to get Syria to open up because the country's basic safeguards treaty with the agency covers only its one declared atomic facility, an old research reactor.

Diplomats and analysts believe the IAEA will avoid escalating the dispute at a time of rising tension with Iran, which the West suspects of seeking nuclear weapons.

[deletia]

Egyptian has 'revealed three Israeli spy cells'

(AFP)

2 days ago [Accessed 2010-12-26T17:15Z]

CAIRO — The confessions of an Egyptian accused of spying for Israel have led to three espionage cells being dismantled in Lebanon and Syria, where an agent was executed in November, Cairo newspapers said Friday.

Tareq Abdul Razzak, the 37-year-old owner of an import-export business, is accused of having spied for the Jewish state together with two wanted Israelis.

Egypt, which has a 1979 peace treaty with Israel, informed Lebanon and Syria of his activities in recruiting agents after Abdul Razzak's arrest in May, Al-Masri newspaper said, quoting a security source close to the investigation.

The suspect has allegedly confessed that his two Israeli contacts had tasked him with making visits to Damascus with a fake passport and identity under the guise of business trips.

The aim of the missions was to deliver sums of money to a Syrian holding a "sensitive" post with the security services.

Al-Shuruk daily said Abdul Razzak has provided investigators with copies of reports he had passed on to Israeli intelligence from a Syrian chemist working for the security services in connection with a Syrian nuclear programme.

The Syrian expert had been spying for Israel for 13 years, according to the confessions. He was executed in Syria last month, said Al-Shuruk, which did not give sources for its report.

On September 6, 2007, Israel launched an air raid on northern Syria that destroyed an alleged secret nuclear reactor.

The Egyptian trader is to be tried in Egypt's High Security Court on charges of spying for Israel and recruiting agents to report on telecoms secrets in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, a judicial source said on Monday.

Arrest warrants have been issued for his two Israeli accomplices, the source said, without giving a trial date.

Abdul Razzak is accused of supplying Mossad between 2007 and 2010 with the names of potential recruits employed in the telecommunications sectors in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.

According to a court statement, Abdul Razzak's first contact with Mossad was in 2007, when he received an email while looking for work in China.

The same year he met the Israeli agents in Thailand, where the Egyptian was asked to set up an import-export business back home as a cover for his real work with Mossad.

Abdul Razzak also set up a website that offered telecommunications jobs in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, with the aim of looking for more potential recruits, the statement said.

In Lebanon, more than 100 people have been arrested on suspicion of spying for Israel since April 2009, including telecoms employees, members of the security forces and active duty troops.

Egyptian spy handed Israel files on Syria's nuclear program

Ahmed Eleiba

Sunday 26 Dec 2010

Egypt helped Syria uncover a high-level Israeli mole in its security apparatus, as well as a host of other sensitive Syrian intelligence the suspected Egyptian spy is said to have given over to the Israelis

A source in the Syrian foreign ministry told Ahram Online that Egyptian-Syrian security cooperation remains strong despite the uneasy nature of their political ties in the past few years.

The two countries continue to work together on many security files, including the recently revealed network of Israel spies, lead by the Egyptian suspect Tarek Abdel Razeq.

The source added that after the discovery of this "conspiracy", Egypt handed over to Damascus a dossier of sensitive technical information relating to Syria's nuclear program, including the project's maps and strategic positions and means of obtaining nuclear materials.

The file has been a rich source of details for the discovery of an Israel spy network in Syria. The most outstanding piece of information handed over by Egypt to the Syrians concerned an Israeli mole, a high ranking member of Damascus' security apparatus, who had been collaborating with Israel for the past thirteen years.

The source says that the investigation remains open, looking into "other individuals" not yet identified. According to the source, existing information confirms there is a security breach extending to "security personnel in Syria."

The source, who wished to remain anonymous, added that Israel continues to be "an enemy to Arabs" and this, in his words, is one of main conclusions to be drawn from the uncovering of the tripartite networks in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. In his opinion the peace deal between Israel and Egypt did not prevent from continuing intelligence war to damage inter Arab relations. He referred to the Egyptian prosecutor general's statement on the spy issue, particularly his statement that Israel sought to harm relations between Arab countries.

The source ruled out that it was on the operations agenda of the espionage case to assassinate figures in Syria, such the Hezbollah leaders Emad Mughneyah (who was assassinated in February 2008) or Lieutenant Mohammed Souleyman, an advisor to the Syrian president (assassinated in August 2008). However, he admitted that Israel had been able to penetrate highly sensitive security positions in Syria.

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/news/mossad-successfully-recruited-syrian-nuclear-official-spy-ring-member-says>

Mossad successfully recruited Syrian nuclear official, spy ring member says

Ahmed Shalaby

Wed, 29/12/2010 - 10:29

An Egyptian recently arrested on charges of spying for Israel, Tarek Abdel Razek Hussein, has revealed to interrogators the name of a Syrian official he recruited to provide information on Syria's nuclear program.

Hussein, in the summarized interrogations exclusively published by Al-Masry Al-Youm, said the nuclear official in Syria's military intelligence, Saleh al-Nejm, worked with him, under Mossad's coordination, to track Syria's uranium enrichment plants, nuclear remnants disposal spots, and other elements related to Syria's nuclear program.

Hussein discovered that al-Nejm had been working with Mossad for years, he added.

The information was later transferred to an Israeli nuclear expert, according to Hussein, who said he believed it was a helpful tool in the Israeli air raid on alleged Syrian nuclear sites in September 2007.

Translated from the Arabic Edition.

Report: Accused Egyptian spy says Israel paid Syrian agent for nuclear plan details

By DPA

Published 13:29 29.12.10

Latest update 13:29 29.12.10

An Egyptian charged with spying for Israel told authorities that his Syrian counterpart was paid 1.5 million dollars to provide Israel with information on Syrian nuclear activities, Egyptian media reported Wednesday.

The Syrian intelligence official, named as Saleh Al-Nijm, provided Israel with information on the whereabouts of an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor which probably led to the bombing of the facility in 2007, according to Egyptian state media reports.

According to the EgyNews website, Tareq Abdelrazeq told authorities that he met with al-Nijm several times in Damascus and that they collaborated on providing information to the Mossad.

For his part, Abdelrazeq allegedly received 37,000 dollars from Israel in payment for his activities, Egyptian officials said.

Syria denies that the bombed structure was a nuclear reactor.

Meanwhile, Israel has not officially said it was behind the 2007 attack, but a U.S. government cable released by WikiLeaks earlier this month named Israel as responsible.

The cable, written in 2008 by then secretary of state Condoleeza Rice, stated that "on September 6, 2007, Israel destroyed the nuclear reactor built by Syria secretly."

Abdelrazeq also allegedly told prosecutors that no other Egyptians had collaborated with him in providing Israel information.

Egyptian authorities announced the arrest of Abdelrazeq earlier this month, accusing him of spying for Israel and attempting to recruit spies in Syria and Lebanon for the Mossad.

Egypt's Emergency State Security court is expected to hear the case on January 15.

The prosecutor's office also accused two Israelis of working alongside Abdelrazeq and forming a spy ring in Egypt. The prosecutor did not name the suspects, only saying they were "fugitives" and had not yet been arrested.

'Officer charge of Syrian nuclear program was Mossad spy'

By JPOST.COM STAFF

12/29/2010 17:02

Tarek Abdel-Razek, who was arrested in Syria last week for allegedly gathering intelligence for Mossad, revealed while he was undergoing investigation the identity of another alleged spy in Syria, saying he was a senior officer who was in charge of the regime's nuclear project in Damascus, reported the Egyptian newspaper Al-Masry Al-Youm on Wednesday.

According to the report, Razek told investigators that the Syrian officer's name is Salah a-Najam, a colonel in Syria's military intelligence. He claimed that Najam served as an agent of Mossad for many years and received a million and a half dollars from the Israelis.

Razek also said he met with Najam several times in Damascus and received information from him on the development of Syria's nuclear program, the location of nuclear facilities and sites where radioactive waste was buried. The information, according to Najam, was transferred to an Israeli nuclear expert and contributed to the attack on the nuclear reactors in the Syrian desert in September 2007.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,738634,00.html>

SPIEGEL Interview with IAEA Head Yukiya Amano

'We Still Know Too Little about Tehran's Nuclear Activities'

01/11/2011 01:14 PM

[EXCERPTS]

A possible nuclear program in Iran, atomic weapons in North Korea and instability in Pakistan: It is not an easy time to be head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. SPIEGEL spoke with new IAEA head Yukiya Amano about the challenges he faces and the dangers emanating from Tehran.

[deletia]

SPIEGEL: Israel, which feels particularly threatened by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has demonstrated, most recently in September 2007, that it does not shy away from military strikes. In Syria, an ally of Iran, Israel destroyed a complex of buildings where plutonium was presumably being produced. Do you have any new information about Syrian President Bashar Assad's nuclear plans?

Amano: Syria isn't letting our inspectors into the country to examine this location in detail. In a letter to the Syrian foreign minister in November, I was critical of his country's cooperation. We also need progress in this case. And then we have a second problem with Syria: The research reactor in Damascus is under IAEA supervision, and we conduct routine inspections there. We have now found traces of uranium from a source unknown to us, which is something we also want to know more about. We have been given two explanations to date, but we don't consider them sufficient. Even if it's only a matter of a few grams, we still want to know where they came from and why they are there.

Interview With Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

JANUARY 31, 2011

[EXCERPTS]

In a rare interview, Mr. Assad told The Wall Street Journal that the protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen are ushering in a "new era" in the Middle East, and that Arab rulers would need to do more to accommodate their people's rising political and economic aspirations.

[deletia]

WSJ: Can I ask a broader question? I know the big issue in this region from Iran to Syria to Israel is of a region free of WMDs; nuclear free zone. On the one hand, I know Syria and other countries have been very interested in pushing Israelis to sign the NPT under international auspices and that does not happen, but at the same time is in a little bit of a conflict with IAEA over allegations that Syria has this kind of covered pursued nuclear technology. Can you talk about those and how to get to a nuclear free zone and beat your conflict with the IAEA and if there is a way to have a resolution over their accusations?

President Assad: We were a member of the Security Council for two years, 2002 and 2003, and there was a Syrian draft at that time regarding freeing the Middle East from WMDs and of course who opposed that? The Bush administration, because it included Israel, and actually it is still there, and I think they gave it a blue form, I mean it is not activated. This is our point of view: that it has been a region of conflict for centuries not decades. Regarding the IAEA, Israel attacked this site and we said this is a military site. Of course at the beginning they did not say it is a nuclear site. They waited for eight months and after we rebuilt the site, they said it was a nuclear site. They should be punishing the United States and Israel, especially the United States: why did you wait eight months to say it is nuclear, this is the first point. The second point is what happened with IAEA. They asked us to send experts; and because we were very confident we told them you can come, and they came and took samples and went to Vienna I think, and then they said that they discovered some particles of radiations, and you know if you had a nuclear plant, you would not allow anyone in the world to come if you want to keep it secret, this is first. Second, they said Israel attacked a nuclear site under construction and before it started working. If it is under construction, and before it started working, how could you have these particles? Where did they come from? Because you do not bring the materials to the site till it is working, it is ready, is that true? This is second. Third, how can they destroy a site without having casualties, without having any emergency plans, because it is supposed to be nuclear? What about radiations? Everybody could go there now, it is open and you can cross beside it. So, it is clear to everyone that it was not nuclear, but the question is: why they waited for eight months? Because when you wait eight months and we rebuilt the site, it is easy for you to say it was, you understand that?

WSJ: Yes.

President Assad: Because if they believed it was nuclear, they should have done that without the attacking. If they want to create a problem for Syria, they could tell the IAEA: look we have the satellite images, go to Syria and Syria will be cornered. What to do, we have a site, we are going to allow them and they are going to see the site as it is. So, they destroyed it and they waited for Syria to build it, and then they said it was a nuclear site. Now "was" how can you prove "was". Now, this is the convoluted issue, the complicated issue they created and how to prove it? So, as long as you cannot prove it was, then this means it "was"...

WSJ: And definitely it was not?

President Assad: Definitely it was not. From the course of events, it was not because if you attack it, how was it, where are the materials? We do not have it; the experts went there and you have normal live there, how could you have radiations after the attack and you do not have any emergency plans? They have the satellite and its pictures every day and they can tell. The only thing that we did is that we took the debris and removed it somewhere else and rebuilt the site. We did not clean and you cannot clean if you want to clean the radiations; they say it stays for one hundred years or forever I do not know. So, this is not realistic, they know this. The other issue of the IAEA is not related to, what we call a small experimental reactor, of course under the supervision of the IAEA and they come from time to time to Syria to check and they checked this time and discovered materials which they say are illegal and we are still discussing this with them and we do not know about it because we have a phosphate factory and we have yellow cakes as a result and some of our expert scientists made some experiments and the funny thing is that those experiments were published in journals; these experiments are not a secret and they said this is a breach. Okay, but this is public and it was published in a journal; it is not a secret. So, there was this kind of conflict and they want to find a link between this first site and the second site, but this one is different from that.

WSJ: And do you think that this issue with the IAEA can be resolved?

President Assad: Yes, I think now we are discussing with them. Most of the issues are technical and legal actually.

WSJ: Will you allow whatever inspection that is needed, whatever the IAEA wants to do or are you still negotiating with them?

President Assad: No, actually there is cooperation between Syria and the IAEA regarding the normal things like this reactor and this yellow cake, it does not see it every six months or a year, we have rules, but this time they asked Syria to sign the additional protocol that they can come any time. No, we are not going to sign.

WSJ: Anytime, anywhere?

President Assad: No, we are not going to sign. We can only follow the NPT that we are signatory to and we do not have any problem. Nobody will accept to sign it; this is something about sovereignty: to come any time to check anything under the title of checking nuclear activities, you can check anything. We have many secret things like any other country and nobody will allow them...

WSJ: You feel that will be misused?

President Assad: It will definitely be misused...

[deletia]

U.N. Warns Syria on Nuclear Inspections

BY DAVID CRAWFORD

FEBRUARY 1, 2011

The United Nations' nuclear watchdog has toughened its stance toward Syria, warning that lack of cooperation by Damascus won't prevent the publication of a critical report on Syria's nuclear program.

The challenge marks a departure in the International Atomic Energy Agency's nearly three-year effort to gain access to several Syrian sites by shifting the burden of proof to Syria, an ally of Iran, to demonstrate it is fulfilling its international nuclear obligations and isn't pursuing nuclear weapons.

In a November letter to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano demanded that Syria cooperate with the IAEA's investigation of an alleged former nuclear facility at Dair Alzour, according to three Western diplomats familiar with the letter. Otherwise, he indicated, the agency would draw and report its own conclusions as to whether the country's atomic program is in international compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, based on the evidence it has already, without Syrian cooperation, according to these people.

The IAEA could release its findings as early as late February, when an IAEA report on Syria's nuclear activity is expected, roughly two weeks before the agency's board of governors meets on March 7.

An IAEA spokeswoman declined to comment on both the content of the letter and the coming report.

The Syrian government has made it clear that it won't allow the IAEA to revisit the Dair Alzour site, which was bombed by Israel in 2007. Damascus says the venue is off-limits to regular IAEA inspections because it is a military site. Syria doesn't plan to sign an agreement, called the Additional Protocol, that would give the agency unfettered access to inspect suspect Syrian sites.

In an interview Sunday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad denied that Damascus was covertly developing nuclear technologies and said his government was in discussions with the IAEA to provide cooperation on sites already covered by agreements made with the Vienna-based body. "We are not going to sign" the Additional Protocol, Mr. Assad said. "We can only follow the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] that we are signatory to, and we do not have any problem" with this.

Syria's mission to the IAEA didn't return calls and didn't respond to faxed and emailed requests to comment.

Should Syria fail to agree to let inspectors onto the sites, the IAEA's conclusions based on evidence gathered so far are likely to be damning. Two diplomats familiar with the IAEA probe say agency inspectors have concluded that Syria secretly built and later failed to declare a nuclear reactor at the Dair Alzour site. That verdict could lead to referral to the U.N. Security Council, where sanctions could be imposed.

The findings would rely substantially on evidence that construction features at the Dair Alzour building were consistent with features commonly found at nuclear reactors, according to the three diplomats, citing IAEA reports that also were reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. IAEA inspectors concluded that the shielding of the building, the electrical infrastructure and the manner in which Dair Alzour is connected to a large water supply are consistent with features found in nuclear reactors, according to IAEA reports in November 2008 and November 2010.

The IAEA's tougher line follows Syria's refusal for more than two years to allow U.N. nuclear inspectors access to four different sites where the agency has said it suspects nuclear-related activity, including Dair Alzour.

U.S. diplomats—concerned that Syria, like Iran, might delay cooperation with the IAEA indefinitely—have issued requests to several countries represented on the IAEA board of governors to join in a possible board resolution demanding that Syria cooperate with IAEA inspectors, say two of the diplomats, who are from countries on the board. Such a move is often a preliminary step in seeking a broader U.N. resolution.

Lobbying for a board of governors action against Syria began informally during the December board meeting, one of the three diplomats said.

The message U.S. diplomats wanted to convey was that Syria can't "duck and hide from the IAEA in respect to fulfilling obligations" simply by ignoring IAEA requests for cooperation, that person said.

In 2008, the IAEA asked Syria to grant its inspectors access to the four sites, spurred by allegations that Syria had secretly built a nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour before the facility was bombed by the Israeli air force in late 2007.

In 2008, IAEA officials were permitted to briefly visit the Dair Alzour site, but since then, Syria hasn't permitted more in-depth inspections of the site, according to the November 2010 IAEA report.

Syria has denied that the site ever held a nuclear facility.

In his letter, the IAEA's Mr. Amano told the Syrian foreign minister the IAEA would reserve the right to announce its conclusions about Dair Alzour without additional Syrian input. He requested a Syrian reply before the IAEA board of governors meeting in March and stipulated that any last-minute response wouldn't be considered. Syria's only response so far has been to ask for a deadline extension, according to the three diplomats familiar with the letter.

—Jay Solomon contributed to this article.

"We Don't Have a Smoking Gun; We Have Concerns"

IAEA chief Yukiya Amano on nuclear programs in Iran, North Korea, and Syria.

By Lally Weymouth

Posted Sunday, Feb. 13, 2011, at 8:59 PM ET

Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, says it is unlikely the Stuxnet cyberattack on Iran derailed the Islamic republic's nuclear program. The Washington Post's [Lally Weymouth](#) talked to Amano last week in Vienna. Excerpts:

[deletia]

L.W.: What is the status of the al-Kibar situation [in Syria]?

Y.A.: The main issue in Syria is the al-Kibar site that was destroyed by Israel in 2007. They have constructed new buildings, and we visited after the destruction in 2008. After that we continued asking Syria to allow us further access, but they did not. As I didn't receive a response, I wrote a letter to the foreign minister in November.

L.W.: [Syrian] President Bashar al-Assad recently denied the facility ever existed.

Y.A.: Yes, he said the facility was not a nuclear reactor. ... The problem is that this facility was destroyed, cleaned up, and a new building was built on that ground. We hope to visit again; we hope to check it again. But the facility which was touted to be a nuclear reactor is gone.

L.W.: What is the Syrian explanation for the particles you found?

Y.A.: We have particles of radium that are man-made, not natural. ... One allegation is that the depleted uranium used by Israel in the bombs may be the origin, but we don't think that is likely. It's not totally impossible, but it is highly unlikely.

L.W.: If they are so honest, why won't they let your inspectors in?

Y.A.: They say it is not a nuclear reactor.

L.W.: Was the Syrian [nuclear] program eliminated by the Israeli bombing?

Y.A.: The nuclear reactor was eliminated.

[deletia]

Syria stonewalls on site IAEA wants to see-sources

Mon Feb 14, 2011 2:48pm GMT

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA, Feb 14 (Reuters) - Syria has not granted a U.N. nuclear watchdog request for prompt access to a desert site, effectively rebuffing an appeal for urgent cooperation with a probe into suspected covert atomic activity, diplomatic sources said.

For more than two years Syria has refused to allow U.N. inspectors to revisit the Dair Alzour site, which U.S. intelligence reports said was a nascent North Korean-designed nuclear reactor intended to produce bomb fuel.

"Apparently the Syrians have not offered anything new in terms of access to Dair Alzour," one Western source said, referring to Syria's response to a letter sent by Yukiya Amano, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, last year.

It "didn't provide the IAEA with the answers the DG (Director-General Amano) had been seeking," he added. Another diplomatic source painted a similar picture, without giving detail.

It was not clear whether Damascus had made any other concessions in the dispute, which is expected to be high on the agenda of a March 7-11 meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation governing board, in its reply to Amano.

The IAEA had no comment on the issue and officials Syria's mission to the Vienna-based nuclear agency were not immediately reachable.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies ever harbouring an atom bomb programme and says the IAEA should focus on Israel instead because of its undeclared atomic arsenal and the fact it has never joined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Amano's letter to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem on Nov. 18 was the first time he appealed to Syrian authorities directly, rather than just through his regular reports.

He asked the Syrian government to provide prompt IAEA access to relevant information and locations linked to Dair Alzour.

"HIGHLY UNLIKELY"

The United States has suggested that the IAEA may need to consider invoking its "special inspection" mechanism to give it authority to look anywhere necessary in Syria at short notice.

Amano told Reuters earlier this month that he did not rule out this option, but that no decision had been taken.

Some Vienna-based diplomats have cautioned against using the special inspections tool, as it would escalate the issue at a time of rising tension with Iran, which the West accuses of seeking to develop nuclear arms. Tehran denies the charge.

The agency last resorted to these inspection powers in 1993 in North Korea, which still withheld access and later developed a nuclear bomb capacity in secret.

Last year, the IAEA gave some weight to suspicions of illicit atomic activity at Dair Alzour by pointing to uranium traces found in a 2008 visit by inspectors and saying these traces did not come from Syria's declared nuclear inventory.

The agency wants to re-examine the site and take samples from rubble removed immediately after the air strike to an undetermined location.

Damascus has suggested the uranium traces came with Israeli munitions used in the attack, but the IAEA says this is unlikely, a position underlined by Amano in a Washington Post interview published on Monday.

"One allegation is that the depleted uranium used by Israel in the bombs may be the origin, but we don't think that is likely. It's not totally impossible, but it is highly unlikely," Amano was quoted as saying.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich)

Verdächtige Gebäude in bester Wohnlage

Von P.-A. Krüger
23.02.2011, 20:06

Westliche Geheimdienste vermuten, dass Syrien in einem Vorort von Damaskus eine geheime Atomfabrik gebaut haben könnte. Überprüfen lässt sich das nach einem israelischen Bombardement schwer.

Die Wahrheit über el-Kibar liegt unter einer mächtigen Betonplatte begraben. Und damit schienen alle Beteiligten bisher auch gut leben zu können: Syrien, das im Verdacht steht, an diesem Ort am Euphrat einen geheimen Atomreaktor zur Produktion von Plutonium errichtet zu haben; Israel, das den mysteriösen, quaderförmigen Bau im Osten Syriens in der Nacht vom 5. auf den 6. September 2007 bei einem Luftangriff zerbombte; und auch die USA, vorab über die Attacke ins Bild gesetzt, schwiegen monatelang.



In der Zwischenzeit hat Syrien die Reste der Ruine eingerissen, ohne dass jemand hätte prüfen können, was dort vorgegangen war - und ob Syrien den Atomwaffensperrvertrag gebrochen hat. Das erste öffentlich zugängliche Satellitenbild zeigt das Gelände sieben Wochen nach dem Angriff: Es ist planiert, und wenig später begann Syrien damit, ein 60 mal 60 Meter großes Fundament aus Beton zu gießen. Seit Januar 2008 stand darauf eine Halle mit blauem Dach, 13 Meter breiter und länger als der angebliche Reaktor.

Syriens Präsident Baschar al-Assad hat vehement bestritten, das es sich bei dem zerbombten Komplex um eine Atomanlage gehandelt hat: "Definitiv nicht!", sagte er jüngst dem Wall Street Journal. Damaskus beharrt darauf, el-Kibar sei eine normale militärische Einrichtung gewesen. Und Assad kritisierte die USA dafür, acht Monate gewartet zu haben, bis sie Anschuldigungen gegen sein Land erhoben.

Erst im April 2008 hatte die CIA mit einer Video-Präsentation zunächst den US-Kongress und später die Medien darüber informiert, dass es sich bei dem von Israel zerbombten, auch als Dair as-Saur bezeichneten Komplex um einen Reaktor gehandelt habe, mit dem womöglich spaltbares Material für Atomwaffen erbrütet werden sollte. Um ihre Behauptungen zu untermauern, präsentierten die Geheimdienstler grisselige Satellitenbilder und bunte Animationen, die zeigten, wo in dem Quader sich vor der Bombardierung welche Reaktorteile befunden haben sollen. Auch zeigten sie Bilder, die aus dem Inneren des Gebäudes stammen sollen.

"Keine Priorität"

Doch selbst nachdem Washington sein Schweigen gebrochen hatte, sah sich offenbar niemand zur Eile genötigt, das Geheimnis in der Wüste aufzuklären. Israel schweigt beharrlich zu dem Angriff, auch weil er gegen internationales Recht verstieß. Die USA versuchten vor allem, die Hinweise als Hebel zu nutzen, um die Syrer von ihren Verbündeten in Teheran loszueisen und Iran - seinerseits unter Verdacht, an Atomwaffen zu arbeiten - in der Region zu isolieren. Doch auch nachdem in Barack Obama Anfang 2009 ein Präsident ins Weiße Haus einzog, der sich den Kampf gegen die Verbreitung von Atomwaffen auf die Fahnen geschrieben hat, erklärte der neu entsandte US-Botschafter bei der Internationalen Atomenergiebehörde (IAEA) in Wien noch, die Aufklärung der syrischen Aktivitäten habe "keine Priorität". Die Europäer hofierten Assad ebenfalls - in der Hoffnung, ihn zu einem Seitenwechsel bewegen zu können.

"Sie haben es zerstört und gewartet, bis Syrien es wieder aufgebaut hatte", empört sich Assad über Israels Attacke auf das mysteriöse Gebäude und das Schweigen der Amerikaner. "Dann sagten sie, es sei eine Nuklearanlage gewesen. Nun, ‚gewesen‘, wie können sie beweisen, was gewesen ist?", fragt er. Allerdings: So abwegig, wie es der Präsident darzustellen versucht, ist das Unterfangen nicht. Die IAEA hat kurz nach den US-Enthüllungen mit der Spurensuche begonnen, und derzeit scheitert sie vor allem daran, dass Syrien jeden Zugang nach el-Kibar verweigert - und auch zu drei weiteren Orten, die nach Auffassung der IAEA in "funktioneller Verbindung" mit dem zerbombten Komplex stehen sollen. Intern sind diese Objekte bei der Wiener Behörde unter den Namen der Orte Marj as-Sultan, Masyaf und Iskandariyah geläufig.

Zunächst könnten die Trümmer des zerstörten Komplexes nahe Dair as-Saur wertvolle Spuren bergen. Ein Team um den einstigen Chefinspektor der IAEA, Olli Heinonen, fand im Juni 2008 beim einzigen Besuch der Behörde auf dem Gelände nach der Planieraktion der Syrer immerhin kleine Mengen Uran, das von Menschen hergestellt war. Syrien erklärte, es stamme von den israelischen Bomben - was die Inspektoren als "unwahrscheinlich" zurückweisen. Doch weiß die IAEA offenbar nicht, wo die Trümmer des angeblichen Reaktors geblieben sind. "Wir haben den Schutt genommen und woandershin gebracht", sagt Präsident Assad.

Wie eine Person mit Kenntnis der Satellitenbilder aus der Zeit direkt nach dem israelischen Angriff der Süddeutschen Zeitung erklärte, liegt jedoch zumindest ein guter Teil der Reste des Reaktorbaus unter dem Fundament der neuen blauen Halle. Die Syrer haben dieser Beschreibung zufolge Ausrüstungsgegenstände aus der Ruine entfernt, Computer etwa oder möglicherweise auch eine Maschine, mit der einmal die Brennelemente in den Reaktorkern hätten eingesetzt werden sollen. Manches davon soll nach Iskandariyah gebracht worden sein - ohne dass bekannt ist, wo genau ein mögliches Lager dort liegt. Dann aber sprengte Syrien im Oktober 2007 das teils unterirdisch gelegene Reaktorgefäß und füllte den Schutt des Gebäudes in den entstandenen Krater. Bulldozer, die in späteren Satellitenaufnahmen klar zu erkennen sind, schoben Erdreich aus dem umliegenden Gebiet über die Stelle, an der einst der Quader stand. Und wenig später versiegelte der Beton die möglichen Beweise.

Damaskus ist bislang der Bitte von IAEA-Chef Yukia Amano nicht nachgekommen, die Kontrolleure erneut auf das Gelände zu lassen. Amano hatte deswegen Mitte November 2010 eigens einen Brief an den syrischen Außenminister Walid al-Muallim geschrieben, ein einmaliger Vorgang. Doch haben die Syrer immer noch "nichts Konkretes" zugesagt, wie es aus Diplomatenkreisen in Wien heißt. Nur allgemein ihre Bereitschaft zur

Zusammenarbeit hätten sie bekundet. Ganz und gar unwahrscheinlich erscheint es daher, dass Syrien den Kontrolleuren etwa erlauben würde, mit einer Bohrung unter dem neuen Gebäude nach Hinweisen zu suchen, wie es Geheimdienstler für nötig halten.

Glück für die Atomdetektive?

Mehr Glück könnten die Atomdetektive dagegen in Marj as-Sultan haben, 15 Kilometer östlich von Damaskus. Dort befindet sich ein Komplex mit zwei Hauptgebäuden, der an einen Militärstützpunkt grenzt. Genau das führt Syrien als Begründung an, warum es eine Inspektion nicht zulassen könne. In der Umgebung wohnen offenbar betuchte Syrer, Villen lassen sich auf den Satellitenfotos erkennen, Swimmingpools in fast jedem Garten. Und anders als in al-Kibar stehen die verdächtigen Gebäude hier noch, die zumindest in früheren Jahren von einer Mauer umgeben waren.

Der SZ liegen Fotos vor, die aus dem Inneren der beiden Bauten stammen sollen. Es ist nicht bekannt, wann genau sie aufgenommen wurden. Zusammen mit anderen Informationen aber lassen sie erstmals die begründete Vermutung zu, dass Syrien dabei war, dort eine Anlage zur sogenannten Urankonversion zu errichten - eine Vorstufe zur Produktion von Brennstäben, wie sie für den mutmaßlichen Reaktor geeignet gewesen wären. In einem chemischen Prozess wird dabei Uran-Konzentrat - auch Yellow Cake genannt - in metallisches Uran umgewandelt, das dann zu Brennelementen weiterverarbeitet werden kann. Dies könnte ein wichtiges Teil in dem verwirrenden Puzzle sein, das die IAEA-Inspektoren seit bald drei Jahren zusammensetzen versuchen.

Die Fotos sind westlichen Geheimdiensten bekannt und mindestens in Teilen auch der IAEA. Die SZ hat sich bereiterklärt, die Aufnahmen nicht zu veröffentlichen, weil sie eventuell Rückschlüsse darauf zulassen, wann sie gemacht wurden - und somit auf mögliche Quellen. Die Anlagen waren zu dem Zeitpunkt zwar zum Teil installiert, manche Ausrüstungsgegenstände wurden aber gerade erst montiert. Die Atombehörde, die in den kommenden Tagen ihren neuesten Bericht zu Syrien vorlegen wird, lehnte ein Stellungnahme ab. Die meisten anderen Quellen - Geheimdienstler, Diplomaten oder Experten - bestanden auf Anonymität.

Die Bilder aus dem kleineren Gebäude zeigen chemische Apparaturen dem Anschein nach aus Edelstahl, wie man sie nach Aussage eines westlichen Geheimdienstmitarbeiters "in einer Urankonversionsanlage erwarten würde". Ein unabhängiger Experte bewertete die Informationen über die Ausrüstung ähnlich. Die Fotos zeigen etwa eine säulenförmige Apparatur, gut eineinhalb Stockwerke hoch, mit der vermutlich Verunreinigungen aus dem Uran entfernt werden sollten. Ähnliche Technik gibt es in der iranischen Konversionsanlage Isfahan. Dagegen wird sie in Nordkorea nicht eingesetzt, wie ein Experte sagte, der den nordkoreanischen Nuklearkomplex in Yongbyon gut kennt.

Fotos aus dem anderen, größeren Gebäude zeigen einen Gaswäscher und spezielle Anlagen zur Reinigung von Abluft, wie sie unter anderem benötigt werden, um Uranpartikel und gefährliche Chemikalien auszufiltern, die beim Produktionsprozess entstehen, vor allem Fluorverbindungen. Zudem gibt es nach Angaben eines westlichen Geheimdienstlers "Verbindungen" zwischen el-Kibar und Marj as-Sultan. Offenbar wurden dieselben Personen an beiden Orten gesichtet oder Transporte zwischen den Anlagen beobachtet.

Eine weitere Person, die mit den Fotos vertraut ist, deutete an, dass die Anlage möglicherweise auch zur Produktion von Brennelementen dienen sollte. Fotos von speziellen Öfen, wie sie für diesen Prozess nötig wären, fehlen jedoch bisher. Ein europäischer Geheimdienstler gab sich denn auch vorsichtiger: Er sagte, die auf den Aufnahmen erkennbaren Geräte seien zwar für die Urankonversion geeignet, ließen aber nicht zwingend auf eine solche Verwendung schließen.

Ob sich die Apparaturen noch in Marj as-Sultan befinden, ist fraglich. Denn nachdem die IAEA im Mai 2008 Zugang verlangt hatte, zeigen Satellitenbilder von Ende Juli plötzlich auffällige Aktivitäten um die beiden Gebäude. Es sind weiße Objekte zu erkennen, wahrscheinlich Lastwagen. Nach Angaben der IAEA wurden nach

ihrer Anfrage bezüglich der drei Orte dort "große Container" weggeschafft und zudem Veränderungen an dem Gelände vorgenommen - in Marj as-Sultan wurde offenbar der Bodenbelag ausgetauscht oder erneuert. Wie in el-Kibar und auch in Masyaf rief das den Verdacht hervor, die Syrer hätten versucht, Spuren zu verschleiern. Es kann sich auch um einen Zufall handeln. Zumindest aber verlangten die Inspektoren eine "Erklärung für diese Aktivitäten" - bis heute vergebens.

Trotz dieser Indizien bleiben manche Experten weiter skeptisch. Der frühere IAEA-Inspektor Robert Kelley etwa bezweifelt, dass Syrien eine Uranconversionsanlage in unmittelbarer Nähe eines gehobenen Wohnviertels errichten würde. "Warum sollte man so was mitten in Beverly Hills bauen, wenn man Tausende Quadratkilometer Wüste zur Verfügung hätte?", fragt er. Das Risiko, in einer besiedelten Gegend aufzufliegen, ist zweifellos größer. Vielleicht aber wollte Syrien durch die Standortwahl vor allem vermeiden, dass die beiden Gebäude in Marj as-Sultan von Spionagesatelliten aufgespürt werden - nahe einem Militärdepot würde man zum Beispiel Transporte erwarten.

Wenn überhaupt, wird sich all das wohl nur noch klären lassen, wenn Syrien die IAEA-Inspektoren das Gelände untersuchen lässt. Aber auch Damaskus scheint kein Interesse daran zu haben, das Geheimnis von el-Kibar endlich zu lüften.

[Sourcebook note: the two buildings at Marj as-Sultan discussed above are at 33.4951 N, 36.4407 E .]



Board of Governors

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Item 5(d) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2011/2)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. This report of the Director General to the Board of Governors is on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic¹ (Syria).

A. The Dair Alzour Site

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor. The information further alleged that the reactor was under construction but not operational at the time of its destruction, and that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). By the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.²

3. Syria has maintained, since May 2008, that the destroyed building was a non-nuclear military installation and that Syria had had no nuclear related cooperation with the DPRK.³ While it cannot be excluded that the destroyed building was intended for non-nuclear use, the Agency has assessed that the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites.⁴ While Syria has indicated that its efforts to procure pumping equipment and large quantities of graphite and barite were civilian and non-nuclear in nature, the Agency has assessed that these items could also support the construction of a nuclear reactor.⁵ Additionally, the involvement of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission (AECS) in some of the procurement and the inconsistency between end use information provided by the AECS and other information available to the Agency raise further questions regarding Syria's declarations of the civilian and non-nuclear nature of this procurement. Syria has also maintained that the particles of anthropogenic natural uranium found in samples taken during the Agency's June 2008 visit to the Dair Alzour site originated from the missiles used to destroy the building.⁶

4. As indicated in previous reports, the Agency has assessed that the probability that the particles originated from the missiles used to destroy the building is low. The Agency also assessed that there is

a low probability that the particles were introduced by aerial dispersion. The presence of such uranium particles points to the possibility of nuclear related activities at the site and adds to questions concerning the nature of the destroyed building. Syria has yet to provide satisfactory explanations for the origin and presence of these particles.⁷ In this context, information yet to be provided by Israel might be helpful in clarifying the matter.⁸

5. Syria's statements concerning the nature of the destroyed building, the Dair Alzour site, the three other locations allegedly functionally related to it, the procurement activities referred to above and the alleged foreign assistance are limited in detail and no supporting documentation has been provided by Syria. The information and access provided by Syria to date have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building. Since the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, the Agency has made repeated requests to Syria for:

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

6. Syria has maintained that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and three other locations allegedly functionally related to Dair Alzour, it had no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency.⁹ The Agency has explained to Syria that there is no limitation in comprehensive safeguards agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The Agency has repeatedly offered to establish the necessary modalities for managed access to sensitive information and locations, including the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations.

7. As mentioned by the Director General in his 2 December 2010 statement to the Board of Governors, in a letter dated 18 November 2010, the Director General wrote to H.E. Walid Al-Moualem, Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, to request, inter alia, that Syria provide the Agency with prompt access to information and locations previously indicated by the Agency.

8. In a letter dated 6 February 2011 addressed to the Director General, Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that the Director General of the AECS would continue to work with the Agency to resolve all outstanding technical issues in accordance with Syria's commitments under the Agency's Statute, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Syria's Safeguards Agreement.

9. Syria has not engaged substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site since the Agency's June 2008 visit and, since August 2009, has not responded to the other issues noted in paragraph 5 above. The Agency continues to request Syria to provide access to the information, material, equipment and locations previously indicated by the Agency.

B. Activities at Other Locations in Syria

10. As previously reported, particles of anthropogenic uranium of a type not included in Syria's reported inventory were found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in 2008 and in 2009. Syria's initial explanations in June 2009 that the particles had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container were not supported by the results of sampling carried out by the Agency.¹⁰ During the November 2009 inspection, and contrary to its earlier statements, Syria explained that the anthropogenic particles had originated from previously unreported activities performed at the MNSR related to the preparation of tens of grams of uranyl nitrate using yellowcake produced at Homs.¹¹ At the March 2010 physical inventory verification (PIV), another small quantity of undeclared uranyl nitrate was found at the MNSR. Syria explained that the unreported activities had taken place in a different location in the MNSR than previously declared to the Agency.¹² As reported earlier, Syria submitted inventory change reports in June 2010 for the newly declared material shown to the Agency during the PIV. However, inconsistencies between Syria's declarations and the Agency's findings remain unresolved.

11. As previously reported, during a meeting on 3 September 2010, agreement was reached with Syria on a plan of action for resolving these inconsistencies which included, inter alia, actions related to the amounts and use of nuclear material at the MNSR, scientific publications concerning uranium conversion experiments different from those declared by Syria to have occurred at the MNSR, indications of nuclear material under the control of the Waste Management Department of the AECS, and the Agency's requests for access to Homs. Syria's initial response to the plan of action did not provide the necessary clarifications.¹³

12. In a letter dated 9 February 2011, Syria informed the Agency that the Syrian "Authority approved [the] Homs visit, but detailed arrangement[s] of activities and date, have to be agreed upon between both sides; taking into consideration that [the] Homs location is not under the Safeguards obligations of Syria". In the letter, Syria requested that the Agency propose a meeting where arrangements could be made for that visit.

13. In a letter dated 18 February 2011, the Agency welcomed Syria's approval of an Agency visit to Homs and indicated that it looked forward to unrestricted access to the requested locations at Homs and the opportunity to perform the necessary activities at those locations. In the letter, the Agency also proposed a meeting in Damascus on 27 February 2011 to make arrangements for that visit and to perform activities at the Homs locations on 27 and 28 February 2011. Syria responded to the Agency's proposal by indicating that it was prepared to discuss the arrangements for the visit to Homs during a meeting in Vienna on 28 February 2011.

14. Based on the information currently provided by Syria, the Agency cannot draw conclusions regarding the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the MNSR. Additionally, the location and scope of conversion experiments and the quantities of purified uranium and commercial depleted uranium involved in those experiments remain unclear to the Agency.

C. Summary

15. Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

16. With the passage of time, some of the information concerning the Dair Alzour site is deteriorating or has been lost entirely. It is critical, therefore, that Syria actively cooperate with the Agency on these unresolved safeguards implementation issues without further delay.

17. Concerning the MNSR, Syria's responses to date under the agreed plan of action do not resolve the inconsistencies identified by the Agency. For the Agency to draw conclusions about the source of the uranium particles at the MNSR, it is essential that Syria provide further clarification regarding outstanding inconsistencies.

18. The Agency considers that the letter from Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs stating that the AECS would continue to work with the Agency to resolve all outstanding technical issues, together with the recent communication by Syria that it has approved the Agency's proposed visit to Homs, could represent a step forward.

19. The Director General urges Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which would further facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations.

20. The Director General will continue to report as appropriate.

¹ INFCIRC/407.

² GOV/OR.1206, para. 26 and GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

³ GOV/2008/60, para. 1 and GOV/2009/36, para. 15.

⁴ GOV/2008/60, paras 10 and 11.

⁵ GOV/2009/36, para. 14.

⁶ GOV/2008/60, para. 8.

⁷ GOV/2010/47, para. 5.

⁸ GOV/2009/36, para. 7.

⁹ GOV/2009/56, para. 9 and GOV/2008/60, para. 14.

¹⁰ GOV/2009/75, para. 6.

¹¹ A pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid was constructed and commissioned in 1997 at Homs, Syria, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the IAEA. Yellowcake was also produced as a result of the acid purification process. During a July 2004 visit to the Homs phosphoric acid purification plant, Agency inspectors observed some hundreds of kilograms of yellowcake.

¹² GOV/2010/47, para. 10.

¹³ GOV/2010/63, paras 10, 11 and 12.

Diplomats say Syria has evaded UN nuke agency's request for new inspections

The Canadian Press - George Jahn

Feb 25, 2011

VIENNA — Diplomats say Syria has evaded a request from the head of the U.N. atomic agency for access to a suspected nuclear site.

Israeli warplanes destroyed what the U.S. says was a secretly built nuclear reactor in 2007. Syria allowed International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to visit the site once, but has refused subsequent requests.

IAEA chief Yukiya Amano had directly asked Syria's foreign minister in November to allow a new visit — in an unprecedented direct request. But a senior diplomat said Friday the foreign minister's response avoided mention of that site, promising only co-operation in vague terms.

Other diplomats said that amounts to a rejection of the request

The agency is attempting to probe both Syria and Iran. It is to release reports on both nations later Friday.

The diplomats spoke anonymously because their information was confidential.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2011/02/25/Obama-ignoring-Syrian-nukes-lawmaker-says/UPI-41291298653591/

Obama ignoring Syrian nukes, lawmaker says

Published: Feb. 25, 2011 at 12:06 PM

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON, Feb. 25 (UPI) -- It is "dangerous" for Washington to ignore the nuclear threat from Damascus, a top U.S. foreign affairs official said amid allegations of a new site in Syria.

U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement she was "gravely concerned" about evidence emerging that indicates Syria may have additional nuclear sites in the country.

U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford presented his credentials to Syrian President Bashar Assad in January. U.S. Republican lawmakers protested the Ford nomination in part because of Syria's alleged role regarding Hezbollah and Scud missiles in Lebanon.

Commercial satellite imagery published Wednesday by Washington's Institute for Science and International Security shows what appears to be a suspected nuclear site near Damascus, The Wall Street Journal reports.

[deletia]

UPDATE 2-UN nuclear inspectors to visit Syria plant soon

By Fredrik Dahl

Wed Mar 2, 2011 4:32pm GMT

VIENNA, March 2 (Reuters) - Syria has agreed to allow U.N. nuclear inspectors into a plant with possible uranium material, diplomatic sources said, but Washington said the gesture would not be enough to address allegations of covert atomic activity.

The sources, familiar with a long-stalled U.N. nuclear watchdog inquiry into U.S. intelligence suggesting Syria tried to build a reactor suited to producing plutonium for atom bombs, said Syrian and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials agreed at a meeting this week to a visit on April 1.

One IAEA source said two sides had also worked out a programme for the trip to the Homs acid purification plant, where uranium concentrates, or yellowcake, were a by-product.

But letting inspectors only go to Homs would not satisfy Western concerns about Syria, which has stonewalled repeated IAEA requests for further access to a desert site seen as crucial to resolving the matter.

For over two years, Syria has refused IAEA follow-up access to the remains of a complex that was being built at Dair Alzour in the Syrian desert when Israel bombed it to rubble in 2007.

U.S. intelligence reports said it was a nascent North Korean-designed nuclear reactor intended to produce bomb fuel. Inspectors found traces of uranium there in June 2008 that were not in Syria's declared nuclear inventory, heightening concerns.

Syria, an ally of Iran, whose nuclear programme is also under IAEA investigation, denies ever concealing work on nuclear weapons and says the Vienna-based agency should focus on Israel instead because of its undeclared nuclear arsenal.

Glyn Davies, U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, said Dair Alzour was the main issue regarding Syria and that allowing the agency to travel to Homs would amount to only "relatively minor" cooperation by Damascus.

SPECIAL INSPECTION?

"That (IAEA access to Homs) is good as far as it goes, but that is not the central question. The central concern is Dair Alzour," Davies told reporters.

Late last year, after repeated entreaties to Syria's nuclear agency went nowhere, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano appealed directly to its foreign minister for cooperation with his agency and access to Dair Alzour and other locations.

As part of its Syria probe, the IAEA has sought to examine the yellowcake at Homs, which if further processed could be used as nuclear fuel. Syria says the plant is for making fertilisers.

Inspectors were likely to check for any links with a Damascus research reactor where they earlier found uranium traces that had not been declared to the IAEA as required.

Enriched uranium can be used to run nuclear power plants, but also provide material for bombs, if refined much further.

During a 2004 visit to Homs inspectors observed hundreds of kilograms of yellowcake, a confidential IAEA report said.

Last week a German newspaper said Western intelligence agencies suspected that Syria may have been building a secret uranium processing facility near Damascus possibly linked to the former Dair Alzour complex.

Diplomats said this was believed to be one of several sites the agency has sought access to since 2008 and which Syria has said are military in nature and therefore beyond the scope of IAEA authority. The IAEA has not commented on the German report.

The United States has suggested the IAEA may need to consider invoking its "special inspection" mechanism to give it authority to look anywhere necessary in Syria at short notice, if Syria does not let inspectors back to Dair Alzour.

The agency last resorted to such inspection powers in 1993 in North Korea, which still withheld access and later developed a nuclear bomb capacity in secret.

The IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors will discuss the Syria and Iran probes at a March 7-11 meeting in Vienna. "What we are asking is that Syria uphold its obligations and cooperate with the necessary access to sites and equipment," Davies said.

(Writing by Sylvia Westall and Fredrik Dahl; editing by Mark Heinrich)

Syria suspected of nuke activity

By Ely Lake

8:40 p.m., Wednesday, March 2, 2011

The Obama administration and a U.N. watchdog agency want Syria to show inspectors a suspected uranium-conversion facility and two other nuclear sites possibly linked to the remnants of a covert arms program.

Since 2007, when Israel bombed the nuclear site at al Kibar, U.S. intelligence agencies feared the conversion plant near the town of Marj as-Sultan outside of Damascus was built to supply fuel to the bombed reactor, according to two former U.S. intelligence officers. Israeli jets destroyed the reactor site in September 2007, but not the suspected site at Marj as-Sultan.

Recent disclosures about the suspected uranium-conversion plant suggest Syria's nuclear program is more expansive than previously known.

"Both the Bush and Obama administrations had and still have open questions about the facilities the IAEA is looking to inspect in Syria and what has become of the al Kibar site, including a facility that has been reported as Marj as-Sultan," said Chuck Lutes, former director of nonproliferation at the White House National Security Council staff, who served in that capacity until September.

Before that, Mr. Lutes, a retired Air Force colonel, was director of counterproliferation under President George W. Bush.

The U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will conduct an inspection on April 1 at a chemical-processing plant at Homs, Syria, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. The site, however, is not one of the original three sites the IAEA has asked to inspect in connection with the al Kibar site, also known in IAEA reports as the Dair Alzour site.

"Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it," stated the latest IAEA report to the Board of Governors on Syria's suspected nuclear program.

Syria has publicly denied that al Kibar was a nuclear reactor. When IAEA inspectors found traces of man-made unenriched uranium in soil samples near the reactor in 2008, Syrian officials said the traces came from Israeli munitions, according to the IAEA report released Feb. 25.

Olli Heinonen, who was the chief inspector for the IAEA during the agency's 2008 inspection of al Kibar, said in an interview the Syrian explanation for the traces of uranium was faulty. "We found the particles there," he said. "And there was not a good explanation for that. The Syrians say it was from the Israeli bombs."

The latest IAEA report on the Syrian program concludes, "The Agency has assessed that the probability that the particles originated from the missiles used to destroy the building is low. The Agency also assessed that there is a low probability that the particles were introduced by aerial dispersion."

Officials confirmed suspicions about the three sites after the German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung published a detailed story about the Marj as-Sultan facility last week. The newspaper stated that it had photos from inside the plant but withheld publishing them to protect the source.

The newspaper said the photos allowed them to make a “reasonable assumption that Syria was busy building a facility for the conversion of uranium, a preliminary stage in the production of fuel rods that could have been used in the presumed reactor.”

Mr. Heinonen said the new uranium-conversion facility was likely built for research because it appears too small to produce fuel at larger-scale industrial levels. “Most likely this facility disclosed in the German press was too small,” he said. “It was only research and development. The fuel for al Kibar had to come from somewhere else in Syria or from abroad.”

After the German report was published, the private Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) in Washington, which tracks illicit nuclear proliferation, published what it said were commercial satellite photographs of the site on its website (isis-online.org.)

[<http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/satellite-image-shows-suspected-uranium-conversion-plant-in-syria1/>]

“The facility’s operational status is unknown,” the ISIS report said. “However, there is suspicion that Syria may have emptied the buildings prior to mid-2008 and taken steps to disguise previous activities at the site.”

A senior U.S. official interviewed for this article said he did not know whether the facility at Marj as-Sultan was operational or not.

“Looking at the stuff that has been in the press and what [ISIS] has shown, there is significant questions about the Marj as-Sultan facility,” said the senior U.S. official. “It remains a question about the scope and breadth of their nuclear program and remains unclear also if there is ongoing activity there. The satellite photos from ISIS indicate that perhaps there is not activity, but it’s hard to know. That is why we need to know what they were doing and what they are doing.”

A spokesman for the Syrian Embassy in Washington declined to comment for the article.

The standoff between Syria and the IAEA over the suspected nuclear sites could also affect Middle East diplomacy.

“There has been a push internationally to possibly invoke special inspections by the IAEA,” said Mr. Lutes, now with the Project on National Security Reform.

Special inspections are more intrusive than the kind of collaborative approach to inspections most countries allow, by which the schedule and content of the inspections are planned out beforehand between the country and the IAEA.

Special inspections, according to Mr. Lutes, have only been invoked twice before, once in Romania after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, and then in 1993 to determine the extent of North Korea’s nuclear program.

In 1993, the call for special inspections resulted in North Korea expelling IAEA inspectors, which touched off the first of several nuclear confrontations with the reclusive Pyongyang regime.

Mr. Lutes said the potential value in calling for a “special inspection” of the Syrian facilities would be that it could force the IAEA to refer the Syria file to the U.N. Security Council if the Syria refuses to allow the inspections as it has since 2008.

If the U.N. Security Council took up the Syria file, Damascus would be in the same kind of diplomatic jeopardy as Iran and North Korea today.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/mar/4/lawmakers-call-on-iaea-to-examine-syrian-nuke-faci/>

Lawmakers call on IAEA to examine Syrian nuke facilities

By Eli Lake

The Washington Times

9:40 a.m., Friday, March 4, 2011

[EXCERPTS]

A bipartisan group of senators and House members this week urged the head of the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency [IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano] to demand intrusive inspections of Syria's suspected nuclear program.

The letter — signed by 25 lawmakers — follows new disclosures that Syria blocked inspections for three years by the International Atomic Energy Agency to three sites believed to be linked to the al Kibar nuclear reactor that was destroyed by Israeli jets in 2007. The al Kibar reactor is called the Dair Alzour site by the IAEA.

[deletia]

“In light of the Syrian Foreign Minister’s refusal to address the agency’s concerns and the latest in Syria’s apparent efforts to hinder the IAEA’s efforts to carry out its verification activities,” the 19 senators and six House members stated in the letter, dated March 3. “We are concerned that Syria’s recalcitrance, if it continues unabated, will cause lasting harm to the credibility of the IAEA safeguards regime.”

Fifteen Republicans, nine Democrats and one independent Democrat signed the letter, including Sen. Jon Kyl, Arizona Republican and the senate minority whip, as well as Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, New York Democrat who replaced Hillary Clinton in the Senate.

The letter to the IAEA chief followed reports last month that Syria continued to deny access to a suspected uranium conversion plant located near Damascus outside the town of Marj as-Sultan.

[deletia]

The 25 members of Congress stated that “without direct and unfettered inspections, the IAEA cannot dismiss the evidence you have cited in your report that the Dair Azour site is a nuclear facility, including: the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, the involvement of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission (AECS), the inconsistency between end use information provided by the AECS and other information available to IAEA, and the type of uranium particles found in samples taken during the IAEA’s June 2008 visit to the site.”

[deletia]

The 20 lawmakers urged Mr. Amano to consider the portion of the safeguard agreement signed by the Syrian government that calls for the “special inspections.” That clause said a special inspection should be invoked “if the Agency considers that information made available by the state, including explanations from the State and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the agency to fulfill its responsibilities under the agreement.”

Gillibrand, Kyl Lead Bipartisan Coalition Of 25 Members Of Congress Calling For Int'l Atomic Energy Agency To Conduct Special Nuclear Inspections In Syria

March 4, 2011

Washington, DC – As Syria denies access to U.N. nuclear inspectors, and with mounting concerns over Syria's suspected nuclear activities at the Dair Alzour site and other possible locations, U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Jon Kyl (R-AZ) led a bipartisan effort of 25 Members of Congress today in urging Yukiya Amano, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to bring transparency to the state of Syria's nuclear program. In advance of the IAEA's March meeting next week, the Senators called on the agency to insist on special inspections in Syria to uncover the truth on its potential nuclear development. Syria has obstructed two years of investigations into its nuclear activities.

"Syria's refusal to allow international inspectors entry to suspected nuclear sites is alarming for the security of America, Israel, and all of our allies," Senator Gillibrand said. "If we're going to keep America and our allies safe, we need to know the status of Syria's nuclear activities, and Syria needs to know that there will be consequences if they are engaging in illicit nuclear activities."

"Syria must live up to its international agreements and allow IAEA nuclear inspectors direct and unfettered access," said Senator Ensign. "Syria's past actions and its continued disregard of agreements that require transparency of its nuclear practices lead to the conclusion that it is fostering illegal nuclear programs. If Syria continues to deny access to its facilities, the IAEA must step in and conduct special nuclear inspections to ensure it is not engaging in activities that threaten the safety of our country and our allies."

Reports indicate Syria is harboring a uranium conversion reactor. Syria allowed IAEA inspectors access to the Dair Alzour site once in 2008, but has denied all subsequent requests. According to commercial satellite photos, a second suspected nuclear installation has been identified in Syria.

The full letter signed by Senators Kirsten E. Gillibrand (D-NY), Jon Kyl (R-AZ), Joseph I. Lieberman (I-CT), John Ensign (R-NV), Ron Wyden (D-OR), James Inhofe (R-OK), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Pat Roberts (R-KS), Robert P. Casey, Jr. (D-PA), David Vitter (R-LA), John Cornyn (R-TX), John Barrasso (R-WY), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Mike Johanns (R-NE), James Risch (R-ID), Richard Burr (R-NC), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Representatives Fortenberry (R-NE), Edward Markey (D-MA), Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Ed Royce (R-CA) and Ted Deutch (D-FL), Adam Schiff (D-CA) to Director General Amano is below:

Dear Director General Amano:

We share your concern about the suspected nuclear activities at the Dair Alzour site and possibly other locations in Syria, as outlined in your most recent report on the [Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic](#). Given the Syrian Foreign Minister's evasion of your direct request for access to all necessary information and locations, we propose that you give urgent consideration to using your authority to call for "special inspections" in Syria.

As a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Syria is legally obligated by its NPT-required IAEA safeguards agreement to make correct and complete declarations of its nuclear materials and related nuclear facilities and equipment. We recognize that Syria has agreed to an inspection of the Homs facility;

however, even if Syria were to allow the level of access you have requested, which seems unlikely, such an action would still not adequately address the international community's concerns over Syria's nuclear efforts. Without direct and unfettered inspections, the IAEA cannot dismiss the evidence you have cited in your report that the Dair Azour site is a nuclear facility, including: the features of the building and its connectivity to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, the involvement of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission (AECS), the inconsistency between end use information provided by the AECS and other information available to IAEA, and the type of uranium particles found in samples taken during the IAEA's June 2008 visit to the site.

We agree with you that "after two years of investigations constrained by Syria's lack of cooperation, it is critical that Syria positively engage with the Agency on these issues without further delay." As you are aware, Article 72 of Syria's safeguards agreement permits special inspections "[i]f the Agency considers that information made available by the State, including explanations from the State and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the Agency to fulfil its responsibilities under the Agreement." In light of the Syrian Foreign Minister's refusal to address the Agency's concerns and the latest in Syria's apparent efforts to hinder the IAEA's efforts to carry out its verification activities, we are concerned that Syria's recalcitrance, if it continues unabated, will cause lasting harm to the credibility of the IAEA safeguards regime.

As a bi-partisan group of the U.S. Congress, we urge you to take this next step in order to bolster the safeguards regime and bring transparency to the state of Syria's nuclear program.



**IAEA Board of Governors
Introductory Statement to Board of Governors
by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano**

Vienna, Austria

7 March 2011

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Concerning the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and some other locations. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.

Last month, I received a letter from Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs in response to my letter of November 2010 in which I requested Syria to provide the Agency with prompt access to information and locations related to Dair Alzour.

I believe that the Minister's response, stating that Syria would continue to work with the Agency to resolve all outstanding technical issues, could represent a step forward. I wish to inform you that we have since reached agreement with Syria on a visit by the Agency to locations at Homs.

Syria must not be allowed to stonewall IAEA probe: US

(AFP) – 5 hours ago [Accessed 2011-03-09T19:00Z]

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA — Syria cannot be allowed to continue to block a long-running investigation by the UN atomic watchdog into alleged illicit nuclear activity, the United States said here Wednesday [2011-03-09].

"The United States' position on this is that we are not going to let this matter simply fade away or go away. We are not going to let Syria simply run out the clock on this matter," Washington's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Glyn Davies, told reporters.

[deletia]

"There is credible information that Dair Alzour was a reactor, that it was constructed with help from North Korea and that -- and this is the key part, -- that it was intended for non-peaceful purposes," Davies said on the sidelines of an ongoing meeting of the IAEA's board of governors here.

Damascus had "actively hindered and stood in the way of the IAEA's investigation by denying the IAEA access to the site, by refusing to provide information and by sanitising or cleaning up the suspected sites," Davies continued.

The IAEA board of governors "cannot accept this tactic this undermining of the nuclear safeguards regime."

Earlier this month, Syria did in fact agree to allow IAEA inspectors visit a much less significant site at Homs, a move which Amano said could be seen as a possible step forward.

The visit looks set to take place on April 1.

IAEA chief Amano said the visit would not "solve all the problems, of course," but, depending on what inspectors found at Homs, "this could be a step forward in my view."

The current EU president Hungary, in its own statement to the IAEA board, was similarly cautious.

"We hope it will be followed by further steps by Syria to help clarify all unresolved issues," Hungary said.

US ambassador Davies said the IAEA could also resort to a rarely-used tool called a "special inspection" if Damascus continued to stonewall the probe.

"That is a tool that could be used to get at this issue," Davies said.

But he added: "I don't think it's up to us... We'll take our lead from (Amano) on the special inspections."

Syria "can't be allowed" to block nuclear probe -US

By Fredrik Dahl

Wed Mar 9, 2011 6:41pm GMT

[EXCERPTS]

VIENNA, March 9 (Reuters) - The United States warned Syria on Wednesday it "can't be allowed" to stonewall a U.N. watchdog investigation into a desert site where covert atomic activity may have taken place before it was destroyed by Israel in 2007.

[deletia]

"The United States position on this is that we are not going to let this matter simply fade away or go away," U.S. Ambassador Glyn Davies told reporters on the sidelines of a week-long meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation governing board. He suggested the Arab state may still be pursuing secret atomic work, accusing it of "deliberate efforts to conceal the full extent and scope of what we strongly believe were, and may still be, clandestine nuclear activities."

[deletia]

SPECIAL INSPECTION?

Davies said the Syrian case represented a challenge to the IAEA's nuclear safeguards regime. "They can't be allowed to simply stonewall and block the investigation."

[deletia]

The United States has suggested the IAEA may need to consider invoking its "special inspection" mechanism to give it authority to look anywhere necessary in Syria at short notice, if Syria does not agree to inspectors visiting Dair Alzour.

[deletia]

"I think it is still the case that this is a situation that could be addressed by a special inspection," Davies said.

But nuclear expert Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said he did not believe Amano would do this.

"Were the IAEA to go to these sites and find nothing, Syria would be vindicated and the political credibility of the IAEA could be damaged," Hibbs said.

UN inspectors back from trip to Syria: IAEA

VIENNA,

April 4 (AFP) Apr 04, 2011

UN inspectors have returned from a trip to Syria and are now analysing the data they collected there, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Monday.

"IAEA inspectors have returned from Syria and will now analyse the information they have collected," a spokesman for the Vienna-based watchdog said.

After stonewalling an IAEA probe for more than two years, Damascus finally gave nuclear inspectors permission earlier this year to fly to Syria on April 1 to visit a site at Homs.

The IAEA has been investigating allegations since 2008 that Syria had been building an undeclared reactor at a remote desert site called Dair Alzour until it was bombed by Israeli planes in September 2007.

Damascus granted UN inspectors one-off access to that site back in June 2008 but has not allowed any follow-up visits to either Dair Alzour or other possible related sites since then.

Homs, north of Damascus, is not one of the suspect sites, but the IAEA welcomed Syria's decision to allow the visit, seeing it as a possible first step forward in its hitherto stymied investigation.

IAEA chief: Syria tried to build nuclear reactor

By JAMEY KEATEN and GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press

Apr 28, 12:29 PM EDT

PARIS (AP) -- The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said for the first time that a target destroyed by Israeli warplanes in the Syrian desert in 2007 was the covert site of a future nuclear reactor, countering assertions by Syria that it had no atomic secrets.

Previous reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency have suggested that the structure could have been a nuclear reactor. Thursday's comments by IAEA chief Yukiya Amano were the first time the agency has said so unequivocally.

By aligning Amano with the U.S., which first asserted three years ago that the bombed target was a nuclear reactor, the comments could increase pressure on Syria to stop stonewalling agency requests for more information on its nuclear activities.

Amano spoke during a news conference meant to focus on the Fukushima nuclear disaster after a visit to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to discuss clean-up efforts at Japan's tsunami-ravaged nuclear plant.

"The facility that was ... destroyed by Israel was a nuclear reactor under construction," he told a full news conference in response to a question from The Associated Press, repeating to the AP in taped comments afterward: "It was a reactor under construction."

Suggesting that Amano had erred in making the public comments, the IAEA later put out a statement that he "did not say that the IAEA had reached the conclusion that the site was definitely a nuclear reactor."

The rollback reflected previous, more circumspect, IAEA language. In a February report, Amano had said only that features of the bombed structure were "similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites."

Israel has never publicly commented on the strike or even acknowledged carrying it out. The U.S. has shared intelligence with the agency that identifies the structure as a nearly completed nuclear reactor that, if finished, would have been able to produce plutonium for the fissile core of nuclear warheads.

Syria denies allegations of any covert nuclear activity or interest in developing nuclear arms. Its refusal to allow IAEA inspectors new access to the bombed Al Kibar desert site past a visit three years ago has heightened suspicions that it had something to hide, along with its decision to level the destroyed structure and later build over it.

Drawing on the 2008 visit by its inspectors, the IAEA determined that the destroyed building's size and structure fit specifications that a reactor would have had. The site also contained graphite and natural uranium particles that could be linked to nuclear activities.

The IAEA is also trying to probe several other sites for possible undeclared nuclear activities linked to the bombed target but Damascus has been uncooperative on most counts, saying that most of the sites are restricted because of their military nature.

Jahn reported from Vienna

AP Exclusive: Diplomats say Syria's referral to Security Council likely for nuclear defiance

By George Jahn, The Associated Press

1 hour ago [Accessed 2011-04-29T13:55Z]

VIENNA — The International Atomic Energy Agency is setting the stage for potential U.N. Security Council action against Syria as the organization prepares a report assessing that a Syrian target bombed by Israeli warplanes was likely a secretly built nuclear reactor meant to produce plutonium, diplomats say.

Such a conclusion would back intelligence produced by Israel and the United States. Syria says the nearly finished building had no nuclear uses. It has repeatedly turned down IAEA requests to revisit the site after allowing an initial 2008 inspection that found evidence of possible nuclear activities.

In interviews over the past week, three diplomats and a senior U.N. official said such an assessment — drawn up by IAEA chief Yukiya Amano — would be the basis of a Western-sponsored resolution at a meeting of the 35-nation IAEA board that condemns Syria's refusal to co-operate with the agency and kicks the issue to the U.N. Security Council. They said reporting Syria to the council would likely come as early as a June board meeting and no later than in November.

All asked for anonymity in exchange for discussing confidential information.

In an apparent slip of the tongue that could have opened a window on his plans, Amano said for the first time Thursday that the bombed site was a nearly finished nuclear reactor. He spoke in taped comments at a news conference and later to The Associated Press.

Suggesting that Amano had erred in making such comments publicly, the IAEA later put out a statement that "he did not say that the IAEA had reached the conclusion that the site was definitely a nuclear reactor."

The rollback reflected previous, more circumspect, IAEA language. In a February report, Amano said only that features of the bombed structure were "similar to what may be found at nuclear reactor sites."

Once formally involved, the council has options ranging from doing nothing to passing its own resolutions demanding compliance with the IAEA, followed by sanctions to enforce such demands. This has been the scenario for Iran, under four sets of U.N. sanctions for ignoring council demands to stop activities that could be used to build nuclear arms and to co-operate with an IAEA probe of experiments that could be used to develop such weapons.

The greatest uncertainty, said one of the diplomats, is Syria's current unrest, which could delay or change Western plans to force a resolution and referral to the U.N. Security Council. Since the public uprising in Syria began in mid-March, inspired by revolts across the Arab world, hundreds of people have been killed nationwide, activists say.

Syria sanctions are unlikely. While Tehran continues with its nuclear program, intelligence services believe that the Israeli bombing of the Al Kibar site effectively ended Syria's covert activities. Also, the diplomats said, forcing the issue with Syria would detract council attention from Iran, the main focus of nuclear concern, and could muddy efforts to focus on an end of Syria's bloody crackdown on its grass-roots pro-democracy movement.

Still, Security Council involvement carries both symbolic weight and opens the path for concrete action later, should new evidence be found.

A U.S. official called any referral to the council significant, while the diplomats — all from IAEA board member nations — said that beyond sending a signal to Syria, reporting it to the council also would be a rehearsal for action against Iran further down the road.

They said that after more than four years of gridlock in IAEA attempts to investigate Iran's alleged experiments geared toward developing nuclear arms, Amano also was planning to draw up an assessment saying that such experiments were likely conducted, perhaps by the end of the year.

That, in turn, would open the path for renewed IAEA referral of Iran to the Security Council and lead to potential tightening of existing sanctions or a new set of U.N. penalties, the diplomat said.

One said assessments such as ones for Syria and Iran were rare, if not unprecedented, in the IAEA's history and reflected the agency's frustration with both nation's refusal to co-operate.

Beyond Iran, only four other countries — Saddam Hussein's Iraq, North Korea, Libya and post-communist Romania — have been reported to the Security Council by the IAEA in its 54-year history.

Like Iran, Syria denies allegations of any interest in developing nuclear arms. But its refusal to allow IAEA inspectors new access to the bombed desert site has heightened suspicions that it had something to hide along with its decision to level the structure that was destroyed by Israel and later to build over it.

Drawing on the 2008 visit to Syria by its inspectors, the IAEA determined that the destroyed building's size and structure fit specifications that a reactor would have had. It also found graphite and natural uranium particles that could be linked to nuclear use of the structure.

U.S. Presses Nuclear Case Against Damascus

By JAY SOLOMON

MAY 14, 2011

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON—The U.S. and its European allies, seeking to pressure Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to end his violent crackdown on protesters, are lobbying the United Nations nuclear watchdog to formally accuse Damascus of covertly building a nuclear reactor.

Such a declaration by Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, could lead the U.N. Security Council to censure and perhaps penalize Syria in the coming months if it fails to provide information on its alleged nuclear activities, including at a suspected reactor site bombed by Israel in 2007, said U.S. and European officials.

"It is our longstanding view that the Syrian facility...was a nuclear reactor configured for plutonium production," said a senior U.S. official involved in the discussions.

The U.S. and European Union have been seeking ways to further isolate Damascus in the wake of a brutal offensive by Mr. Assad's security forces. Both Washington and Brussels have announced unilateral economic sanctions on senior Syrian officials in recent weeks, although not on Mr. Assad himself.

But the Obama administration and its allies have so far been stymied in their attempts to pressure Mr. Assad through the Security Council, according to diplomats involved in the discussions. Russia, in particular, has resisted U.N. action to punish Syria, a decades-long ally of Moscow. The IAEA is viewed as a separate channel through which to put pressure on Damascus, said these officials.

"We're looking to increasingly isolate Assad," said a European official briefed on the talks. "The IAEA is one of the routes."

Syria's ally, Iran, has been hit with four rounds of U.N. economic sanctions since 2006 as a result of Tehran's own standoff with the IAEA.

For more than three years, the IAEA has been seeking access to at least four Syrian sites the U.N. agency suspects of being part of a covert nuclear program. The facility in eastern Syria destroyed in late 2007 by Israeli fighter jets, Dair Alzour, was a nearly operational nuclear reactor built in collaboration with North Korea, U.S. intelligence agencies believe.

Damascus has repeatedly denied the charges. It has refused to allow IAEA inspectors to visit the suspect sites after an initial mission went to Dair Alzour.

Mr. Amano in recent months has publicly talked about the possibility of utilizing a special power of his office to demand immediate access to Syria. But IAEA officials worry privately that Syria could again refuse to comply, making Mr. Amano's office look weak.

The U.S. and Europe, subsequently, have advised the IAEA to declare in its quarterly report on Syria, due out next month, that its inspectors have concluded that the bombed facility was a reactor. Such a move could lead the IAEA's 35-member board to issue a resolution declaring Damascus in noncompliance with its commitments to the agency. Syria's case could then be referred to the U.N. Security Council.

Mr. Amano, in a speech earlier this month, suggested he might go this route. In Paris, he told a conference that "the facility that was ... destroyed by Israel was a nuclear reactor under construction," his most definitive comment to date on the nature of the Syrian facility. Mr. Amano's representative in Vienna, however, subsequently stated that the IAEA hadn't reached a firm conclusion on the Syria case and wouldn't comment on what action the agency might take.

[deletia]

Ex-IAEA official adds weight to Syria atom suspicion

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Tue May 17, 2011 10:10am EDT

(Reuters) - Satellite images and other information indicate Syria was building a covert atomic reactor when Israel bombed the site in 2007, a former senior U.N. nuclear inspector said on Tuesday.

Olli Heinonen, who stepped down as deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2010, made his remarks at a time when some argue that Damascus may soon be referred to the U.N. Security Council over the issue.

Now a senior fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, he said "satellite imagery, procurement, and infrastructure information tend to point (in the) direction that the destroyed building at Dair Alzour was, indeed, a nuclear reactor at an advanced state of construction."

In an email to Reuters, he said, however, that Syria had not "engaged in any substantial discussion" about Dair Alzour.

Israeli warplanes wrecked the desert site in September 2007 and Syria has allowed IAEA investigators to visit it only once, in June 2008, rejecting repeated requests for further visits.

Western diplomats expect the Vienna-based IAEA to use stronger language in its next quarterly report on Syria which is due later this month, possibly by saying it believes the facility was a reactor under construction.

The United States and its European allies are expected to seize on this finding to push for a decision at the June 6-10 meeting of the IAEA's governing board to send the file to the U.N. Security Council -- a move last used against Iran in 2006.

The move would reflect growing frustration in the West over Syria's stonewalling of an IAEA probe into Dair Alzour, which U.S. intelligence reports said was a nascent North Korean-designed reactor intended to make bomb fuel.

Preparations for a possible U.S.-led move by the IAEA's 35-nation governing board coincide with a Syrian crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations. Western diplomats in Vienna insist the two issues are separate.

"There is a general feeling that there has been a stalemate in the Syrian case for too long and therefore something has to be done," one European ambassador accredited to the IAEA said.

"It is a dramatic step," he said about the possibility that the Syria nuclear case would be handed over to the Security Council, which may debate the issue or take other action.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies ever having a nuclear weapons program. It has suggested uranium traces uncovered at Dair Alzour after a one-off IAEA visit came with Israeli munitions used in the attack. The agency has dismissed this as unlikely.

SOME COUNTRIES SCEPTICAL

Diplomats said the IAEA -- which in earlier reports said there were indications nuclear activity may have taken place at Dair Alzour -- was unlikely to make a definitive, final assessment due to a lack of further access to the site.

"They can say that according to everything they know there is a high probability, or that they assume, it was a nuclear reactor," one Western official said.

Western diplomats say Syria's refusal to allow U.N. inspectors follow-up access to Dair Alzour risks undermining the IAEA and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that underpins its work to prevent the spread of atom bombs, if nothing is done.

The board has the power to refer countries to the Security Council if they are judged to have violated IAEA rules designed to make sure atom technology is not diverted for military aims.

A majority vote in favor would be needed for this step.

"I think it will be feasible to get a decision to refer the issue to the Security Council," the Western official said.

The European ambassador said some countries on the IAEA board may not back such a decision. He expected Russia and China, which last month resisted a Security Council condemnation of Syria's clampdown on demonstrators, to abstain in any vote.

One developing country diplomat said that whatever Syria did at Dair Alzour it was now in the past, unlike the Iran case.

"To send it to the Security Council it has to be a threat to international peace and security," said the diplomat. "Do you have any proof they are doing it right now?"

(Editing by Maria Golovnina)

Indications Syria site was nuclear reactor: IAEA

By David Brunnstrom

BRUSSELS

Thu May 19, 2011 10:28am EDT

(Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog has information indicating that Syria was covertly building a nuclear reactor when Israel bombed the site in 2007, but has yet to reach a definite verdict, its head said on Thursday.

If Yukiya Amano formalizes the conclusion in his quarterly report on Syria, due within weeks, diplomats say the United States and its allies will seize on the finding to try to have Syria's case referred to the U.N. Security Council.

The West is increasingly frustrated at what it sees as Syria's stonewalling of an international probe into the Dair Alzour site, which U.S. intelligence reports say was a nascent North Korean-designed reactor intended to make bomb fuel.

"We have the allegation that this facility was a nuclear reactor under construction," Amano, director general of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said in an interview in Brussels.

"We do have information that indicates that it was the case. But for now, as of today, we haven't yet come to any conclusion."

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies ever having a nuclear weapons program. It has suggested uranium traces uncovered at Dair Alzour after a one-off IAEA visit came from Israeli munitions used in the attack. The agency has dismissed this as unlikely.

Damascus has rejected repeated IAEA requests for follow-up visits to the desert site.

NO ACCESS

Amano, who in earlier reports said there were indications that nuclear activity may have taken place at Dair Alzour, made clear his view that Syria was not cooperating.

"We kept on asking Syria to accept our inspectors and I wrote a letter in November, but I haven't received a positive response regarding the visit of inspectors to Dair Alzour."

But he said Syria had become more cooperative on another facility, a research reactor near Damascus.

The 35-nation IAEA board has the power to report countries to the Security Council if they are judged to have violated IAEA rules designed to make sure that nuclear technology is not diverted for military aims.

It reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006 over its failure to dispel suspicions that it was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran has since been hit with four rounds of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to curb sensitive nuclear work.

Preparations for a possible U.S.-led move on Syria at the board's meeting from June 6 to 10 coincide with a Syrian crackdown on a pro-democracy uprising.

Western diplomats said the IAEA was unlikely to make a final assessment on Dair Alzour due to a lack of further access.

They say Syria's refusal to let U.N. inspectors return to Dair Alzour risks undermining the IAEA and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, if no action is taken.

Amano said: "Lack of cooperation on their part -- and if we cannot draw conclusions -- is not good for the IAEA, for Syria (or) for anyone."

(Additional reporting and writing by Fredrik Dahl in Vienna; Editing by Kevin Liffey)

Syria faces pressure at U.N. atomic agency: diplomats

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Mon May 23, 2011 2:27pm EDT

(Reuters) - U.N. inspectors are likely to increase international pressure on Syria this week with a report about suspected illicit nuclear activities that could lead to a referral of Damascus to the U.N. Security Council.

Diplomats say the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will probably give a clearer indication than in previous such reports that it suspects Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in the desert when Israel bombed the site in 2007.

The United States and its European allies may then use the finding to push for a resolution at a June 6-10 meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation board to refer Syria's case to the Security Council -- a step it last took against Iran in 2006.

The move would underline the West's frustration with what it sees as Syria's stonewalling of an IAEA probe into the Dair Alzour site, which U.S. intelligence reports say was a nascent North Korean-designed reactor intended to make bomb fuel.

"We expect that it is going to be a very straightforward, tough report on Syria," one senior Western diplomat said.

If IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano "makes a clear indication that he believes that this was very likely a clandestine reactor under construction, the board would have to take action, and strong action," he added.

But some non-Western diplomats expressed skepticism about any such step by the board, saying that whatever Syria did at Dair Alzour it was now in the past. "I assume that some countries will not be very happy," said one envoy.

The confidential, quarterly report on Syria is expected to be sent to IAEA member states in the next few days. It coincides with fresh Western sanctions imposed on the Arab country this month over its bloody crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, ending efforts to woo Damascus away from its alliance with Iran.

NUCLEAR TREATY UNDERMINED?

Diplomats in Vienna, where the IAEA is based, insist the two issues are separate and that Damascus has refused agency inspectors access to Dair Alzour for nearly three years.

"These are two different things. What we are concerned about are basically Syria's violations of its international obligations (to cooperate with the IAEA) and the integrity of the (nuclear) safeguards regime," the Western diplomat said.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies ever having a nuclear weapons program. It has suggested uranium traces uncovered at Dair Alzour after a one-off IAEA visit came from Israeli munitions used in the attack. The agency has dismissed this as unlikely.

The IAEA board has the power to report countries to the Security Council if they are judged to have violated IAEA rules -- designed to make sure that nuclear technology is not diverted for military aims -- by pursuing covert nuclear activity.

It reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006 over its failure to dispel suspicions that it was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran has since been hit with four rounds of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to curb sensitive nuclear work.

Western diplomats say Syria's lack of cooperation risks undermining the IAEA and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which underpins the agency's work, if no action is taken.

But they said Amano, who in earlier reports said there were indications that nuclear activity may have taken place at Dair Alzour, was unlikely to make a final, definitive assessment about the nature of the site.

"He will, I believe, point out in a stronger way that -- relying on the material and information that the IAEA has -- many things point to a reactor," a senior Western official said.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich)

<http://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/IAEA-Syria-very-likely-hid-nuke-program-1393346.php>

IAEA: Syria very likely hid nuke program

GEORGE JAHN, Associated Press

Published 08:56 a.m., Tuesday, May 24, 2011

VIENNA (AP) — The U.N. nuclear agency says that a Syrian target bombed four years ago by Israel was very likely a nearly finished, covertly built nuclear reactor.

The finding by the International Atomic Energy Agency backs U.S. findings and sets the stage for potential U.N. Security Council action against Syria.

Syria says the nearly finished building had no nuclear uses. It has repeatedly turned down IAEA requests to revisit the site after allowing an initial 2008 inspection that found evidence of possible nuclear activities.

Diplomats have told The Associated Press that a strong IAEA opinion that the Syrians were trying to build a nuclear reactor secretly would likely result in a Western push to report Syria to the Security Council.

A senior Western diplomat said Tuesday that push would come next month at the next meeting of the 35-nation IAEA board, with the initiative likely to get majority backing.



Board of Governors

GOV/2011/30

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Item 7(f) of the provisional agenda
(GOV/2011/23)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report by the Director General

1. This report of the Director General to the Board of Governors is on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic¹ (Syria). It includes the Agency's assessment of the nature of the destroyed building at the Dair Alzour site.

A. The Dair Alzour Site

2. On 2 June 2008, the Director General informed the Board of Governors that the Agency had been provided with information alleging that an installation at the Dair Alzour site in Syria, destroyed by Israel in September 2007, had been a nuclear reactor that was not yet operational and into which no nuclear material had been introduced. Information subsequently provided to the Agency further alleged that the reactor was a gas cooled graphite moderated reactor, that it was not configured to produce electricity, that it had been built with the assistance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and that there were three other locations in Syria that were functionally related to the Dair Alzour site. By the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building.² Syria has maintained, since May 2008, that the destroyed building was a non-nuclear military installation and that Syria had had no nuclear related cooperation with the DPRK.³

3. The Agency regrets that information concerning the Dair Alzour site was not provided to it in a timely manner and that force was used before the Agency was given an opportunity to establish the facts in accordance with its responsibilities under Syria's Safeguards Agreement.

4. In June 2008, during the Agency's visit to Syria, the Agency requested supporting documentation concerning the past and current use of the buildings at the Dair Alzour site and at three other locations allegedly functionally related to that site. The Agency also requested clarification about procurement activities by Syrian entities, including the Syrian Atomic Energy Agency (AECS), concerning pumping equipment, and large quantities of graphite and barite. During the visit, Syria stated that the function of the destroyed building was missile related. Syria also stated that the destroyed building could not have been a nuclear facility because of the unreliable and insufficient electricity supplies in the area, the limited availability of human resources in Syria and the unavailability of large quantities of treated water.

5. Environmental samples taken during the visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008 contained particles of anthropogenic natural uranium, graphite and stainless steel. Syria maintains that the particles of anthropogenic natural uranium found at the Dair Alzour site originated from the missiles used to destroy the building.⁴

Syria also maintains that the pumping equipment and large quantities of graphite and barite that it sought to procure were for civilian and non-nuclear purposes.

6. Syria's statements — concerning the nature of the destroyed building, the Dair Alzour site, the three other locations allegedly functionally related to it, the procurement activities referred to above and the alleged foreign assistance — are limited in detail, are not supported by documentation and have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's assertions regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building. Since the Agency's visit to the Dair Alzour site in June 2008, the Agency has made repeated requests to Syria for:

- information concerning the Dair Alzour site, the infrastructure observed at the site and certain procurement efforts which Syria has stated were related to civilian non-nuclear activities;
- access to technical documentation and any other information related to the construction of the destroyed building;
- access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are now situated; and
- further access to the Dair Alzour site and access to three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

7. Syria has maintained that, due to the military and non-nuclear nature of the Dair Alzour site and three other locations allegedly functionally related to the Dair Alzour site, it has no obligation to provide more information under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency.⁵

The Agency has explained to Syria that there is no limitation in comprehensive safeguards agreements on Agency access to information, activities or locations simply because they may be military related. The Agency has repeatedly offered to establish the necessary modalities to enable Syria to substantiate its statements while protecting sensitive information related to its activities at the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations.

8. In a letter dated 18 November 2010, the Director General wrote to H.E. Walid Al-Moualem, Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, to request, inter alia, that Syria provide the Agency with prompt access to information and locations previously indicated by the Agency.

9. In a letter dated 6 February 2011 addressed to the Director General, Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that the Director General of the AECS would continue to work with the Agency to resolve all outstanding technical issues in accordance with Syria's commitments under the Agency's Statute, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Syria's Safeguards Agreement.

10. Notwithstanding the Minister's statement referred to above, Syria has not engaged substantively

with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site since the Agency's June 2008 visit and, since August 2009, has not responded to the other issues referred to in paragraph 6 above.

B. Assessment of the Dair Alzour Site

11. As further described below, the Agency has assessed that:

- features of the destroyed building are comparable to those of gas cooled graphite moderated reactors of the type and size alleged;
- prior to the bombing, the configuration of the infrastructure at the site, including its connections for cooling and treated water, was able to support the operation of such a reactor and was not consistent with Syria's claims regarding the purpose of the infrastructure; in addition, a number of other features of the site add to its suitability for the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor;
- analysis of samples from the site indicates a connection to nuclear related activities; and
- the features of the destroyed building and the site could not have served the purpose claimed by Syria.

B.1. Features of the Destroyed Building

12. The Agency has assessed that the dimensions, shape and configuration of the destroyed building are comparable to those found in reactors of the alleged type.

13. Based on commercial imagery from 2001 to 2007, the dimensions of the building⁶ are comparable to those for nuclear reactors of the type and power alleged, i.e. similar to the 25 MW(th) gas cooled graphite moderated reactor at Yongbyon⁷ in the DPRK. The Agency's analysis of a photograph of the bombed building that was provided to the Agency by a Member State corroborates the allegation that Syria attempted to conceal the features of the building's configuration by the addition of wall and roof sections.

14. Analysis of imagery provided by two Member States, taken shortly after the building was destroyed, indicates that internal features of the building correspond to a large central hall, a cylindrical biological shield, a containment structure, heat exchanger shielding structures and a spent fuel pond; all of which would be required for a reactor.⁸ The Agency procured a radar image of the building taken shortly after its destruction. Within the limits of the resolution, the image is consistent with those provided to the Agency by the two Member States.

15. The imagery of the destroyed building showed that the feature interpreted as being a containment structure had similar dimensions, shape and layout to other known reactors of the type alleged, and the overall size of the building was sufficient to house the equipment needed for such a nuclear reactor. Photographs of a reactor vessel at the Dair Alzour site released by a Member State simultaneously with the publication of the allegations are not inconsistent with the Agency's assessment of the dimensions of the containment structure. Based on all the information available to the Agency, including the Agency's analysis of these photographs, it is estimated that the reactor core had 843 fuel channels and 79 access ports, and, depending on the heat transfer characteristics of the fuel, the reactor may have had a thermal power of 25 MW or higher.

16. During the June 2008 Agency visit, Syria stated that some equipment which remained functional after the bombing had been removed from the destroyed building. Satellite imagery provided by a Member State confirms Syria's efforts to recover equipment and material from the destroyed building prior to its complete demolition and burial. The efforts included the covering of areas of the destroyed building which may have served to conceal features of the facility during the process. A significant fraction of material and equipment had been removed from the site before the remainder was demolished and buried in the seven weeks following the bombing.

B.2. Site Infrastructure and Site Suitability

17. Based on satellite imagery and the Agency's observations made during the June 2008 visit, the Agency has assessed that the configuration and capacity of the infrastructure at the site prior to the destruction of the building were consistent with the cooling requirements of a 25 MW(th) nuclear reactor. Syria claims that the pumps at the river pump house (RPH) and the Dair Alzour site pump house (SPH) comprised a staged pumping system to supply river water to the civilian water treatment facility (WTF) located approximately 5 km to the east of the Dair Alzour site. Syria's claims in this respect are not supported by the Agency's assessment (see Figure 1 below). Factors considered in the Agency's assessment include:

- Before the destruction of the building, the river water pumping system had the necessary pipes to supply the building with river water. A pipe ran from the building to a point downstream from the RPH. This configuration was consistent with the supply of cooling water to a reactor and the return of water to the river;
- The observed pumping capacity was adequate for cooling 25 MW of thermal power. Additionally, the stated function of the destroyed building (i.e. missile related) would not require connection to the observed river water pumping capacity;
- Before the destruction of the building, the river water pumping system's output was not connected to the WTF; and
- After the destruction of the building, Syria reconfigured the pumping infrastructure to remove sections of the return pipe and to install a new large diameter water pipe connection from the SPH to the WTF.

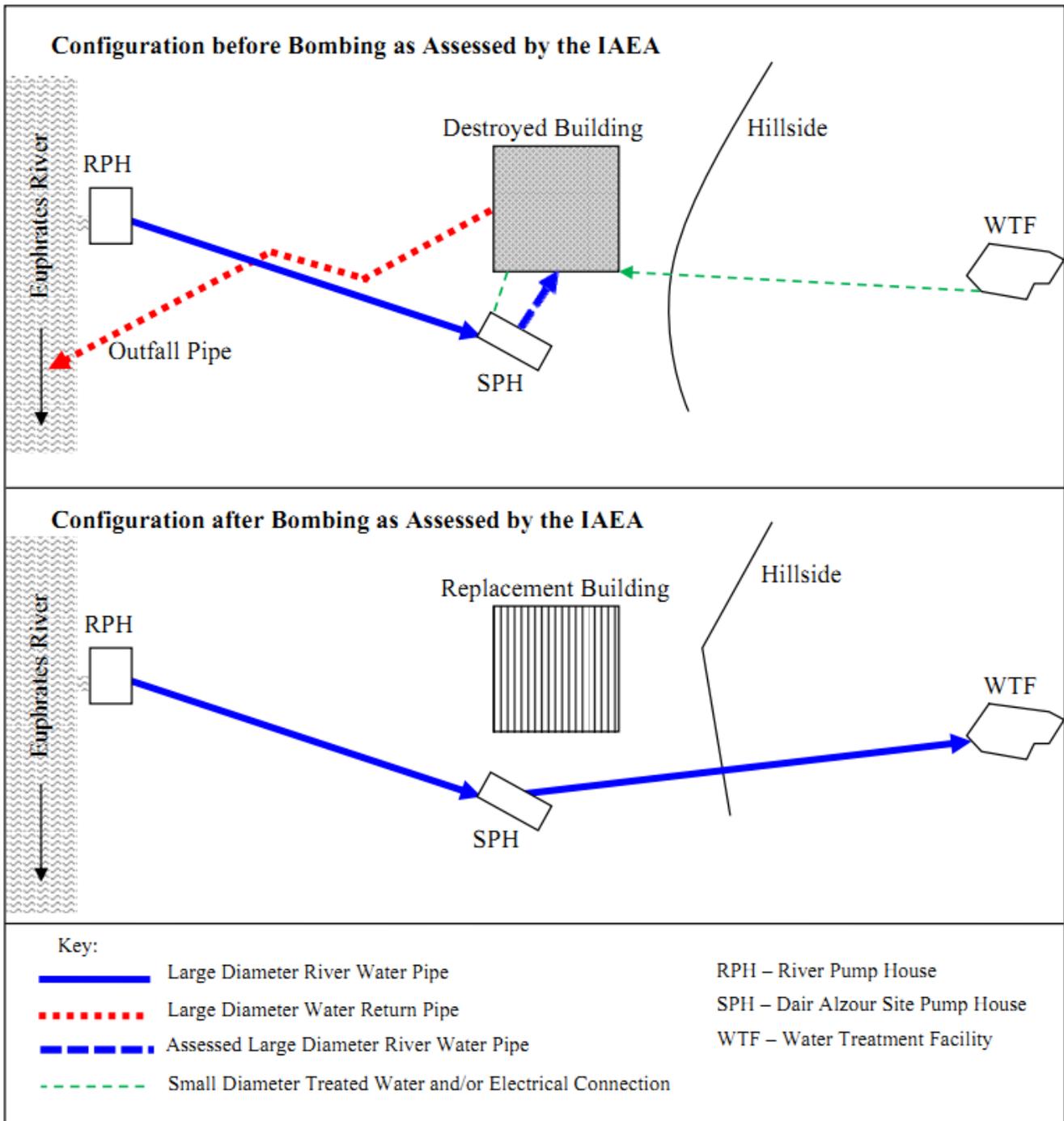


Figure 1. Key infrastructure configurations before bombing and after reconfiguration (not to scale).

18. In contrast to Syria’s statements concerning insufficient electricity supplies in the area, the site infrastructure included buried high voltage power distribution and transformer equipment. At the time of the Agency’s June 2008 visit, the Agency observed electrical infrastructure and the operation of all the river water pumps at the RPH and SPH. The combined electrical load of the pumps represents a significant fraction of the total electrical power requirement for operation of a reactor of the alleged type. Therefore, the Agency has assessed that the electrical infrastructure at the site was possibly sufficient to meet the needs of such a nuclear reactor.

19. Based on the available information, including 1994 AECS seismology data centred on the Dair Alzour site and 2002 geology data concerning the Dair Alzour region, the site has a number of other features which add to its suitability for the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor. These features of the site include a relatively stable geological platform on which to construct a heavy building, low population density in the area, close proximity to a river for the supply of cooling water, and the availability of services, including treated water and electricity. Such features are normally considered in the site selection process for a nuclear reactor.⁹

B.3. Sampling

20. Assessments of samples taken from the Dair Alzour site indicate a connection to nuclear related activities and the presence of materials that could possibly be used in the construction of gas cooled reactors.

21. The presence of a significant number of particles of anthropogenic natural uranium at the Dair Alzour site indicates a connection to nuclear related activities at the site and increases concerns about possible undeclared nuclear material at the site. The Agency has not been able to determine the origin of the particles. Notwithstanding the lack of response to the Agency's requests for additional information concerning the origin of the particles, the Agency's assessment of Syria's explanation for the presence of the particles is that, based on their morphology and distribution, there is a low probability that they could have originated from the munitions used to destroy the building or by aerial dispersion as suggested by Syria.

22. The Agency has examined the samples retrieved from the Dair Alzour site during the June 2008 visit for indications of the presence of construction materials associated with a gas cooled graphite moderated reactor. The results showed the presence of graphite and stainless steel. The graphite particles were too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor. The types of stainless steel detected at the site were compatible with nuclear use, but not exclusively so.

B.4. Stated Function of the Dair Alzour Site

23. The Agency's assessment of the features observed at the Dair Alzour site prior to the building's bombing and immediately thereafter is that it is unlikely that the purpose of the site was missile assembly, storage or launching. Factors considered in the Agency's assessment included the building's configuration, the construction materials, suitability of openings and hatches for missile handling or launching, the assessment of the water infrastructure described in paragraph 17 above, Syria's declaration of the civilian nature of the water infrastructure on the site and normal missile handling practices.

B.5. Assessment Summary

24. The circumstances relating to the Dair Alzour site are unique, in that the building on the site has been destroyed, the debris from the site has been cleared, several years have now passed, and Syria has not provided the necessary cooperation required by the Agency, as detailed in this report and previous reports. Notwithstanding the loss of substantial information, after considering the initial allegations and Syria's responses thereto, and considering all information available to the Agency, the Agency concludes that the destroyed building was very likely a nuclear reactor¹⁰ and should have been declared by Syria pursuant to Articles 42 and 43 of its Safeguards Agreement and Code 3.1 of the General Part of the Subsidiary Arrangements thereto.

C. Other Activities and Locations Possibly Related to the Dair Alzour Site

25. The Agency does not have sufficient information to provide any assessment concerning the function or operational status of the three other locations that are alleged to be functionally related to the Dair Alzour site.

26. Large quantities of barite were purchased by the AECS between 2002 and 2006. Syria has stated that the material was to be used for shielded radiation therapy rooms at hospitals, without providing any supporting information.¹¹ However, the end use of the barite as stated in the actual shipping documentation indicates that the material was intended for acid filtration. Additionally, the delivery of the barite was stopped at the request of the AECS after the destruction of the building at the Dair Alzour site and the remaining quantity was left undelivered. Given that barite is frequently used to improve radiation shielding properties of concrete, and the inconsistency concerning the end use of the barite and the involvement of the AECS in its procurement, the Agency cannot exclude the possibility that barite may have been intended for use in the construction of shielded spaces for purposes linked to nuclear fuel cycle related facilities.

D. Activities at Other Locations in Syria

27. As previously reported, particles of anthropogenic uranium of a type not included in Syria's reported inventory were found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) in 2008 and in 2009. Syria's initial explanations in June 2009 that the particles had originated either from standard reference materials used in neutron activation analysis or from a shielded transport container were not supported by the results of sampling carried out by the Agency.¹² During the November 2009 inspection, and contrary to its earlier statements, Syria explained that the anthropogenic particles had originated from previously unreported activities performed at the MNSR related to the preparation of tens of grams of uranyl nitrate using yellowcake produced at Homs.¹³ At the March 2010 physical inventory verification (PIV), another small quantity of undeclared uranyl nitrate was identified by the Agency at the MNSR. Syria explained that the unreported activities had taken place in a different location in the MNSR than previously declared to the Agency.¹⁴ As reported earlier, Syria submitted inventory change reports in June 2010 for the newly declared material shown to the Agency during the PIV. However, inconsistencies between Syria's declarations and the Agency's findings remained unresolved at that stage.

28. As previously reported, during a meeting on 3 September 2010 to resolve the inconsistencies, agreement was reached with Syria on a plan of action which included, inter alia, actions related to the amounts and use of nuclear material at the MNSR, scientific publications concerning uranium conversion experiments different from those declared by Syria to have occurred at the MNSR, indications of nuclear material under the control of the Waste Management Department of the AECS, and the Agency's requests for access to Homs. Syria's initial response to the plan of action did not provide the necessary clarifications.¹⁵

29. On 8 March 2011, the arrangements for a visit to Homs by the Agency on 1 April 2011 were finalized. The Agency visited the Phosphoric Acid Pilot Plant and associated locations on that date and performed all of its planned sampling and other activities. The Agency took environmental samples from specified locations and destructive analysis samples from specific batches of the yellowcake by-product of the phosphoric acid purification. The AECS provided some documentation requested by the Agency and made arrangements for relevant research staff to be present for the discussion of the uranium conversion experiments indicated in paragraph 28 above.

30. Analytical results from the samples taken during the visit to Homs are not inconsistent with Syria's statements concerning the origin of the uranyl nitrate prepared during experiments at the MNSR and the origin of the anthropogenic natural uranium particles found at the MNSR.

31. On 19 April 2011, the Agency carried out a PIV at the MNSR where routine verification activities were performed, including the verification of previously undeclared waste material.¹⁶

32. Based on the information provided by Syria, and the results of the Agency's verification activities, the Agency has concluded that Syria's statements concerning the origin of the anthropogenic uranium particles found at the MNSR are not inconsistent with the Agency's findings. Therefore, the matter will be addressed in the routine implementation of safeguards.

E. Conclusion

33. The Agency regrets that Syria has not cooperated since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the three other locations allegedly functionally related to it. Based on all the information available to the Agency and its technical evaluation of that information, the Agency assesses that it is very likely that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site was a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the Agency. Concerning the three other locations, the Agency is unable to provide any assessment concerning their nature or operational status.

34. Concerning the MNSR, Syria has cooperated with the Agency by providing the requested access to Homs. Syria's statements concerning the previously unreported conversion activities at the MNSR and origin of the anthropogenic uranium particles found at the MNSR are not inconsistent with the results of the Agency's verification activities. The matter will be addressed in the routine implementation of safeguards.

¹ INFCIRC/407.

² GOV/OR.1206, para. 26; GOV/2008/60, para. 16.

³ GOV/2008/60, para. 1; GOV/2009/36, para. 15.

⁴ GOV/2008/60, para. 8. In this context, it is noted that no additional information has been provided by Israel.

⁵ GOV/2009/56, para. 9; GOV/2008/60, para. 14.

⁶ The assessment of the dimensions of the destroyed building takes into account the considerable portion of the building that was constructed below ground level.

⁷ Officially referred to as the 5 MW(e) Experimental Nuclear Power Plant Number 1.

⁸ The Agency notes that there is a variety in the configuration of known examples of this type of reactor, some with partial underground construction, cooling without cooling towers, different core sizes and different placement of spent fuel ponds. The configuration of the destroyed building falls within this variety of configurations.

⁹ IAEA Safety Standards Series, No. NS-R-3, "Site Evaluation for Nuclear Installations"; IAEA Nuclear Energy Series, No. NG-G-3.1, "Milestones in the Development of a National Infrastructure for Nuclear Power".

¹⁰ Since the early years of implementation of comprehensive safeguards by the Agency, it has been recognized that securing absolute proof of compliance (or otherwise) of a State with the terms of its Safeguards Agreement is not possible, and that "reasonable" inferences must be drawn in making conclusions, taking into account all the available information (GOV/2107, para. 3(2); GOV/2863, paras 31 and 32).

¹¹ GOV/2009/36, para. 14; GOV/2009/56, para. 5.

¹² GOV/2009/75, para. 6.

¹³ A pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid was constructed and commissioned in 1997 at Homs, Syria, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the IAEA. Yellowcake was also produced as a result of the acid purification process. During a July 2004 visit to the Homs phosphoric acid purification plant, Agency inspectors observed some hundreds of kilograms of yellowcake.

¹⁴ GOV/2010/47, para. 10.

¹⁵ GOV/2010/63, paras 10, 11 and 12.

¹⁶ GOV/2010/63, para. 12.



Mark C. Toner
Acting Deputy Department Spokesman
Daily Press Briefing
Washington, DC
May 25, 2011

[EXCERPT]

MR. TONER: Yeah. Go ahead, Michelle.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. One other about Syria because the –

MR. TONER: Yeah. You want to do both IAEA reports together?

QUESTION: Yeah. The – because the IAEA report on Syria said that this – it was very likely that this was as nuclear plant that Iran – that Israel bombed in 2007, and I wonder if this serves as a basis now to bring this up to the UN Security Council for sanctions on Syria.

MR. TONER: Sure. Well, you're right, it does confirm our longstanding concerns about Syria and its – again, its lack of compliance with its international nuclear obligations. The actual – or the attempt by Syria to construct a clandestine nuclear reactor site is obviously a matter of concern, and we fully expect that the IAEA board will address this issue when it meets, I believe, next week. And I believe that's also the next – natural next step. The IAEA board will meet and then decide whether to advance it to the UN Security Council.

QUESTION: But is it the U.S. policy to take it all the way to the Security Council? Is that what you would like to do?

MR. TONER: Again, I don't want to preview how we will, but you can guess at how we'll vote. But you can guess that we view this as a matter – or you don't even need to guess; we view this is a matter of tremendous concern, and we'll make our views clear at the board meeting.

Under pressure, Syria offers nuclear cooperation

By Fredrik Dahl

Mon May 30, 2011 11:27am GMT

VIENNA, May 30 (Reuters) - Syria, in a policy reversal, has offered to cooperate fully with the U.N. atomic agency, which wants to inspect a suspected nuclear reactor site that was bombed by Israeli warplanes in 2007, diplomats said.

The move comes as Western nations were pushing to report Syria to the U.N. Security Council for its uncooperative stance.

Damascus had insisted the site known as Dair Alzour was a military, non-nuclear complex before it was destroyed in 2007.

But that assertion by Syria -- which is also facing Western sanctions over a violent crackdown on pro-democracy unrest in the country -- was rejected in an IAEA report on May 24 which said Dair Alzour was "very likely" to have been a reactor.

U.S. intelligence reports said the desert site was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic bombs.

Damascus has rebuffed repeated requests by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for follow-up access to the site after a one-off inspection in 2008.

The United States and its European allies were expected to seize on the IAEA report's finding to lobby for a resolution by the agency's 35-nation board, meeting on June 6-10 in Vienna, to send the Syrian file to the Security Council in New York.

In a move that could complicate this, Syria offered in a letter to IAEA chief Yukiya Amano late last week to fully cooperate with the agency to resolve outstanding issues related to Dair Alzour, diplomats said.

The promise may make some non-Western IAEA board members more reluctant about taking the issue to New York now.

"It will make it more difficult, there is no question about that," one senior diplomat from a developing country said. "It is a very smart move."

But a Western envoy said he expected the letter to have "close to zero impact" on the board's decision, saying it was an apparent last-minute attempt by Syria to undermine support for a vote to refer it to the Security Council.

"I think the letter will be seen, except by very close friends of Syria, as just going through the motions," he said.

"IN THE PAST"

Another Western diplomat said Syria's letter only "pledges cooperation in an attempt to stave off a resolution and Security Council referral. Syria has stonewalled the IAEA for three years, and this is more of the same."

The board has the power to refer countries to the Security Council if they are judged to have violated global non-proliferation rules by engaging in covert nuclear work.

It reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006 over its failure to dispel suspicions that it was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran has since been hit with four rounds of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to curb sensitive nuclear work.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies harbouring a nuclear weapons programme and says the IAEA should focus on Israel instead because of its undeclared nuclear arsenal.

Western diplomats said their approach to the Syrian nuclear issue was not linked to anti-government protests inside the country, saying Damascus had long failed to cooperate over Dair Alzour and it was now time to act.

But some non-Western members of the IAEA board have expressed doubt about taking strong action against Syria, saying that whatever happened at Dair Alzour was now history.

The new Syrian letter may further strengthen this view.

"Is it really something which you need to send to the Security Council, something that has happened in the past?" said the developing country diplomat.

(Editing by Elizabeth Fullerton)

June Board of Governors Meeting Convenes

[EXCERPTS]

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano opened the Board of Governors meeting on 6 June 2011 with his statement focusing on, among other issues, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident, nuclear applications, and nuclear safeguards.

[deletia]

Syrian Arab Republic

"As you will have seen from my report on the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Agency has come to the conclusion that it is very likely that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site was a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the Agency. This is the best assessment of the Agency, based on all the information in its possession.

"The Syrian Government was given ample time by the Agency to cooperate fully concerning the Dair Alzour site, but did not do so. Nevertheless, we had obtained enough information to draw a conclusion. I judged it appropriate to inform Member States of our conclusion at this stage as it was in no one's interest to let this situation drag on indefinitely. On 26 May, I received a letter from the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria, the contents of which have been shared with you. I am confident about our conclusion and I look forward to engaging further with Syria to resolve related outstanding issues.

"It is deeply regrettable that the facility was destroyed - allegedly by Israel - without the Agency having been given an opportunity to perform its verification role. Rather than force being used, the case should have been reported to the IAEA.

"Concerning the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor, Syria has cooperated with the Agency by providing the requested access to Homs, among other sites. Syria's statements concerning the previously unreported conversion activities at the MNSR and the origin of anthropogenic uranium particles are not inconsistent with the results of the Agency's verification activities. This matter will be addressed in the routine implementation of safeguards."

[deletia]

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/22/2011/06/07/351096.htm>

Russian Official: Moscow Will Not Support Any US resolution against Syria at IAEA **Jun 07, 2011**

VIENNA, (SANA) – Moscow will not support the US draft resolution on Syria submitted to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Russian representative at the IAEA Board of Governors Gregory Berdennikov said on Monday.

Itar-Tass Agency reported Berdennikov as saying in Vienna that Russia considers this draft resolution as unbalanced and comes at an inappropriate time. Russia will vote against it.

The Russian official added that Syria sent a message to the IAEA that it is ready for cooperation, pointing out that instead of supporting this Syrian initiative, they suggest that we should adopt that resolution which could spoil everything. We are trying to convince the US that this is wrong.

Fadi Allafi /Mazen Eyon

Russia resists Western push on Syria nuclear issue

By Fredrik Dahl

Tue Jun 7, 2011 6:57pm GMT

VIENNA, June 7 (Reuters) - Western powers pressed ahead on Tuesday with a bid to report Syria to the U.N. Security Council over covert nuclear activity, despite opposition from Russia and some other states, diplomats said.

They said the United States and allies put forward a draft resolution at a board meeting of the U.N. nuclear watchdog that would rebuke Damascus for its three years of stonewalling a probe into a Syrian desert site destroyed by Israel in 2007.

U.S. intelligence reports have said Dair Alzour was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic bombs before it was reduced to rubble.

The U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), giving independent weight to the U.S. allegation, said in a report last month that the facility targeted at Dair Alzour had "very likely" been a reactor.

The proposed resolution on Syria -- which is also facing Western sanctions over its violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests -- would refer the case to the Security Council in New York if adopted by the IAEA board, the diplomats said.

The agency's 35-nation governing body, holding a regular June 6-10 meeting in Vienna, was expected to debate the issue later in the week.

"It is a non-compliance resolution," one senior Western diplomat said, referring to Syria's international obligations to disclose any nuclear activities to the IAEA.

But several non-Western board members oppose or are doubtful about sending the issue to the Security Council. Some argue that whatever happened at Dair Alzour was now in the past and did not represent a current threat.

Along with Russia, the sceptics include China and some Arab states, diplomats said.

"Obviously the Russians have thrown a spanner in the works," one envoy from a developing country said.

WARNING TO IRAN?

Western diplomats suggested the draft could still be amended if that would help to win wider support, even though they expressed confidence that they already had enough votes.

Russia and China are especially important because they are among five permanent and veto-wielding members of the Security Council. The others are the United States, France and Britain.

"Some European states and developing countries argue that, if only three of the P5 countries at the IAEA vote in favour of the resolution, and if Arab states oppose it, the resolution will have far less weight," said proliferation expert Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Russia and China have also resisted a Western call for the Security Council to condemn Syria's clampdown on anti-government protests, making clear they dislike the idea of council involvement in what they see as a domestic issue.

The IAEA board has the power to refer countries to the Security Council if they are judged to have violated global non-proliferation rules by engaging in covert nuclear work.

It reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006 over its failure to dispel suspicions that it was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran has since been hit with four rounds of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to curb sensitive nuclear work.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies harbouring a nuclear weapons programme and says world powers should focus on Israel instead because of its reputed nuclear arsenal.

In an apparent bid to derail any censure by the IAEA, Syria offered last month to fully cooperate with the agency, after earlier rebuffing repeated requests for access to Dair Alzour.

Western diplomats dismissed the Syrian initiative as a stalling tactic, and said action by the IAEA board was important in order to deter other countries from secret atomic activities. (Editing by Dan Williams)



Board of Governors

GOV/2011/40

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Item 7(f) of the agenda
(GOV/2011/36 and Add.1)

Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

Draft resolution submitted by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom and United States of America

The Board of Governors,

- (a) Noting the Director General's May 24, 2011 report (GOV/2011/30) on the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, and previous reports by the Director General regarding Syria (GOV/2008/60, GOV/2009/9, GOV/2009/36, GOV/2009/56, GOV/2009/75, GOV/2010/11, GOV/2010/29, GOV/2010/47, GOV/2010/63, and GOV/2011/8),
- (b) Recalling that Syria undertook to accept safeguards, in accordance with its comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (INFCIRC/407) concluded pursuant to Article III of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), on all source or special fissionable material in all peaceful nuclear activities within its territory, under its jurisdiction, or carried out under its control anywhere,

(c) Noting that the Director General in his latest report to the Board expressed regret that information concerning the Dair Alzour site was not provided to the Agency in a timely manner and that force was used before the Agency was given an opportunity to establish the facts in accordance with its responsibilities under Syria's Safeguards Agreement,

(d) Commending the Director General and the Secretariat for their professional and impartial efforts to implement the Safeguards Agreement in Syria and to resolve outstanding safeguards issues in Syria,

(e) Noting with serious concern that Syria's statements concerning the destroyed building at Dair Alzour are limited in detail, are not supported by documentation and have not allowed the Agency to confirm Syria's assertions regarding the non-nuclear nature of the building,

(f) Noting with serious concern Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA Director General's repeated requests for access to additional information and locations as well as Syria's refusal to engage substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site since the Agency's June 2008 visit,

(g) Noting with serious concern the conclusion of the Agency that, notwithstanding the loss of information, and after considering Syria's response to allegations of an undeclared reactor and all relevant information available to the Agency, the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site in September 2007 was very likely a nuclear reactor and should have been declared by Syria pursuant to Articles 41 and 42 of its Safeguards Agreement and Code 3.1 of the General Part of the Subsidiary Arrangements thereto,

(h) Mindful that the history of concealment of Syria's nuclear activities referred to in the Director General's reports, the nature of these activities, including the presence of a significant number of particles of anthropogenic natural uranium at the Dair Alzour site, procurement activities, and the resulting absence of confidence that Syria's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes, have given rise to concerns regarding the maintenance of international peace and security, and

(i) Noting that the Director General has repeatedly urged Syria to bring into force an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, which would further facilitate the Agency's work in verifying the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations,

1. Finds, based on the report of the Director General, that Syria's undeclared construction of a nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour and failure to provide design information for the facility in accordance with Code 3.1 of Syria's Subsidiary Arrangements are a breach of Articles 41 and 42 of Syria's NPT Safeguards Agreement, and constitute non-compliance with its obligations under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency in the context of Article XII.C of the Agency's Statute;

2. Calls upon Syria to remedy urgently its non-compliance with its Safeguards Agreement and fulfill its May 26 pledge to the Director General by responding positively and without delay to the Director General's requests for updated reporting from Syria under its Safeguards Agreement and access to all information, sites, material and persons necessary for the Agency to verify such reporting and resolve all outstanding questions so that the Agency can provide the necessary assurances as to the exclusively peaceful nature of Syria's nuclear program pursuant to Syria's Safeguards Agreement;
3. Decides to report, as provided for in Article XII.C of the Statute, through the Director General, Syria's non-compliance with its Safeguards Agreement to all Members of the Agency and to the Security Council and General Assembly of the United Nations, to provide to the Security Council all reports prepared by the Director General related to the issue, and to make the text of this resolution as well as all previous reports on this issue available to the public;
4. Calls upon Syria to sign and promptly bring into force and implement in full the Additional Protocol and, pending that, to act in accordance with the Additional Protocol so that the Director General can provide the necessary assurances regarding both the correctness and completeness of Syria's declarations pursuant to its safeguards agreement;
5. Requests the Director General to continue his efforts to implement fully the Agency's safeguards agreement with Syria and to report any significant developments to the Board and to the Security Council of the United Nations, as appropriate; and
6. Decides to remain seized of the matter.

UN nuclear watchdog refers Syria to Security Council

9 June 2011 Last updated at 12:23 ET

The UN nuclear watchdog is to report Syria to the Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear programme.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) voted to rebuke Syria on claims of an undeclared nuclear reactor.

The alleged structure, which Syria has maintained was a non-nuclear military site, was destroyed by Israel in 2007.

The IAEA's move comes as international pressure mounts on the UN Security Council to censure Syria over its lethal crackdown on protests.

European nations on Wednesday presented a separate draft resolution to the Council condemning Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

Desert site

At the IAEA meeting at its headquarters in Vienna, 17 countries voted for and six against, including Russia and China.

Diplomats said that overall 11 countries of the 35-member board of governors abstained and one country was absent from the vote.

Israel bombed the desert site of the alleged reactor - near Deir Alzour in the country's remote north-east - in September 2007.

The IAEA began investigating the allegations in June 2008, but Syria has refused to co-operate and, with the exception of a one-off visit, has not allowed UN inspectors to Deir Alzour or related sites to verify the US claims.

Thursday's motion was proposed by the US and its Western allies who had asked the IAEA's governing body to find Syria in "non-compliance" with its international obligations.

According to AFP news agency, US Ambassador Glyn Davies told the closed-door assembly: "Syria's apparent attempt at constructing a covert, undeclared plutonium production reactor, a reactor with no credible peaceful purpose, represents one of the most serious safeguards violations possible."

He said the intentions of the structure at Deir Alzour were clear and that a resolution was the only responsible course of action.

"The reactor there was built for the express purpose of producing plutonium for possible use in nuclear weapons."

'Regrettable'

Syria's ambassador to the IAEA called the agency's move "regrettable" but pledged that the country would honour its obligations.

"I think Syria has always been committed to its obligations and to its duties and I think we will continue to do so," Bassam Al-Sabbagh said after the meeting.

Syria is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which gives it the right to enrich its own fuel for civil nuclear power, under inspection from the IAEA.

But it has also signed a safeguards agreement with the IAEA under which it is obliged to notify the UN's nuclear watchdog of any plans to construct a new nuclear facility.

The last country the IAEA referred to the Security Council was Iran, in February 2006.

The Security Council has the power to impose sanctions, a move it has taken in the case of Iran no less than four times.

However, diplomats are not convinced that this will happen in Syria's case due to opposition from both Russia and China.

The diplomatic move at the IAEA came a day after Britain, France, Germany and Portugal proposed a draft resolution condemning Syria's crackdown on protesters to the Security Council, despite the risk of a Russian veto.



Statement by the Press Secretary on the IAEA Board of Governors Resolution on Syria

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

June 9, 2011

Today's decision by the IAEA Board of Governors that Syria violated its international nonproliferation obligations marks a significant action by the international community to uphold the nonproliferation rules of the road. As the IAEA reports, with assistance from North Korea, Syria attempted to build a secret nuclear reactor capable of producing large amounts of nuclear weapons-usable plutonium, but with no apparent legitimate civilian purpose. Syria has stonewalled and obstructed the efforts of the IAEA to investigate the nuclear reactor for years, refusing to provide access to associated sites, personnel and documents in violation of Syria's freely-accepted legal obligations. With this resolution, the Board has referred Syria to the UN Security Council for further deliberation, consistent with the Board's mandate and authorities when confronted with noncompliance. The United States remains determined to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. We will work with partners and allies around the world to stand together to insist that every country meet its responsibilities or be held accountable for its actions.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

June 9, 2011

2011/934

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

IAEA Resolution on Syria

Today in Vienna, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors adopted a resolution, co-sponsored by fourteen nations, finding Syria in noncompliance with its international nuclear obligations. This is an important step given the troubling findings in the IAEA's latest report -- including Syria's demonstrated refusal to cooperate with the IAEA investigation and its attempts to construct a secret nuclear reactor with the assistance of North Korea. We fully welcome the IAEA's actions today to address this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

The IAEA's latest report outlining the very likely construction of a covert nuclear reactor makes clear that Syria was violating its nonproliferation obligations. The report is also a troubling update of Syria's continued refusal to cooperate with the IAEA investigation and efforts to conceal the true purpose of the facility, which raise further serious concerns about Syria's compliance with its international obligations. Syria must fully cooperate with the IAEA by providing necessary access to all sites, items, and information related to the Dair Alzour investigation and allow the IAEA to verify that Syria is fully complying with its safeguards agreement.

Syria is challenging the authority of the IAEA and the integrity of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. The only way Syria can demonstrate that it has come back into full compliance with the NPT is by cooperating with the IAEA and providing the necessary information and access.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-06-09/un-nuke-agency-sends-syria-to-security-council.html>

UN Nuke Agency Sends Syria to Security Council

By Jonathan Tirone

Jun 9, 2011 3:59 PM CT

[EXCERPTS]

The U.S. won a divisive vote that sent Syria to the United Nations Security Council over an alleged nuclear-weapon facility destroyed by an Israeli raid in September 2007.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-member board of governors voted 17-6 today to report Syria to the UN's top decision-making body. Eleven countries abstained from voting on the U.S. and European measure that called Syria a threat to "international peace and security" and Mongolia was absent.

"We had in the latest IAEA report a conclusion that was sufficiently robust that we believed we could take action on," U.S. IAEA Ambassador Glyn Davies said after the vote. "It is not appropriate for a country to build a secret nuclear reactor. It had no civilian purpose."

The UN nuclear agency concluded on May 24 that Syria was probably building a surreptitious nuclear reactor. The government in Damascus stymied IAEA inspections and limited access to the bombed site for more than three years. Investigators reported finding traces of modified uranium particles at the bombed Dair Alzour site that they said may have been residue from a reactor.

[deletia]

China and Russia led opposition to the measure, which will give the Security Council leeway to impose sanctions against Syria. Russia called the IAEA referral "unfair and not objective," in a written statement to the board.

"Under current circumstances, there is no need to adopt a resolution on the Syrian nuclear issue, and even more unnecessary to refer the issue to the Security Council," China's IAEA Ambassador Wang Minzheng said, according to the state-run news agency Xinhua.

The Security Council referral coincides with a separate European resolution to punish the embattled regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. His security forces have killed at least 1,100 people and detained more than 10,000 since protests against his government began in mid-March, according to human-rights groups.

"When you have a situation where the permanent five members of the Security Council are split, that can make it tough for countries," Davies said about the number of nations that voted against or abstained from voting on the measure.

"It is certainly a new precedent," Peter Crail, a Washington-based Arms Control Association analyst, said in an e-mail response to questions. "Syria doesn't have very many friends, and countries may have been more willing to accept standards of 'good-enough' evidence."

To contact the reporter on this story: Jonathan Tirone in Vienna at jtirone@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: James Hertling at jhertling@bloomberg.net

Syria Faces Sanctions For Alleged Nuclear Facility

by Mike Shuster

June 9, 2011

MIKE SHUSTER: It's been nearly four years since Israel bombed a construction site in the Syrian Desert near the town of Dair Alzour. Almost a year later, Syria allowed a team of inspectors from the IAEA to visit the site, but by that time the Syrians have removed the rubble, scrubbed the site clean and built a warehouse where a suspected nuclear reactor had been under construction.

For another three years, the agency tried to persuade Syria to let it mount a full investigation, involving visits to three more locations in Syria, access to documents for the original site and to the engineers who were building the facility. To all those requests, Syria said no. Finally, earlier this week, Yukiya Amano, the IAEA's director, went public with his conclusions in a speech to the 35 nations that comprise the agency's board of governors.

Mr. YUKIYA AMANO (Director, IAEA): The agency has come to the conclusion that it is very likely that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site was a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the agency. This is the best assessment of the agency based on all the information in its possession.

SHUSTER: With that conclusion in hand, the U.S. along with 12 other nations put forward a resolution declaring Syria in noncompliance with its legal obligations to the IAEA. Today, that resolution received 17 votes in favor, six nations voted against, eleven abstained, and one nation was absent.

After the vote, the U.S. ambassador at IAEA, Glyn Davies, said the reactor under construction had no credible peaceful purpose and was being built solely in order to produce plutonium for possible use in nuclear weapons.

Ambassador GLYN DAVIES (IAEA): They really should come clean about what they were doing in the desert, what they started to do a half a decade ago by building this nuclear reactor.

SHUSTER: Syria's ambassador called the vote today regrettable but pledged full cooperation with the agency.

Frequently in the past, the IAEA's board of governors has preferred to seek consensus on its resolutions, but clearly, the board is deeply divided on this issue. China said there was no reason to refer Syria to the Security Council. Russia called the action untimely and not objective.

But Olli Heinonen, a former senior official of the IAEA, said the action was necessary to protect the agency's credibility.

Mr. OLLI HEINONEN (Former Official, International Atomic Energy Agency): I see it as an erosion in the verification scheme because here we have a partner who doesn't cooperate with the IAEA, and IAEA doesn't use all the tools and means at its disposal.

SHUSTER: With China and Russia now on record opposing the action against Syria, though, it will be very difficult to convince them to support punitive action in the Security Council such as economic sanctions.

Sabbagh: IAEA Board of Governors didn't Respond to Syria's Offer to Cooperate with the Agency

SANA (Syria Arab News Agency)

10 Jun 2011

Vienna, (SANA)- Syria's permanent envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Ambassador Bassam al-Sabbagh expressed disappointment and deep regret after the IAEA Board of Governors has adopted a resolution regarding application of the comprehensive guarantees' agreement in Syria, based on assumptions, not on facts or evidence.

"The resolution didn't respond to the offer extended by Syria to cooperate with the international Agency according to its message sent on May 26th, but the response was through issuing this resolution which is considered as a negative sign by the Board of Governors," Al-Sabbagh said in a speech on Thursday.

He underlined that the resolution was unbalanced because it had ignored Israel's military flagrant aggression on the sovereignty of a country member in IAEA and a party in the non- Proliferation Agreement as well as destructing a military- under construction- building that had no relation to any nuclear activities.

" Israel has violated the rules of the international law and international legitimacy resolutions... the resolution has also ignored the concerns regarding Israel's rejection of cooperating with IAEA to provide it with information about the nature of materials used in destructing or polluting the site in Deir Ezzor," the Syrian Ambassador said.

IAEA's Board of Governors had adopted a draft resolution submitted by the Western group asking the General Director to inform the UN Security Council about the evaluation of the Agency regarding the site destructed by Israel in 2007.

Federal Russia, China, Venezuela, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Ecuador have voted against the resolution while countries of the Non-Aligned Movement abstained.

Iran Urges Verification of Israel's Military N. Program

News number: 9003200586

13:20 | 2011-06-10

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called on the UN nuclear watchdog to continue its technical verification activities specifically sampling missile launchers in Israel and report the result of the analysis of contamination.

Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh made the remarks, addressing the IAEA Board of Governors on Thursday. The full text of his comments which also includes Syrian issue is as follows:

In the Name of God
The Most Gracious and the Most Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

I have to declare the following:

1- The Issue of Syria is a clear evidence of the instrumental use of the international organizations specifically IAEA and the UNSC.

2- A sovereign Member State of the IAEA has been attacked by Zionist regime of Israel, having the dark record of violation of all international laws. Its very existence is by occupation, expelling millions of innocent Palestinian from their homelands and massacring thousands of children and women.

3- Silence of the United Nations vis-à-vis the aggression which a clear breach of the UN Charter is shameful. Another dark chapter which confirm the legitimate demand for a reform of the UNSC.

4- Director General was officially requested to investigate the source of contamination at the bombard site by taking samples from the Israeli missile launcher. DG has not taken any action. I remind that the principle function of the IAEA related to verification if based on nuclear material. How come DG permit himself to make any conclusion based on couple of Satellite imagery received for US and Israeli intelligence as well as some commercial companies. Agency has to only conclude base on diversion of nuclear material.

5- I recall that according to the Agency's resolution 533 of 1990, any threat or attack against nuclear facilities under construction or under operation constitute violation of UN Charter, IAEA Statute and the international laws. The UNSC must immediately act upon according this resolution. The world faces the shameful silence of the UNSC and some western countries particularly the allies of Zionist regime supporting at any price even damaging the image of their nations. The international community has to know about this bitter facts and the unjust situation we are facing in this century in such international arena. The matter is very simple even if the claim of aggressor is true then has to be condemned and according article XIX of the Statute and based on resolution 533 has to be deprived from the right and privileges of membership of the IAEA.

6- The draft of resolution proposed by the United States has serious legal and technical problem. I only mention some:

A- According to paragraph C of the article XXII, non-compliance has to be recognized by the inspectors then to be reported to the DG where he does report to the Board of Governors. In case of Syria this is not applied. There is no non-compliance. Even if it was a project to construct a reactor it is a failure of delay in reporting civil

construction. As I said the basis of judgment has to be the diversion of nuclear material to military purpose. Which is not applied to Syrian case.

B- The article XII-C written decades ago was for the recipient states that has miss-used the nuclear material received from the Agency and diverted to military purpose. The phrase "Recipient State or States" in this article speak for itself. Syria has not received nuclear material from Agency to use in Dair-Alzor site. Therefore this article does not apply to Syria.

Conclusion:

- 1- Zionist Regime has to be condemned for the violation of the UN Charter and the IAEA Statute.
- 2- DG has to continue its technical verification activities specifically sampling missile launcher in Israel and report the result of the analysis of contamination;
- 3- If the UNSC is once again involved in the IAEA matters, by adoption of the draft resolution, DG is fully accountable for the consequences including damaging the credibility and authority of the Agency since his unbalance, inconclusive, politically motivated, hasty and careless report, which he submitted upon the request of the United States has pave the way. The United States as well as those voting this draft which lacks any legally and technical basis has to share the blame of the consequence specially the polarization and confrontational environment.

Thanks

Other Matters
Mr. Chairman,

The IAEA is facing a crisis of legitimacy by continuous involvement of the UNSC and weakness of the Secretariat to perform professionally as mandated by the General Conference. The Board of Governor is deviating from the right path. This is to push for the amendment of the Statute for changing the structure and membership on of the Board of Board of Governor. 35 seats mainly from a certain block, blocking any decision and passing resolution damaging the Agency cannot continue. Amendment of article 6 for the increase of membership from 35 to 42 of the Statute is not in force yet. Other provision on the election and appointment of DG has to be amended in such a way that all Member States could have a voice so that the elected DG could have chosen by screening of all membership and nor few in the Board of Governor.

Thanks

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/21/2011/06/26/354928.htm>

Habib: Syria encounters conspiracy and mounting pressures, but strong by national unity

M.Eyon

Jun 26, 2011

DAMASCUS, (SANA)-Minister of Defense Ali Habib on Sunday underlined that Syria encounters conspiracy and mounting pressures by several foreign sides in a bid to internationalize, interfere and instigate internal conflict in the country.

"The US and western countries have imposed sanctions on Syria and exerted pressures on the UN to issue a resolution condemning it and refer the so-called Syrian nuclear file, all to intensify pressures on Syria," Minister Habib said in a speech at a celebration to graduate army officers under the patronage of President Bashar al-Assad.

He added that armed terrorist organizations have sabotaged, burned private and public buildings and properties, killed and mutilated the bodies of the army soldiers, officers and policemen.

Habib underlined that Syria is strong and immune by the unity of its people who support the Syrian leadership to overcome the current crisis.

AP Exclusive: Security Council to talk Syria nukes

By GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press

Published: Monday, July 4, 2011 at 4:58 p.m.

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VIENNA - The U.N. Security Council plans to meet next week to discuss what to do about Syria's refusal to cooperate with an investigation of its alleged secret nuclear activities, diplomats told The Associated Press on Monday.

The move comes just weeks after the International Atomic Energy Agency referred it the council. The closed session could result in anything from debate to sanctions of the kind imposed on Iran for defying international demands to cease activities that could be used to make nuclear arms.

Sanctions are unlikely: Iran continues to expand its nuclear activities in defiance of the council, whereas Syria's alleged violations appeared to have occurred in the past and thus do not seem to represent a present proliferation threat.

Still, one of the three diplomats who agreed to discuss confidential information on condition of anonymity said the planned July 14 discussions are significant. He pointed to the fact that the council found the issue important enough to take it up less than a month after the June 9 IAEA referral.

The IAEA has tried in vain since 2008 to follow up on strong evidence that a site in the Syrian desert, bombed in 2007 by Israeli warplanes, was a nearly finished reactor built with North Korea's help.

The resolution that reported Syria to the Security Council expressed "serious concern" over "Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA Director General's repeated requests for access to additional information and locations as well as Syria's refusal to engage substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site."

Syria is already on the Security Council's docket. The council on Thursday expressed united support for the U.N. peacekeeping force on the tense Syrian-Israeli border - even while remaining divided over any direct condemnation of Syria's crackdown on peaceful demonstrators and human rights abuses.

All three diplomats said that the council had asked high-ranking IAEA officials to testify at the hearing - another sign of the importance attached to it. They said that IAEA chief Yukiya Amano and Herman Nackaerts, the agency's nonproliferation point man, would either both attend or one of them would go.

IAEA officials contacted after office hours Monday said they could not comment.

Two of the diplomats said that influential Western member nations of the IAEA and the agency itself were concerned that the council might simply decide to throw the case back to the agency.

That could burden the IAEA with additional work on Syria, they said, and thereby deflect from IAEA efforts to concentrate on Iran - considered by most of the agency's 35-nation board to be greatest potential nonproliferation threat.

Western powers pushing referral at the June 9 IAEA board meeting had two goals: to show that Syria could not defy the agency and to clear the decks for potential referral of Iran to the council later this year.

But if the Security Council asks the IAEA to prepare a new report on Syria, it would need to split its work between Syria and Iran, potentially diluting its efforts on pressuring Tehran to heed international demands for nuclear openness and cooperation, they said.

Iran already was reported by the IAEA to the Security Council in 2005, setting into motion four sets of sanctions - which the Islamic Republic has ignored. Western nations hope that a new referral would ramp up the pressure.

The council has demanded that Iran stop enriching uranium, which can create both reactor fuel and fissile warhead material. It also wants Tehran to stop stonewalling IAEA attempts to investigate growing allegations that the Islamic Republic worked on secret experiments that could be used in a nuclear arms program.

Iran denies such experiments and says it is enriching only to create fuel for future nuclear power plants.

UN Security Council to discuss "secret" Syrian nuclear programme

Jul 13, 2011, 16:10 GMT

New York/Vienna - The UN Security Council planned to discuss Syria's alleged secret nuclear programme with a senior International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspector who was traveling to New York to present the agency's findings, diplomats in Vienna said Wednesday [2011-07-13].

The 15-nation council meeting on Thursday was to take place behind closed doors with senior IAEA inspector Neville Whiting, but was not expected to adopt any immediate action, diplomats said.

The council is being presided over by Germany for July.

The IAEA's governing board formally referred the case to the top UN body last month, reacting to IAEA chief Yukiya Amano's conclusion that Syria had likely been building a reactor.

Whiting would keep his presentation technical, to make sure that the Vienna-based nuclear agency does not get drawn into the UN Security Council's political process, dominated mostly by the five permanent members, who are often split on controversial nuclear issues, including those in North Korea.

Diplomats said the briefing would include satellite images and intelligence photos of the site that was bombed by Israel in 2007.

'There will definitely be no resolution or presidential statement,' one diplomat said, citing the reluctance of veto powers Russia and China, which in the past preferred to keep discussions confidential.

Russia and China had been opposing referring Syria's nuclear issue from Vienna to New York, along with IAEA board members Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Pakistan and Venezuela.

Western countries had pushed for this step.

Damascus maintains that the Dair Alzour site in the desert was a conventional military installation.

After several years of Syria blocking the IAEA's probe, the nuclear agency concluded it was likely a reactor, based on the layout and dimensions of the buried remains, the local infrastructure and uranium traces found by IAEA inspectors.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-13/u-s-europeans-blocked-anew-at-un-over-syrian-nuclear-plant-1-.html>

U.S., Europeans Blocked Anew at UN Over Syrian Nuclear Plant

By Bill Varner

Jul 13, 2011 1:27 PM CT

The U.S. and its European allies at the United Nations are facing the same opposition to punishing Syria's secret construction of a nuclear facility that has blocked their efforts to condemn government repression of protesters.

The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency voted on June 9 to report Syria's violation of non-proliferation accords to the UN Security Council. Neville Whiting, the IAEA's director of nuclear safeguards for the Middle East, is scheduled to brief the council tomorrow on Syria's failure to report the facility and refusal to cooperate with an investigation by the Vienna-based nuclear agency.

Russia is leading opposition in New York that will likely make the briefing and a subsequent private discussion the Security Council's only involvement in the issue. Recognizing the division in the 15-member council, the U.S., Britain, France, Germany and Portugal haven't sought a statement or threatened sanctions against Syria.

The Security Council should play "no role" in the matter, Russia's Deputy Ambassador Alexander Pankin said.

"In a crime investigation, if you don't have a corpse you don't have a case," Pankin said, referring to the fact that Israel destroyed the then-suspected nuclear reactor in 2007. "There is nothing there. We are not an investigation team, we are the Security Council. We deal with imminent or coming threats."

'Won't Fly'

Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri of India, a Security Council member, said that while he heard that a draft statement might be circulated to the panel, "it won't fly." Russia and China, which voted against the IAEA resolution, would block any proposed statement on the nuclear facility, he said.

Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, acknowledged the division in the Security Council today by telling reporters that "there are several members of the council, including some veto-wielding members, who did not support the referral and who are unlikely to support a council product."

India has joined Russia, China and Security Council members Brazil and South Africa in opposing a draft resolution condemning the repression in Syria. It's been blocked since late May.

Asked Brazil's view of how the Security Council should handle the Syrian nuclear issue, Ambassador Maria Viotti said there were "no grounds for doing anything."

The UN nuclear agency concluded on May 24 that Syria was probably building a surreptitious nuclear reactor. The government in Damascus stymied IAEA inspections and limited access to the bombed site for more than three years. Investigators reported finding traces of modified uranium particles at the bombed Dair Alzour site that they said may have been residue from a reactor.

Syria's Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari said the Security Council shouldn't be discussing the issue. It's the "IAEA's business," he said.

To contact the reporter on this story: Bill Varner at the United Nations at wvarner@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Mark Silva in Washington at msilva34@bloomberg.net

U.N. nuclear agency brings Syria to Security Council

By Patrick Worsnip and Megan Davies

UNITED NATIONS | Thu Jul 14, 2011 7:46pm EDT

(Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear watchdog brought allegations of covert atomic work by Syria before the Security Council on Thursday, but the 15-nation body took no immediate action amid divisions among key powers.

The International Atomic Energy Agency board of governors voted in June to report Syria to the council, rebuking it for stonewalling an agency probe into the Dair Alzour complex, bombed by Israel in 2007.

Western countries said Thursday's closed-door briefing by Neville Whiting, head of the IAEA safeguards department dealing with Syria and Iran, had made clear that Syria had a secret nuclear plant. They said the council should pursue the issue, but suggested it might not discuss it again before September.

Russia and China, allies of Damascus who can veto any council action, queried whether the council should be involved, as the Syrian complex no longer exists.

U.S. intelligence reports have said the complex was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic weaponry, before Israeli warplanes reduced it to rubble. Syria has said it was a non-nuclear military facility.

British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant told reporters Whiting had given a "devastating briefing ... from which you could only draw one conclusion -- that Syria did have at Dair Alzour a clandestine nuclear plant."

Damascus had "tried to conceal the purpose of that plant ... misled the IAEA about what the purpose was and ... failed to cooperate effectively with the IAEA in following up the questions that the IAEA put to them," he said.

NEW REPORT

Both Lyall Grant and German Ambassador Peter Wittig noted that the IAEA was due to produce a new report on Syria for its board of governors in September. "And then we take it from there," Wittig said.

But Chinese envoy Wang Min said Beijing was "not very happy" about the council's involvement. "We should not talk about something that does not exist. There are a lot of things that happened in the past -- should we discuss all of them?" he asked.

Russian envoy Alexander Pankin, asked what he had learned from Thursday's briefing, said "not much."

Syrian Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari said the meeting "didn't come to any conclusion because the Security Council considers only matters related to threats to peace and security, not to prefabricated, unfounded accusations against a member state of the United Nations."

"The point is that there is no case for the Security Council to consider in its deliberations," he said.

Diplomats have said council members could strive for language urging Syria to cooperate with the IAEA but that Damascus is unlikely to face U.N. sanctions over the issue.

Syria pledged on May 26 to cooperate with the IAEA and provide access to sites and information related to the probe, but Lyall Grant quoted the nuclear watchdog as saying cooperation had not improved since then.

In a statement, U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice called on Syria to fulfill its pledge and that Damascus's "positive and prompt cooperation with the IAEA would be the best way to resolve outstanding questions about its nuclear program."

AP Interview: IAEA chief says no progress on Syria

By GEORGE JAHN, Associated Press

1 hour ago [Accessed 2011-07-22T19:26Z]

VIENNA (AP) — International Atomic Energy Agency experts met with Syrian officials recently, but received no information that would change the IAEA's assessment that Damascus tried to secretly build a plutonium-producing reactor, the agency's head said Friday.

"There was nothing concluded" from the talks earlier this month, which arose from a pledge by Damascus to cooperate with an agency probe, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano told The Associated Press.

He said it was now up to Syria to disprove the agency's assessment that a target destroyed in 2007 by Israeli warplanes was a nearly finished reactor built clandestinely, and meant to produce plutonium, which can be used to arm nuclear warheads .

"We have done our jobs," Amano said. "If there is further cooperation it is very nice. If not, ... the conclusion is there."

The U.N. Security Council met in closed session on July 14 to discuss the IAEA finding and some Western ambassadors said afterward that the agency's assessment has raised concerns the country violated its nonproliferation obligations.

The IAEA has tried in vain since 2008 to follow up on strong evidence that the site in the Syrian desert bombed by Israel was a nearly finished reactor built with North Korea's help.

Syria has said the facility was a non-nuclear military site.

The IAEA resolution that reported Syria to the Security Council on June 9 expressed "serious concern" over "Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA Director General's repeated requests for access to additional information and locations as well as Syria's refusal to engage substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site."

Asked whether the popular uprising in Syria contributed to the lack of progress at the July meeting between Syrian and IAEA officials, Amano said the Syrians "didn't have an explanation to that effect, but our understanding is that they were too busy."

He said the agency was still hoping for cooperation from Damascus, but "if they don't prove otherwise, we continue to be very confident with our conclusion" that the site Israel targeted was a secret nuclear reactor.



Israel Defense Force Spokesperson



URL: <http://idfspokesperson.com>

Updated: 50 min 30 sec ago

[Accessed at www.foiwa.org.au at 2011-07-24T12:50Z]

US Air Force Commander Visits Israel

Sat, 23 Jul 2011 - 1:15 AM

Recently, General Mark A. Welsh III, the U.S. Air Forces in Europe commander, was in Israel for a four-day working visit with the Israeli Air Force (IAF). During the scheduled visit, Gen. Welsh was briefed on the capabilities and activities of the General Corps, as well as the increase in US-Israel air force cooperation.

The general also met with Israeli Air Force Commander Major General Ido Nechushtan; part of their scheduled time included a tour of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, and the Nevatim and Palmachim airbases.

At the Nevatim airbase, Gen. Welsh viewed the F-16 squadron, the plane which took part in the IAF attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor. At the Palmachim airbase, he visited the Sword Shield unit which operates the Arrow antitactical ballistic missile program and maintains US-Israel cooperation on missile defense.

In addition, the general addressed the activities of US Air Forces in Europe during working meetings with high-ranking IAF commanders.

[Sourcebook note: as of 2011-07-24T12:50Z the direct link to this story found in Google News, <http://idfspokesperson.com/2011/07/22/us-air-force-commander-visits-israel/>, returns "Not Found."]

IAEA head chides Iran, N. Korea, Syria

Published: July 27, 2011 at 1:21 PM

MATSUMOTO, Japan, July 27 (UPI) -- The U.N. nuclear energy chief Wednesday singled out Iran, North Korea and Syria for not complying with a nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty.

"My approach to nuclear verification since taking up office in December 2009 has been very straightforward," Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in a release. "All safeguards agreements between [member countries] and the agency, and other relevant obligations such as U.N. Security Council resolutions, should be implemented fully."

Iran was not cooperating with IAEA officials in providing "credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities" and that nuclear material in Iran was used for peaceful purposes, Amano said during the 23rd U.N. Conference on Disarmament Issues in Matsumoto, Japan.

North Korea's nuclear program "remains a matter of serious concern," Amano said, because the IAEA hasn't been able to implement any safeguard measures in the country since April 2009.

"Last year's reports about the construction of a new uranium enrichment facility and a light water reactor in [North Korea] are deeply troubling," he told the conference.

Concerning Syria, Amano said the IAEA concluded it is "very likely" a building destroyed in Dair Alzour in 2007 was a nuclear reactor that should have been declared.

"Following my latest report on this subject, the IAEA board of governors last month adopted a resolution finding Syria to be in non-compliance with its safeguards obligations," he said. "I continue to engage with Syria to resolve related outstanding issues."

Amano said the nuclear agency supports creation of new nuclear weapons-free zones and will help in their implementation. He said he was discussing with IAEA members the possibility of a forum on the relevance of current nuclear weapon-free zones and the consideration of establishing a zone in the Middle East.

<http://news.yahoo.com/apnewsbreak-israel-arabs-back-nuke-meeting-112324506.html>

APNewsBreak: Israel, Arabs, back nuke meeting

By GEORGE JAHN - Associated Press

AP – Wed, Aug 10, 2011

VIENNA (AP) — Following more than a decade of diplomatic maneuvering, Israel and Arab nations have tentatively accepted an invitation by the U.N. nuclear agency for preliminary talks on a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, in correspondence shared with The Associated Press.

Israel is commonly considered to be the only Middle East nation with atomic weapons — and its secretive nuclear program has long been a heated subject of contention with Arab neighbors.

Letters from Egypt and Israel and passages from a letter from Syria reflect a willingness to meet. But whether the talks take place may depend on willingness to compromise on preconditions.

The Arabs have urged Israel to open up its secretive nuclear program to international inspection. Israel in turn says the proposed talks should not be construed as nuclear negotiations.

Reflecting the sensitivity of the issue, a statement from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel's reported willingness to discuss a nuclear weapons-free Middle East "is not correct."

But in a May 2 letter made available to the AP, Shaul Chorev, head of Israel's atomic energy commission, told International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano that "Israel is ready to cooperate with you" with his efforts to convene talks on "the experience of other regions ... relevant to the establishment of a NWFZ" — a nuclear weapons free zone.

The official and members of other delegations describe the chances of success as possibly the best since 2000. That was when IAEA nations first asked the agency to convene such talks.

An official from a delegation accredited to the International Atomic Energy agency says Amano planned to meet with the Arab group on Sept. 5 to try to bridge differences. He and others spoke on condition of anonymity because their information was confidential

Amano himself attaches high importance to the meeting — despite its relatively modest scope, focusing only on "the potential relevance" to the Middle East of nuclear-free zones elsewhere in the world. He told the AP that the talks would be "a very rare and good occasion in which all parties concerned can discuss their issues."

Israel's presumed nuclear power status and constantly flaring Mideast tensions have made any talks the Jewish state and Arab countries a rarity since the mid-1990s, when regional peace negotiations broke down.

But a decision last year by the 189 members of the Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty to convene a U.N.-sponsored conference on establishing a Middle East nuclear-free zone appears to be working as an incentive for the region's Muslim nations to meet this year with Israel for the exploratory Vienna talks.

Arab countries and Iran are aware of the potential of using the 2012 U.N. conference as a platform to pressure Israel to fulfill their long-standing demands: joining the nonproliferation treaty, acknowledging that it has nuclear weapons and allowing IAEA inspectors to probe their atomic activities.

Israel is unlikely to do any of that. It remains unclear whether it will even attend the 2012 talks and Chorev, the Israeli nuclear chief, emphasized in his response to Amano's overture that his country views any Vienna meeting as "solely an informational and discussion event and not a forum for negotiations."

Egyptian Ambassador Ehab Fahwzy drew a clear link between the proposed 2012 conference and the Vienna talks. In his letter to Amano shared with the AP, he said such talks "acquire added significance" in the wake of the decision to hold next year's gathering.

Newfound Arab and Iranian willingness to sit at the same table with the Jewish state was already reflected in a little-publicized closed-door meeting convened in Brussels by the European Union last month, where the two sides exchanged views on nonproliferation and confidence-building.

Even Syria appears ready to compromise, despite traditionally stormy relations with Israel exacerbated by Israel's 2007 air strike that destroyed what the IAEA says was a nearly finished secret nuclear reactor capable of producing plutonium. Its conditions, cited by an official who has seen them, are vague, stressing only "the need for the parties wishing to establish a nuclear free zone in the Middle East to implement international obligations and ratify the relevant treaties."

Iran remains a wild card for the Vienna talks. Its president has called for the eradication of the "Zionist" state and in past years has called for full Israeli openness on its nuclear program as a precondition for any talks. Israel in turn says peace must be established in the Middle East as a precondition for nuclear discussions.

Officials familiar with the proposed Vienna talks said Tuesday that Iran had still not indicated whether it would attend. An AP email to Ali Asghar Soltanieh, Tehran's chief representative to the IAEA, was not answered by Wednesday.

The official who had seen the Syrian letter said that Arab representatives were considering attending the talks even if Iran refuses. That would represent a breach of Mideast Islamic solidarity in dealings with Israel and likely exacerbate tensions between Shiite Iran and its mainly Sunni Arab neighbors.

Cheney Says He Urged Bush to Bomb Syria in '07

By CHARLIE SAVAGE

Published: August 24, 2011

[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON — Former Vice President Dick Cheney says in a new memoir that he urged President George W. Bush to bomb a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor site in June 2007. But, he wrote, Mr. Bush opted for a diplomatic approach after other advisers — still stinging over “the bad intelligence we had received about Iraq’s stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction” — expressed misgivings.

“I again made the case for U.S. military action against the reactor,” Mr. Cheney wrote about a meeting on the issue. “But I was a lone voice. After I finished, the president asked, ‘Does anyone here agree with the vice president?’ Not a single hand went up around the room.”

Mr. Bush chose to try diplomatic pressure to force the Syrians to abandon the secret program, but the Israelis bombed the site in September 2007. Mr. Cheney’s account of the discussion appears in his autobiography, “In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir,” which is to be published by Simon & Schuster next week. A copy was obtained by The New York Times.

<http://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/APNewsBreak-Syria-reportedly-stonewalling-IAEA-2150603.php>

APNewsBreak: Diplomats say Syria stonewalling IAEA

GEORGE JAHN, Associated Press

Updated 05:59 a.m., Thursday, September 1, 2011

VIENNA (AP) — Syria has reneged on a promise to quickly cooperate with a U.N. probe of its nuclear activities, saying it won't be able to provide more information to challenge an assessment that it tried to build a plutonium-producing reactor until October, diplomats told The Associated Press on Thursday [2011-09-01].

The delayed cooperation will likely add to concerns that Damascus was in the early stages of a secret program that could be harnessed to produce nuclear weapons. It also comes as Syrian leader Bashar Assad faces unprecedented international pressure over his months-long crackdown on anti-government protesters, possibly deflecting attention in Damascus from dealing with the nuclear issue.

The two diplomats, who asked for anonymity because their information is confidential, said U.N. nuclear chief Yukiya Amano will tell board member nations of the International Atomic Energy Agency that he has been unable to make progress in his Syria probe at their 35-nation meeting starting Sept 12.

The board referred Syria to the U.N. Security Council in June for stonewalling IAEA attempts to investigate covert nuclear activities revealed in 2008, a year after Israeli warplanes bombed a secret Syrian desert site.

After trying in vain for three years to secure Syrian cooperation in its investigation, the IAEA drew on evidence available in June to assess that the target was in fact a nearly finished reactor, built with North Korean help, meant to produce plutonium.

Along with highly enriched uranium, plutonium can be used to arm nuclear warheads.

Syria has denied any secret nuclear activities. But the Arab country also has rejected IAEA requests for follow-ups to an initial visit to the desert site and access to others believed linked to it.

In a letter shared with the AP just before the Security Council referral in June, the Syrian government promised "full cooperation" with the probe. Since then, however, Amano has told the AP that meetings with Syrian nuclear officials have produced no results.

The diplomats said Thursday that the Syrians told the agency in a recent letter that they cannot meet requests for access to suspect sites and other information until October. Damascus did not provide substantial details about the reason for the delay.

Amano last month told the AP that — unless the Syrians come forward with new information — the agency stands by its assessment that the facility destroyed by Israeli jets in 2007 was meant to be a plutonium-producing reactor once completed.

The agency has produced regular written reports on its attempts to probe Syria's undeclared nuclear programs since 2008, but the diplomats said that won't be the case for the September board meeting, in another reflection of the fact that Damascus has provided no information to help the IAEA probe.

The U.N. Security Council met in closed session on July 14 to discuss the IAEA assessment. Some Western ambassadors said afterward that the agency's findings raised concerns that Syria violated its nonproliferation obligations.

Gates and Netanyahu

by Elliott Abrams

Posted on Friday, September 9, 2011

While I've been out of the country a small tempest has, I see, developed about former Secretary of Defense Gates's views of Prime Minister Netanyahu. Jeffrey Goldberg reported this:

Senior administration officials told me that Gates argued to the president directly that Netanyahu is not only ungrateful, but also endangering his country by refusing to grapple with Israel's growing isolation and with the demographic challenges it faces if it keeps control of the West Bank.

In Israel, where of course this is big news, critics of Netanyahu have blamed him for sparking such views from Gates. Even in the United States, it has been Netanyahu who is blamed for evoking such an attitude from Gates.

I beg to differ, for in my experience Secretary Gates had and expressed this exact view in 2007. As Vice President Cheney's new memoir recounts in some detail, there was in the spring and summer of that year long consideration of what to do about the then recently discovered Syrian nuclear reactor. There were endless discussions between Israeli and U.S. officials, and meeting after meeting inside the U.S. government. I participated in most of them.

Vice President Cheney notes that he favored a U.S. bombing of the reactor, and was alone in this. That is my memory as well. I was alone in favoring an Israeli strike, for I thought it would be useful to restore some of the credibility they had lost in the Lebanon War of 2006. Secretaries Rice and Gates favored a diplomatic route, taking the Syrians first to the IAEA and then to the UN Security Council to demand that they take the reactor apart. Cheney believed, and I agreed, that this was folly: the Syrians could drag that out for years while they finished construction of the reactor. When had the UN ever forced a rogue state to give up its nuclear program, Cheney asked. Moreover, once the Syrians found out that we knew about the reactor our military options would be gone: for example, in Saddam Hussein style they could put a kindergarten or hospital at the site and prevent a strike—for once the reactor was "hot" a strike could create dangerous effects for many miles around.

In the end, the president was persuaded to try the diplomatic route and told then Prime Minister Olmert this. Olmert immediately responded that this would not work, and that if we would not bomb the reactor he would. He reminded the president that he had from the first said it had to be destroyed one way or another. President Bush was instantly and thereafter fine with that decision, ordering that nothing be said or done that might compromise Israel's plans.

In our internal discussions Secretary Gates had been firmly in favor of the diplomatic option. The question of course arose in those discussions what we should do if Israel disagreed—as in the end it did. Secretary Gates was firm, as I recall him: Israel was ungrateful and its policies were at times risking our own interests. We needed to be tough as nails and tell them our interests came first and their action would threaten the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Fortunately his policy recommendations were not accepted by President Bush, who understood that Israeli action against the reactor would advance rather than harm U.S. interests.

This story is worth telling for only one reason: that somehow it is now being "explained" that the Gates view of Israel is new and has been provoked by recent Israeli actions and by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Not so. Secretary Gates expressed essentially similar views in the Olmert days. Then as now he was wrong, but back then there was a different president who could listen to his honest and candid advice on how to protect U.S. interests and how to handle Israel—and firmly reject it.

Secretary Gates presided over years of steadily improving U.S.-Israel military cooperation under both President Bush and President Obama. He should get real credit for this, as should the officers who have served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the last decade, Gen. Myers, Gen. Pace, and Adm. Mullen, and as should above all the two presidents they served. But his views about the Israelis being “ungrateful” are not new and should not, in fairness, be attributed to recent developments or blamed on Prime Minister Netanyahu.



Board of Governors' September Meeting Convenes

Staff Report

IAEA Board of Governors

[EXCERPTS]

On 12 September 2011, the 35-nation IAEA Board of Governors convened for their deliberations from 12-16 September, which precede the annual General Conference to be held from 19-23 September 2011.

On Monday morning, the Board session began with a statement by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano, focusing on several issues including nuclear safety, security, energy and verification.

[deletia]

Nuclear Verification

[deletia]

Syrian Arab Republic

"Following my last report, in a letter to the Agency dated 26 May 2011, Syria indicated its readiness to fully cooperate with the Agency to resolve issues related to the Dair Alzour site. After a number of meetings with the Agency, Syria, in a letter dated 24 August 2011, stated its readiness to have a meeting with Agency Safeguards staff in Damascus in October. Syria's letter stated that the purpose of the meeting would be 'to agree on an action plan to resolve the outstanding issues in regards to [the] Dair Alzour site'. The Agency subsequently proposed that a meeting take place on 10 to 11 October 2011 with the aim of advancing the Agency's verification mission in Syria."

Middle East

"In September 2000, the General Conference tasked the Director General to make arrangements to convene a forum in which participants from the Middle East and other interested parties could learn from the experience of nuclear-weapon-free zones already established in other regions. I am pleased to inform you that, following my consultations with Member States over the past few months, I believe conditions have become more favourable for the holding of such a forum. I have therefore invited all Member States to a forum, here in Vienna, on 21-22 November. I am also pleased to announce that the Permanent Representative of Norway, Ambassador Jan Petersen, has accepted my invitation to serve as Chairperson for this important gathering. We will continue our consultations in the coming weeks to help ensure that the forum is a success.

Issues on the Agenda

During the September 2011 Board meeting, a number of issues are under consideration, including:

[deletia]

Nuclear verification, including, applying safeguards in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; implementing the NPT safeguards agreement and relevant provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran; as well as implementing NPT safeguards agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Board will further discuss issues under consideration since the 2009 and 2010 sessions of the General Conference, including applying IAEA safeguards in the Middle East, as well as efforts to pursue a target of equal representation of women across all occupational groups and categories in the Agency, especially in senior policy-level and decision making posts.

[deletia]

-- By Sasha Henriques and Peter Kaiser, IAEA Division of Public Information

Syria offers nuclear cooperation, IAEA says

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Mon Sep 12, 2011 11:45am EDT

(Reuters) - Syria has offered to cooperate with a U.N. nuclear watchdog probe into a suspected reactor site after years of stonewalling, and a meeting on the issue has been proposed for October, the Vienna-based agency's head said on Monday.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Yukiya Amano said he was hoping to get "full information" about the desert site of Dair Alzour, which was bombed by Israel in 2007.

Western diplomats have expressed caution about previous offers of cooperation from Damascus.

U.S. intelligence reports have said the Dair Alzour complex was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic weaponry, before Israeli warplanes reduced it to rubble.

Syria has said it was a non-nuclear military facility, but Amano said he stood by an IAEA conclusion earlier this year that the destroyed site was "very likely" to have been a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the agency.

In June, the IAEA board of governors voted to report Syria to the U.N. Security Council, rebuking it for failing to cooperate with the agency's efforts to get concrete information on Dair Alzour and other sites.

Russia and China opposed the referral, highlighting divisions among the major powers.

It was the first time the governing board of the IAEA -- the Vienna-based U.N. body tasked with preventing the spread of nuclear weapons -- referred a country to the Security Council since it sent Iran's file there five years ago.

The move coincided with a continuing crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Syria.

Some Vienna-based Western diplomats have suggested that the turmoil inside the Arab state could further complicate efforts to get Damascus to cooperate on the nuclear issue.

Addressing the IAEA's board on Monday, Amano said Syria in a letter last month had "stated its readiness to have a meeting with agency safeguards staff in Damascus in October," according to a copy of his statement released to the media.

The Syrian letter said the purpose of the talks would be to "agree on an action plan to resolve the outstanding issues" regarding the Dair Alzour facility, Amano added.

The IAEA had proposed that the meeting take place on Oct 10-11 "with the aim of advancing the agency's verification mission in Syria," Amano said.

Syria, an ally of Iran, denies harbouring a nuclear weapons program.

Shortly before the IAEA board voted in June to refer the case to the Security Council, Syria offered to fully cooperate with the agency, after earlier rebuffing repeated requests for access to Dair Alzour.

Western diplomats dismissed this at the time as a tactical maneuver and said it was important for the board to act as it would also send a warning signal to other countries such as Iran.

The IAEA board reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006 over its failure to dispel suspicions it was trying to develop atomic arms. Tehran has since been hit with four rounds of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to halt sensitive nuclear work.



Effective Approaches for U.S. Participation in a More Secure Global Nuclear Market

Remarks

Ellen Tauscher

Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security

Remarks to Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) Nuclear Initiative Conference at the Columbus Club at Union Station

Washington, DC

October 3, 2011

As prepared

[EXCERPTS]

Good afternoon. Thank you for organizing this workshop and giving me the opportunity to speak here today. I am honored to share the podium with such distinguished panelists, good friends, and patriots. I give many speeches about how the Administration is working toward the President's goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

[deletia]

Syria is also being held accountable for non-compliance with IAEA safeguards. In June, the IAEA ratcheted up scrutiny of Syria's nuclear activities by reporting that non-compliance to the UN Security Council.

IAEA sees Syria talks for end-October

VIENNA | Tue Oct 4, 2011 9:58am EDT

(Reuters) - United Nations nuclear inspectors plan to meet Syrian officials this month to try to kickstart a long-stalled probe into a suspected reactor site bombed to rubble by Israel in 2007.

A spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Vienna-based U.N. agency, said on Tuesday that a meeting was scheduled to take place in Damascus on October 24-25.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said last month Syria had offered to cooperate with the agency's investigation into the destroyed Dair Alzour site after years of stonewalling.

Amano said he was hoping to get "full information" about Dair Alzour. The IAEA has also repeatedly asked for information about other sites that may have been linked to it.

U.S. intelligence reports have said that before the Israeli raid Dair Alzour had housed a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic weaponry.

Syria says it was a non-nuclear military facility, but the IAEA concluded in May that Dair Alzour was "very likely" to have been a nuclear reactor that should have been declared.

Western diplomats have expressed caution about previous offers of cooperation from Damascus.

Some Vienna-based diplomats have suggested that Syria's crackdown on pro-democracy protests could further complicate efforts to get the Arab state to cooperate on the nuclear issue.

In June, the IAEA board of governors voted to report Syria to the U.N. Security Council, rebuking it for failing to cooperate with the agency's efforts to get concrete information on Dair Alzour and other sites. Russia and China opposed the referral, highlighting divisions among the major powers.

Syria denies harboring a nuclear weapons program, as does its main regional ally Iran.

(Reporting by Fredrik Dahl; Editing by Alistair Lyon)

SPIEGEL Interview with Former Nuclear Watchdog

The Iranians 'Tricked and Misled Us'

10/06/2011

[EXCERPTS]

In a SPIEGEL interview, Olli Heinonen, the former deputy director of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, offers his first assessment of his 27 years at the global nuclear watchdog. He addresses Iran's nuclear program, his concerns about the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and mistakes made in Fukushima.
Info

[deletia]

SPIEGEL: EIBaradei's successor, Yukiya Amano of Japan, who has headed the IAEA since December 2009, has noticeably toughened the rhetoric against Tehran ...

Heinonen: ... which is also more in line with the (IAEA) Department of Safeguard's perspective. **But the situation has also worsened considerably in Syria in recent years.** As Tehran did before it, Damascus is now resisting pressure from the international community.

SPIEGEL: Didn't Israel do the IAEA's job for it back in 2007, when it sent planes to bomb a secret Syrian reactor near Deir al-Sur in a night-time raid? Or are there grounds to doubt this story, which SPIEGEL helped to uncover with its reporting but was never confirmed officially?

Heinonen: **All the evidence seems to suggest that the destroyed building really was a nuclear reactor. But the IAEA only got one opportunity to inspect the site. I feel the IAEA should have exercised its right to a special inspection. We were refused permission to enter Syria to carry out more research there and at other sites, and that remains the case to this day. It's a clear, sanctionable breach of the agreements. Incidentally, the Deir al-Sur reactor bears a striking resemblance to the North Korean Yongbyon reactor.**

[deletia]

Jordanian bank tied to illicit weapons?

Published: Oct. 7, 2011 at 2:18 PM

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 (UPI) -- A bank in Jordan, a strong U.S. ally in the region, may have unknowingly moved cash for the North Koreans to finance illicit weapons programs, cables suggest.

Sensitive cables distributed by WikiLeaks and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal suggest Jordan's Arab Bank PLC was used by North Korea to get money from Syria and Iran to help with its proliferation activity.

An August 2007 cable from the U.S. State Department to Washington's embassy in Amman expressed concern "that Iran, Syria and DPRK (North Korea) proliferation entities are using the Arab Bank network to process what may be proliferation-related transactions."

Arab Bank, in a statement published by the Journal, said it "does not believe" it carried out business with the North Koreans. The bank was fined in 2005 by U.S. banking regulators for not having mechanisms in place to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing, the newspaper adds.

The cables suggest the Jordanian bank processed the North Korean activity without knowing about it.

U.S. hopes IAEA report clearer on Iran nuclear fears

By Alexandra Ulmer

SANTIAGO | **Thu Oct 13, 2011 3:38pm EDT**

[EXCERPTS]

(Reuters) - The United States hopes the U.N. atomic watchdog will be more detailed about its concerns Iran is covertly developing nuclear missiles in a report due out next month, a senior U.S. diplomat said on Thursday.

But it is too early to say if the report about Iran's uranium enrichment program could prompt Tehran's referral to the U.N. Security Council, Glyn Davies, the U.S. envoy to the watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters in Santiago on the first stop of a Latin American trip to study uses of nuclear power.

[deletia]

SYRIAN REACTOR PROBE

Davies said he didn't know what progress would be made at a planned meeting between United Nations nuclear inspectors and Syrian officials this month to try to kick-start a long-stalled probe into a suspected reactor site bombed to rubble in Syria by Israel in 2007.

"The Syrians have said once again they'll cooperate... I don't know where it's going to go," he said.

U.S. intelligence reports have said that before the Israeli raid, Dair Alzour had housed a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor intended to produce plutonium for atomic weaponry.

Syria says it was a nonnuclear military facility, but the IAEA concluded in May that Dair Alzour was "very likely" to have been a nuclear reactor that should have been declared.

"They (Syria) have been covering up like nobody's business," Davies said. "Obviously there is a bit of hierarchy of safeguard cases ... and for us, Iran looms largest."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/21/us-nuclear-syria-iaea-idUSTRE79K40320111021>

IAEA seeks to kick-start stalled Syria probe

VIENNA |

Fri Oct 21, 2011 11:10am EDT

(Reuters) - U.N. inspectors plan to meet Syrian officials next week to try to make progress on a long-stalled investigation into suspected nuclear activities in the Arab state, but Western diplomats played down any hopes of a breakthrough.

Herman Nackaerts, head of nuclear safeguards inspections worldwide at the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency, will travel to Damascus on Monday for talks expected to take place the following two days, an IAEA official said.

The official declined to give any details on who Nackaerts, an IAEA deputy director general, was expected to meet and what the discussions would focus on.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2011/oct/23/syria-nuclear-iaea?newsfeed=true>

UN nuclear inspectors to visit Syria

Against the backdrop of the Syrian revolt, the IAEA will seek answers on a 'likely' nuclear reactor

Posted by Julian Borger

Sunday 23 October 2011 02.31 EDT

In the next few days, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency are due to arrive in Damascus for the first time in more than three years to talk about the Dair Alzour site, bombed by Israel in 2007. In May, the IAEA declared that the site was 'very likely' a covert nuclear reactor under construction, and has referred the issue to the Security Council.

Since an agency visit in 2008, Syria stonewalled on further cooperation. The regime however is now fighting for its life and seeking to prevent the formation the kind of international consensus on its fate that proves so fatal for Muammar Gaddafi. So the inspectors are on their way back to Damascus, which should make for an interesting mix of nuclear politics and pro-democracy revolt.

Olli Heinonen, the IAEA's former chief inspector, sent these thoughts on the imminent visit.

First, the IAEA's findings on Syria is an important attestation of an information-driven safeguards approach that underpins strengthened safeguards within the IAEA. The traditional core of IAEA verification continues to be physical access to nuclear material, facilities, sites, and people. But in situations where international inspectors are hampered or denied cooperation in some or all of the above, varied approaches that include examining and corroborating information available from: satellite imagery, procurement activities, on-site inspection observations, and open source data, have been key in supplementing the IAEA's findings. In the case of Syria, these additional tools in the kit have led the IAEA to draw conclusions on the nature of the Dair Alzour facility.

Second, even as Syria's dossier has been referred to the UN Security Council, it remains a case of on-going investigation at the IAEA. Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building have lacked details. It has also failed to provide a satisfactory explanation to the uranium contamination found at Dair Alzour. Syria has also not lived up to its safeguards' commitments when it failed to report activities conducted at the Miniature Research Reactor (MNSR) in Damascus involving nuclear material.

To move forward on the nuclear dossier, the IAEA together with Syria reached an agreement in September last year that established a plan of action to resolve issues related to MNSR. The plan included, inter alia, actions related to the amounts and use of nuclear material concerning uranium conversion experiments. The IAEA's subsequent investigations showed that its findings were not inconsistent with Syria's statements concerning the origin of uranium used during experiments undertaken, and on the origin of uranium particles found at the MNSR. However, this does not mean that all nuclear material related issues in Syria have been resolved. Questions concerning the source of uranium particles found at Dair Alzour remain open. Uncertainties also continue to surround nuclear material related activities that have a bearing on the destroyed site, in particular, at one of the three locations which the IAEA has unsuccessfully sought access since 2008.

We also know that the kind of reactor which was being constructed at Dair Alzour was neither suitable for isotope production nor for nuclear R&D purposes. And it was also too small to be meaningful for electricity generation. Rather, it resembled a plutonium production reactor similar to one that North Korea operated in Yongbyong.

So while the work plan is important to progress matters when meaningfully applied, the IAEA has the opportunity as well as onus to seek, in its meetings this week with Syria, a broader and more comprehensive scope beyond what is reflected in Syria's current offer. Dair Alzour is the focus of the problem, but it is not the only problem, hence the need to address all nuclear material and activities in Syria – such as foreign involvement in Syria's nuclear program and related offers made including on uranium enrichment.

Ensuring safeguards is kept to a high and comprehensive standard is not an easy business. Neither is it a job that necessarily endears itself to states. That is because safeguards, at the end of the day, is about walking the walk.

U.N. agency in Syria nuclear talks, no word on outcome

Reporting by Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Thu Oct 27, 2011 10:38am EDT

[EXCERPTS]

(Reuters) - Senior U.N. nuclear inspectors held talks with Syrian officials in Damascus this week to try to kick-start a long-stalled probe into suspected atomic activities in the Arab state, but it was not immediately clear whether any progress was made.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Vienna-based U.N. nuclear watchdog, said that two days of discussions took place as planned Tuesday and Wednesday in the Syrian capital.

The outcome will be reported to the IAEA's 35-nation board, which next meets on November 17-18, the agency said in response to a question. It gave no further detail.

Western diplomats had played down any hopes of a breakthrough at the talks between Syrian officials and Herman Nackaerts, head of nuclear safeguards inspections worldwide at the IAEA.

[deletia]

Olli Heinonen, Nackaerts's predecessor at the IAEA, said Deir al-Zor was not the only problem, "hence the need to address all nuclear material and activities in Syria -- such as foreign involvement in Syria's nuclear program."

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/apnewsbreak-diplomats-syria-nuke-probe-stalled-14838270>

APNewsBreak: Diplomats: Syria Nuke Probe Stalled

By GEORGE JAHN Associated Press

VIENNA October 29, 2011 (AP)

[EXCERPT]

Syrian officials have turned down a renewed request from U.N. nuclear inspectors to visit suspected secret nuclear sites during talks in Damascus described by diplomats Friday [2011-10-28] as failing to advance a probe of the Arab nation's hidden atomic program.

Meetings between Syrian and International Atomic Energy officials Monday and Tuesday had been highly anticipated after Damascus pledged to end more than three years of stonewalling IAEA inspectors. Since 2008 the agency has been stymied in attempts to seek more information over what the agency says was a clandestine nuclear program centered around a nearly completed reactor.

The offer for cooperation came after the IAEA's 35-nation board reported Damascus to the U.N. Security Council in June on the basis of an agency assessment that a facility destroyed by Israeli war planes in 2007 was a nuclear reactor meant to produce plutonium when completed.

Damascus says the target was a non-nuclear military building but has refused to allow IAEA officials to return to the site after an initial visit that produced samples with traces of uranium and other nuclear footprints.

It has also turned down agency requests to visit three other sites that the IAEA suspects are linked to what it describes as the destroyed reactor.

Officials at the IAEA have refused to comment on the trip, saying details will only be released to the board next month by IAEA chief Yukiya Amano. But diplomats from two IAEA member nations — who spoke to The Associated press on condition of anonymity because their information was privileged — said Friday that the trip had essentially been a failure.

Led by deputy IAEA Director General Herman Nackaerts, the U.N. delegation had asked for a return visit to the destroyed desert site at Dair Alzour, as well as access to the three other facilities that the agency suspects are connected to that site, said one of the diplomats.

They were turned down by the Syrians, who told them that they would present new evidence that the Dair Alzour site was non-nuclear, making any further on site inspections anywhere unnecessary, said one of the diplomats.

He said that the Syrian response was considered disappointing by the agency delegation because it was vague on what new information would be produced and contained no time line, indicating that the offer was nothing more but an attempt by Damascus to buy more time.

[deletia]

Diplomats: No breakthrough at Syria atomic talks

By REUTERS

10/29/2011 11:27

[EXCERPT]

Visit was disappointing, Syria refuses to provide access to sites, still claims Deir al-Zor was not nuclear reactor, Western diplomat says.

The Vienna-based UN nuclear watchdog has also been seeking information about other sites that may have been linked to Deir al-Zor.

Syria says Deir al-Zor was a non-nuclear military facility, but the IAEA concluded in May that it was "very likely" to have been a reactor that should have been declared.

Diplomats said there was no real progress on this sticking point at the Damascus talks.

"It was a disappointing visit. Syria is still refusing to provide access to additional sites, still claims that Deir al-Zor was not a nuclear reactor," a Western diplomat said.

Another diplomat said that while Syria was sticking to its assertion that Deir al-Zor was a non-nuclear military site it had offered cooperation to back this up. There were no further details.

A third diplomat said the meeting "yielded nothing substantial," adding that Syria's crackdown on more than seven months of pro-democracy protests may be complicating decision-making in Damascus on nuclear issues.

The outcome of the meeting will be reported to the IAEA's 35-nation board, which next meets on Nov. 17-18

[deletia]

<http://www.iaea.org/press/>

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT TO THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Vienna

17 November 2011

Yukiya Amano, Director General

INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

In my report to the June Board on the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic, I reported the Agency's conclusion that a building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site was very likely a nuclear reactor and should have been declared by Syria.

A delegation from the Agency's Department of Safeguards visited Damascus in October with the aim of advancing the Agency's verification mission in Syria. Unfortunately, no progress was made in meetings with the Syrian authorities on obtaining the full access which we have requested to other locations which the Agency believes are functionally related to the Dair Alzour site. I urge Syria to cooperate fully with the Agency in connection with unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and other locations.

**Unclassified Report to Congress
on the Acquisition of Technology
Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction
and Advanced Conventional Munitions,
Covering 1 January to 31 December 2011**

The Director of National Intelligence hereby submits this report in response to a congressionally directed action in Section 721 of the FY 1997 Intelligence Authorization Act, which states:

"(a) Reports

The Director of Central Intelligence shall submit to Congress an annual report on -

(1) the acquisition by foreign countries during the preceding 6 months of dual-use and other technology useful for the development or production of weapons of mass destruction (including nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, and biological weapons) and advanced conventional munitions; and

(2) trends in the acquisition of such technology by such countries."

[deletia]

Syria

Nuclear

Syria- despite being a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Party with full-scope IAEA safeguards- was engaged for more than a decade in a covert nuclear program with North Korean assistance. The program involved construction of a nuclear reactor at AI Kibar without informing the IAEA and while taking measures to preserve the site's secrecy. We assess the reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. The reactor was destroyed in September 2007, before it became operational, and Syria went to great lengths to try to eradicate evidence of its existence and remains generally uncooperative with the IAEA investigation. The covert nature of the program, the characteristics of the reactor, and Syria's extreme efforts to deny and destroy evidence of the reactor after its destruction are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear applications.

IAEA inspectors in June 2008 took environmental samples at the AI Kibar site. The IAEA reported to the November 2008 Board of Governors that analysis of the AI Kibar environmental samples revealed a significant number of chemically processed natural uranium particles. The report also noted the Agency's assessment that the features of the AI Kibar building were similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site, but stated that the IAEA could not exclude the possibility that the building was intended for non-nuclear use. The IAEA reported to the June 2011 Board of Governors that it is "very likely" that the building destroyed at the AI Kibar site was a nuclear reactor that should have been declared to the Agency. The Board of Governors found Syria in non-compliance with IAEA Safeguards Agreement and reported the finding to the UN Security Council and General Assembly. The IAEA is continuing its investigation of Syria's nuclear file.

OLMERT: Iran hasn't crossed line yet

April 30th, 2012

01:05 PM ET

In his first sit-down interview in years, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is revealing and controversial speaking with CNN's Christiane Amanpour.

by Lucky Gold

[EXCERPT]

Olmert was asked to compare the situation in Iran with that in Syria five years ago, when he was Israel's Prime Minister. At that time, Syria was developing a nuclear reactor and Israel reportedly launched a clandestine attack to destroy it.

Olmert said, "I think the attempt to draw a comparison between Iran and Syria is false, misleading and dangerous."

Without ever acknowledging that he ordered an attack, he said: "The reactor in Syria was about to be operated within days, and therefore there was no time to wait. You could either do it or you have an atomic reactor that would produce a bomb."

"In Iran," he said, "The situation is different. There is time. The international is community fully aware. Everyone knows. The President of the United States is fully committed to work against it. And therefore this is a big difference."

'Olmert bombed Syria despite US diplomacy'

By HERB KEINON

06/14/2012 22:03

Former prime minister Ehud Olmert decided in September 2007 to bomb the al-Kabir nuclear facility in Syria after then-president George W. Bush told him the US had opted for the diplomatic route and would try to get the International Atomic Energy Agency to close the site, Elliott Abrams told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday.

Asked about Wednesday's Israeli State Comptroller's Report chastising the government for a haphazard decision-making process, Abrams said Bush was provided with impeccable options, policy papers and intelligence.

"We took it all to the president – covert options, military options, diplomatic options – and he chose the wrong option," said Abrams, who at the time was the deputy national security advisor in the White House. "It is a mistake to believe that the process itself will provide you with the right answer."

The State Comptroller's Report was highly critical of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for not fully empowering his National Security Council, as mandated by law, and for a sloppy, informal decision-making process leading up to the Mavi Marmara raid in May 2010.

Abrams, however, used the Syrian nuclear facility issue to illustrate that what is more important than thorough preparation and a good process is the right people making the right decisions. He also said that some of the best White House meetings were informal ones where no notes were taken.

He said that his preferred option in the summer of 2007, when intelligence information emerged that the Syrians were building a nuclear facility, was for Israel to take it out in order for Jerusalem to rebuild its deterrence capability following the Second Lebanon War a year earlier. He added that then-vice president Dick Cheney argued for the US to bomb the facility itself to rebuild America's deterrence capability.

Cheney, in his memoirs *In My Time*, wrote that not only would a US strike demonstrate America's seriousness concerning nonproliferation, "it would enhance our credibility in that part of the world, taking us back to where we were in 2003, after we had taken down the Taliban, taken down Saddam's regime, and gotten Gaddafi to turn over his nuclear program."

But the option Bush chose, some six weeks before Israel acted, was the one preferred by secretary of state Condoleezza Rice: Make the existence of the facility public and then go to the IAEA and UN and build an international consensus to get the Syrians to close it.

Abrams said he thought the idea was "absurd" and that Syrian President Bashar Assad would defy the IAEA and do nothing.

When Bush informed Olmert of the US decision in July 2007, Abrams recalled, Olmert said the strategy was unacceptable to Israel. It was clear to everyone that from this point on there would be no sharing of plans and that "Israel would let us know afterward," he said.

Indeed, according to Abrams, Israel informed Washington immediately after the September 7, 2007, strike. A decision was then made not to "rub the Syrians' nose in the matter" by making it public, thinking that if everyone remained quiet Assad would not be compelled to hit back. Indeed, news of the attack began trickling out in the Turkish media a couple of weeks afterward when jettisoned parts of Israeli fighter jets were found in Turkish territory.

[Deletia]

Syria showing 'contempt' for UN nuclear agency: US

(AFP)

7 hours ago [*Accessed 2012-09-14T19:10Z*]

VIENNA — Syria is showing "contempt" towards the UN atomic watchdog by refusing to cooperate over a suspected undeclared reactor destroyed by Israel in 2007, the US envoy to the agency said Friday.

President Bashar al-Assad's government "is using its brutal repression of the Syrian people as an excuse for not cooperating with the agency's investigation," Robert Wood told a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board.

Syria's "rejection of the international community's calls to remedy its non-compliance shows its continuing contempt for this board and for the system of international safeguards," he said, according to a text of his remarks.

The IAEA board reported Syria to the UN Security Council in June 2011 after watchdog head Yukiya Amano concluded that the Dair Alzour desert site was "very likely" a nuclear reactor which should have been declared to the IAEA under Damascus's safeguards agreement with the agency.

The IAEA says information provided to the agency suggested that the alleged reactor, which was still under construction when it was bombed by Israeli aircraft in September 2007, was being built with North Korean assistance.

Syria's ambassador to the IAEA, Bassam Sabbagh, reiterated at Friday's meeting in Vienna that the site in question was a "non-nuclear military installation" and denied not wanting to cooperate with the agency, diplomats said.

The IAEA visited the site in June 2008 and requested documentation related to buildings there as well to three other allegedly related sites but since then Syria "has not engaged substantively," the agency said in a report last month.

In talks in Damascus in October 2011, Syria offered the IAEA the chance to go back to Dair Alzour but under conditions rejected by the agency. Syria said the other three sites were "not relevant," the IAEA said.

In February 2012, Syria sent a letter to the IAEA indicating it would provide a detailed response at a later date in view of the "difficult prevailing security situation in the country," the watchdog said, referring to the bloody 18-month-old uprising against Assad's rule.

Iran, meanwhile, speaking in its role as head of the Non-Aligned Movement at Friday's closed-door meeting, encouraged Syria and the IAEA to "continue cooperating" and said that access to information, activities and locations must be provided in accordance with Syria's safeguards agreement with the agency.

But it also said it was "essential not to lose sight of the manner in which (the site) was initially brought to the attention of the agency," saying Israel's attack "constituted a flagrant of the UN charter."

U.S.: Syria must end nuclear go-slow, conflict no excuse

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Fri Sep 14, 2012 2:04pm EDT

(Reuters) - The United States accused Syria on Friday of using the "brutal repression" of its people waging an uprising as an excuse not to address U.N. nuclear watchdog concerns about suspected past illicit nuclear activity in the Arab state.

For its part, Syria insisted at a debate of the governing board of the International Atomic Energy Agency that it had agreed last year with the IAEA on how to handle the issue. This was denied on Monday by the IAEA chief in a speech to the board.

The IAEA has long sought access to a site in Syria's desert Deir al-Zor region that U.S. intelligence reports say was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor designed to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons before Israel bombed it in 2007.

The Vienna-based watchdog has also been requesting information about three other sites that may have been linked to Deir al-Zor.

IAEA chief Yukiya Amano said earlier this year that Syria had asked for understanding of its "delicate situation" in response to requests for Syrian cooperation with his inspectors' inquiry.

President Bashar al-Assad is fighting a 17-month-old revolt in which more than 27,000 people have been killed.

U.S. IAEA envoy Robert Wood said Syria's "own destabilizing actions are no justification for its refusal" to abide by its commitments under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), set up to prevent the spread of atomic weaponry.

"The Assad regime is using its brutal repression of the Syrian people as an excuse for not cooperating with the agency's investigation," he told the closed-door board governors' session, according to a copy of his speech.

"SO-CALLED ACTION PLAN"

Syria says Deir al-Zor was a conventional military facility but the IAEA concluded in May 2011 that it was "very likely" to have been a reactor that should have been declared to its anti-proliferation inspectors.

"Syria must allow access to all relevant locations, materials and persons, including in particular the three additional sites suspected of having a functional relationship to the clandestine Deir al-Zor," Wood said.

Syrian Ambassador Bassam Al-Sabbagh repeated his country's position that Deir al-Zor was not a nuclear reactor and said an agreement had been reached with senior IAEA officials last October on an action plan on how to clarify the matter.

According to one diplomat present, Al-Sabbagh told the board that if Syria could convince the IAEA that Deir al-Zor was a non-nuclear facility then the issue of the three other sites was "moot".

Amano, the IAEA director-general, did not respond at Friday's board session, but on Monday he told the opening day of the week-long board meeting: "I wish to make clear that no agreement was ever reached on a so-called action plan."

The veteran Japanese diplomat later told a news conference that "some options" had been discussed during the IAEA team's visit to Damascus last year but that they were rejected after a careful review by the IAEA.

"It was not sufficient because the so-called action plan is limited only to the Deir al-Zor site and Syria was not ready to discuss other locations," Amano said.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of mostly developing states said in a statement read out by Iranian Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh that it welcomed "Syria's resolve to continue cooperating" with the IAEA.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich)

The Silent Strike

How Israel bombed a Syrian nuclear installation and kept it secret.

By David Makovsky

2012-09-17

[EXCERPT]

In the first days of March, 2007, agents from the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, made a daring raid on the Vienna home of Ibrahim Othman, the head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission. Othman was in town attending a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors, and had stepped out. In less than an hour, the Mossad operatives swept in, extracted top-secret information from Othman's computer, and left without a trace.

In recent months, Israel and the United States had become worried by Syria's nuclear ambitions. In the nineteen-nineties, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad sought to buy nuclear research reactors from Argentina and Russia, but the deals fell through under U.S. pressure. Toward the end of 2006, Israel began to pick up intelligence of possible renewed nuclear activity. There were also suspicions about a large, "enigmatic" building under construction in the desert of northeastern Syria, General Michael Hayden, the director of the C.I.A. at the time, told me.

The information the Mossad operatives recovered was damning: roughly three dozen color photographs taken from inside the Syrian building, indicating that it was a top-secret plutonium nuclear reactor. The reactor, called Al Kibar, was nine hundred yards from the Euphrates River and halfway between the borders with Turkey and Iraq. The photographs showed workers from North Korea at the site, which was far from Syria's biggest cities. The sole purpose of this kind of plutonium reactor, in the Mossad's analysis, was to produce an atomic bomb. Inside, the reactor had many of the same engineering elements as the North Korean reactor in Yongbyon—a model that no one but the North Koreans had built in the past thirty-five years.

Two and a half decades earlier, Israel had dispatched bombers to Iraq to destroy the Osirak nuclear reactor. That strike marked the rise of the Begin doctrine, named for Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which held that no Israeli adversary in the Middle East should be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon. Israel itself has reportedly possessed nuclear weapons since roughly 1967, although it has never either admitted or denied it; the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies estimates that today Israel has as many as two hundred nuclear warheads. Off the record, Israeli officials reject any claim of moral equivalence between their reputed possession of nuclear weapons and Syria's. One reason, officials say, is Syria's relationship with Hezbollah and Hamas, both of which are considered terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department.

On March 8th, days after the raid, Meir Dagan, the director of the Mossad, and two senior officials met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and presented the findings from the raid. During a courtroom appearance last year, at which Olmert was facing corruption charges (he was largely acquitted), he never directly mentioned Dagan or the Syrian site, but he referred obliquely to "a piece of information" that had been put on his desk "such as rarely happens in the country." He added, "I knew from that moment, nothing would be the same again. The weight of this thing, at the existential level, was of an unprecedented scale." Olmert pledged to destroy the reactor as soon as possible; if it went "hot," radiation from its destruction could contaminate the Euphrates.

Five years later, the Al Kibar affair is still not discussed on the record in Israel. When referred to by journalists or military analysts, reports are usually credited to foreign sources. Word has gradually leaked out that Israel destroyed the Al Kibar reactor. Some of the details of the operation have been published. In April, 2008, after several months of secrecy, U.S. intelligence officials finally briefed Congress on their evaluation of the reactor. The most senior members of the Bush Administration, including Bush himself, mentioned in their memoirs how the U.S. responded to the evidence on the reactor. In recent months, I have spoken with about two dozen Israeli and American officials who were knowledgeable about the fate of Al Kibar, to learn exactly what happened and

why details of the affair have remained so closely guarded. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government consider how to confront Iran's nascent nuclear program, Israel's response to Al Kibar has emerged as both an exemplary and a cautionary tale.

The small suite of offices where Prime Minister Olmert and a half dozen of his aides worked, in a nondescript government office building in Jerusalem, sits behind glass doors and was so closely watched that it was nicknamed the Aquarium. For that reason, in the days after the discovery of the Syrian installation, Olmert began hosting important meetings at his official residence, on Balfour Street, a couple of miles away.

Olmert, a former cabinet minister and onetime mayor of Jerusalem, had come to power in early 2006 on a platform of peace, and the war that summer with Hezbollah, in Lebanon, had been disastrous for his popularity. In December, in an attempt to restore his focus on peacemaking, Olmert had begun holding regular meetings with Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, to address the establishment of a Palestinian state. On February 15, 2007, a few weeks before the Mossad raid in Vienna, Olmert met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in Ankara, and asked him to explore whether Syrian President Bashar al-Assad—the son of Hafez—would be willing to open secret peace talks with Israel. After meeting with Assad on April 3rd, Erdogan reported back to Olmert that Assad was willing. By that time, Israel had discovered evidence of the Syrian reactor, and a grim resolve had set in.

The briefings on Balfour Street began with Israel's former Prime Ministers, including Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, and Netanyahu, Olmert's political rival. The leaders were summoned one by one, to insure confidentiality and to prevent leaks. A second group—including Amir Peretz, the Defense Minister; Gabi Ashkenazi, the Israel Defense Force's chief of staff; Amos Yadlin, the I.D.F. head of military intelligence; Yuval Diskin, the head of the Shin Bet, Israel's security service; and Dagan, of the Mossad—met most Fridays from late March of 2007 through early September. Each member signed a secrecy agreement.

The time came to inform the Americans. On April 18th, during a routine visit to Israel, Robert Gates, George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense, met with his Israeli counterpart, Peretz. Because Peretz does not speak English fluently, an index card was prepared for him, which he could refer to as he divulged the news about the reactor. Olmert also dispatched Dagan, along with two of Olmert's top personal aides, Yoram Turbowicz and Shalom Turgemen—nicknamed TnT by U.S. officials—to Washington, to report the news to other senior U.S. officials. Dagan briefed his U.S. counterpart, Hayden, the C.I.A. director. Dagan, Turbowicz, and Turgemen met with Vice-President Dick Cheney and the national-security adviser, Steve Hadley. Dagan presented them with the photographs of the site and other information. According to one former senior U.S. official, Cheney, who had been urging the intelligence community to investigate a link between North Korea and Syria, was vindicated by the news.

President Bush instructed his intelligence chiefs to verify the Israeli claims; the disastrous intelligence failure on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was fresh in everyone's mind. Bush's words, according to the former U.S. senior official, were "Gotta be secret, and gotta be sure." A C.I.A. crisis task force was established, and, according to the same official, the C.I.A. compared "handheld" photographs of the site with "overheads" taken by American satellites. The photographs were then given to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which analyzes imagery and map-based intelligence for policymakers and the national-security community. The N.G.A. determined that the two sets of photographs were valid, as did nuclear experts at the Department of Energy and an outside nuclear-proliferation authority. Finally, an ad-hoc C.I.A. "red team" concluded, according to the former senior U.S. official, "If it's not a nuclear reactor, then it's a fake nuclear reactor."

While U.S. intelligence officials scrambled to confirm the Israeli report, Hadley, the national-security adviser, directed an interagency deputies committee—known, with deliberate blandness, as the Drafting Committee—to develop policy options. The committee's members included Elliott Abrams, a deputy national-security adviser; James Jeffrey, a top Middle East specialist at the State Department, who was later the deputy national-security adviser; Eric Edelman, a senior aide to Gates who had previously served as the Ambassador to Turkey; and Eliot Cohen, who was counsellor to the State Department under Condoleezza Rice. No personal aides were included

in the group's secure government e-mails. The policy options were not circulated on any government computers, and the committee's members were forbidden from taking any relevant documents out of the White House Situation Room.

From the start, several members of the Drafting Committee were skeptical that diplomacy could neutralize Syria's nuclear program. The fear was that Assad would stall in order to buy time for the reactor to go hot, at which point military action would become too risky. Over several Tuesday afternoons, an even more senior national-security group gathered in Hadley's office in the West Wing of the White House. At the time, few from the group advocated American military action. "Every Administration gets one preemptive war against a Muslim country," Gates told Edelman, half in jest, "and this Administration has already done one."

Moreover, Israel's 2006 war with Hezbollah had weakened Rice's faith in Israel's military judgment. "Condi thought that the Israeli military was unreliable and that they were no longer the ten-foot giants that we had grown up with," a former senior Administration official told me. Rice feared that a strike would lead to a wider conflict, including war with both Syria and Hezbollah. She was also invested in two diplomatic initiatives: six-party talks with North Korea about its nuclear program and a Middle East peace conference that would be held later that year, in Annapolis. Meanwhile, the Administration was staring down the end of its tenure. "We were just turning the corner in Iraq, and there was an uneasy sense about Afghanistan," Eliot Cohen told me. "Many in the Administration were deeply reluctant to start what they thought would be a third Middle Eastern war. They thought the American people would have no patience for it, quite apart from their own aversion to such a prospect."

On June 17th at the White House residence, just before a scheduled visit from Olmert, Bush met with advisers in the Yellow Oval Room, which encouraged intimacy and informality, and which allowed Bush to "be in a listening rather than deciding mode," according to another former senior official. Recounting that period for a 2011 Washington Post article, Hayden said that he "told the President that Al Kibar was part of a nuclear weapons program" and that "we could conceive of no alternative uses for the facility." But, because they "could not identify the other essentials of a weapons program," such as a reprocessing plant or active work on a warhead, Hayden wrote, "we cautiously characterized this finding as 'low confidence.'"

The Administration conceded that the reactor could go hot in the coming months, but, once the term "low confidence" had been invoked, Bush no longer felt he had the political cover to justify a preemptive strike. In his memoir, Bush says that he told Olmert, "I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it's a weapons program." David Albright, a nuclear-proliferation expert at the Institute for Science and International Security, told me that a reprocessing plant has yet to be found; then again, he noted, Syria has not granted anyone permission to look for one.

Olmert met with American officials in Washington on June 19th. He told reporters that he was there to discuss Iran and the Palestinian peace process, but, in his meetings with Bush and Cheney, he urged that the U.S. lead the attack on the Syrian reactor. Olmert argued that a U.S. strike would "kill two birds with one stone," allowing Bush to remind the international community of Assad's villainy and send a message dissuading Iran from pursuing its own nuclear program. Olmert told Bush that if the U.S. did not destroy the reactor, Israel would, even if it lacked support from the Americans. Bush promised an answer shortly.

On July 12th, Bush convened a second meeting, and declared that he would send an envoy to Syria with an ultimatum for Assad to begin dismantling the reactor. The five permanent members of the Council, or P5—the United States, Russia, China, Britain, and France—would oversee the dismantling.

Bush called Olmert at eight o'clock the next morning. If the Americans were to hit the reactor, he said, the Administration would have to explain to Congress that the intelligence had come from Israel. Was this what Olmert wanted? Bush offered to send Rice to the region, but Olmert replied that he was not interested in a visit from Rice, and said he feared that a diplomatic route would simply enable Syria to stall until the reactor went hot. In his memoir, Bush wrote that "the prime minister was disappointed" at the U.S. preference for diplomacy,

adding that Olmert told him, “This is something that hits at the very serious nerves of this country.” The American nuclear-prevention policy toward North Korea and Pakistan was characterized as “too early, too early—oops—too late,” Ariel Levite, a nonresident senior associate in the nonproliferation program at the Carnegie Endowment, told me. The Israelis also believed that a diplomatic focus would undermine the surprise of a military operation. Once Assad realized that he had been caught, as Abrams put it to me, what would stop him from putting a kindergarten near the site, or from deploying anti-aircraft weaponry?

Although the U.S. and Israel agreed on the fundamental facts and risks, they had reached opposing policy conclusions. Until the phone call from Bush, Olmert hoped that the United States would lead the attack. Now he was worried that any U.S. official who was not on board with the Israeli strike would try to sabotage it by leaking information, and he expressed his fears to Bush. The President promised Olmert that the American side would remain “buttoned up.”

Bush probably did not relish further military action and feared a repeat of the intelligence debacle in Iraq, but he seems to have understood Olmert’s position. At no point did Bush suggest that the U.S. would block Israeli action. “Olmert said he did not ask Bush for a green light, but Bush did not give Olmert a red light,” an Israeli general told me. “Olmert saw it as green.”

The Israelis began preparations for a unilateral attack. The I.D.F. and the Israeli Air Force considered three possible strategies: a wide strike by the Israeli Air Force, nicknamed Fat Shkedi, after Israel’s Air Force chief, General Eliezer Shkedi; a narrower strike, nicknamed Skinny Shkedi; and a ground attack by special forces. Cartoon “I should have bought toys with better posture.” Buy the print »

A key consideration was the desire to minimize the potential of a response from Damascus. Since discovering the reactor, many Israeli officials had concluded that the lower the signature of the attack the less likely Syria would be to retaliate. By failing to report the presence of a nuclear reactor, Assad would be violating his obligations to the International Atomic Energy Agency. To avoid drawing further attention to this violation—not to mention the humiliation of having its nuclear ambitions exposed and thwarted by Israel—Assad might prefer to bury the matter. Psychologists consulted by the I.D.F., who had profiled Assad for years, argued that Syrian retaliation might be avoided if Israel did not corner the President by publicly claiming credit for a strike, thus preserving for Assad what Israeli security officials called a “zone of denial.” Assad’s decision not to take any direct hostile action against Israel during its 2006 war with Hezbollah, in Lebanon, demonstrated that he saw the advantage of avoiding military confrontation with Israel. Also, from what the Israelis could discern, the Al Kibar reactor was in a remote location; a strike would be unlikely to cause civilian fatalities or even draw public attention.

Given these factors, the I.D.F., the Mossad, and the Foreign Ministry, led by Tzipi Livni, all favored a low-signature attack on the reactor. Back in June, an Israeli special-operations unit had been dispatched to within a mile of the site to take and transmit additional photos, bring back soil samples, and provide Israel with other information it needed for a strike.

By June, Peretz had lost the Labor Party leadership and the position of Defense Minister passed to Ehud Barak, the former Prime Minister, former Army chief of staff, and one of the most decorated soldiers in Israeli history. The “two Ehuds,” Olmert and Barak, had a cordial relationship, despite belonging to different parties. When Olmert was the mayor of Jerusalem, in the nineties, he defended Barak, then the Prime Minister, from the usual refrain from the right that a Labor leader would cede half of Jerusalem to the Palestinians. (In fact, Barak did offer significant parts of Jerusalem during the Camp David summit in 2000.)

But the friendship did not endure. Barak told his fellow cabinet ministers that he feared a repeat of the 2006 war, and thought it would be better to delay the attack on Al Kibar. This would give Israel’s military command in the north sufficient time to prepare for possible Syrian retaliation. For Olmert, the 2006 Lebanon war had established deterrence; Hezbollah had not openly fired a shot at Israel since then. Olmert suspected that Barak had another reason for putting off an attack on Al Kibar. The final report of the Winograd Commission, a

government-appointed inquiry into the decisions involved in the 2006 war with Hezbollah, was anticipated around the end of the year and was expected to criticize Olmert for his handling of the war and weaken him politically. Olmert worried that Barak would seize upon the report's findings, trigger Olmert's ouster as Prime Minister, and lead the operation against the Syrian reactor himself.

In Israel, all major military actions that could lead to war must be approved by the security cabinet. Olmert invited several members of the security cabinet separately to his home and briefed them on Al Kibar. Each signed a written vow of secrecy, agreeing to face investigation if he or she leaked information. Over the next five weeks, a half-dozen extraordinary security-cabinet meetings unfolded. Barak argued that a careful attack in the early phases after the reactor went hot would not contaminate the Euphrates. Olmert gave a long and persuasive rejoinder. "It may have been the most dramatic set of sessions that I can ever recall in the security cabinet," one of the cabinet ministers in attendance told me.

On September 1st, Turbowicz told the White House that preparations were almost complete. Israel informed one other country's intelligence service before the strike—Britain's MI6—but did not share the exact timing of the attack with either country.

On September 5th, the security cabinet deliberated for the last time, and voted to strike. (The only minister to abstain from voting was Avi Dichter.) The cabinet also voted to grant Olmert, Barak, and Livni sole power to approve the military approach and the timing of the strike. Barak and Olmert had made several handwritten amendments to the text of the resolution that ordered the strike, explicitly indicating the potential for war. After the cabinet session, Olmert, Barak, and Livni reconvened in the briefing room adjacent to Olmert's office. The chief of staff came into the room and recommended attacking that night, using the Skinny Shkedi approach. After the chief of staff left, Olmert, Barak, and Livni voted unanimously to proceed.

Just before midnight on September 5, 2007, four F-15s and four F-16s took off from Israeli Air Force bases, including Ramat David, southeast of Haifa. After flying north along the Mediterranean Coast, the planes turned east and followed the Syrian-Turkish border, to avoid detection by radar. Using standard electronic scrambling tools, the Israelis blinded Syria's air-defense system. In Tel Aviv, in a room of the underground I.A.F. command-and-control center known as "the pit," Olmert, Barak, Livni, and senior security officials followed the planes by radar. The room would serve as a bunker for Olmert in the event that the strike sparked a war; the Israelis had also prepared a military contingency plan.

General Shkedi tracked the pilots by audio in an adjacent room. Sometime between 12:40 and 12:53 A.M., the pilots uttered the computer-generated code word of the day, "Arizona," indicating that seventeen tons of explosives had been dropped on their target. "There was a sense of elation," one participant recalled. "The reactor was destroyed and we did not lose a pilot."

The next day, the Syrian Arab News Agency announced that Israeli planes had entered Syrian airspace but had been repelled: "Air-defense units confronted them and forced them to leave after they dropped some ammunition in deserted areas without causing any human or material damage." The Israelis say that not a single Syrian air-defense missile was launched. At least ten, and perhaps as many as three dozen, workers were killed in the strike.

As the planes returned to their bases, Olmert went to his secondary office, at the Kirya defense complex, in Tel Aviv, and asked to be connected to Bush, who was in Australia. "I just want to report to you that something that existed doesn't exist anymore," Olmert told him. "It was done with complete success."

Syria has consistently denied that it had a reactor, and the responses from its administration officials have been contradictory. Three weeks after the strike, President Assad told the BBC that Israeli warplanes had attacked an unused military building and said that Damascus reserved "the right to retaliate," though not necessarily in a "bomb for bomb" manner. Meanwhile, Bashar Ja'afari, the Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, continued to insist that nothing was bombed in Syria and that Israeli planes "were encountered by our air defense fire" and were forced to drop their ammunition and fuel tanks.

“Nobody in Syria believed that Israel did this,” Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert who is a fellow at the Washington Institute and was in Damascus at the time, told me. “People believed the regime.” Syrians were incredulous on two accounts, Tabler said: that Assad had secretly built a reactor and that Israel had demolished it. Even as confirmation of some sort of strike came out in the world press, Syria did not strike back. This reinforced Israel’s initial psychological reading: as long as Assad could deny the existence of the reactor, he would not feel pressured to retaliate.

The Israelis helped secure that zone of denial. They briefed their regional allies, including Egypt and Jordan, and urged their leaders to refrain from making public statements about the strike. Olmert flew to Moscow to brief Russia, which has close ties with Assad. Dick Cheney was eager to expose the flagrant role of North Korea in the Syrian project and argued for disclosure. But Condoleezza Rice, keen to preserve the six-party diplomatic talks with North Korea, urged that the request for silence be honored. She prevailed.

On October 23rd, Olmert met Erdogan in London to brief him on the attack and on Israel’s motives. During the meeting, Olmert asked Erdogan to gauge Syrian interest in re-starting peace negotiations. Assad agreed to indirect peace talks, which began in Ankara in February, 2008; they ended that December, when Syria and Turkey withdrew in protest over Israel’s war against Gaza. Israelis say the two sides never discussed the Al Kibar strike.

As the months went by, and the odds of Syrian retaliation diminished, Bush asked Olmert for permission to tell certain senators and representatives what had happened. Details had begun to leak out, and members of the congressional intelligence committees were upset that they had not been briefed. Moreover, there was a fierce debate within the Administration over the decision not to go public about North Korea’s role in the construction of the Syrian reactor. Olmert relented; in Israel, however, official restrictions remain.

After rebuffing repeated requests by the I.A.E.A. to visit the site, Syria ultimately permitted a small group of inspectors, including Olli Heinonen, to visit for one day in June, 2008. The inspectors found particles of man-made uranium in the samples, which Syria claimed were the residue of the bombing. In 2009, the inspectors reported that graphite had also been found at the site; Syria again issued a denial. In its most recent report, the I.A.E.A. concluded that the site was “very likely” a nuclear reactor.

When I met with Heinonen this past spring, he told me that the site had been cleaned up before the inspectors’ visit. His statement echoed a cable, released by WikiLeaks in 2010 to an Israeli daily, that Condoleezza Rice sent to State Department representatives around the world on April 25, 2008, after the congressional briefing. “Syria’s concealment and lies about what happened for months now after the Israeli air strike is compelling proof that it has something to hide,” Rice wrote. “In fact, after the attack on the site, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there.” Syria’s cleanup effort was also monitored and confirmed by I.D.F. satellites.

Heinonen said that one of the inspectors’ escorts at the site was General Mohammed Suleiman, who served as a primary regime contact on various issues related to Iran. An Israeli general called him the head of the Syrian “shadow army,” meaning he dealt with issues unrelated to Syria’s conventional Army, such as transferring Iranian weapons to Hezbollah. Israeli officials say that Suleiman, a fellow-Alawite and longtime friend of the Assad family, was believed to be one of the very few senior regime officials who knew of the reactor’s existence.

On August 1, 2008, Suleiman was killed by snipers while hosting a dinner at his weekend home overlooking the sea at the Syrian port city of Tartus. The operation is believed to have been carried out jointly by the Mossad and the Shayetet 13, or Flotilla 13, an élite commando unit of the Israeli Navy that specializes in sea-to-land incursions and counterterrorism. Nobody else was injured. Israel has never acknowledged the assassination.

Olmert’s poll numbers did not recover after the fallout of the 2006 war, and the rest of his term as Prime Minister was marred by corruption charges, even as he continued Palestinian peace talks with Abbas. In July, 2008, he

announced that he would resign his position, and he left office after elections the following February. This July, Olmert was cleared of charges of receiving illicit cash payments and of double-billing Israeli organizations for travel expenses, but convicted on breach of trust. He faces another trial on corruption charges related to a Jerusalem real-estate deal, but some recent polls show that if Olmert were to head a new centrist coalition it would run strongly against Netanyahu's party. If he is acquitted of the final charge, many analysts in Israel expect him to attempt a political comeback, though he has denied it in public.

For Israel, the raid on Al Kibar was an unparalleled success. The Begin doctrine was reaffirmed, and neither Syria nor Hezbollah has encroached on Israel since. The pressing question today is whether the lessons of that success can be applied to Iran, which has insisted, against all evidence, that its nuclear ambitions are limited to civilian purposes, and whether Israel and the U.S. view the threat the same way.

[deletia]

Bombing the Syrian Reactor: The Untold Story

Elliott Abrams

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As the civil war in Syria enters its third year, there is much discussion of the regime's chemical weapons and whether Syria's Bashar al-Assad will unleash them against Syrian rebels, or whether a power vacuum after Assad's fall might make those horrific tools available to the highest bidder. The conversation centers on Syria's chemical weaponry, not on something vastly more serious: its nuclear weaponry. It well might have. This is the inside story of why it does not.

Relations between the United States and Israel had grown rocky after Israel's incursion into Lebanon in 2006, for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice believed the Israelis had mishandled both the military and the diplomatic sides of the conflict. While Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's personal relations with President George W. Bush were excellent, those with Rice were sometimes confrontational—especially when Rice worked at the United Nations to bring the war to a close while Olmert sought more time to attack Hezbollah. Olmert always seemed to ask for 10 days more, while Rice believed the war was not going well and that more time was unlikely to turn the tables.

By the war's end on August 14, 2006, Olmert's political status had been diminished and his ability to negotiate any sort of peace agreement with the Palestinians was in doubt. The autumn of 2006 and winter of 2007 saw no movement on the Israeli-Palestinian front, and all the Israeli analysts we consulted said there would be none. We were stuck. And there was another surprise in store.

In the middle of May 2007, we received an urgent request to receive Mossad chief Meir Dagan at the White House. Olmert asked that he be allowed to show some material to Bush personally. We headed that off with a suggestion that he first reveal whatever he had to National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley and to me; I was then the deputy national-security adviser in charge of the Middle East portfolio on the National Security Council. Vice President Dick Cheney joined us in Hadley's office for Dagan's presentation. What Dagan had was astonishing and explosive: He showed us intelligence demonstrating that Syria was constructing a nuclear reactor whose design was supplied by North Korea, and doing so with North Korean technical assistance. Dagan left us with one stark message: All Israeli policymakers who saw the evidence agreed that the reactor had to go away.

There then began a four-month process of extremely close cooperation with Israel about the reactor, called al-Kibar. As soon as our own intelligence had confirmed the Israeli information and we all agreed on what we were dealing with, Hadley established a process for gathering further information, considering our options, and sharing our thinking with Israel. This process was run entirely out of the White House, with extremely limited participation to maintain secrecy. The effort at secrecy succeeded and there were no leaks—an amazing feat in Washington, especially when the information being held so tightly was as startling and sexy as this.

Initially, there were doubts that Bashar al-Assad could be so stupid as to try this stunt of building a nuclear reactor with North Korean help. Did he really think he would get away with it—that Israel would permit it? But he nearly did; had the reactor been activated, striking it militarily could have strewn radioactive material into the wind and into the nearby Euphrates River, which was the reactor's source of water needed for cooling. When we found out about the reactor, it was at an advanced construction stage, just a few months from being "hot."

The consideration of what to do about the reactor continued alongside tense meetings between Rice and Israel on how to proceed with the Palestinians, but the two initiatives did not collide. For the most part, this was because different people were involved. Military and intelligence personnel uninvolved in peace negotiations were the

key interlocutors for Israel in considering the al-Kibar reactor, as were individuals on the vice president's staff who were sympathetic to Israel's position. The work on al-Kibar was a model both of U.S.-Israel collaboration and of interagency cooperation without leaks. Papers I circulated to the group were returned to me when meetings ended or were kept under lock and key; secretaries and executive assistants were kept out of the loop; meetings were called under vague names such as "the study group."

The debates were vigorous in our secret meetings in the White House Situation Room. The role of those in the Situation Room was not to decide what was to be done about the reactor; it was merely to be sure every issue had been thoroughly debated and was covered in the memos we drafted for the administration's principal officials on foreign-policy matters and for the president. This was an excellent example of how policy should be made. Several times, principals—Rice and Hadley, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, CIA Director Michael Hayden, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Peter Pace and Vice President Cheney—trooped over to the president's living room in the residence section of the White House to have it out before him, answer his questions, and see what additional information he sought.

I attended all these meetings as note taker, and the notes are under lock and key at the National Archives.



From above: A satellite image of the Syrian reactor site one month after it was bombed by Israeli forces in September 2007.

The day I left those notes on the floor under my chair in the president's living room, and discovered when back at the NSC that I no longer had them, remains emblazoned in my mind. These were among the most sensitive notes then existing in the U.S. government, amazing precautions for secrecy had been taken, and I had simply left them on the floor. Pale and drenched with sweat, I ran back to the residence, where the butler graciously let me back in and accompanied me to the Yellow Oval Room where we had met. There was my portfolio, under the chair, untouched. Well, I thought, if the butler keeps his mouth shut, I may actually not be shot after all.

The facts about al-Kibar were soon clear, and about those facts there was no debate: It was a nuclear reactor that was almost an exact copy of the Yongbyon reactor in North Korea, and North Koreans had been involved with Syria's development of the site. Given its location and its lack of connection to any electrical grid, this reactor was part of a nuclear-weapons program rather than intended to produce electric power.

The array of options was clear as well: overt or covert, Israel or United States, military or diplomatic. The United States and Israel both had an obvious military option: Bomb the site and destroy the reactor. This was not much of a military challenge, General Pace assured the president. Whether anything short of a military strike could destroy the reactor was another question, and the difficulties with such an option were obvious: Just how would you get the needed explosives to the site except through a military attack? It was soon agreed that a covert option did not exist, and military options were quickly designed to make the reactor disappear; as Dagan had said when he first visited us, the Israelis clearly believed it had to go away. We developed elaborate scenarios for U.S. and Israeli military action addressing these issues: Whom would you inform when, what would you announce and what would you keep secret, and what if anything would you say to the Syrians?

But a diplomatic option existed as well, and we did draw up elaborate scenarios for it. We would begin by informing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the facts and making them public in a dramatic session before the IAEA Board of Governors in Vienna. We would demand immediate inspections and that Syria halt work on the reactor. If Syria refused, we would go to the UN Security Council and demand action. If there was no action, the military option in theory remained open.

However, this diplomatic option seemed faintly ridiculous to me. For one thing, it would never be acceptable to Israel, whose experience with the United Nations was uniformly bad. The Jewish state would never trust its national security to the UN. For another, it would not work; Syria's friends in the UN, especially Russia, would protect it. At the IAEA, we had plenty of experience with Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian. He was redefining the director general's role from that of inspector and cop to that of peacemaker and diplomat; he would seek a deal with Syria rather than concerted action against it. Moreover, taking the reactor issue to the UN and the IAEA meant handing it over to the State Department, and I thought an issue of this importance should be handled in the White House.

Finally, the argument that there would always remain a military option as a last resort was misleading at best. Once we made public our knowledge of the site, Syria could put a kindergarten right next to it or take some similar move using human shields. Military action required secrecy, and once we made any kind of public statement about al-Kibar, that option would be gone.

The vice president thought the United States should bomb the site. Given our troubles in Iraq and the growing confrontation with Iran, this would be a useful assertion of power and would help restore our credibility. As he later wrote:

I again made the case for U.S. military action against the reactor. Not only would it make the region and the world safer, but it would also demonstrate our seriousness with respect to non-proliferation. . . . But I was the lone voice. After I finished, the president asked, "Does anyone here agree with the vice president?" Not a single hand went up around the room.

My hand did not go up (and as we left the president's living room that day, June 17, I apologized to the vice president for leaving him isolated) because I thought the Israelis should bomb the reactor, restoring their credibility after the annus horribilis of 2006 with the Second Lebanon War and then the 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza. It seemed to me that Israel would suffer if we bombed it, because analysts would point out that Israel had acted against the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981 but had become paralyzed when it came to Syria. Such an analysis might embolden Iran and Hamas, a development that would be greatly against American interests. Moreover, hostile reactions in the Islamic world against the bombing strike might hurt us at a time when we were fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq—another argument for letting Israel do the job. (I did not think there would be any such reactions, but this was an argument worth deploying in our internal debate.)

Secretaries Gates and Rice argued strenuously for the diplomatic option. Gates also argued for preventing Israel from bombing the reactor and urged putting the whole relationship between the United States and Israel on the line. His language recalled the “agonizing reappraisal” of relations Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, had threatened for Europe in 1953 if the Europeans failed to take certain defense measures: They simply had to do what we demanded or there would be hell to pay.

I thought I understood why Gates did not want the United States to bomb Syria: America was a steward of wars in two Islamic countries already, so striking a third one seemed terribly unattractive to him. Why he was almost equally insistent that we prevent Israel from bombing it was never comprehensible to me, nor was Rice's similar position. It seemed clear to me that if we could not prevent Syria from undertaking a nuclear-weapons program, our entire position in the Middle East would be weakened, just as it was being weakened by our inability to stop the Iranian program. If there were too many risks and potential complications from striking Syria ourselves, we should not only allow but encourage Israel to do it; a Syrian nuclear program in addition to Iran's should be flatly unacceptable to the United States.

I tried to think my way through Rice's reasoning, but came up with only one theory. She had simultaneously been expressing opposition to a new program of increased military aid to Israel. This indicated to me that she had an underlying strategy: She did not want Israel feeling stronger. Rather, she wanted Israel, and especially Prime Minister Olmert, to feel more dependent on the United States. That way she would be able to push forward with plans for an international conference on Israeli-Palestinian issues and for final-status talks leading to the creation of a Palestinian state before the end of the second Bush term.

I hoped this was not her intention, because it seemed to me that such designs were sure to fail. An Israel that was facing Hamas in Gaza and now two hostile nuclear programs, in Iran and just across the border in Syria, would never take the risks she was asking it to take. I thought we had learned that lesson with Ariel Sharon as Bill Clinton had learned it with Yitzhak Rabin: Wrap your arms around Israel if you want it to take more risks, so it feels more secure, not less.

The arguments for going to the IAEA and UN seemed so flimsy to me, despite the length and detail of the planning memos and scenarios to which they gave rise, that I did not much worry about them. Who could believe these organizations would act effectively? Who could believe we would not be sitting there five years later entangled in the same diplomatic dance over the Syrian program that we were in with respect to Iran?

In the end, our near-perfect policy process produced the wrong result. At a final session in the gracious Yellow Oval Room at the Residence, Bush came down on Rice's side. We would go to Vienna, to the IAEA; he would call Olmert and tell him what the decision was. I was astounded and realized I had underestimated Rice's influence even after all this time. The president had gone with Condi.

I tried to figure this one out and could not. Perhaps it was the same worry that Gates had about making another American military strike in the Islamic world. But that would not explain why he bought the IAEA/UN strategy lock, stock, and barrel; instead, he could have said, “Let the Israelis do what they want; let's just tell them we will not do it.” Years later I asked him if he thought he had been wrong; he said no. It was then, and is still,

baffling. In his memoir, Bush explains one key consideration: The CIA told him it had “high confidence” that the facility in Syria was a nuclear reactor but “low confidence” that Syria had a nuclear-weapons program, because it could not locate the other components of the program. The president thought that the “low confidence” judgment would leak, as it surely would have, and the United States would have been attacked for conducting the bombing raid despite the “low confidence” report. That is a reasonable argument, but it explains only why we did not bomb—it does not explain why he urged the Israelis not to do so.

On July 10, I gave Hadley a memo explaining my views on where we stood with the Israelis. First, we were on the verge of telling the Israelis that we had considered which of us should act against the reactor and had decided that neither of us should use force. Moreover, we were going to say we would pressure them not to do so even if they disagreed. And we would be saying all this after Hamas had just taken over Gaza (which it did, in a coup against the Palestinian Authority, in June 2007). Hezbollah was back fully rearmed in Lebanon despite all those UN Security Council resolutions we had told the Israelis would work. Iran was moving toward nuclear capability. Syria was building a reactor that could only be part of a nuclear-weapons program.

It also looked as if we would be telling them we were about to call for an international meeting on the Palestinians that Israelis did not want and that they feared—and would be doing so in a presidential speech that talked about negotiations for Palestinian statehood “soon” (the word was in the speech drafts). Such a big international conference was the State Department’s answer to unsticking a “peace process” that was stuck.

The editorial comment from our friends on the right, I told Hadley, will be that we have taken leave of our senses: Hamas takes over Gaza, Syria and Iran build nukes, and we are handing things over to the UN and then pushing final-status talks? I still did not think there was a need for any presidential speech, but if there were to be one, I wrote that it should be sober about the situation and supportive of the new Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad.

At that point, Fayyad had been prime minister for about a month, and already the PA was changing. It now had a serious, talented, incorruptible executive at the top of the government. This had never been tried before. The least we could do was to back him, firmly and fully, and not spend all our political capital on great conferences. It was, as I recall it, a terrific memo, yet like all the wonderful memos about the Syrian reactor, it had no impact whatsoever. On July 16, the speech that Condi had sought was given. “Bush Calls for Middle East Peace Conference,” the headlines read.

Three days earlier, on July 13, President Bush had called Prime Minister Olmert from his desk in the Oval Office and explained his view. I have gone over this in great detail, Bush explained on the secure phone to the Israeli prime minister, looking at every possible scenario and its likely aftermath. We have looked at overt and covert options, and I have made a decision. We are not going to take the military path; we are instead going to the UN. Bush recounts in his memoir that he told Olmert, “I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it’s a weapons program” and that “I had decided on the diplomatic option backed by the threat of force.” We will announce this approach soon, Bush said on the secure line, and we will then launch a major diplomatic campaign, starting at the IAEA and then the UN Security Council. And of course a military option always remains available down the line.

I wondered how Olmert would react and believed I could predict his response: He would say, “Wait, give me some time to think about this, to consult my team, to reflect, and I will call you tomorrow.” I was quite wrong. He reacted immediately and forcefully. George, he said, this leaves me surprised and disappointed. And I cannot accept it. We told you from the first day, when Dagan came to Washington, and I’ve told you since then whenever we discussed it, that the reactor had to go away. Israel cannot live with a Syrian nuclear reactor; we will not accept it. It would change the entire region and our national security cannot accept it. You are telling me you will not act; so, we will act. The timing is another matter, and we will not do anything precipitous.

This is not the account President Bush gives in his memoir, in which he writes that Olmert initially said, “George, I’m asking you to bomb the compound.” Someday transcripts of their conversation will be available, but Bush’s recollection does not comport with mine.

After that conversation, there was a nearly two-month gap, from July 13 to September 6. We now know the time was filled with Israeli military calculations—watching the weather and Syrian movements on the ground—with the aim of being sure that Israel could act before the reactor went “critical” or “hot.” We knew the Israelis would strike sooner or later. They acted, in the end, when a leak about the reactor’s existence was imminent and Syria might then have gotten notice that Israel knew of its existence. That would have given Assad time to put civilians or nuclear fuel near the site. The Israelis did not seek, nor did they get, a green or red light from us. Nor did they announce their timing in advance; they told us as they were blowing up the site. Olmert called the president on September 6 with the news.

As I had sat in the Oval Office on July 13, listening to his conversation with Olmert, I had wondered how the president would react to the Israeli action. With anger? Or more pressure? None of it. He heard Olmert out calmly and acknowledged that Israel had a right to protect its national security. After hanging up, the president said something like “that guy has guts,” in an admiring tone. The incident was over; the differences over al-Kibar would obviously not affect Bush’s relationship with Olmert or his view of Israel.

So quickly did he accept the Olmert decision that I wondered then, and do still, if the president did not at some level anticipate and desire this result. He had sided with Condi and shown that she was still in charge of Middle East policy, but her “take it to the UN” plan had been blown up along with the reactor. He did not seem very regretful. What is more, he instructed us all to abandon the diplomatic plans and maintain absolute silence, ensuring that Israel could carry out its plan.

The Israeli assessment of Syria’s likely reaction was correct. The Israelis believed that if they and we spoke about the strike, Assad might be forced to react to this humiliation by trying to attack Israel. If, however, we all shut up, he might do nothing—nothing at all. He might try to hide the fact that anything had happened. And with every day that passed, the possibility that he would acknowledge the event and fight back diminished. That had been the Israeli theory, and the Israelis knew their man. We maintained silence and so did Israel—no leaks. As the weeks went by, the chances of an Israeli-Syrian confrontation grew slim and then disappeared. Syria has never admitted that there was a reactor at the site. Soon after the bombing, the Syrians bulldozed the reactor site, but the only way they could be sure their lies about it were not contradicted was to prevent a full examination. When a 2008 site visit by IAEA inspectors found some uranium traces, Syria made sure never to permit a return visit.

Two final points are worth noting. First, in May 2008, Turkish-mediated peace talks between Israel and Syria were publicly announced in Istanbul. The discussions had begun secretly in February 2007, and obviously had continued after the Israeli strike on al-Kibar. It would appear that the strike on al-Kibar made the Syrians more, not less, desirous of talking to the Israelis because it made them afraid of Israeli power. It also made them more afraid of American power until we undermined our own position, which is the second point.

A very well-placed Arab diplomat later told us that the strike had left Assad deeply worried as to what was coming next. He had turned Syria into the main transit route for jihadis going to Iraq to kill American soldiers. From Libya or Indonesia, Pakistan or Egypt, they would fly to Damascus International Airport and be shepherded into Iraq. Assad was afraid that on the heels of the Israeli strike would come American action to punish him for all this involvement. But just weeks later, Assad received his invitation to send a Syrian delegation to that big international confab of Condi’s, the Annapolis Conference, and according to the Arab envoy, Assad relaxed immediately; he knew he would be OK. I had not wanted Syria invited to Annapolis because of its involvement in killing Americans in Iraq, but Condi had wanted complete Arab representation as a sign that comprehensive peace might be possible. It was only years later that I learned that Assad had instead

interpreted the invitation just as I had: as a sign that the United States would not seriously threaten or punish him for what Syria was doing in Iraq.

Since the day the Israelis struck the Syrian reactor in September 2007, much has changed in the neighborhood: Assad faces a civil war he cannot win, the “Arab Spring” has replaced Hosni Mubarak with a Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, and Israel has now fought two wars with the Hamas statelet in Gaza, in December 2008/January 2009 and in November 2012. Yet there are three lessons from this incident that still bear noting.

First, good “process” and good policy are related but distinct. In the end what counts is output, not input: the foreign policy we adopt, not the proposals that are advanced. And that output depends, when it comes to foreign policy, mostly on one man: the president. That’s the second lesson. Advisers advise; the president decides. All the books about how rival bureaucracies or powerful lobbies determine policy are off the mark; the simpler and truer conclusion is that at any given moment our foreign policy reflects the views of the president.

Finally, this incident is a reminder that there is no substitute for military strength and the will to use it. Think of how much more dangerous to the entire region the Syrian civil war would be today if Assad had a nuclear reactor, and even perhaps nuclear weapons, in hand. Israel was right to bomb that reactor before construction was completed, and President Bush was right to support its decision to do so. Israel was also right in rejecting fears that the incident would lead to a larger war and in believing that it, and the United States, would be better off after this assertion of leadership and determination. That lesson must be on the minds of Israeli, and American, leaders in 2013.

[About the Author](#)

[Elliott Abrams](#) is a senior fellow in Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. This article is taken from his new book, just published by Cambridge University Press, [Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#), a memoir of his service at the National Security Council from 2001 to 2009.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4348292,00.html>

Report: Syrian rebels take over Al-Kibar nuclear facility

Roi Kais

Latest Update: 02.23.13, 06:20 / Israel News

According to Syrian opposition sources, the Free Syrian Army has taken over a nuclear facility in Al-Kibar, the Al-Jazeera network reported.

According to foreign media reports, the Al-Kibar facility was reportedly struck by Israel in 2007.

The rebels released a video, in which they are seen in a base storing missiles, most likely scud missiles.



The rebels in a scud-missile base

[deletia]

Syrian rebels say willing to work with IAEA

Roi Kais

Published: 02.24.13, 10:20

A spokesman for the Free Syria Army hinted Sunday [2013-02-24] that the rebels would be willing to allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors into the Al-Kibar nuclear facility, which they seized last week.

The Al-Kibar facility, according to foreign media reports, was nearly leveled by a 2007 air strike, presumably launched by Israel.

"We're willing to cooperate with the IAEA if our conditions are met," the FSA said in a statement.

The London-based Arab newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat further quoted a commander of one of the rebel brigades as saying that the rebels would be willing to lend the IAEA their cooperation in investigating the site, "As long as the revolution is protected."

He added that the FSA has set up a special security parameter around Al-Kibar, to protect it.

The IAEA has never been allowed to visit the suspected nuclear site.

The spokesman said that an FSA officer has been made the liaison to the UN agency and will present it with the rebels' demands, which he said were "Primarily political, technical and logistical, the kind that mean to serve the revolution's intelligence's needs."

He further confirmed earlier reports of the facility's takeover, saying that the rebels found it empty. He refused to tell the newspaper whether anything was found on the premises to suggest that the facility was used for nuclear work.

"Those details will be given only to the IAEA," he said.

[deletia]

IAEA has no contacts with Syrian opposition on Al-Kibar site - Amano

04/03/2013 | 10:28 PM

VIENNA, March 4 (KUNA) -- Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano said Monday the agency has so far no contacts with the Syrian opposition forces who captured Al-Kibar site in the eastern Deir Al-Zor Governorate recently.

There are sticking issues related to the alleged nuclear site which was bounded by the Israeli warplanes on September 6, 2007, Amano told reporters here after the IAEA Board of Governors began its first meeting of the year.

"As far as the implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic is concerned, I renew my call to Syria to cooperate fully with us in connection with unresolved issues related to the Deir Al-Zor site and other locations," he said.

The rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) claimed control over the site on February 24 after fierce fighting against the regular troops.

Syrian opposition captures ballistic missile facility

By Doug Richardson

3/5/2013

The Syrian opposition has captured what appears to be a ballistic-missile facility equipped with fixed-site launchers for 'Scud'-type ballistic missiles. Located at Al Kibar, often referred to as Deir Az-Zor, it takes the form of a hanger-like building erected on the site thought to have been formerly used by a Syrian nuclear facility. In September 2007 the latter was destroyed by an Israeli air strike, and the shattered building was subsequently razed to its foundations by the Syrians.

In February 2009, the New York Times reported that Ibrahim Othman, the head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission, had told a closed technical meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna that a missile facility had been constructed on the site.

The recent capture of the Al Kibar site has been credited to the Ja'far al-Tayyar brigade and the al-Nusra front. Ja'far at-Tayyar is an alternative name for Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, son of Abu Talib ibn 'Abdul Muttalib, the uncle of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Poor-quality video, probably taken using cellphones, shows that the building now present on the Al Kibar site houses a number of fixed launchers for missiles.

192 of 476 words



Iran-North Korea-Syria Ballistic Missile and Nuclear Cooperation

Paul K. Kerr

Analyst in Nonproliferation

Mary Beth D. Nikitin

Specialist in Nonproliferation

Steven A. Hildreth

Specialist in Missile Defense

April 16, 2014

Congressional Research Service

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CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

[EXCERPTS]

North Korea and Syria²⁷

North Korea assisted Syria with building a nuclear reactor that may have been part of a Syrian nuclear weapons program, according to U.S. official accounts.²⁸ Both the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) assessed that Damascus was building a nuclear reactor; Israel destroyed the facility in a September 2007 air strike.²⁹ According to a May 2011 IAEA report, the agency assessed that the destroyed Syrian structure “was very likely a nuclear reactor,” a claim Syria denied.³⁰ The IC assessed that the reactor’s purpose was to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons, a senior intelligence official stated during an April 2008 briefing, but added that the IC had “low confidence” in this judgment.³¹ According to a 2013 State Department report, the United States assessed that “the reactor’s intended purpose” was to produce plutonium, rather than to conduct research or produce electricity, “because the reactor was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.”³²

²⁷ In addition to its dealings with Syria, North Korea was also a probable supplier to Libya’s nuclear weapons program. According to a February 2013 Defense Department report, “North Korea provided Libya with uranium hexafluoride,” which is the material fed into the uranium enrichment process. (*Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea*, February 15, 2013). Conveying slightly less certainty about the matter, a September 2011 International Atomic Energy Agency report stated that “it is very likely that” natural uranium hexafluoride contained in a cylinder that Libya received in 2001 via the Khan network “originated in” North Korea (*Application of Safeguards in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*, GOV/2011/53-GC(55)/24), September 2, 2011).

²⁸ Although there have been press reports regarding nuclear cooperation between Syria and Iran, they are not corroborated by official U.S. open-source assessments. See, for example, Erich Follath and Holger Stark, “The Story of ‘Operation Orchard’: How Israel Destroyed Syria’s Al Kibar Nuclear Reactor,” *Der Spiegel*, February 11, 2009; and Hans Rühle, “How Iran Pushed Forward Syria’s Nuclear Armament; Background of the Israeli Action Against the Reactor of Al-Kibar,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 19, 2009.

²⁹ Richard Cheney, Vice President during the George W. Bush Administration, wrote in 2011 that Israel destroyed the reactor. (Dick Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* [New York: Threshold Editions], 2011, p. 472.) See also George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishing), 2010, p. 422; and Elliott Abrams, “Bombing the Syrian Reactor: The Untold Story,” *Commentary*, February 2013.

³⁰ *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic*, GOV 2011/30 May 24, 2011. The IAEA also wants information about “three other locations allegedly functionally related” to the reactor site, the May 2011 report said. According to an August 2012 IAEA report, the IAEA “remains unable to provide any assessment concerning” these sites’ “nature or operational status.” (*Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic*, GOV 2012/42, August 30, 2012). Syria has not since complied with the board’s request.

³¹ “Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria’s Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea’s Involvement,” April 24, 2008.

³² *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments*, Department of State, July 2013.

Syria was constructing the reactor with “North Korean assistance,” the same 2013 report said.³³ A senior U.S. intelligence official stated during the 2008 briefing that “North Korea has assisted Syria with this reactor,” citing similarities between the Syrian reactor and the North Korean reactor that has produced plutonium for that country’s nuclear weapons program.³⁴ The official also cited the “involvement of nuclear-related North Koreans in a project somewhere in the area,” as well as “evidence of cargo being transferred from North Korea, most likely to [the] reactor site, in 2006.” More recently, a February 2014 Defense Department report stated that North Korea “provided Syria with nuclear reactor technology until 2007.”³⁵

It is worth noting that an IAEA investigation discovered Syrian uranium conversion activities that the government had failed to declare to the IAEA. Uranium conversion is the process by which uranium hexafluoride (the feedstock for centrifuges) is produced. However, the IAEA has apparently resolved its concerns regarding these activities.³⁶

Iran and North Korea

U.S. intelligence officials have expressed concern that North Korea might export its nuclear technology or fissile material. According to testimony from DNI Clapper before Congress in February 2012, North Korea’s export of “ballistic missiles and associated materials,” as well as its assistance to Syria’s nuclear reactor, “illustrate the reach of the North’s proliferation activities.” The IC “remain[s] alert to the possibility that North Korea might again export nuclear technology,” he added.³⁷

³³ *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea*, 2013.

³⁴ “Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria’s Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea’s Involvement,” April 24, 2008.

³⁵ *Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea*, 2014.

³⁶ GOV 2011/30.

³⁷ Clapper, *Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, Senate Committee on Armed Services, February 16, 2012.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4517536,00.html>

Ex-atomic agency chief: Netanyahu using scare tactics on Iran nuclear program

Ronen Bergman

Published: 05.08.14, 11:53

[EXERPTS]

Brigadier General (res.) Uzi Eilam, who for a decade headed the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, does not believe that Tehran is even close to having a bomb, if that is even what it really aspires to.

Uzi Eilam comes from the heart of Israel's secret security mechanisms, having served in senior roles in the defense establishment that culminated in a decade as the head of the atomic agency.

"The statements and threats made regarding an attack on Iran did not help," Eilam says. "We cannot lead the charge on this front. As far as the project goes, Iran's nuclear facilities are scattered and buried under tons of earth, concrete and steel. **This would require more than one strike, such as on the nuclear reactors in Iraq and Syria.** A strike on Iran's nuclear facilities would in effect be the opening salvo in all-out war."

Russia and West at odds over Syria at U.N. nuclear meeting

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Wed Sep 17, 2014 6:38am EDT

(Reuters) - Russia is pushing for the issue of Syria's alleged past nuclear activities to be removed from the agenda of the U.N. atomic agency's board, diplomats said on Wednesday.

Western members of the 35-nation board of the International Atomic Energy Agency are against the Russian initiative as they believe Damascus should be kept under pressure to cooperate with the IAEA's long-stalled inquiry, the diplomats said.

As in previous meetings over the last six years, Syria will be debated by the IAEA board later this week during a quarterly meeting of the governing body, even though there has been little movement on the file since 2011.

The IAEA has long sought to visit a Syrian desert site U.S. intelligence reports say was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor geared to making plutonium for nuclear bombs, before Israel bombed it in 2007.

Syria has said the site at Deir al-Zor in its east was a conventional military base but the IAEA concluded in 2011 that it was "very likely" to have been a reactor that should have been declared to its anti-proliferation inspectors.

IAEA inspectors examined the site in mid-2008 but Syrian authorities have barred them access since. In February last year, opposition sources in eastern Syria said rebels had captured the destroyed site near the Euphrates River.

The IAEA has also been requesting information about three other sites that may have been linked to Deir al-Zor.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said on Monday that his agency remained "unable to provide any assessment concerning the nature, or operational status" of those locations.

"I urge Syria to cooperate fully with the agency in connection with all unresolved issues," he told the board.

Diplomats said Russia had circulated a proposed decision by the board -- whose members also include the United States, China, Britain and others -- asking Amano not to include the issue in the agenda of future meetings, without elaborating.

It was unclear whether Russia would request a vote on the matter. Russian diplomats were not available for comment.

Russia, a veto-wielding permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, has given President Bashar al-Assad crucial backing in Syria's civil war, which has killed more than 200,000 people.

One Western diplomat said Syria still had questions to answer and it was not yet time to take it off the agenda.

Western and Israeli security experts in early 2013 said they suspected that Syria may have tonnes of unenriched uranium in storage and that any such stockpile could potentially be of interest to its ally Iran, which denies Western allegations that it is seeking a nuclear weapons capability.

Even if Syria did have such a stockpile, it would not be usable for nuclear weapons in its present form.

(Editing by Janet Lawrence)

Syrian nuclear activities divide global powers at UN atomic meeting

[ca. 2014-09-19]

[EXCERPTS]

Western states defeated a Russian proposal on Friday to remove Syria's alleged past nuclear activities from the agenda of meetings of the UN atomic agency, diplomats said.

But in a vote that highlighted how polarizing the global political debate has become, China supported Russia's initiative while only about half of the nations on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board - 17 out of 35 - voted against.

Western diplomats argued that Damascus should be kept under pressure to cooperate with the IAEA's long-stalled inquiry, even though this has hardly advanced in the last three years as the country descended into bloodshed.

US envoy Laura Kennedy told the meeting ahead of the vote that the Russian proposal if adopted "would threaten the credibility" of the IAEA's board of governors.

Russia, a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council, has given Syrian President Bashar Assad crucial backing during the civil war, which has killed more than 200,000 people.

Apart from China, Venezuela was the only other country which backed Russia while most other countries abstained. One representative was absent from the vote, a diplomat said.

The Syrian case has been on the agenda of the IAEA board's quarterly meetings over the last six years, and Washington believes it should remain in the "focus of the agency," Kennedy said.

[deletia]

The IAEA has also been requesting information about three other sites that may have been linked to Deir al-Zor.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said on Monday the agency remained "unable to provide any assessment concerning the nature, or operational status" of those locations.

"I urge Syria to cooperate fully with the agency in connection with all unresolved issues," he told the board.

Diplomats said Russia had circulated a proposed decision by the board - whose members also include Britain and France - asking Amano not to include the issue in the agenda of future meetings, without elaborating.

[deletia]

Western and Israeli security experts in early 2013 said they suspected that Syria may have tons of unenriched uranium in storage. Even if Syria did have such a stockpile of material that can be used to fuel research reactors it would not be usable for nuclear weapons in its present form.

Israel's IAEA envoy, Merav Zafary-Odiz, told the board that the "whereabouts of the nuclear fuel, which was supposed to be introduced to the nuclear reactor that Syria built ... is just one example to the many open questions that remain in relation to the Syrian file."

<http://vienna.usmission.gov/151126syria.html>



IAEA Board of Governors Meeting

November 26-27, 2015

Agenda Item 4

Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the

Syrian Arab Republic

U.S. Statement

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

The United States thanks the Director General for his remarks today and for his ongoing commitment to addressing the important issue of Syria's non-compliance with its safeguards agreement, which remains as urgent today as when it was first raised to the Board's attention. We note that Syria has taken no actions to address this non-compliance.

This inaction has been the standard since this Board found Syria to be in noncompliance with its NPT safeguards agreement more than four years ago. At that time, this Board called on Syria to remedy urgently its noncompliance, to provide the Agency with access to all information, sites, materials, and persons necessary to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program, and to sign and bring into force an Additional Protocol. Unfortunately, the Asad regime has taken no steps since that Board finding, and in fact has taken no steps in over seven years to remedy its noncompliance or to address the international community's concerns regarding the nature and scope of its nuclear program. Likewise, Syria's refusal to sign and implement the Additional Protocol denies the Agency the necessary tools to provide assurances regarding the completeness and accuracy of its declarations.

The United States takes note of the recent physical inventory verification of the Syrian miniature neutron source reaction (MNSR), and commends the Agency's inspectors for undertaking this activity under difficult security arrangements. However, we underscore that this work is a normal inspection of a declared facility in Syria, a routine action required by Syria's safeguards agreement, and does not at all address Syria's ongoing non-compliance, nor its continued failure to cooperate with the IAEA to remedy that non-compliance.

To do so, Syria must engage substantively with the Agency without further delay, and provide access to all relevant locations, materials, and persons that it retains reasonable access to, including the three sites with a potentially functional relationship to the reactor at Dair Alzour. Until Syria fully cooperates to resolve the international community's concerns, the Board must remain seized of this matter, and should be prepared to consider further action if necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/introductory-statement-to-the-board-of-governors>

Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors *[by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano]*

Vienna, Austria

07 March 2016

[EXCERPT]

Nuclear Verification

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

As far as implementation of safeguards in the Syrian Arab Republic is concerned, there have been no new developments since my last report to the Board. I renew my call to Syria to cooperate fully with us in connection with unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and other locations.

Ex-CIA director: I was sure if we didn't strike Syria's nuclear reactor, Israel would

Ronen Bergman|Published: 30.12.16 , 23:50

Gen. Michael Hayden provides an inside look into the attack that stopped Assad's nuclear ambitions in their tracks. From that fateful moment when Meir Dagan entered his office with photos of the reactor, through the clash between the Mossad director and the CIA's analysts, who feared an all-out-war with Syria, to the secret meeting at Bush's residence in which Hayden announced: 'Mr. President, the Syrians are building a nuclear reactor, and it is part of a weapons program.'

"It was one of the most candid conversations I've ever had with him," says Gen. Michael Hayden as he recounts that fateful meeting with Mossad director Meir Dagan on the seventh floor of the United States Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

It was in April 2007, at the office of General Hayden, the director of the CIA at the time. When Hayden with his broad smile talks about a "candid conversation," he means one between two people who have known each other for many years and had great respect for one another. But at least in that conversation, there was total disagreement between them.

That charged conversation at Langley revolved around one question: "How can this thing, which undoubtedly endangers the peace in the region, be destroyed without starting an all-out war in the Middle East?"

"This thing" was the Syrian nuclear reactor that was secretly being built at the time in Deir ez-Zor, not far from the Euphrates River.

Several months earlier, Hayden recounts, at that very same desk, the late Mossad director showed Hayden photos of that secret site, the first the Mossad was able to obtain. Since then, the two nations' intelligence communities have mounted a worldwide covert intelligence gathering operation in an effort to understand what exactly was happening in Deir ez-Zor and at what stage of the construction was the reactor.

The conclusion the two intelligence communities reached, according to Hayden, were more or less the same: North Korea was building a nuclear reactor in Syria that was similar to the one in its capital of Pyongyang, and this clandestine project could only have one objective: developing nuclear weapons.

But the two intelligence chiefs were of different minds regarding one question: What should their countries do with that information?

Hayden says that Meir Dagan tried to convince him to walk into the Oval Office and convince President Bush to send a squadron of B2 stealth bombers to destroy the reactor. Hayden, who was basing his position on what he heard from the CIA's expert analysts, was sure that if the US did that, Assad would launch an all-out-war.

"In hindsight," Hayden says, "it turns out Meir was right to think Assad would actually show restraint and not retaliate, and my analysts were wrong."

What happened next is no secret. In September 2007, Israel mounted an airstrike on the Syrian reactor and destroyed it.

Despite the fact nine years have passed and Syria is currently being torn by a civil war, this complex operation, which remains shrouded in mystery, still ignites the imagination of journalists from across the globe, who continue publishing contradictory reports about the strike.

I met Hayden recently at his corner office, overlooking Washington, DC's beautiful views, at Chertoff Group, one of the biggest security consultancies in the US, of which he is a partner.

The meeting was in honor of the release of his autobiography, “Playing to the Edge,” which includes a chapter on the discovery and bombing of the reactor. Hayden agreed to share his fascinating testimony of the Syrian reactor affair—from the moment Dagan showed up in his office with the implicating photos, through the arguments at the top echelons of Israeli and American leaderships, to the decisive meeting at the White House, the attack on the reactor, and the series of events that followed it both in the Middle East and in Washington.

Hayden recounted every moment of one of the most dramatic events of that time, with President Bush and Prime Minister Olmert at the helm and Hayden and Dagan as the senior intelligence officers at their side.

On the agenda: Syria, an enemy state to Israel with close ties to Iran and Hezbollah, which was working to obtain a nuclear bomb that would change the balance of power in the Middle East.

The stakes: Syria’s missile arsenal includes chemical warheads that cover the entire Israeli territory. American analysts warned that bombing this reactor could lead to a war whose outcome was unknown. On the other hand, Dagan makes it absolutely clear: “Israel cannot accept a situation in which an enemy state is armed with nuclear weapons.”

And now, a fateful decision had to be made that could alter the course of history.

The smoking gun, or: The Syrian ‘Godfather’ allegory

In 1991, then-Syrian President Hafez Assad made a military acquisition alliance with the dictatorial regime in North Korea. He purchased missiles, as well as a lot of knowledge on how to produce more advanced missiles. He viewed this arsenal as a counterbalance to nuclear weapons he believed Israel had. For many years, the Israeli intelligence community believed that the Syrian leadership thought its chemical weapons were enough to maintain the balance of power against Israel and that Damascus was not trying to obtain nuclear weapons.

But what Israel did not know was that near the end of the 1990s, something changed for the Syrian president. It might have had something to do with the tragedy that befell him when his beloved elder son and heir, Bassel, was killed in a car accident. Since his second son, Maher, was considered hot-headed (if not worse than that), Assad senior was left with only one option for heir: His third son, Bashar, who was in London at the time, doing his postgraduate degree in ophthalmology.

Seen as the more absent-minded, timid daydreamer among his brothers, Bashar was nevertheless summoned from London by his father Hafez who, until his death in June 2000, trained his son to be the next leader of Syria.

At the time—it’s unclear on whose initiative—the possibility arose for Assad senior to buy a nuclear reactor from the North Koreans that would create military-grade plutonium to be used in building a nuclear bomb. Assad eventually signed a contract with North Korea to build that reactor, but construction was done at a relatively slow pace.

“It’s quite possible,” Hayden says, “that the reason he started this project was because he was worried his son was too weak and not really fit to lead Syria after his death, and he sought to leave Bashar with a powerful weapon that would ensure his survival.”

Bashar Assad tied his fate to Iran and Hezbollah. His representative in this alliance, the “Radical Front” as it is referred to by the IDF’s Military Intelligence Directorate’s Research Division, was a mysterious man called Gen. Muhammad Suleiman. He was so mysterious that his name and appearance remained a secret until his death, despite the fact he was a general. Suleiman was an engineering graduate of Damascus University, underwent countless of technology and military training courses in the Soviet Union, and was a man whose great talent was surpassed only by his extremism.

The ties to Iran and Hezbollah, Syria’s involvement in terror activity and in drug trade, and its continued presence in Lebanon among other reasons, have all led the American intelligence community to underestimate the new Syrian president.

In the argument that would take place several years later between Hayden and Dagan over what should be done about the Syrian reactor, the CIA director told his Mossad counterpart that the Assad family reminded him of the Corleone family from Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*.

"There is no doubt the Assads, along with the Makhloufs who are tied to them in bonds of marriage and partnerships, were just as busy with crime and committing particularly cruel acts as they were with ruling over Syria," Hayden told Dagan.

Just like in *The Godfather*, the Assad family also lost its older son, the heir apparent. In *The Godfather*, that son is Sonny, who in the movie is murdered by assassins.

"But when Sonny was rubbed out, the Don had the gifted Michael to replace him. When Basel Assad was killed in an accident, Hafez had to settle for the one who represented Fredo, the weak and lazy brother, the one no one had ever imagined would ever get to a position of power—Bashar."

Assad junior was known in the CIA as a "serial miscalculator." Hayden reveals that "we tried to cooperate with him against the terrorists who were fighting us in Iraq, but almost without success. The Syrians looked the other way when this activity crossed into their territory."

Assad junior may have been a failed serial gambler, but on one thing he took no chances: His fear of just how much the Mossad and the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate knew about what was going on inside his country. Bashar became truly obsessed with his loathing—and admiration—to the Israeli intelligence community. He was convinced that any phone call or digital message in Syria was being intercepted by Israeli intelligence. "He truly believed that every time Mustafa was calling Mohammad, Moishe'le was listening in," says a senior intelligence officer in the IDF's elite 8200 unit with a smile.

To evade the Israeli intelligence community's watchful eye, General Suleiman carried out his special clandestine missions through a bureaucratic and operational body, which was completely separated and isolated from the rest of the Syrian defense establishment. Assad authorized Suleiman to keep knowledge of the existence and operations of this body even from the most senior military figures in Syria, including the army's chief of staff and the defense minister. When Israel discovered this activity—quite late in the game—officials in the Military Intelligence Directorate would dub it "General Suleiman's Shadow Army."

Suleiman instructed his men to send any important message, any plan, only in envelopes sealed with wax, using a network of messengers on motorcycles. It worked. Suleiman's operations were kept completely hidden from the Israeli intelligence community despite the great resources invested to ensure it missed nothing important.

General Suleiman kept the greatest secret of all hidden in Deir ez-Zor, in northeastern Syria. There, at an isolated and faraway area, construction was underway on the nuclear reactor the Syrians bought from North Korea with the help of Iranian funds (intelligence officials both in Israel and the US are still split on whether or not Iran knew what the money it was giving Syria was being used for).

Such a reactor could produce plutonium for a nuclear bomb, which the young Assad believed would help Syria reach strategic equality with Israel. The nuclear reactor project was so clandestine and compartmentalized that even Syrian Chief of Staff Ali Habib Mahmud didn't know anything about it. When he heard that Israel attacked a facility in the area, he thought they had got the wrong address.

For many years, Israel had no idea what was going on in the isolated compound in Deir ez-Zor. The fact Israel didn't know the reactor was being built "is a failure akin to that of the Yom Kippur War (the surprise attack in October 1973) for the Israeli intelligence community," one of the former intelligence heads told me.

Hayden says that already in 2001, the CIA began to gather scattered, unverified and ambiguous information about nuclear ties between Syria and North Korea. It will be years before the real meaning of this information comes to light. Only after Dagan came to Hayden with the photos of the reactor.

In 2004, according to Hayden's notes, the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency—an agency in the US Defense Department whose primary mission is collecting, analyzing, and distributing geospatial intelligence—discovered the reactor site and marked it as “enigmatic,” but “we couldn't exactly tell what it was,” Hayden explains.

That year, the US National Security Agency intercepted a series of transmissions from the Deir ez-Zor area to North Korea, in a North Korean code the CIA was unable to break.

The turning point was when the Mossad was able to obtain photographs that the head of the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria, Ibrahim Othman, took with him on a trip to Europe. The German weekly *Der Spiegel* claimed the Mossad managed to get the photos from him in London, while the *New Yorker* reported it happened in Vienna.

Either way, the knowledge that Syria was at an advanced stage of its nuclear project and that Israel was oblivious to it hit the Israeli intelligence community hard.

“Meir came to me with this material (the photos taken from Othman's laptop),” recalled Ehud Olmert, “and it was like an earthquake. I realized that from now on everything would be different.”

The options on the table, or: Dagan's brilliant trick

According to few reports, the IDF's Military Intelligence Directorate and the Mossad launched a wide-scale operation to gather intelligence about the reactor, Suleiman, and his “Shadow Army.”

A report by David Makovsky in the *New Yorker* claimed that in June 2007, Olmert instructed to dispatch a special operations unit to within a mile of the reactor to gather soil, water and vegetation samples that would help determine whether the reactor had already gone hot and to conduct observations of the security at the facility.

At the same time, Olmert sent Dagan, along with his chief of staff Yoram Turbowicz and political advisor Shalom Turgemen, to Washington to brief Hayden and the White House.

By this time, when he rode the elevator up to the seventh floor of CIA HQ at Langley, he was already a familiar—and welcome—guest.

Dagan first met with Hayden in 2003, when the latter was leading the NSA. “He was to the point, an intelligence officer in every bone in his body, and he listened to what I proposed,” Dagan said. The result was very impressive and initiated an era of deep cooperation between the two agencies.

Thus it came to pass that Dagan, who lacked the niceties and polish of the American elites, and whose English was pretty basic, succeeded in establishing the closest ever mutual trust between the top echelons of the intelligence agencies of the two countries.

“I never felt being manipulated,” Hayden says of Dagan. “No, no. He was representing Israel, and he was representing Mossad, and he was representing Israeli policy. But I never had the impression that he was trying to mislead me for Israeli advantage.”

Dagan, according to Hayden, was “straightforward, plain spoken, bluntly honest, unpretentious, sincere and very knowledgeable.”

The former CIA chief also described the relationship between the two intelligence agencies: “We're big, we're rich, technologically sophisticated, and we're global,” while the Israelis are “small, focused, culturally and linguistically smart and relevant to the targets (Jihadist terrorism and attempts by Middle Eastern countries to develop weapons of mass destruction).”

When Hayden was named head of the CIA in 2005, he further deepened collaboration with the Mossad. Every time that Dagan came to visit, he brought with him sensitive information and suggestions—some of them quite imaginative—for joint operations.

But at that April meeting, not even the experienced Hayden anticipated the bombshell. “Dagan sat down, opened his briefcase and took out color copies of the pictures of the reactor at Deir ez-Zor.”

For an hour, Dagan “walked me through the intelligence” and wanted to know whether the CIA experts agreed with the Mossad’s analysis of the intelligence material.

Dagan, Hayden says, realized that with all due respect for the Mossad’s capabilities in Syria, his agency had almost no information about what was happening at the other end of the nuclear deal—North Korea. So he asked Hayden to take the information he had brought “and plug it into the CIA’s broader knowledge of North Korea.”

Incidentally, the fact Dagan was sharing the Israeli intelligence’s top secret with his American colleague surprised the CIA director, considering the “less-than-glamorous record of the American administration with keeping secrets,” Hayden says.

During the interview, Hayden wonders aloud whether that generosity might have had another reason, which Dagan did not state specifically. “He wanted me to influence American policy on this matter,” Hayden offers.

In other words, Dagan wanted the American intelligence community to tell the decision-makers at the White House that they share Israel’s factual assessment of the situation, which could have an effect on the kind of measures Israel was going to ask the US to take in light of this monumental development.

After that meeting, Dagan left the CIA headquarters and headed to the White House with Turbowicz and Turgemen to apprise Stephen Hadley, the then-US National Security Council chief, of the situation.

Back at Langley, Hayden was left with a group of his closest senior aides. “Meir never told me where they got the photos from,” Hayden recounts. “Our guess was that they downloaded them from the computer of a careless Syrian scientist. But none of that really mattered. What Meir showed me was pretty convincing. The question was only whether this was authentic material or a form of very sophisticated forgery.”

The first task Hayden gave his experts was to ascertain whether the photos had been doctored. Hayden did not suspect the Mossad of doctoring the photos, but because he did not know where Israel had obtained the photos from, he instructed his experts to make every effort to determine whether the photos were real.

Hayden’s experts had doubts concerning one of the photos Dagan had brought them. They zoomed in to closely examine the side of one of the trucks in the photo, and thought the writing on it might have been photoshopped. But the rest of the photos passed the strict examination and were found to be authentic. The CIA’s photo lab even constructed three-dimensional computerized models of the facility in Deir ez-Zor based on the photos and compared them to other photos. Everything matched exactly.

The day after his meeting with Dagan, Hayden was called to the White House for an urgent meeting. President Bush had already received a general update from Hadley on the matter. While the gathered officials waited for Bush to join them, Hayden turned to Vice President Dick Cheney, who has been claiming Syrian was trying to obtain nuclear weapons for a long time, and whispered in his ear: “You were right all along, Mr. Vice President.”

Hayden presented Bush with the photos he got from Dagan. “That was the very last thing he needed,” Hayden recounts, “having to take action in a region where any action could spark a war, with an ally that has the ability and the desire to work alone.”

President Bush already learned a sobering lesson when US intelligence agencies had told him that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, leading him into a long, bloody war in Iraq. He summed up the meeting with two clear-cut but rather contradictory orders: “Number one, be sure. Number two, this can’t leak.”

Hayden went back to Langley wondering how to corroborate the Israeli information without spreading the word about. “To be sure, you want to get more people involved, but that increases the risks of spilling the secret.”

Hayden joked with his close aides that if Assad learned that his reactor had been found out and that the Americans and Israelis were investigating the matter, he'd immediately get rid of all of the implicating evidence "and claim that this was a daycare center." After all, "the building itself," Hayden says, "looked from the air like a Walmart store."

But the head of the CIA was well aware that if the information does leak, the joke would be at his expense. In an attempt to reconcile the president's two orders, Hayden formed an inquiry team, in what was later described in a classified cable from Condoleezza Rice as "an intensive, months-long effort to confirm and corroborate the information Israel provided us on the reactor and to gather more details from our own sources and methods."

The conclusions of the team—which included experts from the Pentagon, the CIA and the NSA—were deeply troubling: "the facility is in fact a nuclear reactor of the same type North Korea built indigenously at its Yongbyon nuclear facility ... We have good reason to believe this reactor was not intended for peaceful purposes."

Hayden says he had formed a "red team" that was instructed to "build an alternative case as to why it's not a nuclear reactor." The team, made up of analysts who had not yet been "read in" on the intelligence regarding the Syrian reactor, received all of the data and intelligence, and after close examination and thorough investigation came back with the following conclusion: "If it isn't a nuclear reactor, it must be a fake nuclear reactor." In other words: It's a Syrian plot to make it appear as if they were covertly building a nuclear reactor. Of course, such a thing would be highly unlikely, and so the red team essentially confirmed the conclusion that what Syria was building in Deir ez-Zor was indeed a nuclear reactor.

In a meeting between Olmert and Bush, recounted by the president in his autobiography, the Israeli prime minister asked the Americans to bomb the Syrian reactor. When he returned home, Olmert reported to a small group in his cabinet that it was his understanding that Bush was going to bomb the reactor.

But during that time, a heated argument took place between Hayden and his analysts and Dagan and his men. The background to that argument was the murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri a year and a half earlier by Hezbollah assassins who were sent by Syria. The outcry from the international community and the immense pressure that Bush and then-French President Jacques Chirac put on Assad have led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

"Assad could not stand another embarrassment after the (2005) withdrawal from Lebanon," Hayden said. "Out of weakness, he would have to show his strength and retaliate with war."

Dagan took the exact opposite view: "You had to look at it from Assad's point of view," he said. "On the one hand, he had always wanted to reach strategic equality with Israel, and therefore get his hands on nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Bashar Assad always preferred not to confront us directly. Furthermore, if he went to war after the bombing, it would expose the existence of the nuclear installation—that he had built an atomic facility in violation of his signature on the NPT—which even the Russians, his allies, don't know about, and for sure would not be happy to know of it. If we were to attack covertly, and keep it totally under wraps without publicizing it and embarrassing him, Assad would not do anything."

Dagan's recommendation was to bomb posthaste, before the reactor becomes active and its destruction could cause radioactive pollution. Hayden says that Dagan was very firm in his stance: "Israel cannot accept a situation in which an enemy state is armed with nuclear weapons."

On the other hand, if war with Syria had broken out, it is safe to assume that while it would have ended in Israel's victory, this win would be costly: Thousands of victims and a significant change of the political situation in the region.

The dark prophecies of Hayden's analysts led to intense consultations at a series of forums in the American intelligence community, at the National Security Council, and at the White House.

"It was clear to us that a strictly diplomatic approach would not lead anywhere," Hayden says.

Theoretically, the Americans could make the existence of the reactor public and hand over the information they had gathered to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But the Americans realized that this would eventually lead to endless stalling by Assad, who would repeatedly postpone visits by the IAEA's inspectors to the reactor. The damage would be enormous: The entire world would realize the US was sitting on this information and failed to act decisively. Meanwhile, Assad would hide the evidence so "eventually, we would have looked completely pathetic," Hayden asserts.

Another possibility that was raised was a commando operation of a Delta Force—the Navy SEALs—or another American Special Forces unit. The advantage of such an operation is, of course, that it is low profile, doesn't point an accusatory finger at anyone, and might stop Syria from launching an all-out-war in retaliation. The downside is that Syria will probably blame the United States regardless, and that "it wasn't clear whether the force would be able to carry enough explosives to blow up the entire facility. And, of course," Hayden adds, "the danger the SEALs would be caught."

A third operation on the table: Bombarding the facility. "B2 stealth bombers that would take off from one of our bases in the Mediterranean or the Persian Gulf could reach the facility and destroy it," Hayden explains. "Syria's aerial defense was respectable, but nothing we couldn't handle."

But the American intelligence analysts believed that such a public attack risks an all-out-war breaking out. "The more we thought about it, the more we reached the conclusion a hybrid option was preferable: Diplomatic action that entails an ultimatum of military action," Hayden says.

The American intelligence community's recommendation was "To *démarche* the Syrians with a threat," to publish the incriminating photos in a special White House statement, and give the Syrians only a few days or weeks to dismantle the installation and to allow IAEA inspectors access to the site to ascertain that this had been done. If the Syrians refused—immediately follow up with an attack on the reactor.

"The weak point of this solution was that it gave Assad enough time to gather some of the 7,000 American citizens in Syria and take them hostage."

With these options, Hayden went into the boss's office. It was time to make a decision.

Meeting in the Yellow Oval Room, or: 'No Core, No War'

The crucial meeting took place at the White House. The matter was so secret that the meeting wasn't held in the West Wing, but on the second floor of the White House's residential area—in the Yellow Oval Room—to keep it out of the president's public schedule. The meeting included President Bush, his vice president, the defense and state secretaries, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the national security adviser, the heads of the American intelligence community, and others.

As the guests sank into the comfortable arm chairs, the staff served them iced tea and then left. Stephen Hadley turned to Hayden and asked him for the latest intelligence update.

"Mr. President," Hayden began, "I have an update that contains four main points. The first: it is a nuclear reactor; the second: the Syrians and North Koreans have been cooperating on nuclear matters for about a decade; the third: the North Koreans are the ones who built the facility in Deir ez-Zor; and the fourth: the facility is part of a (greater) plan to produce nuclear weapon.

"I imagined that after I said those things, everyone would think about the Iraq affair," Hayden remembers. That is why he quickly explained why the Syria case was different and why this time there was a very high degree of certainty that the facility is in fact a nuclear reactor.

Hayden then explained that the nuclear reactor was "an exact copy of the reactor in Yongbyon and that the Koreans were the only ones to build these reactors since they purloined the designs from the British in the 1960s."

At this point Hayden paused for a moment, allowing the gathered officials to take a deep breath, and continued with a statement just as dramatic: “But Mr. President, I was unable to locate the other parts of the Syrian nuclear weapon program: Not the reprocessing facility (chemically separating and recovering fissionable plutonium from irradiated nuclear fuel); nor the “weapons group” (of scientists and engineers building the bomb itself and its explosive mechanism). Therefore, Mr. President, there is only a low degree of certainty regarding these parts.”

During the silence that followed, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she wished she had such intelligence officers several years earlier, referring of course to the search for the Iraqi WMDs that were never found. Rice knew the danger posed by the existence of a nuclear reactor, but objected to an American attack against it. Vice President Cheney disagreed, arguing that the US must attack to send out a strong message to Syria, North Korea and Iran—that the United States would not tolerate such behavior.

Hayden said that one thing was clear to him, “that we kind of used up all of our preemptive attack chips. And besides, we stuck to the mantra that: No Core, No War (referring to an active nuclear core). I could not say with certainty that the Syrians didn’t have a weapons group or a reprocessing facility but neither I nor the Israelis had any proof those exist.”

President Bush, who was deeply entangled in two wars against Muslim nations, concluded the discussion with: “What Mike (Hayden) just told me is this is not imminent danger, and therefore, we will not do this.”

The option that was then raised—and was accepted by most of the officials present—was making an ultimatum to the Syrians. But the implementation of this plan depended on the agreement of the Israelis, who provided the US with the photos and information, to make this knowledge public. But Dagan would in no way allow that.

Despite reaching a dead end, Hayden remembers that “I was pretty comfortable that if we didn't strike the Syrian reactor, Israel would.”

Olmert, President Bush reveals in his memoir, was bitterly disappointed by the American decision not to strike. Many in Israel saw the American refusal to take military action as a sign that the US was not willing to take too great a risk upon itself to protect Israel, especially in the era that followed the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We can only rely on ourselves,” the Israelis said during internal discussions.

The strike

On the night between September 6 and 7, 2007, Israel Air Force warplanes bombed and completely destroyed the nuclear reactor under construction in Deir ez-Zor.

The Syrians suffered huge embarrassment as it became known that they were advancing a project that blatantly contradicted the Non-Proliferation Treaty they signed.

The great victor of this operation was Dagan, whose organization was the one to bring the information that exposed the Syrian project and also the one “who truly understood President Assad more than anyone else,” as Hayden put it.

At first, Syria refused to give the IAEA inspectors access the site of the bombed reactor. When it finally consented, following immense international pressure, to allow the inspectors to visit the site, it was months later, after General Suleiman and his men have had time to clear the site and remove any implicating evidence of nuclear development. Despite this, the inspectors found evidence of uranium and graphite and concluded that the site bore features resembling an undeclared nuclear reactor.

Later, the UN nuclear watchdog asked to send its inspectors to three other sites in Syria that were suspected to be part of the nuclear project, but the Syrians refused. On June 9, 2011, the agency announced that Syria failed to declare the construction of a nuclear reactor and that it was in non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it signed.

Meanwhile, General Suleiman was furious. Within a few months, he lost both Imad Mughniyah, his colleague and close friend, and his life's work—the nuclear reactor in Deir ez-Zor.

According to documents obtained by Wikileaks, Syrian's mobile missile systems were on high alert following the strike, but Bashar Assad decided not to pull the trigger. This kind of behavior "requires self-discipline," Prime Minister Olmert will later tell the US House Minority Leader John Boehner, "Assad is not stupid at all."

Olmert had a different opinion on Suleiman. "Suleiman was a piece of shit, with extraordinary organizational and logistical abilities," he said.

In April 2008, the CIA's analysts reached the conclusion that Assad was not going to war over the strike on the reactor and that there was no longer a need to keep the matter a secret. They could use the material gathered for other purposes. At the time, there was a heated argument in the American administration on whether to sign yet another nuclear disarmament deal with North Korea, the likes of which it had already violated several times in the past.

Israel, Hayden remembers with a sigh, fiercely objected to making the photos from the Syrian reactor public, but the CIA chief decided differently.

"We needed to make this (the Syrian reactor affair) more public because we were about to enter into an agreement with North Korea, that had been guilty of the greatest proliferation crime in history. We had to inform the Congress," he remembers.

The CIA even prepared a video about the discovery and bombing of the Syrian reactor. Michael Hayden, along with another senior intelligence official, presented it to the Senate's Intelligence Committee and to a group of American journalists during a briefing. The discovery of the reactor was an impressive triumph of intelligence, and the agency was happy to be able to present a victory.

To "add a dimension of drama" and tie Damascus's shadow operative to those in Pyongyang, the CIA also added a photo they obtained from their own clandestine sources—General Suleiman with North Korea's nuclear chiefs—and included many details about the Syrian general, his influence and power.

Except that Suleiman was not long for this world. In August 2008, the head of Syria's "Shadow Army" was assassinated while having dinner at his summer home in the coastal city of Tartus in Syria.

According to US cables made public by Wikileaks, the IDF's Special Forces naval commando unit Shayetet 13 was behind that assassination.



IAEA Director General's Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors

Vienna Austria

11 September 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

[EXCERPT]

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic

As far as safeguards implementation in the Syrian Arab Republic is concerned, our assessment remains that it was very likely that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site in 2007 was a nuclear reactor that should have been declared to the Agency by Syria under its Safeguards Agreement.

I renew my call on Syria to cooperate fully with the Agency in connection with unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and other locations. Syria has yet to respond to these calls.

STATEMENT

BY

Mr. Zeev Snir

Head
Israel Atomic Energy Commission

The 61st General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency

September 2017

[EXCERPT]

Madame President,

Ten years ago the secretive nuclear reactor at the Dair Alzour site in Syria was revealed to the international community. Many questions remain regarding this clear breach of Syria's safeguard agreements.

Syria's lack of cooperation and transparency is a source of significant concern, and sets a dangerous precedent. We strongly support the Director General's call on Syria to cooperate fully with the Agency on issues relating to all relevant sites.

The international community must persist in demanding that Syria urgently remedy its non-compliance and provide full access to all information, sites, material and persons.

<https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/operations/the-secret-operation-revealed-a-decade-later/>
[Accessed 2018-03-21T11:50Z]

The Secret Operation Revealed a Decade Later

21.03.18

During the night of September 5th and 6th, 2007, the Israeli Air Force destroyed a nuclear facility in its last stages of construction in the Deir ez-Zor region in Syria, 280 miles north-east of Damascus. Four F-16 jets eliminated a nuclear threat not only to Israel, but to the entire region.

Background and Preparations for the Operation

For two years, officials in the Military Intelligence Directorate had been monitoring the Syrian nuclear project. Their intelligence suggested that the facility would become active toward the end of 2007, which prompted the IDF to initiate an attack on the facility.

The Israeli Air Force had very little time to prepare the attack and account for possible contingencies, such as retaliation by the Syrian forces. Once the attack plan was ready, however, it was possible to execute it within 12 hours from the moment the order was to be given.



Before the destruction of the Nuclear Facility

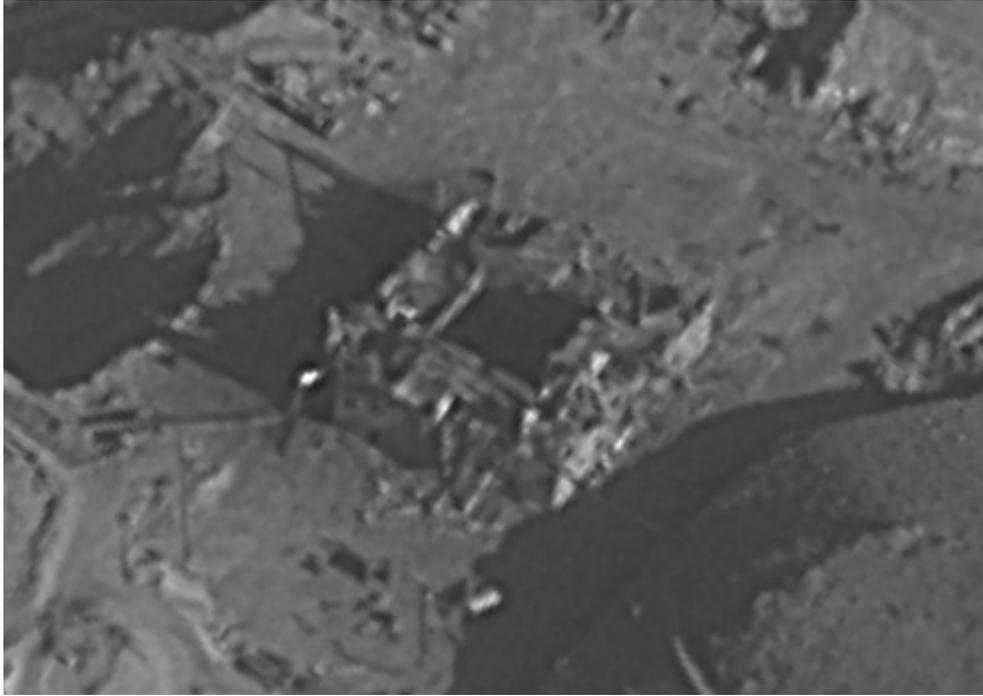
The Attack

Shortly after midnight, the Prime Minister, Defense Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chief of the General Staff, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Head of the Military Intelligence Directorate and Head of the Operations Directorate assembled in the aerial war room.

From there, they attentively followed all aircraft's aerial locations and the communication systems. Two different groups of aircraft including the F-16I and the F-15I left the base at 10:30 pm and flew low to stay undetected. The whole operation took four hours.

The Result

The Military Intelligence Directorate estimated that the nuclear facility was damaged beyond repair. As the IDF was preparing for retaliation, it decided that information about the operation shouldn't be disclosed to the general public at the time. The operation was deemed a success by the Chief of the General Staff. The nuclear facility was destroyed and an escalation in the region prevented.



After the destruction of the nuclear facility

Only a few years later, ISIS captured the Deir ez-Zor region. One could only imagine how much havoc they could have wreaked with a nuclear facility in their hands.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-syria-nuclear/israel-admits-bombing-suspected-syrian-nuclear-reactor-in-2007-warns-iran-idUSKBN1GX09K>

[Accessed 2018-03-21T12:00Z]

Israel admits bombing suspected Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007, warns Iran

stephen farrell

March 20, 2018 / 10:13 PM / Updated 3 hours ago

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - Israel for the first time admitted that it bombed a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007 and said on Wednesday the strike should be a warning to Iran that it would not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons.



A still frame taken from video material released on March 21, 2018 shows a combination image of what the Israeli military describes is before and after an Israeli air strike on a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor site near Deir al-Zor on Sept 6, 2007. IDF/Handout via Reuters TV

The Israeli military released previously classified cockpit footage, photographs and intelligence documents about its Sept. 6, 2007, air strike on the Al-Kubar facility near Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria.

It said the reactor was being built with help from North Korea and the facility had been months away from activation. Reuters has been unable to immediately verify the Israeli material.

Israel's decision to go public comes after repeated calls in recent months by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the United States and international community to take tougher action on Iran, Syria's ally.

Israel's intelligence minister, Israel Katz, said on Twitter: "The (2007) operation and its success made clear that Israel will never allow nuclear weaponry to be in the hands of those who threaten its existence - Syria then, and Iran today."

The Israeli military described in detail events leading up to the night of Sept 5-6, 2007, in which, it said, eight warplanes, F-16s and F-15s, carried out the mission after taking off from the Ramon and Hatzetim air bases and flying to Deir al-Zor region, 450 km northwest of Damascus. Eighteen tonnes of munitions were dropped on the site, it said.

In his 2010 memoir “Decision Points,” former U.S. President George W. Bush disclosed that he discussed intelligence about the Syrian facility with then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert before it was destroyed but did not give him the green light for the raid.

James Jeffrey, Bush’s deputy national security adviser, said on Wednesday the former U.S. president had been “absolutely supportive” of Israel.

“(He) made it clear that we were very happy that events had eliminated this threat and that if there were any threats to Israel that would emerge from this situation, the United States would stand with Israel, period,” Jeffrey told Israel’s Army Radio.

In 2008 the United States presented what it described as intelligence showing that North Korea had helped Syria with “covert nuclear activities.” At the time Syria dismissed the accusations as part of a campaign to discredit the Damascus government.

“The Syrian government regrets the campaign of lies and falsification by the U.S. administration against Syria, including allegations of nuclear activity,” said a government statement issued on the Syrian state news agency.

Iran, which says its nuclear program has only peaceful aims, signed a 2015 deal under which it accepted curbs on its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. U.S. President Donald Trump and Netanyahu have both been critical of the deal.

“TOP SECRET”

The Israeli military declassified internal “top secret” intelligence reports, in Hebrew, some of them partly redacted.

One, dated March 30, 2007, said: “Syria has set up, within its territory, a nuclear reactor for the production of plutonium, through North Korea, which according to an (initial) worst-case assessment is liable to be activated in approximately another year. To our assessment [REDACTED] secretive and orderly [REDACTED] for achieving a nuclear weapon.”

Israeli intelligence predicted that the suspected reactor “would turn operational by the end of 2007”.

The mission to destroy the facility started at 10.30 p.m. on Sept. 5 and ended with the return of the warplanes at 2.30 a.m. the next day, the Israeli military said.

The event was first made public by Syria, which, as reported by Reuters at the time, said in the early hours of Sept. 6 that Syrian air defenses had repelled an incursion by Israeli warplanes.

Syria, a signatory of the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has always denied that the site was a reactor or that Damascus engaged in nuclear cooperation with North Korea.

The Israeli military’s announcement on Wednesday noted that the area in question, around Deir al-Zor, was captured by Islamic State after the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011.

Had there been an active reactor there, the Israeli military said, it would have had “severe strategic implications on the entire Middle East as well as Israel and Syria”.

The Israeli release contains a black-and-white aerial photograph captioned “before the attack” and showing a box-like structure amid desert dunes with smaller outlying buildings.

A series of black-and-white videos, taken above the target, shows the structure in cross-hairs. A male voice is heard counting down three seconds, a cloud of black smoke rises from the structure as it explodes. Other footage appears to show the aftermath - a smoldering hole in the ground.

Wednesday's release came ahead of the publication of a memoir by Olmert containing passages about the 2007 strike.

Writing by Dan Williams and Stephen Farrell; Editing by Janet Lawrence

Inside Israel's Secret Raid on Syria's Nuclear Reactor

By YOSSI MELMAN and DAN RAVIV

March 20, 2018

Even if President Donald Trump is able to reach an agreement with Kim Jong Un, with North Korea promising to freeze or even dismantle its nuclear program, there will always be uncertainty about possible cheating.

Just ask Israel—which, despite having one of the world's most competent and aggressive intelligence services, the Mossad—nearly missed the fact that North Korea was helping build a nuclear reactor in next-door Syria, a country long viewed by Israel as a dangerous threat.

The American CIA missed it, too, and now, 11 years after Israeli air force jets bombed the clandestine Syrian facility, Israel's military censor is finally lifting the veil of secrecy and permitting locally based reporters to publish interviews with participants in the operation for the first time. We spoke with dozens of former cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, as well as military and intelligence chiefs and commanders and even some of the pilots who took part in the operation. The codename for the Sept. 6, 2007, raid, conducted near the remote desert city of Deir ez-Zur: "Outside the Box." Before today, Israel has never officially acknowledged its existence.

Years later, Israeli spooks are still raising bitter questions about the CIA's intelligence failure. Former Mossad director Tamir Pardo asked in an interview with us: "Where were the Americans? North Korea is a highly important target for them. And it still isn't clear whether [Syrian President Bashar] Assad was running the nuclear project, or was it the North Koreans?" The former spy chief added that he has some doubts that Syria was going to keep the plutonium, or perhaps it was going to be shipped to North Korea as a supply of which the West would be unaware. "This is a resounding failure by the Americans," Pardo said.

Pardo's questions raise another: If one of the best intelligence communities in the world, and certainly the most formidable in the Middle East, could be fooled by North Koreans and Syrians, what might the CIA be missing? That could be true in Korea, in Iran, or almost anywhere on Earth.

The Israeli air force raid on a secluded, unmarked building in northeastern Syria took place—a few minutes after midnight between 5th and 6th of September. To attack deep in enemy territory is *[sic]* easy, but Israel's American-made F-15 and F-16 jets enjoyed protection by sophisticated electronic jamming that blinded Syria's air defenses, and they had no trouble dropping tons of explosives on the target and confirming visually that it had been flattened. (Photos, many provided by Israeli intelligence, were released by the CIA to Congress – and immediately leaked to the media in Washington.)

The Syrian facility was almost identical to the Yongbyon nuclear complex in North Korea that produced plutonium for nuclear bombs, according to Israeli intelligence officials, and it was only weeks away from beginning to produce highly radioactive materials.

Deir ez-Zur, the largest city in eastern Syria, would be captured in 2014 by ISIS forces and then held by the Islamic militants for more than three years. Just imagine if ISIS had gotten its hands on plutonium and other parts designed to construct nuclear bombs. Israel's action – a difficult decision by then-Prime Minister Olmert, after he unsuccessfully asked President George W. Bush to bomb the building – prevented the world's most bloodthirsty terrorists from acquiring the world's most lethal weapons.

Israeli ministers and officials are proud of it. Olmert, who later resigned amid accusations of corruption, which eventually after being indicted by a court landed him in prison for 18 months, told us it was one of his most important and difficult decisions. Even his nemesis, then defense minister Ehud Barak, said in an interview: "Olmert deserve full credit for the brazen decision."

Lifting the veil of secrecy also reveals an ego battle for credit between Israel's two largest intelligence agencies. "The exposure of the reactor is one of the great achievements of Military Intelligence [the agency known by its Hebrew

acronym, Aman] in particular, and of Israeli intelligence in general,” said Brig. Gen. Shalom Dror, who in 2007 was a major in charge of Aman’s research on Syria. Yet Pardo, who was deputy director of the Mossad at the time (and from 2011 through 2015 the spy agency’s chief), differs: “For years, Syria built a nuclear reactor under our noses, and we did not know about it for years. It was not built on the dark side of the moon, but in a neighboring country where we always thought we know almost everything.”

Israel’s highest ranking general at the time, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, recalled receiving reports on many Arab countries from Aman and the Mossad, but none linked the words “Syria” and “nuclear” in any serious way. “Sure, suspicions arose, but there was no proof,” continued Ashkenazi, who has since retired. “And in intelligence work there were a lot of suspicions. Syrian nuclear was not a subject considered to be important.”

Ram Ben-Barak, senior man in the Mossad for many years who was then head of one of its operations, told us: “Anyone who says that he knew that Syria was building a nuclear reactor either doesn’t know or isn’t telling the truth. When we brought the information, it was a complete surprise. Until then, the assessment was maybe yes, maybe no—that perhaps they were planning a nuclear project by the route of enriching uranium, and perhaps a reactor to produce plutonium. In short, we didn’t know at all what to look for.”

The fact that there was any attention paid to the possibility of a secret Syrian program at all was the result of a trauma suffered by Israeli intelligence near the end of 2003. Libya’s dictator, the late Col. Muammar Gaddafi, publicly admitted that he had a nuclear weapons program. Western governments quickly discovered that the knowhow and materials had been sold to the Libyans by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the so-called father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb, who later became a freelancer and made a fortune as a nuclear trafficker.

Israel’s spy chiefs winced as they admitted they had made an error comparable to the 1973 war, when the Jewish state was taken by surprise by its neighbor’s armies on Yom Kippur. Israeli intelligence had not completely ignored A.Q. Khan. They had strong evidence that he helped Iran launch its military, unacknowledged, nuclear ambitions. But they did not realize that his sales efforts had succeeded elsewhere.

Shabtai Shavit, who was the director of the Mossad in the 1990s, told us a few years ago that Israeli intelligence knew about Khan’s travels in the Middle East – hawking his wares – but did not understand how the Pakistani engineer could provide a quick and relatively easy kit for starting the route toward a nuclear arsenal. “If we had understood, I would have recommended that he be assassinated,” Shavit said, “and that would have been one of the few times that eliminating a person could have changed history.”

After the revelation that Gaddafi’s Libya was dangerously advanced in its nuclear work, Israel’s military intelligence chiefs ordered that every scrap of evidence that had been collected – but filed away without much analysis – be looked at again. Aman found reports of Khan’s visits to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria. Because the first two countries were friends of the United States, it seemed highly unlikely they would pursue nuclear weapons. The agency doubled its focus on Syria, where President Bashar Assad had come to power in 2000 by default when his father died – because his elder brother, groomed for leadership, had perished in a car crash.

Israeli intelligence saw the new dictator, who had been working as an ophthalmologist in London, as having a borderline personality—an inexperienced man who could be tempted to act recklessly or adventurously. Because his aspirations could be lethal and he sat on Israel’s northeastern border, Aman commanders decided not to underestimate Assad.

“I had to explain to my people why I insisted on concerning ourselves with Syria,” said a research head in the agency, retired Brig. Gen. Eli Ben-Meir, because the top topics at that time had been Iran and its proxy force in Lebanon, Hezbollah. Israel fought a war against the Lebanese Shiite militia in the summer of 2006 that was notably frightening due to the constant rain of rockets from Lebanon that compelled almost a million Israelis to descend to shelters or move temporarily to southern Israel.

Ben-Meir told us there were clues in Israel’s deep and constant monitoring of Syria. Ships arrived from Asia with no apparent purpose. Trucks moved toward the east. Israel’s intelligence liaisons asked friendly services, including the CIA, if they had noticed anything of a nuclear nature in Syria. The answer was negative.

Pardo's boss at the time, Meir Dagan (who was director of the Mossad from 2002 to 2011 and died two years ago) joined Chief of Staff Ashkenazi in asking Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for an extra budget specifically to look for a nuclear project in Syria. Aman's renowned Unit 8200 greatly increased its monitoring of all Syrian communications.

Ibrahim Othman, director of Syria's Atomic Energy Commission, was considered to be the man who had to know the secrets. He became a high-priority target for Israeli intelligence.

As reported elsewhere, Israel Mossad's operatives broke into rooms where he stayed in Europe, including an apartment Othman maintained in Vienna, Austria, near the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency—and found a gold mine. Othman had left a digital device and all its data was sucked out and sent to Israeli intelligence laboratories.

Surprisingly, because no one believed any vital information had been obtained, deciphering it was not a priority. The data was waiting on the laboratory's shelves a few days until it was finally deciphered. "My intelligence officer entered my room," recalls Ben Barak, "and showed me the photos taken from the phone." He added, smiling, "Sometimes intelligence operations need luck."

The photos from Othman's device showed him in the company of some North Korean scientists and most importantly were shot inside the structure, which clearly revealed that it was a nuclear reactor to produce plutonium.

The photos were the "smoking gun"—the ultimate evidence to corroborate Israel's suspicions. The information was rushed to Prime Minister Olmert, who approached U.S. President George W. Bush to ask him if the U.S. would do something about it. Bush said no, explaining that U.S. forces were fully engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan and that he didn't want to open a third front. Nevertheless, Bush didn't say anything about an Israeli raid. For Olmert, that was all he needed. He interpreted Bush's silence as a green light and instructed Lt.-General Ashkenazi to prepare an air strike.

After the raid, Israel kept silent—and so did Assad. Syria didn't want to admit it had violated its international commitments. Israel, for its part, figured out that if it said nothing in public, Assad would swallow his pride and not retaliate. Privately, Israeli leaders and chiefs of the military and intelligence contacted or met their allies in the West—the U.S., UK, France, Germany—and in the Arab world (Egypt and Jordan) to share with them the information behind the raid. Olmert also personally called Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Israel's calculation that Syria would not strike back proved correct, and the world seemed relieved that someone had removed a potentially serious threat to peace.

But to remove Iran's or North Korean nuclear threats will be a much more difficult task if President Trump decides to exercise the much-trumpeted military option.

Yossi Melman is an intelligence and defense analyst for Maariv and other Israeli media, and a co-author of "Spies Against Armageddon: Inside Israel's Secret Wars."

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No Longer a Secret: How Israel Destroyed Syria's Nuclear Reactor

By Amos Harel and Aluf Benn

Mar 21, 2018

This is the story of a single night more than a decade ago, and a daring, hair-raising operation executed by the Israeli air force, army and intelligence community that destroyed an atomic plant in northeastern Syria. Yet no less, it is also a story of a big intelligence failure – the worst since the Yom Kippur War, according to a number of top intelligence people – in which Israel somehow managed for years not to notice a reactor being built right under its nose, in a neighboring country on whose surveillance Israel was spending vast amounts of money.

The operation was the finest hour of a prime minister who just a year earlier had led Israel into a failed war in Lebanon and who less than two years later would be compelled to resign before going on to serve a prison term for crimes of corruption. And it was also the start of the intense hostility between that prime minister and his defense minister, which took root during that summer of 2007, and of the impassioned war over who among the top brass in the military organizations deserved the credit.

It is especially surprising that this is also the story of a secret that was maintained for a long time here in Israel despite the considerable personal interests of a number of those who are now involved in its publication. Only now, more than a decade later, has the military censor allowed the Israeli media to report the history of this affair – and even that, still with restrictions.

The Haaretz investigation of the bombing of the nuclear reactor is based on conversations with 25 of the individuals who were involved in the operation and in the events connected to it, in Israel and in the United States. One of the key figures who led to the decision to bomb the Syrian reactor, the head of the Mossad at the time, Meir Dagan, died in March last year.

“Many of the people involved in the action deserve to get credit and also demand it,” said one person who played a key role in planning the operation. “Ultimately, however, the bombing of the reactor would not have happened without three people who believed in the mission and pushed the operation forward, unstintingly, throughout: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Mossad chief Meir Dagan and Israel Air Force commander Eliezer Shkedi.”

The Cube

A large, cubical building that was still under construction in the heart of the Syrian desert, not far from Deir al-Zour, was a focus of the Israeli defense establishment starting from the end of 2006. Very quickly, it was given a name: the Cube. As the months went by, the suspicion grew that beneath the broad roof of the building hid President Bashar Assad’s secret flagship project: a nuclear reactor produced in North Korea, intended to provide the younger Assad with the achievement that had eluded his father, Hafez Assad, on the battlefield and between wars – and to lead toward a point of strategic balance that could cancel out Israel’s clear military and technological advantage.

The first indication of the Syrian regime’s interest in purchasing nuclear research facilities came to the notice of Israel and the Western countries in the late 1990s, toward the end of the elder Assad’s rule. However, Israel began to pay serious attention to that inclination only after the discovery of a serious intelligence gap in another country: Libya.

“On December 19, 2003, a Saturday morning, I turned on the radio and heard on a news broadcast that the Americans and the British had persuaded Libya to dismantle its nuclear program,” says Amnon Sufrin, who was then head of the intelligence division at the Mossad. “The next morning I assembled my people and I said we had experienced two total failures here: We’d had absolutely no idea that such a program even existed and, second, we didn’t know that negotiations to dismantle it had been going on for eight months. We started to back-analyze the Libyan program and try to figure out where else in the region similar programs could be hiding.”

According to Sufrin, after a month and a half of investigating, the Mossad research team concluded that Syria was working on a nuclear program of its own. The Mossad intelligence division distributed a document with an assessment to that effect in February 2004. Meir Dagan was skeptical about the findings; Syria was not a top priority for Mossad activity and the assessment did not constitute a breakthrough in the gathering of substantial proof.

A similar possibility regarding Syria was also considered during those years at the research branch of Military Intelligence. In 2005, Col. (today reserve brigadier general) Eli Ben Meir had taken up the position of head of the technology field in the research branch. "Iran was the focus of our interest," Sufrin says now, "but we delegated a team of researchers to examine the possibility of a nuclear program in Syria. All the intelligence people who knew Bashar told me: It's not like Bashar. But when you put researchers on a project, if there's something they will find it."

In the course of the examination, the researchers identified the Cube. At a distant and isolated site called Al Kibar, less than a kilometer west of the Euphrates River, the Cube aroused their interest in particular. It was a square building with an area of about 1,600 square meters (more than 17,200 square feet), which was 20 meters (close to 66 feet) high. "We had satellite pictures of a large building in the middle of the desert, with no explanation," says the MI chief at the time, Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin.

According to Sufrin, "The Koreans and the Syrians built a camouflage structure on top of the reactor that made it look like a factory from the outside. You don't see what is happening inside. It is far from any settlement. There is no reason for anyone to be in this area except for herdsmen. We began to suspect that there, in broad daylight, a reactor was hiding."

Rubble was scattered around the building and the place looked fairly neglected, perhaps intentionally so. There was not much traffic in the area. The people who were seen nearby mostly arrived on motorcycles; it looked as though the structure stood empty at night. No security arrangements – fences or guards – were visible there nor had batteries of ground-to-air missiles been stationed there for defense from air strikes.

The first research breakthrough occurred in November 2006. Major Y., a researcher in MI's technology branch, composed a document headed "An Issue for Examination." This is a well-known procedure in MI whereby, with the approval of the head of the organization and the head of the research division, a researcher is permitted to publish a dissenting assessment, even if it is not accepted by the chain of command, in order to prompt examination of a new hypothesis. Until then MI had been focusing on the more accepted channel of countries working their way toward a nuclear project – an installation for enriching uranium, based on centrifuges. Y. reached the conclusion that they were looking in the wrong place. Assad was building a plutonium nuclear reactor, he argued. The 20-page document was distributed to top defense officials. At the Mossad they remained skeptical.

In January 2007, a pipeline leading from the Cube to the Euphrates was identified in satellite photos. The researchers believed that this was the sign of the existence of a cooling system, an essential element in a reactor. At both MI and the Mossad, they started to act to confirm or refute the hypothesis proposed by Major Y. The Mossad led several overseas operations as part of that intelligence gathering. "Dagan assigned us the task of finding out whether or not there was a nuclear project," says Rami Ben-Barak, a senior Mossad official at that time. "The approach was: confirm or rule out. There is no in-between. Meir Dagan was very determined. A lot of people told him that it wasn't possible that there was a reactor, and that it would be a pity to waste the resources and the time. However we, under his orders, did not let go of it for a long time."

Smoking gun in Vienna

The next breakthrough, in fact the turning point of the whole affair, occurred in Vienna in early March 2007. Israel has never officially acknowledged or accepted responsibility for it, and the following is based on an investigative report published by American journalist David Makovsky in The New Yorker in 2012. According to the report, Ibrahim Othman, head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission, had come to Austria to participate in the deliberations of the International Atomic Energy Agency. A cell of Mossad agents from the Keshet unit broke into the apartment where Othman was staying and within less than an hour "vacuumed up" the information that was on the Syrian official's personal computer, which had remained in the apartment while he was taking part in the conference.

Othman's negligence turned out to be the worst security offense in the history of Syria. Had it not been for his carelessness and the Mossad's brilliant work, it is doubtful that the operation to destroy the reactor would have taken place.

When the material taken from the computer was received in Israel, it was found to include about 35 photographs from inside the mysterious building in the Syrian desert. In the pictures, the inside of the reactor is visible, and in it are fusion cylinders and bars and also some Korean workers.

When the intelligence people analyzed the material from Vienna, they were appalled. The material left no room for doubt: The plutogenic reactor that Y. had written about did indeed exist – it had been found in the heart of the desert and was in advanced stages of construction, and nearing completion.

“The material was analyzed on a Wednesday night,” recalls Amnon Sufrin. “Dagan's weekly meeting with the prime minister in Tel Aviv was scheduled for 8 A.M. the next day. It is a plutogenic reactor,” the head of the Mossad told Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The intelligence people say they told him: “There are no more question marks. Now there are only exclamation points.” The prime minister “breathed a sigh and asked: ‘What do we do with this?’ We said to him: ‘We destroy.’” (In Olmert's circle, as often happens in such cases, they remember an opposite course of events. “Dagan asked: ‘Mr. Prime Minister, what do we do?’ Olmert replied: ‘We destroy it.’”)

In a rare public reference to these developments while giving testimony in the trial against him in the affair involving Morris Talansky (involving unlawful acceptance of gifts of cash from a New York businessman), the prime minister related: “The head of the Mossad called me. I meet with him as a matter of course. It's only rarely that a Mossad chief calls and says: ‘I have to see you.’ The Mossad chief arrives and sits in my office. They put on the table an intelligence finding of the type rarely encountered in this country. There was silence. I looked at them. He looked at me I knew that from that moment on nothing would be the same. [The threat] at the existential level is of an unprecedented order of magnitude.”

After the photographs were shown to nuclear experts, among the head of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission at the time, Gideon Frank, and his deputy, Eli Levita, it emerged that the Cube was indeed a North Korean reactor, which was in turn a copy of an outdated British reactor built in the 1950s. The technology experts at MI located the plans of the British original.

“We were able to say with certainty: This reactor is intended to produce plutonium – and for military purposes only,” says Yadlin.

Depressed PM and army

In Olmert's circle they describe a bleak mood prevailing after the discovery. “It had never happened that they came to an Israeli prime minister and told him: Very close to your home something is being built that could destroy the state. This isn't about bunkers with centrifuges 1,500 kilometers [more than 900 miles] away. This is right next door. This is very serious.”

In the background, of course, there was the historical memory of “the Begin doctrine” and the precedent of the bombing of the reactor in Iraq in 1981 (an operation in which MI chief Yadlin had been one of the eight pilots who carried out the attack). It was the prime minister at that time, Menachem Begin, who established the doctrine whereby Israel will not allow any of its foes in the Middle East to develop nuclear weapons.

Olmert was a very unpopular prime minister. Israel was still grappling with its disappointment after the Second Lebanon War. In some public opinion polls, the level of support for the premier didn't rise above the single digits. In April 2007 the Winograd commission published its devastating interim report on the conduct of the war, in which it was very critical of Olmert's functioning the previous year. The politicians were waiting in suspense for the final report, which was due to be published in January 2008. Alongside the urgent necessity of removing the surprising new threat in Syria, Olmert was keen to mend the flaws revealed in his functioning in Lebanon – as well as the public's impression of him.

The vast majority of those who took part in the meetings describe a very sharp, determined leader, almost chomping at the bit. Moreover, this time careful attention was paid to the procedures of the discussions and decision-making, for the neglect of which Olmert was severely chastised in the interim report. The process, say many, was very organized, strictly by the book and a paragon of order by Israeli standards.

To hear opinions from individuals beyond the heads of the military and the intelligence communities, Olmert consulted (as did then-Defense Minister Amir Peretz, separately) other experienced people and external oversight teams. The advisers, as well as a number of ministers, first and foremost Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, were for the most part summoned individually for personal meetings with the prime minister at his residence, where they were informed about details of the affair, mostly by Yadlin and Dagan. Later, somewhat larger forums were also convened.

Olmert consulted, individually, three of the previous prime ministers: Shimon Peres (who a few months later was elected president of Israel), leader of the opposition Benjamin Netanyahu and citizen Ehud Barak. In those meetings Netanyahu and Barak were very firm in their opinion that Israel had to attack the reactor. Peres, who as leader of the opposition at the time of the bombing of the reactor in Iraq had expressed reservations about that attack as well, surprised Olmert with the suggestion that Israel should attempt to talk with the Syrians first. The prime minister chose to ignore this suggestion.

An extensive process of preparation got underway in the IDF. The then-newly appointed chief of staff, Gabi Ashkenazi, found an army that was depressed and mired in a deep crisis after some of its top brass had resigned, while others were still fighting the conclusions of the internal investigations and on edge about what might be said about them in the final report on the Second Lebanon War. The war and the investigations revealed huge gaps in the army's capabilities and the readiness of its units. The new chief of staff initiated a process of rehabilitation but when he was shown the findings from Othman's computer, Ashkenazi realized that he was facing a series of problems completely different from what he had been preparing for: how to get rid of the new threat in a way that would not spark a new war with Syria and Hezbollah – and if a war did break out – how to ensure that the IDF would win this time.

To make sure the reactor would be destroyed, it was necessary to deploy tremendous firepower, in the form of a relatively extensive aerial bombardment. However, an extensive action was liable to be perceived as a humiliation by President Assad and push him into a corner so that he would feel obliged to retaliate. A quiet and relatively clandestine action would probably be perceived in Syria less emotionally but in such a case, there would be no certainty that the nuclear threat had been eradicated. Olmert had to take into account a reaction that was liable to include direct hits on civilian and military infrastructures, from northern Israel to the Tel Aviv area.

The dilemma Israel faced with respect to the choice between effectiveness and secrecy did not end with the question of the operation itself. If the IDF had to prepare for the pessimistic scenario of Assad retaliating massively and a war breaking out – how could that be accomplished without preparing the units in advance, thereby revealing the secret and enabling the Syrians to prepare to thwart the bombing of the reactor?

Americans enter the picture

After mulling everything over, and at the advice of former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Olmert decided to share the sensitive new information about Syria with the Americans. He hoped that perhaps the George W. Bush administration would take it upon itself to destroy the reactor. **Defense Minister Amir Peretz briefed his American counterpart Robert Gates, who was in Israel on a routine visit. Gates was “pretty much in shock.”** The prime minister's two close advisers, Yoram Turbovich and Shalom Turgeman, flew to Washington to brief top administration people. In Washington the Israeli delegation met with Vice President Dick Cheney and top people in the CIA and the National Security Council.

Gradually, it became clear that there were three competing approaches within the administration, and that the president was trying to choose among them. Cheney, as usual the rapacious hawk, wanted the United States to attack and destroy the reactor as a public and deterrent message, a warning against the development of additional secret nuclear programs in other countries. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was recommending a diplomatic move to thwart the reactor by means of applying pressure on Assad. Gates and some of Bush's advisers believed that an attack should be left in Israel's hands. They were concerned about the possibility of a blunder that could develop from

mistaken intelligence information, as had happened to the Americans in the affair of the weapons of mass destruction (that were not found) on the eve of the Iraq War in 2003.

In mid-June, Olmert arrived in the United States for a meeting with Bush. Prior to the meeting the president consulted his advisers. Michael Hayden, the head of the CIA, wrote years later in *The Washington Post* that he told Bush that his agency had concluded that the site at Al Kibar was part of a nuclear weapons program and there was no other explanation for its existence. However, Hayden added a reservation: No other elements of such a program were identified, such as development of a warhead. Therefore, the findings from the reactor were presented as findings “at a low level of certainty.” In Israel they were surprised by that conclusion.

In his memoirs, Bush wrote that following Hayden’s assessment, he told Olmert at their meeting on June 19 that he could not justify an American attack on a sovereign state. Olmert implored Bush and Cheney to attack nevertheless, and argued that such a move would also help deter Iran. “I am able to defeat Syria,” said Olmert in that conversation, “but I need you to act there specifically because of the Iranian nuclear program.”

On July 13, Bush informed Olmert in a conversation over the direct and secure “red phone” line between the White House and the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem that he opposed a military attack on the reactor. However, said the president, he had decided to send an envoy to Syria to pose an ultimatum to Assad to demolish the reactor, under international supervision. The prime minister warned the American president that setting the diplomatic channel in motion would make it possible for the Syrians to play for time in the talks while hastening the completion of the construction of the reactor. Israel and the West, he said, would lose the element of surprise.

In the Israeli defense establishment, the concern was that if the diplomatic channel were employed, Assad was liable to position anti-aircraft batteries near the reactor or even to establish something like a kindergarten there as a “human shield.” The prime minister was also afraid of a leak to the media by American officials who opposed an Israeli attack. He succeeded in persuading Bush to halt the diplomatic move and to commit to preventing leaks. Olmert did not ask Bush for authorization of an Israeli attack but let the president understand that he was of a mind to order the IDF to act. “If you don’t do it, we will,” he said.

One of the president’s close advisers later told a senior Israeli official that Bush replied in his typical Texas style: “A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.” Bush also had another crude observation, about Olmert: “You see why I love him? Because he’s got the world’s biggest balls.”

Barak strikes again

In the week the prime minister went to Washington, a person who did not share Bush’s enthusiasm for Olmert returned to the core of decision-makers in Israel: Ehud Barak. In mid-June the former prime minister won the primary for Labor Party leadership, replacing Peretz in that position, and he announced that he himself would be the new defense minister. Though the relations between Olmert and Barak were fairly good, and it appeared that Olmert wanted Barak in Defense, Barak had voiced some harsh criticism of the prime minister’s conduct during the war in Lebanon. He did not revise his opinion when they sat together in sensitive deliberations in the cabinet and in smaller forums. Olmert’s behavior toward top people in the defense establishment seemed too “folksy” to him – too much hugging and backslapping, not enough considered judgment. At times, Barak told someone, he had the feeling that Olmert was playing the role of a leader based on what he had seen in American movies.

The differences of opinion between Olmert and Barak on the matter of the reactor became evident relatively quickly. The prime minister was imbued with a sense of urgency and a desire to act. The prime minister was concerned about two possibilities that could thwart the operation – a prior leak to the media or the reactor becoming “hot” (activated) – a development that intelligence assessed was liable to happen toward the end of September. That was marked as a point of no return, because an attack on a “hot” reactor was liable to cause tremendous environmental damage.

Barak, however, began raising reservations. He believed that the operational plans the IDF had formulated for attacking the plant had not yet matured sufficiently and did not ensure complete success. He pushed for formulation of alternative proposals. Barak also thought an attack could embroil Israel in a war with Syria, in which it would again become clear that the IDF and the home front were not properly prepared. The new defense minister believed that before any attack on the reactor, the IDF had to be “98 percent prepared, not 80 percent.”

With the approach of summer, temperatures inside the conference rooms also rose. In a series of cabinet meetings, the hostility between the prime minister and his defense minister became more extreme. “These are discussions that none of the participants will ever forget,” says one of the cabinet ministers. “Barak tried to block approval of the operation and Olmert read out arguments from a piece of paper like a lawyer arguing in court, for the record. Come to think of it – the court of history. This was a breathtaking drama, and unfortunately it played out in front of the top military commanders.”

When Olmert expressed concern about the possibility that the Syrians would preempt Israel and activate the reactor, Barak downplayed the risk of attacking a “hot” reactor. A number of those who were present later observed that, as one of them put it, “Gideon Frank, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, blanched and nearly fainted. Attacking a hot reactor was liable to create tremendous environmental pollution. We said to Barak: For every baby who is born in the next 200 years along the Euphrates with a deformity or a genetic defect, they will blame us straightaway.” In a meeting on August 1, Barak forbade head of the IDF Planning Directorate Ido Nechushtan (who two years later would replace Shkedi as commander of the air force) to screen a presentation that reviewed the strategic picture and recommended a swift attack. Barak, shouting, argued that he had not authorized the presentation.

Olmert, a few of the ministers and some of the army officers who clearly favored the prime minister, suspected Barak of being driven by hidden personal motives. The prevailing conspiracy theory held that Barak was waiting for the final version of the Winograd commission investigative report on the second Lebanon war, which was to be published within a few months, in the expectation that the commission would obligate Olmert to resign. Then, even if Livni were to replace him as prime minister, Barak would lead the Syria operation and take all the credit.

Barak’s behavior, says one of the top defense people, was simply deplorable, “Especially taking into account the disagreement about bombing the nuclear sites in Iran, which erupted two years later. Then, he in fact presented opposite arguments: Suddenly there wasn’t a problem in rushing to bomb, even though an attack in Iran was a far greater challenge than bombing in Syria. Historians in the future who will examine the minutes of those discussions won’t know what to do with this dissonance.”

In contrast, however, another senior officer says: “Had a war with Syria indeed broken out following the bombing and had the IDF been caught unprepared again, Barak was liable to have finished like Moshe Dayan after the Yom Kippur War. I don’t know what was going through his conspiratorial mind, but Barak’s view was correct in my opinion: Leave no stone unturned before you make such a fateful move.”

Barak, in a conversation with Haaretz, rejects the claims against him outright. All his arguments, he says, were to the point. It was in fact his comments that pushed the IDF to present alternative plans, one of which was ultimately the one that was carried out. And during the time that passed, the IDF’s preparedness for war was improved immeasurably. According to him, he did not recommend attacking a hot reactor, but rather said that it was necessary to prepare for any eventuality and that the reactor becoming operational should not cause the decision-makers in Israel to despair. Olmert, according to Barak, tended to act almost automatically, without due consideration. The disagreement between them was a meeting between “a certified lightweight who had never approved any real operational planning” (Olmert) and “a professional who had engaged in that for decades,” from the days of Sayeret Matkal (the elite commando force Barak had led), and up through the weekly discussions on operations and incursions in the defense minister’s and the chief of staff’s offices (Barak). There were no political considerations behind his recommendations.

The denial space

Assad conducted the nuclear project in great secrecy, with very few partners to the secret. The contacts with North Korea were coordinated by the head of the Atomic Energy Commission, Othman, and by Gen. Muhammad Suleiman, the regime’s person for dark ops, who also oversaw military relations with Iran and Hezbollah. This small and secret coterie headed by Suleiman was directly subordinate to the president; in Israel it was called “the shadow army.”

An analysis of the operational possibilities for destroying the reactor, gradually led Israel to a realization that would ultimately guide the decision on the method of action that would be used. The planners came to the conclusion that an Israeli attack had to leave the Syrian president inside “the denial space.” If the attack avoided embarrassing and humiliating Assad publicly, there was a reasonable chance he would decide to hold back and not respond by going to

war. An event with a relatively “small footprint,” a sharp and quiet action at a site far from where people were living, if Israel did not take responsibility for it and if its leaders did not prattle in its aftermath, would enable Assad to downplay the event. In this matter, the Mossad concurred with the Military Intelligence assessment.

Nechushtan, the head of the Planning Directorate, has said that according to the scenario the planning and intelligence directorates had drawn up, “We were going to take Assad by surprise. The trick was not to take responsibility and immediately after the bombing to push ahead with a diplomatic effort that would convince other countries of the reliability of the information about what the Syrians were preparing and spur them to act to restrain him.”

Two different air force strike options were on the table, the difference between them was the size of the aerial force that would be used. The first involved many planes and could have ensured swift and very nearly certain destruction of the reactor, but it would leave behind a large footprint and was liable to spur the Syrians to a harsh response. The second option that was ultimately accepted, was sketched by the air force commander on a paper napkin in a brief conversation with the prime minister. Eight planes would be allocated to the mission – four F-15I "Ra'am" (Thunder) and four F-16I "Sufa" (Storm) – carrying 16 tonnes of bombs. “The idea was to create redundancy. To go in with two kinds of planes, with different kinds of armament, because every plane is vulnerable to blocking in a different way, but this way, the second kind could compensate. With high certainty, one of the two types would reach the target.”

The air force dubbed the plan with the code name “Soft Melody” (the general staff operation had a different code name, “Ein Habasor,” while at Military Intelligence they referred to the preparations as “Outside the Box”). The squadrons to which the mission was assigned were brought into the picture during the month of June, and only in a limited way. In the air force it was decided to brief only the top command in each of the two operational squadrons about the nature of the target that was to be attacked. The greatest challenge, relates “Col. Amir,” one of the F-15 pilots who took part in the attack, was dual: to advance the operation without most of the crews knowing what it was about and at the same time to prepare the rest of the squadron for the possibility that as a result of the operation, hostilities might break out, and all this while this group was not privy to preparations for the attack itself.

“In the preparations for the operation, we practiced ways of arriving, implementation, routes, distances, without telling the pilots and the navigators who were taking part what the target was. People realized that there was something bigger here.” Between June and September, the operational planning became more detailed, additional precise information about the destination came in, different methods of action were assembled and finally the crews were slotted into the operation.

“We had a number of kinds of weapons, a mix that wouldn’t leave you with a single malfunction point without the ability to compensate for it. If a certain weapon or one of the platforms didn’t work, there would be something to cover for it,” says Amir. In manning the crews, “We choose the best. The squadron commander and his deputy take the ones on whom they agree hands down will get the bombs to the target.”

Concurrently, the preparations began in the IDF for the possibility of things going sour, but in order to maintain the secrecy of the operation, it was necessary to tailor a false narrative for most of the commanders, and later also for the public and the media. The explanation that was offered was concern about the possibility of hostilities breaking out over mutual miscalculations: Israel and Syria are suspicious of each other and exchanging threats in the context of the results of the last war in Lebanon. The tension is liable to lead to an unplanned deterioration in the situation, and in order to prepare for that possibility the IDF must increase its level of readiness.

A leak and a decision

Olmert ordered the briefing of the United States concerning his decision to attack, which he was close to arriving at. In mid-August, Olmert convened a dramatic cabinet meeting to discuss the implications of the attack. The prime minister dwelled in particular on the meaning of life in Israel under the shadow of a nuclear threat and warned that this was a condition that was liable to cause profound demoralization of Israel’s populace. Olmert quoted one of Assad’s speeches from early June in which the Syrian president predicted that toward the end of the summer there would be a development that would completely change the reality of the Middle East. “We do not want a war,” Olmert told his ministers. “The disagreement here is not between those who want a war and those who oppose it. Rather, the question is whether to take a risk in order to prevent greater risks – and for that reason there is no alternative to demolishing the reactor.”

Associates of Olmert describe an angry correspondence with Barak that day, which was conducted via messengers. In a one-on-one conversation Olmert tried to resolve their differences of opinion, but according to him Barak continued to try to convince ministers that a premature bombing of the reactor would cost Israel a war. On August 31, Olmert and Barak held a limited operational consultation with the heads of the defense organizations. The Israeli leadership began to converge on the decision – bombing of the reactor in the near term – and the selection of the more limited action by the air force. Shkedi, a man of profound historical awareness, went up to Olmert at the end of the meeting and said to him: “Mr. Prime Minister, trust the air force pilots. They are the best in the world. Authorize the operation.”

On Tuesday, September 4, the air force conducted its last mock maneuver in advance of the attack. “And then – a phone call came in from Dagan that there was a query from the United States,” relates Shkedi. One of the American media organizations had asked the Pentagon a question about the presence of a nuclear installation in Syria. This was, of course, one of the two scenarios that had been feared in Israel during the summer. Any report in the media was liable to awaken the Syrians out of their complacency, alter their defensive preparedness around the reactor and deny the IDF the advantage of surprise. The chief of staff asked the prime minister to convene the cabinet urgently and vote on approving the attack. It was then 2:00 A.M. on Wednesday.

The cabinet met for a discussion in Jerusalem in the morning. In the meantime, Shkedi went to the Hatzetim and Ramon air bases to talk with the crews that would take part in the operation and to reveal the real target to most of them. “I said to them: You are going to do something of incredible significance. By no stretch of the imagination will you come back without the reactor having been destroyed. However, you must avoid aerial dogfights with enemy planes. Their mission this time was not to take down enemy aircraft. For combat pilots to hear a thing like that – it is completely contrary to their intuition and ethos.”

At the cabinet meeting, Ashkenazi presented the various alternatives and recommended attacking. It was decided to attack but to authorize a small forum – the trio of Olmert, Barak and Livni – to decide upon the timing of the attack and the nature of the operation. The trio met just before 6:00 P.M. in a room adjacent to the government meeting room, heard Ashkenazi, Dagan and Yadin, and afterward remained with just the chief of staff. The operation was approved unanimously – and at the army’s recommendation the limited air attack option was chosen. At the beginning of the discussion Livni still hesitated, but she was convinced by the chief of staff’s arguments that the proposed military action would ensure a more certain outcome.

“Suddenly a moment comes when all the theoretical discussions become the here and now, and it could be that this will lead to a war,” she relates. “The odds were low but they did exist. There was unease because the home front was not aware of what might be waiting for it. And that is after the missiles we had absorbed in the Lebanon War and even before we had an interception system like Iron Dome. It occurred to me that we could wake up the next morning and the horizon would be full of [incoming] missiles. However, there were no doubts about the decision itself. We went through the whole process until the correct decision was made. I was very much in agreement with the decision to attack, even though it was with a heavy heart.”

Ashkenazi went back to the General Command building in Tel Aviv. There, his deputy had already convened the men of the General Staff. Some of them heard for the first time about the presence of the reactor in Syria. That evening, the wedding of the chief of staff’s secretary, Liron, went ahead as planned. Ashkenazi showed up together with many of the generals, in part so as not to arouse suspicion that something was afoot. He recently recalled: “I looked at the dancing guests and I said to myself: Five hours from now, we could be waking them up with sirens and Scud missiles falling in the center of the country. At the cabinet meeting I had already warned the ministers: Anyone who talks will be responsible for Assad reacting. Anyone who goes running to television risks causing a war.”

Olmert stayed in his office to work. At 8 P.M. he summoned leader of the opposition Netanyahu to the prime minister’s residence. “Bibi,” he said to his veteran opponent, “it’s at midnight tonight.” Netanyahu wished him success and said, “I will react in accordance with the circumstances.” Olmert, like Ashkenazi, stressed the need for secrecy after the attack as well. The prime minister, who managed to take a two-hour nap, went on to Tel Aviv to follow the operation from the air force underground command post together with Barak, Livni, the chief of staff and the air force commander.

‘Soft Melody’

In the meantime, final preparations were under way in the air force. In the force they were worried about a series of possible complications during the attack, ranging from the presence of a concealed battery of anti-aircraft guns in the area of the reactor to the concern that it was not possible to determine with certainty that the reactor would be destroyed in a single sortie, so that a second one, immediately following the first, might be needed to complete the mission, this time under more complicated circumstances, in which the aim of the operation had already been revealed to the Syrians.

According to David Makovsky, a researcher at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, in addition to eight attack planes, a number of other aircraft also took part in the operation. The planes took off from Ramon and Hatzetim and headed northward along the shore of the Mediterranean, with ample use of electronic warfare as camouflage.

“We set out around 10:30 P.M.,” recalls Amir. “It’s a very long flight, secret, on a dark night and a low altitude of 100 meters above sea level. You have to make all kinds of split-second decisions. Mostly it went according to plan, but not everything. The weather along the way surprised us in a number of places. We had to figure out an answer on the spot. According to what had agreed upon in advance, there was no communication between the planes: We maintained complete silence during the flight. Each of us solved things in his own cockpit, after dilemmas and misgivings. In one plane, a problem was solved, after [it had become clear that] not all the systems were working. We were flying in a hostile area. If the ground-to-air-systems wake up, you are in a vipers’ nest. But the flight to the target was relatively calm, without our getting discovered and without any direct threat.

“And then you get to the target area, climb a bit higher, pulling into execution mode. Everything goes according to the advance briefing. Each plane drops two bombs. You feel a slight shaking of the wing as they are released. There is a bit of excitement before the bomb hits. We made certain five times that it was ‘all systems go.’”

Even today, he remembers the moment of impact. “Everything happens within a few seconds. I see on the thermal system I have on the plane and also outside – the bombs are hitting the structure. There is a tremendous explosion that you see in the darkness and after that, total destruction. The target gets covered in smoke and afterwards you see that it has been demolished. We were over the target for two or three minutes. And then we started to fly back, in accordance with the planning, at a low altitude. There is a brief moment when you feel excellent, because you have achieved what was required – and then you are very vigilant. We had hundreds of miles to fly, some of them in an area full of missiles. We were very focused on the escape route because it could elicit surprises.”

According to the plan, upon hitting the target, all the planes were required to report to the others over the communications network. Following that, one of the F-16s was supposed to broadcast the word “Arizona” on long-range radio back to Tel Aviv – to indicate that the target had been bombed according to plan. All eight planes confirmed a precise hit and returned to the radio blackout. When the F-16I crew reported “Arizona,” it was 12:25 A.M., Israel time, on Friday, September 6.

Amir relates that a number of years later he watched a video that had been filmed in the command post during the attack. “Everyone there is jumping up and down in excitement, like in a Hollywood movie. At 1:30, we got back to Israel and landed at the base. Our assumption was that possibly the operation would be revealed publicly, and the Syrians would respond, and then it would become the opening move in a war. In the underground hangar that our plane returned to, Brig. Gen. Shelly Gutman, the commander of the Hatzetim base, was waiting. He was waiting for us outside the plane as we landed, with hugs. He is usually a pretty reserved person. I can’t remember him ever hugging me on any other occasion but this time he was all smiles. Shelly said to us: You are champions.”

On the way back, in order to reduce weight and save fuel, one of the planes jettisoned an empty fuel container. The tank landed on the Turkish side of the Syrian-Turkish border, creating two problems: First, the incident, and the photos of the tank with Hebrew writing on it, were evidence that an Israeli force had been in the area. Secondly, it caused huge embarrassment vis-à-vis Turkey, which at the time was a country friendly to Israel, even though Recep Tayyip Erdogan was already serving as prime minister. In the air force, they characterized the release of the fuel tank into Turkey as an operational error, although tactically it was possible to have justified the crew’s considerations. The hitch, however, did not cast a pall on the success of the operation. After the attack, Ashkenazi sent MI chief Yadlin to the Turkish chief of staff to explain the considerations and circumstances and to reassure him that there had been

absolutely no violation of Turkish sovereignty during the operation. The Turks were not happy, but they decided not to make an issue of it, apparently in part because of their retrospective realization that a threat to them was also inherent in Assad's secret project.

The lack of immediate response from the regime reinforced the prior intelligence hypothesis that Syria would show restraint following the attack.

Shkedi emerged from the control booth [in the command post] only after the planes were out of the range of danger. "I went to Olmert. Both of us were very excited. We had a big hug. I said to him: The air force did what it was assigned to do."

The prime minister celebrated the achievement by raising a toast. "There was a crazy high all around him," said one of those who were present. His chief of staff, Yoram Turbovich, in a state of total euphoria, said to Olmert: "You can resign now. You have done your bit for the people of Israel."

The day after Arizona

Shortly thereafter Olmert phoned call President Bush, who was on a visit to Australia that week. The two spoke, at Olmert's request, on a secure line.

"Do you remember something in the north that was bothering me?" said the prime minister to the president. "It isn't there any more."

"Very good," replied Bush.

The following afternoon, the Syrian news agency issued a laconic statement to the effect that during the night its air defense system had chased away Israeli planes that had penetrated Syria's air space. In Israel they saw this mendacious statement without many details as reinforcement of the assessment that Assad intended to show restraint. The silence on the Israeli side, which overall was maintained in accordance with the advance planning, helped reduce the sense of humiliation felt by the Syrian president and gave credence to his range of plausible deniability.

Immediately after the attack, Israel embarked on a diplomatic blitz that had been prepared in advance by the Prime Minister's Bureau, the Mossad, MI and the Foreign Ministry. Top Israeli officials, most of them intelligence people, set out for Western countries and a number of friendly countries in the region to share the incriminating information about the secret Syrian reactor. The detailed intelligence helped convince those countries of the justice of the Israeli move – and neutralized the possibility that the attack would become the cause of an international scandal. The Syrian silence helped this.

"It's a story that ended well," says Amos Yadlin. "There was successful cooperation here among the intelligence organizations and between us and the government. It was an extraordinary process, at the end of which the reactor was destroyed."

Ido Nechushtan believes that "this is the kind of problem that it's important for Israel to know how to solve on its own. No one is going to solve them for us. Olmert conducted himself in this affair with courage and skill and did not shy away from making decisions. That was no simple matter, a year after Lebanon."

"An existential threat to the State of Israel arose here and we dealt with it, the way the air force had dealt with the reactor in Iraq in the past," says Col. Amir, the F-15 pilot who took part in the attack. "For me, today it connects with our ability to remove threats in distant countries in the third circle [meaning, Iran]. Since the attack in Syria we have also improved wonderfully – in intelligence, in our range of action, in our ability to attack secretly."

During the course of the past decade, the two operational air force squadrons have fiercely guarded the secret of the attack. Amir says he never told his wife about that night in eastern Syria. "Efrat will know about it only now, when the articles and interviews are published. There are things you don't talk about. She is familiar with this."

Epilogue

Even after the reactor was bombed, ripples in the Syrian-Iranian axis continued, with the incessant involvement of Hezbollah. General Mohammed Suleiman, commander of the Syrian “shadow army,” was the contact person for the Revolutionary Guard Corps leaders and for Imad Mughniyeh, who headed Hezbollah’s terrorism effort.

Mughniyeh was in the know about the most top-secret missions of Hezbollah’s patrons, Iran and Syria. The year before, he commanded the mission to kidnap two Israeli army reservists on the northern Israeli border near Zarit that triggered the Second Lebanon War. As far as is known, it was carried out without the advance permission or involvement of Iran or Syria.

The Syrian regime completed the destruction of the building. When the IAEA wanted to visit the site, following reports of the attack and leaked allegations that it had actually been a nuclear reactor, the Syrians claimed there was nothing to see because there had been nothing there. Yet in 2008, IAEA inspectors found traces of radioactive substances there, and the agency said there was a high probability that a nuclear reactor had been in operation at the site. As was its wont, Damascus denied everything, and the IAEA did nothing about all this despite Syria’s blatant violation of a treaty to which it was a signatory.

By then, Mughniyeh was dead. He had been killed in 2008 in Damascus while leaving a reception at the Iranian embassy. When he turned on the ignition of his jeep, it blew up. According to reports in the American media, his assassination was a joint Mossad-CIA operation in revenge for Mughniyeh’s role in hijacking a TWA airliner in Beirut in 1985, and for attacking U.S. Marines in Lebanon two years earlier. Hezbollah accused Israel of the hit, but Israel never officially responded.

According to various reports at the time, Mughniyeh’s friend General Suleiman had no kinder a fate. Half a year later, the commander of the “shadow army” was attending a banquet at his holiday home in the Syrian seaside town of Latakia when he was shot by snipers from a boat. As in Mughniyeh’s case, Israel was accused of the killing but Jerusalem never officially responded.

Despite the shadow of failure in Lebanon, if all these claims are true, the Olmert administration demonstrated an aggressive and particularly active line against the nuclear threat and against the threats of terrorism and guerrilla warfare in neighboring countries. By the time Olmert left office less than two years later, Israel had – again according to the foreign press – heavily bombed an Iranian convoy in the heart of Sudan that was en route to Gaza. And before that, at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, came the Israeli military operation known as Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza.

Western intelligence sources sold the Washington Post in 2015 that General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, had been with Mughniyeh in Damascus that night, but somehow he did not die in the blast that killed the Lebanese terrorist. Today that same Soleimani commands Iran’s military moves in the Middle East, including the basing of the Shi’ite militias in southern Lebanon, the next front where Israel is likely to find itself acing Syria and Iran. Olmert stayed in his office to work. At 8 P.M. he summoned leader of the opposition Netanyahu to the prime minister’s residence. “Bibi,” he said to his veteran opponent, “it’s at midnight tonight.” Netanyahu wished him success and said, “I will react in accordance with the circumstances.” Olmert, like Ashkenazi, stressed the need for secrecy after the attack as well. The prime minister, who managed to take a two-hour nap, went on to Tel Aviv to follow the operation from the air force underground command post together with Barak, Livni, the chief of staff and the air force commander.

Syria Strike Revealed The Intelligence Failure: It Took Years for Israel to Discover Syria's Reactor

Amos Harel and Aluf Benn

Mar 21, 2018 4:59 AM

The excitement of the Israeli political and security leadership after the successful operation to bomb the Syrian reactor quickly obscured a critical question: How did Bashar Assad's secret nuclear project escape the notice of Israel's intelligence community, which boasted for years about its ability to track even the slightest shifts in military deployments by its northern neighbor?

Neither the Olmert government nor the intelligence community seriously addressed this question by means of an in-depth investigation. The failure to detect the Libyan nuclear program (see main article) in 2003 led to extensive criticism and a classified investigation by the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, which became a source of much tension between committee chair MK Yuval Steinitz (Likud) and the heads of the various intelligence branches. In the case of the Syrian reactor, however, the tremendous lapse seems to have somehow been forgotten – apart from mention in some internal reviews in the intelligence organizations that were never fully addressed or resolved in an intra-organizational framework.

A person who held different senior roles in the intelligence community says that the belated discovery of the reactor, about six months before it was due to become active, was "Israel's greatest intelligence failure, maybe even greater than the Yom Kippur War."

"The operation went smoothly, fine," he says. "The government decided to carry it out and it did so, but the scary thing about the whole story is that its detection happened completely by chance. Assad and the North Koreans were building a plutogenic reactor right under our noses in Deir al-Zour for five or six years. God knows how long. And we had no idea, with respect to our most highly covered intelligence target, that there was this reactor that was nearly at the activation stage. The reactor was practically finished when we bombed it, it wasn't just the foundations. If the Mossad hadn't happened to bring in materials from Vienna that proved that a reactor had indeed been built there – the project would have been completed. We had to rev up from zero to 100 very quickly. How could this have happened?"

He adds: "The failure can be ascribed to a conception, one held by the West and not just Israel. This conception says that an Arab state would not enter into a project like this with a third party. Building a nuclear reactor that can only be for military use, when there is no local trained manpower to operate it – this is something that's unprecedented in the history of nuclear weapons. The Koreans did everything there. It's crazy. We didn't know that the number of people within Syria who were in on the secret was so small. There is no technician in Syria who would know how to operate the reactor. The Iraqi reactor in Osirak that we bombed in 1981, on the other hand, was an openly known project."

In retrospect, the former intelligence official says he thinks that the North Koreans may have intended to operate the reactor themselves: "They were the ones who would have reaped the main benefit from this project. North Korea is a target country for the West. All eyes are on it. We removed the threat by bombing the reactor, but the Americans went to sleep and didn't understand what went on here. There's a question as to whether there aren't more such reactors in other places in the world."

He notes that the North Korean threat to the Americans and to South Asian countries still exists, of course, but since the bombing in Syria, no intelligence relating to North Korean activities in that country has been forthcoming.

"Publicly, it's convenient for everyone that the reactor was destroyed – but it was a disgrace," he continues. "Israel was oblivious as the reactor was being developed for years right under its nose. And the United States just didn't want to know. But when they're handing out medals, there aren't going to be any commissions of inquiry."

Haim Ramon – who, at Prime Minister Olmert's request, rejoined the government in June 2007 as his deputy – recalls a conversation he had with Olmert a few days before assuming his new role.

“He had everyone else leave the room, and then he said to me: I’m about to commit a serious censorship offense, but I’ll be forgiven because I’m the prime minister,” says Ramon. “Then he told me about the reactor and said he needed me in the cabinet. Based on what Olmert described, this was one of the intelligence community’s biggest failures ever. This thing had been moving forward for five years or so and we didn’t know a thing about it. I was in shock.”

Military Intelligence officials take a bit more forgiving view of the lapse. Maj. Gen. (res.) Yossi Baidatz, who headed MI’s research division at the time, says now: “It’s the kind of thing I would have liked to have detected at least a year earlier. If we had found ourselves with a hot reactor that couldn’t be attacked from the air – that would have been another matter, even if it was still a long way from producing a bomb. But that didn’t happen.”

According to then-Col. Eli Ben Meir, head of technology in MI’s research branch: “This was a success. Perhaps we could have discovered it three months earlier based on the information that was available. The important thing is that we found it before the reactor became operational.”

Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel Defense Forces chief of staff at the time, says: “Just as the intelligence community is being criticized for not having detected the reactor project earlier, it should be credited for its insistence on clarifying the situation and locating the reactor and preparing the operation to destroy it.”

People who worked with Olmert at the time say the realization that this was a grave, years-long lapse really dawned on them when the pictures arrived from Vienna. But they say that dealing with the problem itself, by destroying the reactor, took top priority. For this reason, in the months that passed between the discovery of the reactor and the actual bombing operation, there was no comprehensive investigation by the intelligence agencies about how such dramatic developments in Syria were missed. And even after the military strike, there was no such investigation of the critical intelligence fiasco that had gone on for years. Each agency apparently conducted its own review, but friction and rivalries among the heads of the various agencies kept a more in-depth investigation from taking place. Nor did Olmert call for such an inquest – perhaps because his people were already weary after being cross-examined by the Winograd Committee and opted to focus on the operation’s positive outcome.

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/245181>

Olmert: 'What we did in Syria can't be done in Iran'

Iyar 15, 5778, 4/30/2018

[EXCERPT]

Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert spoke on Sunday [2018-04-29] at the Jerusalem Post conference in New York and discussed, among other things, the Israeli strike on the nuclear reactor in Syria which took place during his time in office in 2008.

"What we did with Syria cannot be done with Iran. Syria is relatively close, there was one structure, one nuclear reactor and that was the whole thing. When it was destroyed, their entire nuclear capabilities were destroyed until they decide to build a new one and that will take years," he said.

"In Iran the situation is completely different. The distance is greater," Olmert explained. "Second, the structures are scattered in different locations, especially underground. Israel's ability to destroy Iran's potential for nuclear weapons is much smaller. It requires a different kind of capability."

"When I was prime minister, Israel did a lot of unusual things by any standard, that you will not hear about for many years, in order to ensure we were not under the threat of a nuclear Iran," said the former prime minister.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/air-force-marks-planes-to-commemorate-bombing-syria-reactor-in-2007/>

Air Force marks planes to commemorate bombing Syria reactor in 2007

By TOI staff

7 September 2018, 10:35 am



The Israeli Air Force marked the 11-year anniversary of its destruction of Bashar Assad’s secret nuclear reactor, in a ceremony that saw special markings placed on the warplanes that took part in the strike.

The strike against the reactor in the Deir el-Zour region of Syria took place on the night between September 5 and 6, 2007, but was only officially acknowledged by Israel earlier this year. The reactor had become operational a short time earlier, leading then-prime minister Ehud Olmert to order its destruction.

Three squadrons took part in the attack, dubbed by the military “Operation Outside the Box”: Squadron 69, known as “Hapatishim,” or “The Hammers” flying F-15i fighters; Squadron 119, “Ha’atalef,” or “The Bat” and Squadron 253, “The Negev,” flying F-16is.

The ceremony at the Hatzerim Air Force Base, west of Beersheba, saw the marking of the planes from squadrons 69 and 253. Squadron 119’s planes will be marked in a separate ceremony on September 14.

Pilots who took part in the operation, technical crews who armed the planes in 2007 and the commander of Squadron 69, Lt. Col. G., placed on the planes stickers bearing the symbol of the operation, the army said in a statement.

The symbol includes a triangle, symbolizing an attack and painted in the colors of the Syrian flag, with a radioactivity symbol at its center, symbolizing the nuclear reactor.

Appendix A

Commentary and Supplementary Material

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HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND CENTRAL ASIA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS
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[EXCERPT]

Nuclear

As I [John Bolton] informed Congress last fall [i.e., fall of 2002], we are concerned about Syria's nuclear R&D program and continue to watch for any signs of nuclear weapons activity or foreign assistance that could facilitate a Syrian nuclear weapons capability. We are aware of Syrian efforts to acquire dual-use technologies—some, through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Technical Cooperation program—that could be applied to a nuclear weapons program. In addition, Russia and Syria have approved a draft program on cooperation on civil nuclear power. Broader access to Russian expertise could provide opportunities for Syria to expand its indigenous capabilities, should it decide to pursue nuclear weapons. The Syrians have a Chinese-supplied “miniature” research reactor under IAEA safeguards at Dayr Al Hajar.

Syria is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and has a standard safeguards agreement with the IAEA but, like Iran, has not yet signed or, to our knowledge, even begun negotiations on the IAEA Additional Protocol. The Additional Protocol is an important tool that, if fully implemented, could strengthen the IAEA's investigative powers to verify compliance with NPT safeguards obligations and provides the IAEA with the ability to act quickly on any indicators of undeclared nuclear materials, facilities and activities. We believe the Additional Protocol should be a new minimal standard for countries to demonstrate their nonproliferation bona fides.

I Skövde lärde sig syrierna utvinna uran

Av Johan Wallqvist

johan.wallqvist@expressen.se

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GT berättade i går att Syriens atomenergikommission har köpt avancerad kärnteknisk utrustning av göteborgsföretaget MEAB Metallextraktion AB. I dag kan vi berätta att MEAB i samarbete med kärnteknikföretaget Ranstad Mineral AB, utanför Skövde, har utbildat syriska atomforskare i hur man utvinner uran. Hösten 1997 anlände chefen för Syriens atomenergikommission till Ranstad med fem syriska kärnkemister. De lärde sig uranutvinning hos mig i tre omgångar åren 1998 och 1999, säger Bengt Lillhja, ägare till Ranstad Mineral. Blir kärnbränsle Företaget utvinner varje år 1,5 ton anrikat uran från atomsopor som bryts ned i en kemisk process. Uranet bearbetas sedan till kärnbränsle. USA och andra västländer påstår att Syrien är en skurkstat som i smyg skaffar sig massförstörelsevapen och stödjer terrorister. Borde inte alla röda lampor ha blinkat hos Säpo? - Jo, men vi fick veta det här först 2002, säger Håkan Forsström, kriminalkommissarie vid Säpos särskilda grupp för ickespridning av massförstörelsevapen. Frågade om syrierna Säpo ringde då MEAB:s styrelseordförande Hans Reinhardt: - Säpo frågade om syrierna. Jag sa att det var folk som lärt sig hantera en anläggning i Syrien som vi sålt, och som är identisk med anläggningen i Ranstad. Jaha, sa Säpo, säger Reinhardt. Håkan Forsström, Säpo: - 2002 kontaktade vi också SKI, Statens Kärnkraftinspektion, det är deras ansvar att vidta åtgärder. SKI hade redan 1999 fått besked om det vetenskapliga utbytet med Syrien, i en rapport från Ranstad Minerals vd Bengt Lillhja. Men utan att göra något. - Först tre år senare ringde en tjänsteman på SKI till Lillhja och frågade om han hade överfört känslig kärnteknisk information till Syrien? Nej, svarade han. Och det nöjde vi oss med, berättar en källa på SKI. SKI har sedan bedömt att utbildningen av de syriska atomforskarna var tillåten, med hänvisning till en EU-förordning.

<http://www.expressen.se/Nyheter/1.81759/han-saljer-teknik-for-karnvapen>

Han säljer teknik för kärnvapen

Av Johan Wallqvist

johan.wallqvist@expressen.se

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Expressen kan i dag avslöja att ett svenskt företag har sålt avancerad kärnteknisk utrustning till Syrien.

Tullkriminalen i Göteborg har startat en förundersökning av ärendet.

- Syrien har nu förbättrat sin kapacitet att få fram kärnbränsle av uran och i värsta fall - kärnvapen, säger en svensk kärnkraftsexpert.

Det är Göteborgsföretaget MEAB Metallextraktion AB som sålt utrustningen till Syrien. - Syftet är att rena fosforsyra från uran, så att den kan användas i livsmedelsindustrin, säger Hans Reinhardt, styrelseordförande i MEAB. - Utrustningen har svenska underleverantörer gjort. Sedan har vi skickat allt till Syrien där vi byggt upp anläggningen. Priset var 40 miljoner kronor. Utvinna uran Men utrustningen kan också användas för att utvinna uran till kärnbränsle för civil kärnkraft - eller för radioaktiva vapen. - Företaget saknar tillstånd för export av teknik med dubbel användning. Förundersökningen får visa om företaget begått smuggelbrott eller ej, säger tullinspektör Bertil Weingarten. "Vi säger bara SAEC" Expressens granskning visar att det är den syriska atomenergikommissionen SAEC som köpt utrustningen av MEAB. Detta försöker Hans Reinhardt dölja under intervjun. Vad står bokstäverna SAEC för? - S står för Syrian... Och A? - Ja, vad blir det... eeh, nej, det vet jag inte. Jaså? - Hehe, nä, vi säger bara SAEC. Har anläggningen med kärnkraft eller kärnvapen att göra? - Inte ett dugg, säger Hans Reinhardt, doktor i kärnkemi och specialist på uranutvinning. Senare medger han: - Det är fullständigt klart att tekniken och utrustningen som vi sålt till Syrien också går att använda till att återvinna kärnbränsle och till att göra uran. USA och andra västländer hävdar att Syrien är en "skurkstat" som i smyg skaffar sig massförstörelsevapen och stöder terrorister. I staden Homs har MEAB anslutit sin anläggning till en konstgödsselfabrik, ägd av Syriens atomenergikommission som ansvarar för landets kärnkraftsprogram. Utpekas som centralort Enligt amerikanska uppgifter är Homs "centralort för Syriens utveckling av massförstörelsevapen". Det internationella atomenergiorganet, IAEA, konstaterar att konstgödsselfabriken i Homs ingår som en del i Syriens kärnkraftsprogram.

<http://www.gt.se/nyheter/1.82134/foretagets-vinst-skot-i-hojden-1999>

Företagets vinst sköt i höjden 1999

Ranstad Mineral brukar ha en årlig inkomst på 10-20 miljoner kronor.

1999 var ett undantag: då steg företagets inkomster till 66 miljoner.

Det året avslutade företaget utbildningen av syriska vetenskapsmän.

Av Johan Wallqvist

johan.wallqvist@expressen.se

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Uppdaterad 20 februari 2004

Ranstad Mineral redovisar 46 miljoner kronor mer i intäkter 1999, jämfört med många andra år, visar GT:s granskning. - Jag har absolut inte sålt något till Syrien. De 66 miljoner jag tjänade 1999 kom till stor del från aktiespekulationer, säger Bengt Lillhja, företagets ägare. Fick du inget betalt för att du lärt syrierna hur man utvinner uran från atomsopor? - Nej, det internationella atomenergiorganet IAEA var ju införstådda med projektet så jag såg det som en ära att få hjälpa dem utan ersättning. Värt 100150 miljoner GT har tillgång till ett e-postbrev som Lillhja skickade den 11 april 2002 till Statens Strålskyddsinstitut, SSI. Där skriver Lillhja att han värderar sin metod att återvinna uran ur atomsopor, till 100-150 miljoner kronor. Lillhja uppmanar SSI att inte beskriva metoden i en säkerhetsredovisning av hans anläggning. Detta för att förhindra att inte utomstående ska kunna komma över hans livsverk, skriver Lillhja.

SYRIENS GEHEIMES ATOMPROGRAMM

Die Spur führt nach Hanau

Von Sebastian Knauer

28. Februar 2004, 10:27 Uhr

Ein Ermittlungsverfahren Stockholmer Behörden sowie Recherchen der CIA erregen einen schweren Verdacht. Syriens Diktator Baschar al-Assad betreibt womöglich ein geheimes Nuklearprogramm - mit schwedischer und deutscher Hilfe. Das Know-how zum Umgang mit dem Spaltmaterial soll aus der Atomfabrik Hanau stammen.

Hamburg/Stockholm - Der freundliche Amerikaner im Business-Anzug kam ziemlich schnell zur Sache. In den Räumen der US-Botschaft in Stockholm an der prachtvollen Dag Hammarskjölds Väg 31 stellte er sich als Mitarbeiter der CIA vor. "Sie können uns vielleicht helfen?", sagte er dem zuvor telefonisch kontaktierten schwedischen Kernkraftexperten.

Der konnte helfen. Er berichtet dem bärtigen Amerikaner im vergangenen November von seinen internen Kenntnissen der Nuklearanlage "Randstad Mineral" im mittelschwedischen Skövde, eine knappe Flugstunde südwestlich von Stockholm. In der Anlage, die mit dem US-Konzern Westinghouse kooperiert, arbeiteten zwischen 1999 und 2002 syrische Techniker an einer so genannten "Extraktionsanlage" zur Gewinnung von Uran.

Der dazu notwendige Rohstoff kam aus Deutschland: Nach den Transportgenehmigungen des Bundesamtes für Strahlenschutz waren es "unbestr. kontaminierte Reststoffe" mit "5 Prozent angereichertem Uran (Uranoxid)" aus der stillgelegten hessischen Nuklearfabrik in Hanau. "Der Ami wurde ganz wach, als er das hörte", erinnert sich der schwedische Kernkraftexperte.

Hilfslieferungen für Syriens Bombe?

Damit bahnt sich für die hessische Nuklearfabrik möglicherweise ein neuer internationaler Atomskandal an. Während der bündnisgrüne Bundesaußenminister Joschka Fischer noch verzweifelt Wege sucht, den von Kanzler Gerhard Schröder zugesagten Export der Hanauer Neu-Anlage nach China zu verhindern oder wenigstens zu verzögern, entpuppt sich die alte Brennelementefabrik immer mehr als politische Zeitbombe. Mehr als 40 Tonnen uranhaltige Abfälle aus Brennelementen der Firma Siemens für deutsche Atomreaktoren wurden seit 1996 bis 2000 offiziell nach Schweden verkauft.

"Wir liefern keine radioaktiven Abfälle, sondern werthaltige Reststoffe ins Ausland", sagt Helmut Rupa, Chef der Hanauer Nuklearanlage. Doch die "kontaminierten Reststoffe", so die offiziellen Transportpapiere des Bundesamtes für Strahlenschutz in Salzgitter, verhelfen möglicherweise heute dem arabischen Syrien zur Bombe.

Denn in der syrischen Stadt Homs nördlich der Hauptstadt Damaskus steht auf dem Gelände des syrischen Atomforschungszentrums ein kastenförmiges Gebäude aus blau-grauen Metallwänden.

Geliefert hat das offiziell als "Reinigungsanlage für Phosphorsäure" deklarierte Innenleben die schwedische Firma Meab mit Sitz bei Göteborg und einer Zweigniederlassung im nordrhein-westfälischen Aachen. Schwedische Kernkraft-Insider berichten, dass die Fabrik baugleich mit der inzwischen still gelegten "Ranstad Mineral" ist, mit der Uran gewonnen wurde.

Inhaber und Gesellschafter der 1970 gegründeten Meab ist jeweils Hans Reinhardt, 68, einer der führenden Nuklearchemiker Schwedens. Er hat diverse Patente für chemisch-physikalische Verfahren zur Abtrennung von Stoffen aus Mineralien entwickelt. "Unsere Anlage in Schweden dient der Produktion von lebensmittelreiner Säure, sagt Reinhardt, "die für die Herstellung von Düngemitteln gebraucht wird".

Tatsächlich steht die Exporthalle hinter den meterhohen Mauern und mit Wachtürmen gesicherten Gelände einer "Düngemittelfabrik". Hausherr und Betreiber ist allerdings die Atom Energy Commission of Syria (AECS). Westliche Geheimdienste vermuten schon lange, dass hier Teile des ABC-Waffenprogramms von Damaskus vorangetrieben wird - Plutonium statt Blaukorn, Anthrax statt Narkosemittel, Nervengas statt Pestizide. Der tatsächliche Nutzen der Dual-Use Anlagen in Syrien, sagt der Berliner Sicherheitsexperte Oliver Thränert, "sind unklar". Wenig weist jedenfalls auf Bestände von Massenvernichtungswaffen hin, wie sie bei den von Washington erklärten "Schurkenstaaten" vorhanden seien.

Der schwedische Deal ist jedoch ein weiterer Hinweis, dass Syrien, das bereits Raketentechnologie aus China oder potenzielle Giftgas-Technik aus den USA, Frankreich oder Deutschland importierte, in den Club der Atomkräfte strebt. Das Land des Nachwuchs-Diktators und Staatsoberhauptes Baschir Assad verfügt selbst über keine zivil genutzten Reaktoren zur Energieerzeugung.

Immerhin kooperiert Damaskus mit der Internationalen Atomenergiebehörde (IAEA) in Wien bei der Entwicklung von "Kleinanlagen", um uranhaltigen "Yellow Cake" zu gewinnen. Nach Überzeugung des Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, der "erste Schritt in einem nationalen Atomprogramm".

Auch die Beschäftigung der syrischen Experten wurde in Schweden von den Atomaufsichtsbehörden absegnet. Seit 1999 befand sich auch der jetzige AECS-Generaldirektor, Ibrahim Osman, mit fünf weiteren Mitarbeitern über wechselnde Zeiträume im schwedischen Skövde zum "Wissenschaftsaustausch".

Schon damals wunderten sich die schwedischen Kraftwerksingenieure über das besondere Interesse der nahöstlichen Kollegen an der Mineral Randstad-Anlage, in der ursprünglich Uran aus heimischem Schiefer gewonnen wurde. Syrien verfügt über ähnliche uranhaltige Phosphatvorkommen. "Irgendwas war da im Busch", sagt ein Beteiligter. Erst als einige Gramm Plutonium aus der Aufarbeitung der Hanau-Chargen auf einer örtlichen Müllkippe gefunden wurden, reagierte die schwedische Atomaufsicht. (SPIEGEL 18/2002, Atommüll im Birkenwald) Zudem waren aus Mineral Randstad einige sorgfältig inventarisierten Mengen des hochgiftigen Plutonium spurlos verschwunden.

"Ich sage nichts. Auf Wiedersehen"

Vergangene Woche eröffneten die schwedischen Sicherheitsbehörden ein Ermittlungsverfahren gegen den Importeur. Meab-Chef Reinhardt hatte den Nachbau der Urananlage ohne behördliche

Genehmigung bereits seit 1999 ins syrische Homs verschiffen lassen. Kaufpreis: vier Millionen Euro. Im Januar 2004 soll in Damaskus Probelauf gewesen sein. Reinhardt zum SPIEGEL: "Lächerlich, ich sage dazu nichts. Auf Wiedersehen."

Gegenüber der schwedischen Tageszeitung "Expressen" zeigte sich Reinhardt, dessen Sohn und Diplom-Ingenieur Niclas als Gesellschafter mit einer Einlage von 25.000 Euro in Aachen fungiert, ahnungslos: "Ich weiß nicht einmal, was die Abkürzung AECS bedeutet."

Das ist nicht ganz glaubwürdig. Denn auf der Internetseite der Meab steht zur Eigenwerbung: "Schlüsselübergabe der AECS-Anlage in Homs, Syrien."



German Article Claims Syrian WMD Program Receives Swedish, German Help

EUP20040229000106 Hamburg Spiegel Online WWW-Text in German

29 Feb 04

[Article by Sebastuan Knauer: "Syria's Secret Nuclear Program: The Trail Leads to Hanau." The first paragraph is an introduction.]

Strong suspicion has arisen as a result of investigations by Stockholm authorities and CIA research regarding the possibility that Syrian dictator Bashar al-Asad is conducting a secret nuclear program, with Swedish and German assistance. The know-how required for handling the fissile material is believed to have come from the Hanau nuclear plant.

The meeting took place last November in the US Embassy in Stockholm, located at number 31 on the city's imposing Dag Hammarskjolds Vag street. Having introduced himself as a CIA agent, the amiable, bearded American in the business suit quickly came to the point: "Maybe you can help us?" he asked the Swedish nuclear expert he had previously contacted by telephone.

He certainly was able to help. He informed the American of what he had found out through his internal inquiries at the Ranstad Mineral nuclear facility in the central Swedish town of Skovde, just under an hour's flight southwest of Stockholm. Between 1999 and 2002, this factory, which works in cooperation with the American Westinghouse Corporation, served as the base for a group of Syrian technicians working on a uranium extraction plant there.

The raw materials required came from Germany: The transport permit issued by the Federal Office for Radiation Protection [Bundesamt fuer Strahlenschutz: BfS] listed them as "unirradiated contaminated residues" with "5 percent enriched uranium (uranium oxide)" from the decommissioned nuclear plant at Hanau, in the region of Hesse. "The Yank became very alert when he heard that" recalls the Swedish nuclear expert.

CONSIGNMENT OF SUPPLIES FOR SYRIA'S BOMB?

This marked the possible start of a new international atomic scandal surrounding the Hesse nuclear plant. Federal Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who represents the Alliance 90/ Greens, is still racking his brains to find ways of either preventing, or at the very least delaying the export of the new Hanau plant to China, despite Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's pledge that the deal would go ahead. The old burned fuel elements plant has been proving to be more and more of a political time-bomb. Between 1996 and 2000, more than 40 metric tonnes of uranium-containing waste from burned fuel elements produced by the Siemens firm for German nuclear reactors [as published] were officially sold to Sweden.

"We do not supply radioactive waste, but we do send high-value residues abroad" stated Helmut Rupaar, director of the Hanau nuclear plant. But the "contaminated residues" described in the official dispatch documents issued by the Federal Office for Radiation Protection in Salzgitter may now be assisting the Arab state of Syria in producing its atomic bomb.

North of the Syrian capital city of Damascus lies the town of Homs, where the site of Syria's nuclear research center includes a tin-shaped building with blue-gray metal walls. This was supplied by the Swedish firm of Meab, based near Gothenburg, with a branch in the German city of Aachen, in the region of North Rhine -

Westphalia. Though Meab officially described the building as a "cleaning facility for phosphoric acid", Swedish nuclear power specialists report that its structure precisely matches the one previously used by Ranstad Mineral to extract uranium, and since shut down.

The proprietor and one of the partners in Meab, which was founded in 1970, is 68-year old Hans Reinhardt. As one of Sweden's leading nuclear chemists, he has taken out various patents for chemical-physical processes for separating materials from minerals. According to Reinhardt, "Our plant in Sweden is used for producing acids of sufficient purity for use in foodstuffs, and are used for the manufacture of fertilizers."

EXPORT SHED BEHIND METER-HIGH WALLS

Though the export shed is indeed located on the site of a "fertilizer factory," behind meter-high walls guarded by watch towers, its actual landlord and operator is the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS). Western intelligence services have long suspected that this is where parts of Syria's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons program are carried out. In other words, that its products are plutonium, rather than blue corn; anthrax, rather than anesthetics; nerve gas, rather than pesticide. Berlin security specialist Oliver Thraenert regards the actual purposes of dual-use plants in Syria as "unclear," though there is little evidence of the presence of stocks of weapons of mass destruction, as claimed in Washington's "rogue state" characterization of Syria.

However, following its acquisition of missile technology from China and potential toxic gas technology from the United States, France, and Germany, the Swedish link is yet another indication of Syria's determined attempts to join the club of nuclear-armed states. President Bashar Assad's Syria does not itself possess any civil nuclear reactors for energy production.

SMALL-SCALE PLANTS FOR "YELLOW CAKE"

Damascus is nevertheless cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna over the development of "small-scale plants" for the extraction of uranium-rich "yellow cake." The Monterey-based Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) is convinced that this represents the "first stage in a national nuclear program."

Sweden's atomic supervisory authorities also gave their approval to the employment of Syrian experts. Since 1999, the present Director General of the AECS, Ibrahim Osman, has also spent varying periods of time, along with five of his staff, on "scientific exchange" programs in the Swedish town of Skovde.

At that time, Swedish power station engineers were surprised by the particular interest shown by their Middle Eastern colleagues in the Ranstad Mineral plant, originally used for extracting uranium from indigenous slate. Syria possesses similar reserves of phosphorus. "Something was brewing there" says one of those involved. Only after a few grams of plutonium from the reprocessed Hanau batches were found at a local garbage tip did Sweden's atomic supervisory authorities take action. (see SPIEGEL, 18/ 2002: "Nuclear Waste in the Birch Forest.") There was also the case of the batch of highly toxic plutonium that vanished without trace from Ranstad Mineral, after scrupulous stocktaking.

"I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY. GOODBYE."

Last week, the Swedish security authorities launched an investigation into the supplier. Back in 1999, Meab director Reinhardt had arranged for the replicate of the uranium plant to be shipped to Homs, Syria, without obtaining official authorization, for a purchase price of four million euros. A test run is believed to have been conducted in Damascus in January 2004. Reinhardt's comment to SPIEGEL was: "Ridiculous, I have nothing to say. Goodbye."

When he spoke to the Swedish daily newspaper Expressen, Reinhardt, whose Aachen- based son, graduate engineer Niclas, is a business partner with a stake of 25,000 euros, played the innocent, protesting: "I do not even know what the abbreviation 'AECS' signifies."

That does not sound altogether credible, in view of the claim on MEAB's own website: "Key handing over at AECS plant, Homs, Syria."

[Ranstad Mineral: The name appears in three different versions in the original German article; but this version appears to be the correct one.]

[Description of Source: Hamburg Spiegel Online WWW-Text in German -- www.spiegel.de: news web site funded by the Spiegel group which funds Der Spiegel weekly and the Spiegel television magazine.]

Swedish nuclear watchdog allays fears about missing uranium

STOCKHOLM (AFP)

Mar 03, 2004

Sweden's nuclear watchdog on Wednesday rejected claims, attributed to a US secret service agent, that up to 100 kilos of Swedish uranium may have fallen into the wrong hands.

"We keep close tabs on this stuff. None of the uranium is missing," said Anders Joerla, a spokesman for the Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate (SKI).

SKI has disclosed that the Swedish company Ranstad Minerals, which recycles nuclear waste into uranium, has shown some discrepancies in records on the amount of nuclear waste treated and the amount of uranium it has in store.

Since the 1990s, as much as 100 kilos (220 pounds) of the potentially bomb-making material is unaccounted for, Joerla said.

But he said such discrepancies were often due to calculation errors and there was nothing to indicate that the uranium had actually gone missing.

"When you produce uranium from nuclear waste, it's a very complex process," Joerla told AFP. "It's very difficult to calculate how much uranium is actually in the nuclear products... If you overestimate how much uranium is in the products, records will show less uranium than expected."

Reports in the Swedish press on Wednesday said the US Central Intelligence Agency feared that the uranium that remains unaccounted for may have fallen into "terrorist" hands.

A CIA agent quoted by the Swedish daily Expressen also charged that Ranstad Minerals was a "security risk".

"We have acted at a high level to get the Swedes to stop the company in Ranstad," the agent, whose name was not revealed, told the paper. "It is incredible that the the Swedish security police haven't stopped (this) company."

Joerla however insisted that SKI keeps all dealings with nuclear material under tight supervision.

"We don't have much faith in the CIA," he added. "They couldn't find any (nuclear weapons) in Iraq, and they're not going to find any missing uranium in Sweden."

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/blog/2007/04/_syria_revisite.html

Syria Revisited

BY Jackie Bennion

April 04, 2007

[EXCERPTS]

Following her visit to Israel and Lebanon, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi arrived in Damascus, Syria, this week to hold talks with President Bashar al-Assad...

[deletia]

All this reminded FRONTLINE/World series editor Stephen Talbot of his own meeting in Damascus with President Bashar al-Assad in May 2004, during a trip of U.S. news editors sponsored by the International Reporting Project of Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC. Below, we are reprinting Talbot's impressions of the Syrian leader at that time.

[deletia]

My Photo-Op with Bashar al-Assad

by Stephen Talbot

[deletia]

On the matter of WMDs, Assad stressed that Syria had no nuclear capability: "We do not even have a nuclear reactor for peaceful means." The International Atomic Energy Agency announced recently that there was no evidence Syria was trying to develop nuclear weapons. Assad also denied U.S. accusations that Syria has an advanced chemical weapons capability and a stockpile of the nerve gas sarin.

Assad made the case that U.N. inspectors had uncovered all of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

[deletia]

Baradei poohpoohs Bolton's nuke scare

Saturday, **June 26, 2004**

Syria says UN nuclear inspectors welcome

It looks like those pesky "diplomats" are upsetting Baradei and the State Department with their wacky allegations. ("diplomat can only mean John Bolton, who has been riding this dead horse for months) Baradei, who is leading the investigation into the Khan nuclear ring insists that nothing points to Syria having nuclear weapons and claims the "diplomat's" evidence is fishy. I guess Baradei is tired of being bullied by ideologues, who don't care whether they are right or not. Louis Charbonneau of Reuters is getting the dust up.

"The Syrians told me they would be happy if we go and verify whatever we need to verify," International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei told reporters on Saturday during a flight to Moscow for a four-day official visit. "But we haven't gotten any piece of information on why we should be concerned about Syria."

Last week, diplomats told Reuters that the IAEA considered Damascus a top candidate for being the fourth customer of the nuclear black market that supplied uranium enrichment technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya.

But ElBaradei said no country had provided any hard evidence that would implicate Syria as a customer in the black market set up by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's atomic weapons programme. "This is something I read in the paper. Nobody came to us with any information (about Syria)," ElBaradei said. The IAEA, along with governments and intelligence agencies, has been investigating the details of Khan's network so that it can be dismantled. The results of the investigation are classified.

Syria, which has called for the creation of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, has denied any interest in nuclear weapons.

Last month, diplomats and nuclear experts told Reuters that an experimental high-tech intelligence technique developed by the United States had detected what appear to be operating uranium-enrichment centrifuges in Syria. Diplomats said the centrifuges, which spin at supersonic speeds to purify uranium for use as fuel for power plants or weapons, could only have come from Khan's network. But some U.S. officials -- as well as ElBaradei -- are skeptical about the centrifuges.

"We don't have super high-tech detectors, and if somebody detected something they'd better come to us. We are the ones who can clarify fact from fiction," ElBaradei said.

<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/040722/2004072204.html>

Baradei: no evidence on banned nuclear activities in Syria

Syria, Politics, 7/22/2004

The International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA on Wednesday denied the existence of any evidence that Syria has made banned nuclear activities.

In a statement to Egyptian TV in Cairo yesterday, General-Director of the IAEA Mohammed el-Baradei said " the Agency has no evidence on Syria's attempts to build any nuclear program that violates the Non-Proliferation Treaty." He called all the regional states to work on preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region.

US embassy cables: US sought financial pressure on top Syrian officials

Monday 20 December 2010 21.30 GMT

Thursday, 15 March 2007, 15:41

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000269

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA/ELA;TREASURY FOR LEBENSON/GLASER/SZUBIN; NSC FOR
MARCHESE

EO 12958 DECL: 03/06/2017

TAGS EFIN, ECON, ETTC, SY, SANC

**SUBJECT: TREASURY TEAM'S DAMASCUS CONSULTATIONS ON
FINANCIAL SANCTIONS**

REF: A. DAMASCUS 0108 B. 05 DAMASCUS 6224

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, reasons 1.4 b/d

[EXCERPTS]

1. (S/NF) Summary: Treasury representatives recently visited Post to discuss options for using financial sanctions to apply pressure to the Syrian regime. We discussed:

-- Treasury's requirements for finalizing the pending designations of Mohammad Sulayman [*Suleiman*] and Ali Mamluk, and Treasury's information requirements for a public statement;

-- Treasury's need to maintain the legal thread between the classified designation packet and the public statement announcing the designation;

-- Post's support for designating Mohammad Nassif Kheirbek, SARG pointman for its relationship with Iran;

-- How designating regime financiers like Rami and Mohammad Mahloun could be problematic without a new Executive Order on corruption. End Summary.

2. (S/NF) PENDING DESIGNATIONS: Post understands the designations for Mohammad Sulieman, Syrian Special Presidential Advisor for Arms Procurement and Strategic Weapons and Ali Mamluk, Chief of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate, are pending due to a lack of unclassified material necessary for Treasury's public SIPDIS designation statement. In post's estimate, Mohammad Sulayman is a relatively low-payoff target. His activities are not widely known, which will make it difficult to obtain unclassified information for a public statement and, SIPDIS likewise, make it unlikely that his designation would resonate inside Syria. Ali Mamluk, on the other hand, is more well-known within Syria, especially for involvement in his objectionable activities regarding Lebanon, and his suppressing Syrian civil society and the internal opposition. Therefore, Mamluk's designation will likely have a larger impact with local and regional audiences if the public statement announcing his designation also discusses his oppression of Syrian society.

3. (S/NF) We understood from our visit with Treasury representatives that although we are limited to designating regime members under the existing Executive Orders, there is some flexibility in Treasury's public statement announcing the designation. Post has advocated that no matter the legal basis of the designation, any public designation should focus on themes that resonate inside Syria:

corruption, suppression of civil society, and denial of basic human rights (ref A). The need to maintain the "legal thread" between the designation packet and the public announcement could be challenging on cases like Mohamad Sulieman whose links to corruption are less clear. In cases like Ali Mamluk, however, the role of the organization he heads in suppressing internal dissent is publicly known in Syria and stating as much in our statement would resonate well here.

[deletia]

ROEBUCK

US embassy cables: Mossad chief wants to 'detach' Syria from Iran

Sunday 28 November 2010 18.15 GMT

Thursday, 26 July 2007, 13:52

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 002280

SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR APHSCT TOWNSEND.

EO 12958 DECL: 07/13/2017

TAGS PTER, PREL, KNNP, KWBG, EFIN, IR, IS

**SUBJECT: APHSCT TOWNSEND TAKES STOCK OF BMENA REGION WITH
MOSSAD DIRECTOR DAGAN**

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (B/D).

[EXCERPTS]

1. (S) SUMMARY: Frances Fragos Townsend, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism (AFHSC), met Mossad Director Meir Dagan on July 12 for a general discussion of regional security threats. On the Iranian nuclear program, Dagan proved surprisingly optimistic about the effects of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and their impact on Iranian elites. On most other fronts, however, Dagan expressed deep skepticism regarding any near-term solutions. Dagan believes that the Syrians were emboldened by the Second Lebanon War, and argued for a concerted international effort to enforce UNSC resolutions in Lebanon as a means of removing Syria from Iranian influence. In Dagan's personal opinion, present attempts to prop up the government of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad will fail, and "an entirely new approach" with the Palestinians is required. Dagan and Townsend surveyed political developments in North Africa, Turkey, and the Gulf, and shared concerns about Pakistan's ability to withstand the challenge of Islamic radicals. END SUMMARY

[deletia]

Syria Taking Dangerous Risks

5. (S) Dagan echoed other reports that Syria expects an Israeli attack this summer, and has raised its level of readiness. Despite the fact that Israel has no intention of attacking, said Dagan, the Syrians are likely to retaliate over even the smallest incident, which could lead to quick escalation. Dagan believes that Syria's strategic alliance with Iran and Hizballah has not changed, and that Assad views these policies as both "successful and just." There is a tendency to assume that Syria can be separated from Iran, said Dagan, and that this offers the key to weakening Hizballah. Dagan argued that the opposite is true: by enforcing UN resolutions on Lebanon and increasing efforts to disarm Hizballah, the international community can remove the glue that binds Iran and Syria. Enforcing the resolutions would put additional pressure on Assad, who fears being tried for the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri above all else. The advantage of such an approach, continued Dagan, is that the legal ground is already in place for action by the UNSC. This credible threat could sufficiently frighten Syria away from Iran and towards more natural allies in the Arab League.

CRETZ

<http://www.aina.org/news/20060814102533.htm>

Assyrian International News Agency

Syria's Secret Nuclear Program and Long Term Threat

Posted GMT 8-14-2006 15:25:33

Washington -- On May 5, 2004 RPS reported that there is growing concern in the Bush administration that Syria has been pursuing a clandestine nuclear weapons development program, and may already have centrifuges that can purify uranium for use in bombs. Centrifuges are a vital component in any nuclear weapons development program, as they can be used to purify uranium for use as nuclear fuel or in weapons. Experts say getting weapons-grade material is the biggest hurdle for any country that desires the bomb.

On September 16, 2005, John Bolton, then Undersecretary for Arms Control & International Security - U.S. Department of State, testified before the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee on Syria's bio/chem and atomic programs. In his testimony, Mr. Bolton said: "...on the nuclear side we are concerned about Syria's nuclear R&D program and continue to watch for any sign of nuclear weapons activity or foreign assistance that could facilitate a Syrian nuclear weapons capability. We are aware of Syrian efforts to acquire dual-use technologies that could be applied to a nuclear weapons program."

Since Washington began its post-September 11 policy of aggressively pursuing countries it believed had weapons of mass destruction that could be used against the United States and its allies, it has repeatedly issued warnings about Syria. Recent reports issued by the CIA have highlighted growing concern over Syria.

As an important player in the U.N. Oil for Food program, Syria also diverted important resources to its nuclear program by purchasing equipment, expertise, and delivery systems from other rogue nations or individuals.

Early on, various countries such as Belgium, China, Germany, and the former Soviet Union assisted Syria in their nuclear research. Additionally, over the years, Syria has solicited proposals from other countries including Argentina, India, and Italy. Further, the IAEA helped Syria on numerous projects including uranium exploration, uranium extraction from phosphoric acid, isotope production, construction of a cyclotron facility, development of nuclear research laboratories, and preparation for a nuclear power program.

A report by Middle East Newline (MENL) in July of 2004 disclosed that the Bush administration has expressed concern that Syria might exploit dual-use components and technology approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency for a nuclear weapons program.

MENL further went on to say that officials said the United States has been tracking Syrian orders for dual-use components and technologies for its civilian nuclear research program. They said Russia has also been offering Damascus expertise and cooperation in the development of a Syrian nuclear reactor.

Nuclear Site

Sources close to RPS have disclosed that Syria is involved in military nuclear research not too far from Deir el-Hajjar, a tourist area in Syria. *[Sourcebook note: The location of the Israeli strike in Deir al-Zawr Province is close to the Halabiyya site, a popular tourist destination.]* Deir el-Hajjar is also known for agricultural research, which is intended to hide the real purpose of nuclear research. Experts believe that some of the satellite early detection technology will be dismissed because of the agricultural component of the location.

"The CIA is aware of the site and is monitoring the situation closely" Sources told RPS. The site is built underground and has two facilities: civil and military. The civil facility is a cover for the military one, the real purpose of the site.

Furthermore, the Central Intelligence Agency has unclassified recently a report that was sent to Congress on the "Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions". In it, the CIA accuses Syria of promoting a nuclear, chemical and biological programs.

The report states: "Syria...has a nuclear research center at Dayr Al Hajar. Russia and Syria have continued their long-standing agreements on cooperation regarding nuclear energy, although specific assistance has not yet materialized. Broader access to foreign expertise provides opportunities to expand its indigenous capabilities, and we are monitoring Syrian nuclear intentions with concern.

Nuclear Scientists

RPS is aware of three Syrian nuclear scientists who work closely with the regime of Assad. The most prominent is Dr. Ibrahim Othman who heads the Atomic Energy Commission (AECS), an organization established in 1979 by Hafez al-Assad for, in disclosures to the IAEA, peaceful use of nuclear technology for power plants. Dr. Othman is a habitual visitor to all IAEA annual meetings in Vienna. It is believed that he was the contact man with the Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan known to have delivered important secrets to rogue nations.

The other two scientists are Dr. Mustapha Hamolella, a Kurdish nuclear physicist and Dr. Faris Al-Asfari. Both work closely on the Syrian nuclear program and are closely associated with the regime.

It is also believed that Iraqi nuclear scientists may have escaped to Syria and are working closely with the Syrian regime to build a nuclear bomb. A group of about 12 middle-ranking Iraqi nuclear technicians and their families were transported to Syria before the collapse of Saddam's regime. The transfer was arranged under a combined operation by Saddam's now defunct Special Security Organization and Syrian Military Security, which was headed until recently by Assef Shawqat, Assad's brother-in-law.

The Iraqis, who brought with them CDs crammed with research data on Saddam's nuclear program, were given new identities, including Syrian citizenship papers and falsified birth, education, and health certificates. Since then they have been hidden away at a secret Syrian military installation where they have been conducting research on behalf of their hosts.

Expertise and Equipment

According to an IAEA official, Abdul Qadeer Khan, who has sold nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea, is also behind the proliferation of sensitive nuclear technologies to Syria.

"The leadership of Pakistan was well aware of the export of Pakistani nuclear technologies," the unnamed source in the International Atomic Energy Agency was quoted as saying by a Russian news agency, RIA Novosti.

"It is not ruled out that besides Iran, Libya and North Korea, such supplies could have been made to Syria" the official said.

Several Western diplomats who follow the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), have been saying for months that Syria was a customer of Khan's.

"Syria certainly had contact with Khan," said a non-U.S. Western diplomat, adding that suspicions of Syrian research in atomic weapons have existed for decades.

MENL reported on August 25, 2004 that the U.S. intelligence community obtained evidence that the Khan network sold and delivered components for an unspecified number of Pakistani-designed P1 centrifuges to Syria.

On April 29, 2004 then U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton said that Abdul Qadeer Khan had "several other" customers who may want the bomb. Western diplomats in Vienna said Bolton was clearly referring to Syria.

And on June 9, 2004, a North Korean expert disclosed to Future Korea that Syrians visited North Korea to acquire equipment. He said that:

- * Syria ordered a large number of Scud missiles tipped with bio/chem warheads.
- * Syria ordered Rocket engines that were made at "January 8th Factory" in Kaechon.
- * Syria ordered Missile bodies that were made at "No. 26 Factory" in Namchon-dong, Kanggye City.
- * The missiles were assembled at "Shin-eum-ri Factory" in Pyongyang City.
- * And Bio/chemical warheads, the most sensitive parts, were finished at "Namheung Chemical Factory" and transported via train.

Enriched Uranium

RPS reported on March 5, 2004 that large amounts of uranium have gone missing from a nuclear technology company in Sweden. The CIA fears a worst-case scenario where the material has already fallen into terrorist hands, newspaper Expressen reports.

"The company (Ranstad Mineral) is a security risk and we have taken the matter to top level to get the Swedes to stop them," a CIA spokesman told the Swedish newspaper.

The CIA operative claims to know that the little Swedish company has educated Syrian nuclear physicists in the treatment of uranium. The Syrian scientists left the company right after the disappearance of the uranium. He also has information that a Swedish consultancy has sold nuclear equipment to Syria that can be used in the treatment of radioactive material.

"If it transpires that radioactive or nuclear material has been sent on from Sweden to Syria then this is a very serious matter for Sweden," the CIA source said.

After a meeting with the CIA operative Swedish authorities raided Ranstad Mineral several times and shut the company down on the grounds of deficient security.

"It was one of the worst things I have seen. The company has extremely serious deficiencies in its registration system," said Carl Magnus Larsson, divisional leader of the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority after their inspection.

[deletia]

The Iranian Role

On February 29, 2005, during a press conference in Beirut - Lebanon, Iranian defense Minister Shamkhani said that his country has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Syria and another with Lebanon to bolster the military apparatuses of both countries. The Syrian MOU in fact was intended to send a clear signal that cooperation between Iran and Syria are an integral part of their foreign policy, which lead many to believe that Iran may be working closely with Syria on a parallel nuclear program.

Moreover, Iran came quickly to the defense of Syria two weeks ago and threatened Israel with retaliation if Syria is attacked. This shows that the NATO-like MOU signed between Iran and Syria will make it very hard to peel Syria off by offering it any incentives.

Iran is calculating that Syria's involvement may distract attention away from its own nuclear program (Which did not happen) but also the intended purpose is to present the US with another challenge that Iran knows well the US will be unable to face simultaneously and because of a multiple fronts opened to confront terrorism.

Conclusion

All indications are that Syria is building a potent nuclear program with Iran's assistance and help. The United States government has never disclosed publicly the information but some believe that the CIA is fully aware of the damage that Khan has done and that Syria's nuclear program is more advanced than previously stated.

Syria has a potent chemical arms arsenal with a delivery system that can reach 700km that Assad is willing to use as has been proven through his direct Syrian-made missiles to Hezbollah.

Reform Part[y] of Syria

Ex-Officials Say Bolton Inflated Syrian Danger

By DOUGLAS JEHL

Published: April 26, 2005

WASHINGTON, April 25 - John R. Bolton clashed repeatedly with American intelligence officials in 2002 and 2003 as he sought to deliver warnings about Syrian efforts to acquire unconventional weapons that the Central Intelligence Agency and other experts rejected as exaggerated, according to former intelligence officials.

Ultimately, the former intelligence officials said, most of what Mr. Bolton, then an under secretary of state, said publicly about Syria hewed to the limits on which the C.I.A. and other agencies had insisted. But they said that the prolonged and heated disputes over Mr. Bolton's proposed remarks were unusual within government, and that they reflected what one former senior official called a pattern in which Mr. Bolton sought to push his public assertions beyond the views endorsed by intelligence agencies.

The episodes involving Syria are being reviewed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as part of its inquiries related to Mr. Bolton's nomination to become ambassador to the United Nations. Some of the former intelligence officials said they had discussed the issue with the committee, while declassified e-mail messages from 2002 provided to the committee by the State Department allude to one previously unknown episode.

One newly declassified message, dated April 30, 2002, and sent by a senior State Department intelligence official, dismissed as "a stretch" language about a possible Syrian nuclear program that had been spelled out in a draft speech circulated by Mr. Bolton's aides for approval. In the speech itself, delivered five days later, Mr. Bolton made no reference to a Syrian nuclear program.

Until now, Senate Democrats leading the opposition to Mr. Bolton's nomination have focused mostly on a 2002 dispute related to Cuba, in which Mr. Bolton has acknowledged seeking the transfer of two intelligence officials with whom he had differed. But a top Democratic staff member on Monday described the clashes over Syria as "an example, perhaps the most serious one, not of Mr. Bolton's abusing people, but of trying to exaggerate the intelligence to fit his policy views."

In one Congressional appearance, in June 2003 before the House International Relations Committee, Mr. Bolton offered a considerably darker view of Syria's nuclear program than the C.I.A. had in a report to Congress two months earlier. Among other things, Mr. Bolton said American officials were "looking at Syria's nuclear program with growing concern and continue to monitor it for any signs of nuclear weapons intent." The C.I.A. report to Congress in April said only, "In principle, broader access to Russian expertise provides opportunities for Syria to expand its indigenous capabilities, should it decide to pursue nuclear weapons."

In a third episode, in July 2003, the sharp objections raised by intelligence officials from several agencies to proposed Congressional testimony by Mr. Bolton on Syria included a 35-page memorandum from the Central Intelligence Agency. The incident became public at the time, and the government said the assertions spelled out in Mr. Bolton's prepared testimony went well beyond what the United States had previously said about Syria's weapons programs.

In particular, intelligence officials say, Mr. Bolton had planned to say in a classified portion of his testimony that Syria's development of chemical and biological weapons posed a threat to stability in the Middle East. In the face of the objections, Mr. Bolton postponed the testimony until September, though Mr. Bolton has said the main reason for the postponement of the speech is that he was summoned to a White House meeting.

"There were a lot of disagreements about the speech," Mr. Bolton said on April 11, when he was asked about the episode during a confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "It was clear to me that more work needed to be done on it." But Mr. Bolton noted that the testimony he ultimately gave to the House committee in September 2003 had been fully cleared by American intelligence agencies.

Mr. Bolton's office declined to comment Monday, and a State Department spokesman, Tom Casey, referred a reporter to Mr. Bolton's Congressional testimony.

Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr., the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has asked the C.I.A. to provide the committee with a copy of its objections to Mr. Bolton's prepared testimony in 2003.

In the versions most recently supplied by the State Department to the Senate committee, the e-mail messages from 2002 included a subject line that said "Clearance Request: Speech by Under Secretary Bolton - New [] Language," with the word between the brackets deleted, as were the names of most senders and recipients. But earlier, unredacted copies of the message provided to Congress by the State Department had shown that the messages, including the response that criticized some language as a "stretch," referred to Syria, according to Congressional and intelligence officials.

In a letter to the Senate committee on April 22, Matthew A. Reynolds, the acting assistant secretary of state for legislative affairs, said country names had been "inadvertently included" in the documents previously released to the committee, and he asked that the Senate disregard them.

The exchanges on Syria in 2002 were part of a broader debate on an address that Mr. Bolton ultimately delivered to the Heritage Foundation on May 5. Sharp differences over the assertions on Cuba that Mr. Bolton had sought to make led to a rift between the under secretary and the State Department's intelligence bureau. Mr. Bolton's supporters have said the exchanges were part of the customary back-and-forth in government in advance of such speeches, but his critics say they were unusual in scope and intensity, and reflected the degree to which Mr. Bolton sought in his remarks to go beyond previous intelligence assessments.

In the speech itself, Mr. Bolton pointed to Cuba, Syria and Libya as "rogue states intent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction," a trio that extended "beyond the axis of evil" of Iran, Iraq and North Korea that President Bush had described in his State of the Union address several months earlier. On Syria, Mr. Bolton said in the 2002 speech that the government in Damascus "is pursuing the development of biological weapons and is able to produce at least small quantities of biological warfare agents."

In testimony to Congress in June 2003, Mr. Bolton said American officials "know that Syria is pursuing the development of biological weapons." But a report sent to Congress by the C.I.A. in April

2003 was more guarded in its assessment than Mr. Bolton had been. Using an abbreviation for biological warfare, it said only that it was "highly probable that Syria is also continuing to develop an offensive B. W. capability."

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**Current and Projected National Security Threats
to the United States**

**Lieutenant General Michael D. Maples, U.S. Army
Director, Defense Intelligence Agency**

**Statement for the Record
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Committee
11 January 2007**

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chairman Rockefeller, Vice Chairman Bond, and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and your continued support to the dedicated men and women of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Our nation faces a variety of complex national and transnational threats and challenges. My testimony will outline the state of the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, the current threat from global terrorism and proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Finally, I will discuss defense related developments in states and regions of concern and other transnational issues.

[deletia]

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

NBC Weapons. After global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) remains the most significant threat to our homeland, deployed forces, allies, and interests. Increased availability of information together with technical advances has the potential to allow many new countries to develop nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. This is an area of increasing concern.

North Korea continues to develop its WMD capability. North Korea's October 2006 detonation of a nuclear device marked its first nuclear test and an attempt to win international recognition as a nuclear state after a decades-long program to develop these weapons. North Korea could have produced several nuclear weapons from plutonium produced at its Yongbyon facilities. Major uncertainties surround the conditions under which the North would entirely abandon its nuclear weapons capability or the likelihood of the North transferring nuclear weapons-related technology abroad. North Korea's resources include a biotechnical infrastructure that could support the production of various biological warfare agents. DIA believes North Korea has had a longstanding chemical weapons stockpile of nerve, blister, blood, and choking agents.

[deletia]

Syria has pursued development of a strategic deterrent principally based on ballistic missile, chemical, and, to a limited extent, biological warfare programs, as a means of countering Israel's conventional force superiority. Syria's biotechnical infrastructure is capable of supporting limited biological agent development. DIA assesses Syria has a program to develop select biological agents. Syria has had a chemical weapons program for many years and already has a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin, which can be delivered by aircraft or ballistic missiles.

[deletia]

Major Exporters. North Korea and entities in Russia and China continue to sell technologies applicable to WMD and missiles for revenue and diplomatic influence.

[deletia]

North Korea remains committed to selling missiles and related technologies. Although sales have declined to most customers due to its increasing international isolation, North Korea's relationship with Iran and Syria remain strong and of principal concern.

[deletia]

Syria. Syria continues to support and help arm Hizballah to protect Syrian interests in Lebanon and provide leverage against Israel, which it continues to view as its greatest threat. Syrian interference in Lebanon is likely to continue, aimed at influencing Lebanon's policies on Hizballah, Israel, and the UN investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri.

The Syrian leadership is trying to balance a complex mix of objectives in Iraq. These include preventing U.S. success in Iraq and encouraging our eventual withdrawal, while at the same time improving relations with the Baghdad government, supporting a

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The Syrian leadership is trying to balance a complex mix of objectives in Iraq. These include preventing U.S. success in Iraq and encouraging our eventual withdrawal, while at the same time improving relations with the Baghdad government, supporting a unified Iraq, and avoiding a full-blown Iraqi civil war. Syria remains the primary insurgent gateway into Iraq due to corruption, smuggling networks, and cross-border tribal ties.

Syria continues to make minor improvements to its conventional forces. It did not make any major weapons acquisitions in 2006, continuing a trend begun in the mid-1990s. Instead, the Syrian military has focused its limited defense procurement dollars on low cost-high impact weapons such as anti-tank guided missiles, advanced tactical surface-to-air missiles like the SA-24, and upgrades to existing platforms. Syria also maintains an active chemical weapons program.

We judge the regime is generally stable with no cohesively organized opposition supported by a domestic constituency. The regime considers Islamic extremism its greatest internal threat.

Iran: Ex-Defense Official's Whereabouts Remain A Mystery

By Golnaz Esfandiari

March 08, 2007

Alireza Asgari disappeared in Istanbul (AFP)

March 8, 2007 (RFE/RL) -- The fate of a former Iranian defense official remains a mystery a month after his disappearance in Turkey.

At least one Iranian official has suggested that onetime Deputy Defense Minister Alireza Asghari was kidnapped by Western intelligence services. Others have claimed the retired general defected to the West.

Asghari vanished without a trace shortly after arriving in Turkey in early February.

Radio Farda's correspondent in Turkey, Ali Javanmardi, says Turkish newspapers broke the news of his disappearance.

"On February 27, 'Hurriyet' daily reported that an Iranian who has very important information regarding Iran's nuclear activities had disappeared in Istanbul," Javanmardi says. "For the first time, it was also said that Mr. Asghari arrived in Istanbul from a Damascus flight on February 7 and checked into the Hotel Ceylan three days later. Following a meeting with an unknown individual, he disappeared."

Asghari's hotel reservations, for three nights, were reportedly made before his arrival by two non-Turkish citizens. Some reports have suggested that Asghari moved to an Iranian-owned hotel.

Tehran Speaks

Iranian officials initially remained silent as reports emerged in the Turkish, Israeli, and Arab media. Then in early March, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki stated publicly that "a retired staff member" from the Defense Ministry had gone missing during a private trip to Turkey. He said Tehran was pursuing the case through diplomatic channels.

On March 6, Iranian police chief Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam said the former defense official had likely been kidnapped by Western intelligence services because of his background. He did not give further details.

The 63-year-old Asghari was a deputy defense minister under President Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). He reportedly served as a commander in Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) during the Iraq-Iraq War (1980-88).

In The Loop?

Alireza Nourizadeh, a London-based journalist, says the retired general also played a role in Lebanon. He says Asghari owed his political rise to former Defense Minister Ali Shamakhani and his abrupt departure to President Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

"Following the [Iran-Iraq] war, he was among the staff members who were sent to Lebanon," Nourizadeh says. "He led the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) forces in Lebanon. At that time, he used the name 'Reza Asaker.' Later, because of his relation to Admiral Ali Shamakhani and because Shamakhani trusted him, he became a

deputy defense minister. After Ahmadinejad's government came to power [in 2005], Mr. Asghari was automatically dismissed, but they gave him an advisory [post]."

Nourizadeh claims that Asghari's recent responsibilities included a 2006 military deal between Iran and Syria.

Lebanon And Nukes

Speculation has swirled about Asghari's familiarity with highly classified information about Iranian ties to the Lebanese militant group Hizballah as well as Iran's nuclear program.

Officials in Iran say the country's nuclear activities are entirely peaceful. But Washington and Israel accuse Iran of secretly pursuing nuclear weapons.

Iran also says that it provides only spiritual and moral support to the Lebanese Hizballah. But accusations are rife that Iran is providing the Lebanese group with missiles and other weapons.

Some reports suggest that Asghari might possess knowledge about an Israeli pilot, Ron Arad, who went missing after ejecting from his aircraft over Lebanon in 1986.

Usual Suspects

Some sources have said that Mossad or the CIA might have kidnapped Asghari for his knowledge of top-secret Iranian activities.

Others have suggested that the disappearance bears the hallmarks of the Mujahedin-i Khalq Organization (MKO), a group that seeks the overthrow of Iran's government.

But a number of recent reports have hinted that Asghari defected to the West. "The Washington Post" today quotes an unnamed senior U.S. official as saying that Asghari is "cooperating with Western intelligence agencies, providing information on Hizballah and Iran's ties to the organization."

Ephraim Kam, a retired Israeli intelligence officer and deputy head of Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, says he thinks circumstances point to a defection.

"I think logically -- and I emphasize only logically -- I tend to assume that he asked for political [asylum] because I think it's going to be quite dangerous for Israel, even for the United States, to kidnap him," Kam says. "Because the Iranians might respond with the same coin, and it's going to put many Israeli officials [in danger] and also the Americans."

Citing an "Iranian military source," the London-based newspaper "Asharq al-Awsat" newspaper reported on March 7 that Asghari "is currently in a northern European country in American custody." The paper claimed that Asghari is being interrogated ahead of his transfer to the United States.

Nourizadeh says he suspects that the former Iranian defense official had planned his defection.

"Asghari has maybe felt that it would be better for him to cooperate on his own, since reportedly the U.S. intelligence services have files on people like him -- this could be one reason," Nourizadeh says. "Another reason might be that he thinks the Islamic republic [Iran] is facing dangerous conditions -- the country is being led toward war -- and he feels that if he parts with the establishment he might prevent a catastrophe."

But in the absence of any firm evidence, Nourizadeh's and others' theories about this prominent disappearance remain so much speculation. And a mystery that Iranian authorities and others are eager to solve.

Former Iranian Defense Official Talks to Western Intelligence

By Dafna Linzer

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, March 8, 2007

A former Iranian deputy defense minister who once commanded the Revolutionary Guard has left his country and is cooperating with Western intelligence agencies, providing information on Hezbollah and Iran's ties to the organization, according to a senior U.S. official.

Ali Rez Asgari disappeared last month during a visit to Turkey. Iranian officials suggested yesterday that he may have been kidnapped by Israel or the United States. The U.S. official said Asgari is willingly cooperating. He did not divulge Asgari's whereabouts or specify who is questioning him, but made clear that the information Asgari is offering is fully available to U.S. intelligence.

Asgari served in the Iranian government until early 2005 under then-President Mohammad Khatami. Asgari's background suggests that he would have deep knowledge of Iran's national security infrastructure, conventional weapons arsenal and ties to Hezbollah in south Lebanon. Iranian officials said he was not involved in the country's nuclear program, and the senior U.S. official said Asgari is not being questioned about it. Former officers with Israel's Mossad spy agency said yesterday that Asgari had been instrumental in the founding of Hezbollah in the 1980s, around the time of the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut.

Iran's official news agency, IRNA, quoted the country's top police chief, Brig. Gen. Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, as saying that Asgari was probably kidnapped by agents working for Western intelligence agencies. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that Asgari was in the United States. Another U.S. official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, denied that report and suggested that Asgari's disappearance was voluntary and orchestrated by the Israelis. A spokesman for President Bush's National Security Council did not return a call for comment.

The Israeli government denied any connection to Asgari. "To my knowledge, Israel is not involved in any way in this disappearance," said Mark Regev, the spokesman for Israel's foreign ministry.

An Iranian official, who agreed to discuss Asgari on the condition of anonymity, said that Iranian intelligence is unsure of Asgari's whereabouts but that he may have been offered money, probably by Israel, to leave the country. The Iranian official said Asgari was thought to be in Europe. "He has been out of the loop for four or five years now," the official said.

Israeli and Turkish newspapers reported yesterday that Asgari disappeared in Istanbul shortly after he arrived there on Feb. 7. Iran sent a delegation to Turkey to investigate his disappearance and requested help from Interpol in locating him.

Former Mossad director Danny Yatom, who is now a member of Israel's parliament, said he believes Asgari defected to the West. "He is very high-caliber," Yatom said. "He held a very, very senior position for many long years in Lebanon. He was in effect commander of the Revolutionary Guards" there.

Ram Igra, a former Mossad officer, said Asgari spent much of the 1980s and 1990s overseeing Iran's efforts to support, finance, arm and train Hezbollah. The State Department lists the Shiite Lebanese group as a terrorist organization.

[deletia]

By Way of Defection

Is Iran hemorrhaging high-level officials?

Michael Young | March 15, 2007

Who is Ali Reza Asgari and why is he important? No one is quite sure yet, but when the Iranian general and former deputy defense minister disappeared in Istanbul earlier this year, suddenly everyone had a good spy story to follow. Did Asgari defect? Was he kidnapped by a foreign intelligence agency? And how does his fate affect the United States in its ongoing confrontation with Iran, if it does at all?

The story is roughly this. In February, Asgari traveled from Syria to Turkey, where he checked into a hotel before apparently going underground. According to Turkey's foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, the Iranian authorities informed the Turks 10 days after Asgari's arrival that they had lost contact with him. The Iranians were said to have initially refused to divulge Asgari's identity, or even provide a photograph. This compelled Gul to defend the Turkish reaction by saying: "If we don't receive information on a specific individual, then this individual can circulate in complete freedom in Turkey."

As the story gained prominence in early March, the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat quoted an unidentified Turkish source as saying that Asgari had defected. This came as Iran was claiming that the general had been kidnapped by U.S. or Israeli intelligence agents--prompting a tentative Israeli denial. Citing a U.S. official, the Washington Post reported on March 8 that Asgari was "cooperating with Western intelligence agencies, providing information on Hezbollah and Iran's ties to the organization." The paper did not specify who was interrogating him.

Another American official cited by the Post denied an Israeli news story that Asgari was in the United States, before suggesting that his "disappearance was voluntary and orchestrated by the Israelis." An Iranian official told the paper that Iran's intelligence service was unsure of Asgari's whereabouts, "but that he may have been offered money, probably by Israel, to leave the country." The official said the general was thought to be in Europe. "He has been out of the loop for four or five years now," the Iranian was quoted as saying.

Last weekend, London's Sunday Times hardened the mystery a bit further. The author, Israeli reporter Uzi Mahnaimi, quoted unidentified Iranian sources as saying that Asgari "had been spying on Iran since 2003 when he was recruited on an overseas business trip." Mahnaimi threw in some Ian Fleming by pointing out that Asgari had fled in a "daring getaway via Damascus ... organized by western intelligence agencies after it became clear that his cover was about to be blown. Iran's notorious secret service, the Vavak, is believed to have suspected that he was a high-level mole." According to the Sunday Times, Asgari was at a NATO base in Germany being debriefed. "He probably was working for Mossad but believed he was working for a European intelligence agency," an Israeli defense source was quoted as saying. Mahnaimi added that there was "some evidence that the Mossad station in Istanbul was involved in shadowing Asgari after he arrived in Turkey."

An essential question is what Asgari took with him. The London-based Saudi daily Al-Sharq al-Awsat claimed on March 9 that Asgari had left Turkey on a new passport, under an assumed name, in cooperation with "Western parties." (English summary here) He allegedly carried off "military and intelligence maps and documents on the Iranian military establishment, and on relations between the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Mehdi Army, and the Badr Organization."

No less significant is whether Asgari managed to get his family out? The Sunday Times claimed that "[a]t least 10 close members of his family had to flee the country" with Asgari, including sons, daughters and daughters in law. If true, this would suggest he had considerable time to plan his departure, or at least was given great leeway, despite Vavak's purported suspicion. However, developments in Tehran on March 13 contradicted this. Asgari's

wife, daughters, sons, and brother--or at least people claiming to be them--held a press conference denying he could have defected. Mrs. Asgari asked the Iranian authorities to find her husband, and claimed that he had actually disappeared in December, not in February.

The journalists present at the press conference were described by the Financial Times as "selected reporters", and the photos and news of the family were carried by the Fars news agency, linked to the Revolutionary Guards--the organization Asgari had been a senior official in. This might suggest the family's appearance was damage control. It also indicates that the details of the Asgari case are more complex than we know, particularly the timing of his vanishing. Moreover, Mrs. Asgari insisted that her husband's stated age of 63 was wrong, and that he was in fact 46, "thereby undermining speculation that he had been a leading figure in the Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon in 1983 when Islamic militants blew up the US embassy and its marine barracks."

Asgari may not be alone. In a story in Israel's Yedioth Aharonot last weekend, journalist Robin [sic] Bergman quoted a British intelligence official as saying that Iran's Consul General in Dubai, who was described as a Revolutionary Guards officer, had defected to British Intelligence. The source suggested the officer was providing information on Iranian activities in the Gulf. And yesterday, Al-Sharq al-Awsat affirmed that three weeks ago the Iranians lost contact with Colonel Amir Muhammad Shirazi, an officer in the Quds unit of the Revolutionary Guards stationed in Iraq. (English summary here.) The paper also reported that many other Iranians have collaborated with or gone over to the American side in Iraq in the past three years. It's always difficult to confirm such stories, however, and the information might conceivably have been exaggerated to destabilize the Iranians further in the wake of the Asgari affair.

The plot thickens, but where does it lead? Assuming a defection, Asgari's importance seems to be that he was the effective head of the Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon sometime in the 1980s. A former Mossad officer, Rami Igra, was quoted by the Washington Post as saying that "Asgari spent much of the 1980s and 1990s overseeing Iran's efforts to support, finance, arm and train Hezbollah."

Dates are important here. Hezbollah was only reorganized by the Iranians and brought together into a cohesive force in the late 1980s, four or five years after the bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the Marine barracks. Before then, the organization was a looser patchwork of groups with Iranian ties. It was during those earlier years that foreigners were kidnapped in Lebanon. Which phase, or phases, was Asgari involved in? And is the information he is providing useful for unlocking Hezbollah's decision-making today? Also, what does he know about the downed Israeli flier Ron Arad, who was probably taken to Iran from Lebanon, and was said to have been under Asgari's control? As a member of Iran's political-security elite, and as former Revolutionary Guards officer, he must have had access to sensitive information on Iran's dealings with militant Islamic groups. But the key issue is what operational value his information has.

If the U.S. played a role in Asgari's defection, it will boost morale in Washington after the intelligence debacle in Iraq. The episode shows that there are cracks in the Iranian system, and that these can be exploited by the plethora of intelligence agencies today cooperating against Iran's expanding influence in the Middle East. At a time when there are unconfirmed reports that the U.S. is involved in clandestine activities in Iran--particularly among the Sunni or Kurdish populations--this kind of breakthrough surely reinforces the value of human intelligence and the advantages of more traditional methods of spycraft.

The Bush administration and the Pentagon will be especially interested in Iran's ties with Iraqi Shiite militias, namely the Badr Organization and the Mehdi Army. Given that the head of the Badr Organization, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, was given an Oval Office audience with President Bush, the U.S. will be happy (or will it?) to know more about the relationship between its Iraqi partner and Tehran. More immediately, the intelligence agencies will probably want to get a better sense of what role Iran is playing in the Iraqi insurgency. If there is disagreement between the agencies, Asgari may turn into a valuable bureaucratic asset for one side or the other.

It may be too soon to judge how big an information coup Asgari's escape will turn into, but it's already a massive political one. The moral of the story is that if the U.S. wants to deal with Iran successfully, it has to do so as much in the darker recesses of state interaction than from the top of aircraft carriers. The Iranians have always been remarkable builders of institutions. If you're going to erode their self-confidence, those institutions have to appear vulnerable. Whatever Asgari divulges, the real impact of his disappearance is that Iran can be penetrated.

[Reason contributing editor Michael Young is opinion editor of the Daily Star newspaper in Lebanon.](#)

The Inheritance

by David Sanger

Harmony Books, 2009

ISBN 978-0-307-40792-4

Chapter 9 *[EXCERPTS]*

[deletia]

In a series of secret conversations, Bush and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had agreed that any public discussion of the strike -- and the nature of the target -- could force Assad into a corner. "There was a sense," Defense Secretary Robert Gates told me a few months later, that "if you play this wrong there could be a war between Israel and Syria. That was the central worry."⁽¹⁾ But the Americans had another concern, on the other side of the world. The airstrike, it turned out, was about a lot more than destroying the crown jewel of a covert nuclear program in Syria.

It was also about North Korea.

What the Israelis had targeted was a nearly completed nuclear reactor built by North Korean engineers in one of the most stunning examples of proliferation in the nuclear age. For six years American spy satellites had watched the mysterious building rise in the desert and analysts had spun out theories about what it could be -- everything from a covert nuclear facility to a water treatment plant. The Syrians had disguised its purpose by building it in plain view with no barbed wire, no military guards. Around 2002, they even erected a benign-looking, square industrial wall and roof over the entire site to hide the telltale shape of a reactor.

The deception worked for years. The Americans were suspicious, but they failed to discover the real purpose of the project. Then, one day in late April 2007, Meir Dagan, chief of the Mossad, Israel's legendary intelligence service, called the White House from Israel and asked for an urgent meeting with President Bush's national security adviser, Steven Hadley.

On a Wednesday morning in early May 2007 *[Apparently May 2, 9 or possibly 16]*, he slipped unnoticed through a White House gate and was ushered into Hadley's large corner office of the West Wing...

[deletia]

The Israeli spy chief had brought with him a file folder full of photographs, But Dagan's pictures were different from the overhead satellite images that across Washington had been trying to decipher. Thanks to the work of Israeli agents, Dagan spread out a treasure trove of photos taken from inside the facility... What they showed solved the mystery of al-Kibar.

[deletia]

Now, sitting by Hadley's orderly desk, the burly Israeli intelligence chief talked him through each of the photos, some taken three or four years previously, apparently by a Syrian who had been "turned" or paid handsomely for his snapshot collection.

[deletia]

...to the American intelligence analysts who were looking at the same pictures, passed on by their Israeli counterparts, the images seemed familiar... The innards of the reactor building bore a striking resemblance to the reactor at North Korea's main nuclear complex half a world away...

[deletia]

"A carbon copy," one official who had reviewed the intelligence told me. "You looked at and said one thing: 'Shit, the Koreans have been screwing around more than we knew.'" It was the first hard evidence that North Korea -- the broke, desperate, isolated kingdom of Kim Jong-Il -- had found a way to bring in millions of dollars in hard currency by selling its most valuable skill, the manufacturing of nuclear bomb material.

The North Koreans and the Syrians appear to have been working together on the project for the better part of a decade, perhaps back to the end of the Clinton administration. Yet apart from vague suspicions that the two countries were working on something together, perhaps even something nuclear, the American intelligence community never put it all together.

"This would be as scene from Monty Python if it wasn't true," observed David Rothkopf, who wrote the definitive history of the National Security Council. "In 2003 you had all these war planners gathered in the Situation Room planning to bomb Saddam for nuclear facilities that didn't exist. Right next door, two of the most spied-on countries on earth are building a reactor."

"And did we know about it?" Rothkopf asks, shaking his head. "Now that's what I call an intelligence failure."

[deletia]

The Syrian case was, as one senior intelligence official told me later, "the Iraq mistake in reverse." In Iraq, he said, the agency had connected dots that were not there and sent up warnings of a revived nuclear program that no longer existed. In Syria, it failed to put the pieces together until the Israelis arrived with the crucial bits of the puzzle. Adding to the embarrassment, the whole project was happening less than a hundred miles from the Iraqi border.

[deletia]

"We've had lots of suspicions [about North Korean nuclear proliferation]," Hadley once told me as we flew together on a small plane that took him on one of his low-profile trips to Russia, "but no solid evidence."

Hadley immediately sent Dagan across the river to Langley, Virginia, to show his portfolio of pictures to Hayden, the director of the CIA. The next day Hayden used his regular Thursday [Apparently 2007-05-03, -10 or -17] briefing to describe to Bush the detailed Israeli intelligence. Bush quickly ordered that the CIA coordinate the analysis and that the agency's reports be restricted to a handful of officials...

[deletia]

Bush's top aides declined to discuss how close the United States came to striking Syria. But Hadley told me that in his mind, the reactor did not meet the standards of the "Bush Doctrine" for a preemptive strike. The CIA declared that because so much was missing at al-Kibar -- including the equipment needed to convert reactor waste into bomb fuel -- the United States could prove only that Syria was developing the capability to build a bomb, not that it was intending to produce one...

[deletia]

Based on the evidence at hand, [a senior administration] official said, "we had low confidence that it's part of a weapons program." And in the end, Bush decided he could not order another military strike on a state he accused of possessing a program to build weapons of mass destruction...

[deletia]

Instead, [Bush] and Rice pressured the Israelis to agree to a different approach – diplomacy with deadlines. “We had an alternative plan,” Condoleezza Rice later told me, “that involved going rapidly to the United Nations, exposing the program, and demanding that it be immediately dismantled.” The thinking was that while Iran had the money and the clout to resist such pressure, Syria did not...

[deletia]

After arguing with the administration over the summer, Olmert approved a plan for the attack. Though they had debated the issue tirelessly with Rice, Hadley, and Bush himself, in the end the Israelis did what they wanted to do from the start. They were careful not to inform Washington of the precise timing so that both nations could claim, with technical accuracy, that the Americans had not known about the attack in advance.

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/08/07STATE121863.html>

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07STATE121863	2007-08-29 20:05	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Secretary of State

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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2017
TAGS: KNNP XB XF PREL PARM KN IR
SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN USE OF ARAB BANK NETWORK

REF: A. STATE 72416
B. STATE 61222

Classified By: ACTING ISN PDAS GEORGE LOOK FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 3.

SUMMARY/BACKGROUND

2. (S) Washington is increasingly concerned about efforts by North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank to assist Tanchon Commercial Bank to move funds from both Syria and Iran (REF A & B). Tanchon Commercial Bank is the primary financial agent behind the DPRK's weapons programs and was designated by the USG under E.O. 13382 as an entity that provides financial support to the DPRK's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

These transactions have occurred through Arab Bank PLC, one of the oldest and most respected banks in the Middle East. Arab Bank is headquartered in Amman, Jordan and is the largest Arab banking network in the world with 400 branch locations. Arab Bank also owns a 64.2 percent majority stake in Arab Tunisian Bank. We urge Jordan to maintain vigilance with regard to Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean financial transactions in its jurisdiction to prevent these countries from using deceptive financial practices to further their proliferation-related activities.

OBJECTIVES

3. (S) Washington requests Post deliver the talking points and non-paper in paragraph 4 to appropriate host government officials in the foreign affairs and financial ministries.

-- (S) To alert host government officials to information we have about Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean financial activities that could be occurring in the Arab Bank network, which is headquartered in Amman, and urge appropriate authorities to investigate such transactions, especially correspondent relationships, and to take steps to freeze any accounts or transactions held or conducted in support of proliferation-related activities.

-- (S) To urge the Kingdom of Jordan to maintain increased vigilance over financial or commercial transactions with Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean entities and banks in its jurisdiction.

-- (S) To urge the Kingdom of Jordan to investigate these financial transactions, and to take appropriate action.

BACKGROUND/NONPAPER

4. (S/REL JORDAN) Begin points:

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) In light of our commitment to share as much information with your government as possible on Iranian and DPRK proliferation-related activities, we would like to raise serious concerns about Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean financial activities in the Arab Bank network.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) It has long been the policy of the United States to prevent the exploitation of the international financial system for the purpose of conducting illicit or proliferation-related financial transactions, and to urge our international partners to do the same.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) We are concerned that Iranian, Syrian, and DPRK-related entities may be assisting each other in engaging in deceptive practices that exploit and weaken the international financial system and undermine global financial standards and best practices.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) We are concerned that Iran, Syria, and DPRK proliferation entities are using the Arab Bank network to process what may be proliferation-related transactions.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) The United States has information that in 2007, North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank mission in Tripoli, Libya (FTB Libya) has expanded its role as a key node in North Korea's banking network and is

helping Tanchon Commercial Bank, the banking arm of North Korea's primary weapons trading firm, KOMID, to move funds from both Syria and Iran.

SYRIA-DPRK

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) In 2007, FTB Libya provided assistance to Tanchon in making remittances from funds from the sale of unspecified, probably proliferation-related goods in Syria. Our information indicates that Tanchon is establishing this new arrangement because Tanchon could no longer remit funds through a route it had previously used. FTB Libya arranged remittance routes for Tanchon from Syria and other locations via intermediary banks. We have information that Tanchon's financial transfers are conducted surreptitiously by using either aliases or front companies.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) By mid-February, FTB Libya arranged remittances of funds for Tanchon through several Arab Bank branches in the Middle East. Remittances going directly from Syria could be sent from Arab Bank-Syria in Damascus, a sister bank to Arab Tunisian Bank.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) The United States has information that FTB Libya arranged remittance routes for Tanchon from Syria and other locations via intermediary banks in Europe.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) These transfers, which were probably proliferation-related, occurred inside the Arab Bank network and involved both Arab Bank branches and Arab Tunisian Bank, of which Arab Bank is a 64.2 percent stakeholder.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) By processing these transactions, Arab Bank could be unwittingly assisting proliferation-related activities.

IRAN-DPRK

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) We have information that FTB Libya was also planning to establish a route for Tanchon to use from Iran.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) These transactions could be subject to the restrictions in UN Security Council Resolutions 1737 and 1747.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) The U.S. urges countries to maintain increased vigilance over financial or commercial transactions with Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean entities and banks, which may be using deceptive financial practices such as those described above to circumvent targeted sanctions imposed pursuant to UNSC resolutions and continue their illicit or proliferation-related dealings.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) In the spirit of our continued non-proliferation cooperation and joint efforts to prevent Syrian, Iranian, and North Korean abuse of the international financial system, we urge your government to investigate these financial transactions, and to take appropriate action.

-- (S/REL TO JORDAN) We look forward to working with you on this and other related security and counter-proliferation matters, and are prepared to provide additional assistance as appropriate.

REPORTING DEADLINE

5. (U) Post should report results within seven (7) business days of receipt of this cable. Please slug replies for ISN, T, TREASURY, EAP and NEA. Please include SIPDIS in all replies.

POINT OF CONTACT

6. (U) Washington point of contact for follow-up information is Kevin McGeehan, ISN/CPI, (202) 647-5408, McGeehanKJ@state.sgov.gov.

7. (U) Department thanks Post for its assistance.

RICE

“Pyongyang’s Upper Hand”

John R. Bolton

Wall Street Journal, Opinion

August 31, 2007

The Six-Party talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program have now descended into a miasma of “working groups,” one of which, on U.S.-North Korea bilateral issues, will meet this weekend in Geneva. It is worth paying attention to the outcome of this gathering.

North Korea wants to be taken off the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and, as soon as possible, to enjoy full diplomatic relations with Washington. Pyongyang may well succeed, as many in the U.S. State Department seem more eager to grant full recognition to the Pyongyang dictatorship in North Korea than to the democracy in Taiwan. This would be a profound mistake on our part.

Nearly 200 days have passed since Feb. 13, when the Six-Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program produced an “agreement” to eliminate that program. Despite encomiums about the virtues of diplomacy, little real progress has been made in eliminating Pyongyang’s program. Negotiations in July ended without agreement on a timetable, despite repeated State Department assurances since February that the North would be held to strict deadlines.

The Yongbyon reactor is shuttered, but that reactor was not frequently operational in the recent past, and may well be at the end of, or even beyond, its useful life. The return of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to Yongbyon provides North Korea with a new patina of respectability, despite the near certainty that significant nuclear activity is happening anywhere but Yongbyon.

In fact, the key change is that economic assistance is once again subsidizing and reinforcing Kim Jong-il’s hold on power. Heavy fuel oil, food and other “humanitarian” assistance from South Korea, and substantial unpublicized aid from China are all flowing North. Cheeky Pyongyang is once again demanding that the outside world supply it with light-water nuclear reactors. The second North-South Summit in Pyongyang, postponed until October—closer to South Korea’s presidential elections—will provide renewed legitimacy to the North Korean dictatorship, and may bolster the political chances of South Korean advocates of appeasement, in turn providing Kim Jong-il even more breathing room.

Kim is once again besting the U.S. in accomplishing his two central strategic objectives: staying in power and preserving his nuclear-weapons program. The working groups currently underway do nothing to achieve the proper ends of U.S. foreign policy. A few weeks ago in Shenyang, China, the “denuclearization” working group met without visible progress, even on permanently dismantling Yongbyon.

There is still simply no evidence that Pyongyang has made a decision to abandon its long-held strategic objective to have a credible nuclear-weapons capability. This inconvenient fact should make it impossible for the State Department to concede on other issues, even if it were inclined to do so. Creative minds are therefore working on ways to explain that any forthcoming North Korean declaration of its nuclear capabilities is “full and complete,” thus eliminating the remaining troubling obstacles to full normalization of relations.

Consider a possible North Korean “declaration,” perhaps drafted with State’s coaching, which would say something like this: “We manufactured two nuclear devices, one of which we detonated last

October. We detonated the other earlier, but you didn't recognize it as a nuclear explosion. We currently have no nuclear devices. Our plutonium reprocessing efforts were not very successful, which explains why we only had two devices, neither of which produced large yields. We ultimately disposed of our limited remaining plutonium to others, and we have no idea where it now is. We currently have no plutonium. On uranium enrichment, we purchased some UF₆ and a small number of centrifuges for a test cascade from A.Q. Khan, but we could not progress due to inadequate funds. Accordingly, we long ago sold all but a small amount of the UF₆ and the centrifuges to third-parties. We will produce what little we have at Yongbyon shortly. That's it. Are we done now?"

Many will fall for this pretense of "full disclosure," especially those needing a diplomatic "success" to justify long years of faith in the Six-Party Talks. The alternative is to reject any North Korean declaration without full and timely verification. IAEA inspections alone are not enough. Its capacities are limited. Indeed, much of the IAEA's work is accomplished on the basis of intelligence provided by governments.

Precisely because our knowledge of the North's nuclear program is incomplete, we need an intrusive, indeed invasive, verification mechanism before having any confidence that North Korea's nuclear program is in fact being dismantled. We need smart and extensive verification activities inside North Korea, including no-notice inspections, a full range of sensors and sampling, unrestricted interviews and document reviews. If the North rejects effective verification, that is yet another basis to repudiate the Feb. 13 quicksand deal.

We need to know, among other things, precisely how many nuclear weapons the North has manufactured, how and where it manufactured them, how many it now has, and how much reprocessed plutonium remains available for weaponization. If any devices, fissile material or nuclear manufacturing equipment have left North Korea, we need to learn the specifics.

We need to understand the full extent of its uranium enrichment program, and if weapons-grade enriched uranium was produced, where it is and how much there is of it. We also need to know specifically if North Korea possesses any enriched uranium metal or any weapons- or missile warhead-design information.

President Bush has stressed that we must also deal with Pyongyang's biological, chemical and ballistic missile programs. We must address these programs, especially the missiles, soon. Failure to make explicit the important connection between weapons and delivery systems will certainly come back to haunt us, and we are on the verge of allowing this point to slip away entirely.

Finally, we need to learn the details of North Korean nuclear cooperation with other countries. We know that both Iran and Syria have long cooperated with North Korea on ballistic missile programs, and the prospect of cooperation on nuclear matters is not far-fetched. Whether and to what extent Iran, Syria or others might be "safe havens" for North Korea's nuclear weapons development, or may have already participated with or benefited from it, must be made clear.

For our own safety's sake, and that of allies like Japan and South Korea, there can be no compromises on these points.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/901689.html>

ANALYSIS: The question is, how will Damascus respond?

By Yoav Stern, Haaretz Correspondent

Last update - 23:08 **06/09/2007**

Much has been said about and written on this year's "hot summer" in the Middle East. Indeed, Israel, on the one hand, and Syria and Lebanon on the other, have spent the past few months disseminating reports and rumors about preparations for war, while simultaneously issuing warnings to the opposite side.

And today we were party to the first significant military escalation in the region for more than a year. But is this the outbreak of war?

According to reports in Syria, this was clearly an isolated incident, not part of a battle or war. Nevertheless, it does raise a number of questions.

This could well be a one-off that will not develop into anything more, for the time being, but it does send shockwaves across the region. Every Arab media outlet is covering it intensely, simply because in the Mideast every incident can have unexpected consequences.

Syria, for its part, stressed from the first moment that the story broke that it is retaining the right to respond. The Syrian information minister further clarified that Damascus' political and military leadership is weighing its reaction.

That Syrian response will determine considerably how the rest of the incident plays out. Since the end of the Second Lebanon War in August of last year, Syria has emphasized that it could well engage in "resistance" activities against Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights.

In the lexicon of Arab diplomatic language, the term "moqawama" (resistance) means violent but legitimate activity against Israel. Even so, it seems that Syria will stick to the usual course of action, namely a request for condemnation of Israel by the United Nations Security Council.

Many questions remain unanswered regarding details of the incident, among them the exact number of IAF planes that entered Syrian airspace, and where exactly they were when they drew anti-aircraft fire. According to the Reuters news agency, witnesses saw four planes close to the Syrian-Turkish frontier, while a lone report on the Al-Arabiya satellite channel said that the IAF plane was attacked in the region of Qamishli, not far from the Iraqi border.

It's also hard to figure out the point of the mission. Syrian analysts, however, say that the aim was to examine flight paths inside their country which the IAF could use without discovery by Syrian radar.

North Korea-Syria nuclear ties: déjà vu all over again?

Fri, 09/14/2007 - 3:43pm

Something didn't smell quite right in Glenn Kessler's recent story in the Washington Post about a possible nuclear link between North Korea and Syria. It looked to me like déjà vu all over again. So I asked Joseph Cirincione, senior fellow and director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress, author of *Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons*, and a frequent FP contributor, to weigh in. Here's his take:

This story is nonsense. The Washington Post story should have been headlined "White House Officials Try to Push North Korea-Syria Connection." This is a political story, not a threat story. The mainstream media seems to have learned nothing from the run-up to war in Iraq. It is a sad commentary on how selective leaks from administration officials who have repeatedly misled the press are still treated as if they were absolute truth.

Once again, this appears to be the work of a small group of officials leaking cherry-picked, unvetted "intelligence" to key reporters in order to promote a preexisting political agenda. If this sounds like the run-up to the war in Iraq, it should. This time it appears aimed at derailing the U.S.-North Korean agreement that administration hardliners think is appeasement. Some Israelis want to thwart any dialogue between the U.S. and Syria.

Few reporters appear to have done even basic investigation of the miniscule Syrian nuclear program (though this seems to be filtering into some stories running Friday). There is a reason that Syria is not included in most proliferation studies, including mine: It doesn't amount to much. Begun almost 40 years ago, the Syrian program is a rudimentary research program built around a tiny 30-kilowatt research reactor that produces isotopes and neutrons. It is nowhere near a program for nuclear weapons or nuclear fuel. Over a dozen countries have aided the program including Belgium, Germany, Russia, China, and the United States (where several Syrian scientists trained) as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). If North Korea gave them anything short of nuclear weapons it is of little consequence. Syria does not have the financial, technical or industrial base to develop a serious nuclear program anytime in the foreseeable future.

Nor is there anything new about Syria being on the U.S. "watch list"; it has been for years. Unfortunately, this misleading story will now enter the lexicon of the far right. For months we will hear pundits citing the "Syrian-Iranian-Korean nuclear axis" and complaining that attempts to negotiate an end to North Korea's program are bound fail in the face of such duplicity, etc., etc.

The real story is how quickly the New York Times and the Washington Post snapped up the bait and ran exactly the story the officials wanted, thereby feeding a mini-media frenzy. It appears that nothing, not even a disastrous and unnecessary war, can break this Pavlovian response to an "intelligence scoop."

For information on the Syrian nuclear program that any reporter should have read, see the Web site of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

UPDATE: Washington Post diplomatic correspondent Glenn Kessler responds via e-mail:

I think the world of Joe Cirincione. So I obviously take his concerns seriously.

All I can say in response is that I (and a number of uncredited colleagues) spent more than week knocking on doors of many agencies, seeking answers. No one tried to wave us off the story, including people who normally I thought would have tried their best to prevent us from printing it. I did note a number of caveats and explained that Syria never had much of a nuclear program. There appears to be a connection to the Israeli raid, which is now the subject of some of the tightest censorship in years. We will keep pursuing the story in hopes of providing greater clarity for our readers--and especially experts like Joe.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

North Korea and Syria **SEPTEMBER 14, 2007**

A nuclear-armed North Korea is dangerous enough. A North Korea that shares its nuclear technology with other bad actors is worse -- especially if the partner-state is known to be cozy with terrorists. The potential nexus between WMD and terrorism is the biggest threat to the security of the U.S. and its allies.

So reports this week in the New York Times, the Washington Post and elsewhere that North Korea may be cooperating with Syria on some sort of nuclear facility are worth taking seriously. Syria has close ties with Iran and provides sanctuary within its borders for Hezbollah, a group that the National Intelligence Estimate released in July warns may be prepared to launch terrorist attacks against the U.S. Pyongyang has a long, well-documented history of sharing missile technology with Syria, and it is all too believable that sharing nuclear knowhow could be next.

Israel is said to be the primary source of the intelligence on a North Korean-Syrian nuclear connection. But neither Israel nor the Bush Administration has commented officially on this or another mysterious event -- Israel's flyover and apparent raid last week on targets inside Syria. Given the Administration's experience with prewar intelligence on WMD in Iraq, it's understandable that it would want to have solid evidence before going public.

Meanwhile, however, the six-party talks on the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear program have picked up steam, with Pyongyang promising to dismantle its facilities by the end of the year and the U.S. pledging to consider such goodies as fuel aid and removing North Korea from its list of terror-sponsoring states. U.S., Russian and Chinese inspectors turned up at the Yongbyon nuclear facility this week.

If North Korea is moving its nuclear facilities to Syria -- or "merely" proliferating -- it would undermine everything at the heart of that agreement, as well as cross a long-stated American red line that Pyongyang not proliferate. Even if it is unsure of the full implications of the intelligence, the Administration has an obligation not to proceed with a nuclear deal until Pyongyang and Damascus come clean.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7000717.stm

The Syria-North Korea 'connection'

By Jonathan Marcus

Diplomatic correspondent, BBC News

Published: 2007/09/18 13:37:52 GMT

Nearly two weeks on from Israel's incursion into Syrian airspace, the mystery surrounding the operation shows little sign of disappearing.

Press reports suggest strongly that the Israeli jets destroyed a facility near Syria's border with Turkey.

All sorts of details of the operation have "leaked" out, but still the precise nature of the "target" remains unclear.

By far the strongest theory though suggests a North Korean nuclear connection - a linkage which the North Korean authorities have strenuously denied.

The story put about by largely unnamed US sources and backed up by the former US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, is that North Korea - under international pressure to scale down its own nuclear weapons programme - has recently transferred equipment or technology to Syria.

And it is this equipment - possibly at a fledgling research centre - that the Israelis hit.

'Political agenda'

All sorts of questions remain. Experts on North Korea's nuclear programme are highly sceptical about the alleged technology transfer.

Joseph Cirincione, director for nuclear policy at the Washington-based Center for American Progress, a liberal think-tank, has gone so far as to describe the story as "nonsense".

“ If this sounds like the run-up to the war with Iraq, then it should ”

Joseph Cirincione

Center for American Progress

Selective leaks are being used to play up the Syria-North Korea connection, he writes on the online site of the journal Foreign Policy.

"This appears to be the work of a small group of officials leaking cherry-picked, unvetted 'intelligence' to key reporters in order to promote a pre-existing political agenda. If this sounds like the run-up to the war with Iraq, then it should," he writes.

Gary Samore of the Council on Foreign Relations, another leading North Korea nuclear expert, was less dismissive when I spoke to him, but equally sceptical.

"I know that the Israelis have been worried for some time that the Syrians were eager to get nuclear technology from North Korea," he said.

"The North Koreans are looking to liquidate at least part of their enrichment programme, and perhaps want to offload the centrifuges and so on that they obtained from Pakistan."

So the Syrians might be "dabbling" with enrichment technology, but this would not represent "a near-term threat", Mr Samore says.

"There are North Koreans in Syria in connection with missile technology," he said, but on the nuclear front "we just don't know".

One thing he saw as strange, however, was the possible location of the "target" that the Israelis may have hit.

This seems to have been very close to the border with Turkey - an odd place for a potential nuclear research establishment.

Scepticism needed

Of course much of the controversy - given the fact that the Syrians and the Israelis have said very little (which is instructive in itself) - centres on the nature of the messengers, the shadowy leakers in Washington.

Only one of them, Andrew Semmel, a senior non-proliferation official, has gone on the record, and then there is the involvement of the controversial Mr Bolton.

Critics suggest that at least some of these people have a strong desire to derail the Bush administration's current negotiations with Pyongyang.

For whatever reason, the latest round of the six-party nuclear talks involving the two Koreas has been postponed at the last minute, apparently at the North Koreans' request.

But as Mr Samore pointed out: "Just because John Bolton is using this for political purposes doesn't mean that it is not true."

This episode once again highlights the problems for the media in dealing with this kind of story, problems that were exemplified - one has to admit in retrospect- by the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Journalists need copy. But they also have to weigh up what they are told. Official sources cannot simply be discounted.

But on the other hand, a sufficient degree of scepticism needs to be deployed. And just sometimes, that mighty media machine has to admit that it just does not know.

Interview

Samore: A Syria-North Korea Nuclear Relationship?

Authors:

Gary Samore, Vice President, Director of Studies, and Maurice R. Greenberg Chair
Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor

September 19, 2007

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

In the last week there has been considerable speculation about an Israeli air incursion into Syria near the Syrian-Turkish border. There have been some reports the Israelis were trying to knock out a North Korean supplied nuclear facility. The North Koreans and the Syrians have both denied this. Do you have a guess on what happened?

I know the Israelis have been concerned for some time that Syria might be receiving nuclear assistance from North Korea. In particular, I think the Israelis were worried that North Korea was sharing centrifuge systems with Syria, but I haven't seen the evidence for that, so it's hard for me to judge whether that's a solid concern or not. In any event, it seems unlikely that the Syrian program would have been very advanced. Nonetheless, if Israel thought that there was a real risk that the Syrians were beginning to dabble in centrifuge technology, you could understand why they would try to destroy that at a very early stage.

You would think the Syrians would go to the Iranians for help on centrifuge technology.

They might have been going to both. And there's always been speculation that A. Q. Khan [the prominent Pakistani scientist and so-called "father" of Pakistan's nuclear program, who sold nuclear technology to third parties] who of course marketed his services throughout the Middle East, might have approached the Syrians as well. Nobody really knows whether they took advantage of that offer.

Do the North Koreans really have enough left over P-1 centrifuges, provided by Khan, that they would want to sell?

The Pakistani government has acknowledged that A.Q. Khan provided a small number, less than two dozen, of these P-1 centrifuges to North Korea. So in theory, if the North Koreans wanted to sell or barter that technology to Syria, they could certainly do that.

North Korea and Syria both deny the nuclear deal, but Syria has, despite announcing the Israeli raid, never said what actually happened.

Syria has always been an interesting case, because you would think a country in that position, faced with an enemy that has both conventional and nuclear superiority, would want to develop a nuclear option. That would make a lot of sense. But up to now the Syrians seem to have been content with a chemical and biological capability, which they would use as a deterrent against Israel. And it's always been curious that the Syrians have never, as far as we know, developed a nuclear weapons program, unlike many other Arab countries: Egypt, Libya, and so forth.

The latest round of the Six-Party Talks [North Korea, South Korea, United States, China, Russia and Japan] in Beijing was supposed to have been held today, but Beijing announced a postponement and nobody really knows why. Do you have any thoughts on this?

Well three different explanations have been offered. One is that the Chinese wanted to avoid a confrontation between the United States and North Korea over this Syrian business and so they decided to postpone the meeting and let tempers cool before they went ahead with it. A second theory I heard was that the technical experts really haven't reached agreement yet on what steps would be required to disable North Korea's nuclear facilities.

As I'm sure you know, a team of experts from the United States, Russia, and China visited the North Korean nuclear center last week in order to review the proposals that North Korea had made. I haven't heard in detail what the North Koreans had proposed, or whether or not it was acceptable to the weapons inspections committee.

[deletia]

Osirak II?

Israel's silence on Syria speaks volumes.

BY BRET STEPHENS

Tuesday, September 18, 2007 12:01 a.m. EDT

In the late spring of 2002 the American press reported that Israel had armed its German-made submarines with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. In Israel, this was old news. It was also headline news.

"Washington Post: Israeli subs have nuclear cruise missiles," was how the Jerusalem Post, of which I was then the editor, titled its story of June 16. It wasn't as if we didn't previously know that Israel had purchased and modified the German subs for purposes of strategic deterrence. Nor did we delight in circumlocutions. We simply needed the imprimatur of a foreign source to publish items that Israel's military censors (who operate as if the Internet doesn't exist) forbade us from reporting forthrightly.

So it's more than a little telling that the Israeli newspaper Haaretz chose, in the wake of an Israeli Air Force raid on Syria on Sept. 6 dubbed "Operation Orchard," to give front-page billing to an op-ed by John Bolton that appeared in this newspaper Aug. 31. While the article dealt mainly with the six-party talks with North Korea, Mr. Bolton also noted that "both Iran and Syria have long cooperated with North Korea on ballistic missile programs, and the prospect of cooperation on nuclear matters is not far-fetched." He went on to wonder whether Pyongyang was using its Middle Eastern allies as safe havens for its nuclear goods while it went through a U.N. inspections process.

How plausible is this scenario? The usual suspects in the nonproliferation crowd reject it as some kind of trumped-up neocon plot. Yet based on conversations with Israeli and U.S. sources, along with evidence both positive and negative (that is, what people aren't saying), it seems the likeliest suggested so far. That isn't to say, however, that plenty of gaps and question marks about the operation don't remain.

What's beyond question is that something big went down on Sept. 6. Israeli sources had been telling me for months that their air force was intensively war-gaming attack scenarios against Syria; I assumed this was in anticipation of a second round of fighting with Hezbollah. On the morning of the raid, Israeli combat brigades in the northern Golan Heights went on high alert, reinforced by elite Maglan commando units. Most telling has been Israel's blanket censorship of the story--unprecedented in the experience of even the most veteran Israeli reporters--which has also been extended to its ordinarily hypertalkative politicians. In a country of open secrets, this is, for once, a closed one.

The censorship helps dispose of at least one theory of the case. According to CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Israel's target was a cache of Iranian weapons destined for Hezbollah. But if that were the case, Israel would have every reason to advertise Damascus's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty, particularly on the eve of Lebanon's crucial presidential election. Following the January 2002 Karine-A incident--in which Israeli frogmen intercepted an Iranian weapons shipment bound for Gaza--the government of Ariel Sharon wasted no time inviting reporters to inspect the captured merchandise. Had Orchard had a similar target, with similar results, it's doubtful the government of

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert--which badly needs to erase the blot of last year's failed war--could have resisted turning it into a propaganda coup.

Something similar goes for another theory, this one from British journalist Peter Beaumont of the Observer, that the raid was in fact "a dry run for attack on Iran." Mr. Beaumont is much taken by a report that at least one of the Israeli bombers involved in the raid dropped its fuel tanks in a Turkish field near the Syrian border.

Why Israel apparently chose to route its attack through Turkey is a nice question, given that it means a detour of more than 1,000 miles. Damascus claims the fuel tank was discarded after the planes came under Syrian anti-aircraft fire, which could be true. But if Israel is contemplating an attack on Tehran's nuclear installations--and it is--it makes no sense to advertise the "Turkish corridor" as its likely avenue of attack.

As for the North Korean theory, evidence for it starts with Pyongyang. The raid, said one North Korean foreign ministry official quoted by China's Xinhua news agency, was "little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security." But who asked him, anyway? In August, the North Korean trade minister signed an agreement with Syria on "cooperation in trade and science and technology." Last week, Andrew Semmel, the acting counterproliferation chief at the State Department, confirmed that North Korean technicians of some kind were known to be in Syria, and that Syria was "on the U.S. nuclear watch list." And then there is yesterday's curious news that North Korea has abruptly suspended its participation in the six-party talks, for reasons undeclared.

That still leaves the question of just what kind of transfers could have taken place. There has been some speculation regarding a Syrian plant in the city of Homs, built 20 years ago to extract uranium from phosphate (of which Syria has an ample supply). Yet Homs is 200 miles west of Dayr az Zawr, the city on the Euphrates reportedly closest to the site of the attack. More to the point, uranium extraction from phosphates is a commonplace activity (without it, phosphate is hazardous as fertilizer) and there is a vast gulf separating this kind of extraction from the enrichment process needed to turn uranium into something genuinely threatening.

There is also a rumor--sourced to an unnamed expert in the Washington Post--that on Sept. 3 a North Korean ship delivered some kind of nuclear cargo to the Syrian port of Tartus, forcing the Israelis to act. That may well be accurate, though it squares awkwardly with the evidence that plans for Orchard were laid months ago.

More questions will no doubt be raised about the operational details of the raid (some sources claim there were actually two raids, one of them diversionary), as well as fresh theories about what the Israelis were after and whether they got it. The only people that can provide real answers are in Jerusalem and Damascus, and for the most part they are preserving an abnormal silence. In the Middle East, that only happens when the interests of prudence and the demands of shame happen to coincide. **Could we have just lived through a partial reprise of the 1981 Israeli attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor? On current evidence, it is the least unlikely possibility.**

[Mr. Stephens is a member of The Wall Street Journal's editorial board. His column appears in the Journal Tuesdays.](#)

MIDEAST: Neocons Tie N. Korea to Israeli Strike on Syria

Analysis by Khody Akhavi

WASHINGTON

Sep 18 [2007] (IPS) -

Nearly two weeks have passed since Israeli warplanes conducted a mysterious raid against an as yet unidentified target in northeast Syria. Details of the incident have been slow to come, as officials from both countries have remained tight-lipped.

In the absence of a clear picture of what happened in the early hours of Sep. 6, speculation in the U.S. mainstream media has grown as to what exactly the Israelis targeted, and why Damascus -- assuming it was the target of an unprovoked attack -- has been so muted in its response.

Was Israel's attack aimed at testing Syria's radar defences? Did the air strike seek to disrupt arms shipments to Lebanon's Hezbollah? Was it a dress rehearsal for a possible future strike on Iranian nuclear facilities?

Feeding the speculation, a familiar clutch of George W. Bush administration hawks appear to be suggesting that Israel's apparent air strike may have targeted a joint North Korea-Syria nuclear venture.

Writing in the opinion pages of the Wall Street Journal more than a week before the incident, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John R. Bolton asserted, "We know that both Iran and Syria have long cooperated with North Korea on ballistic missile programs, and the prospect of cooperation on nuclear matters is not far-fetched."

"Whether and to what extent Iran, Syria or others might be 'safe heavens' for North Korea's nuclear weapons development, or may have already benefited from it, must be made clear," he wrote. Bolton resigned his position at the U.N. in late 2006 and currently serves as a senior fellow at the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute.

Comments made by a State Department official last Friday fanned the flames further and bolstered the neoconservative argument. Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear non-proliferation policy, told the Associated Press that the U.S. believes that Syria may have a number of "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment as part of a covert programme.

The Bush administration has maintained a hard-line policy stance on Syria. It has not had high-level diplomatic relations with the country since the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005. The U.S. has alleged that Syria played a role in the assassination.

Neoconservatives appear to be re-igniting a political narrative that fits neatly with the infamous cast of the "axis of evil". While not explicitly mentioned, Syria has often been designated as a junior partner of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea's "reign of terror" because of its support for Islamist opposition groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas in Gaza.

"They want to torpedo the North Korea deal, they have clung doggedly to making sure that there is no cooperation in Syria, and they're the same people who got us into this mess in the Middle East in the

first place," said Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator and senior fellow at the Washington-based New America Foundation.

The focus on North Korea comes as the U.S. prepares to implement a deal to end the country's nuclear weapons programme, a diplomatic approach that has drawn the ire of policy hawks like Bolton.

"Bolton represents the crowd that is very distressed that the U.S. has declared defeat in North Korea by trusting the North Koreans. They would like to scuttle that agreement," wrote Syria expert Josh Landis, on his widely-read blog, www.syriacomment.org.

"While doing it, anything they can drag into to boost the notion of weapons transfers between Korea and Syria and Iran will be icing on the cake. Israeli planes were trying to get the goods," he wrote.

Some U.S. analysts have been very dubious of an actual Syrian nuclear threat, describing the speculation surrounding the incident as a manufactured stunt aimed at advancing a neoconservative agenda.

"This story is nonsense. The Washington Post story should have been headlined 'White House Officials Try to Push North Korea-Syria Connection.' This is a political story, not a threat story," said Joseph Cirincione, director for nuclear policy at the Washington-based Centre for American Progress, according to an interview with Foreign Policy.

"Once again, this appears to be the work of a small group of officials leaking cherry-picked, unvetted 'intelligence' to key reporters in order to promote a pre-existing political agenda. If this sounds like the run-up to the war in Iraq, it should. This time it appears aimed at derailing the U.S.-North Korean agreement that administration hardliners think is appeasement. Some Israelis want to thwart any dialogue between the U.S. and Syria," he said.

Cirincione previously served as director for non-proliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The Israeli media -- bound by an army censor that restricts coverage of the incident -- has relied largely on foreign press reports to reconstruct the incident.

"The Israeli press have gone out of their way to say to the Israeli public, 'we know [the story], we're gonna selectively quote from the overseas rumours and you can fill in the gaps,'" Levy told IPS. "[The press] was dismissive about the reports about arming Hezbollah, and gave greater weight to those connecting Syria and North Korea."

Syria lodged a formal complaint with the U.N. Tuesday over the "flagrant violation" of its airspace last week by the Israeli warplanes, which Damascus claims dropped munitions on its territory. Israel and Syria have technically been at war since 1967, when Israel occupied the Golan during the Six-Day War.

The air strike follows a summer that saw heightened tension between the two countries, a period that provides the necessary context for the eventual Israeli action.

"Something will come to light and will make it clear to everyone -- the Israelis were sitting on intelligence," said Levy.

Experts are still unsure of what that intelligence entails, and whether is it "nuclear", "non-conventional", "chemical", or nothing of the sort. Regardless, in most of the narratives, the North Korea connection remains a salient point.

But whatever happened in the early hours of Sep. 6 does not appear to have soured Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's efforts to restart negotiations with his adversary. Olmert announced on Monday that Israel was prepared to hold negotiations with Damascus, without preconditions and without ultimatums, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Mystery Surrounds Israeli Strike in Syria

National Public Radio

All Things Considered: September 19, 2007

MELISSA BLOCK, host:

Mystery continued to swirl around an Israeli air strike in Syria that took place in the middle of the night on September 6th. Neither Israel nor Syria nor the United States has offered an explanation of why Israel hit Syria or what the target was. But that hasn't stopped the speculation, which is focused on an alleged Syrian-North Korean nuclear connection.

Here's NPR's Mike Shuster.

MIKE SHUSTER: Nothing about Israel's air strike on Syria is known for sure. It's not clear how many aircraft were involved nor the route they used to reach their target nor where the target itself was. The target has been reported to be near the Syrian town of Deir ez-Zor in Syria's eastern dessert. But there are also reports the Israeli attack aircraft jettisoned their empty gas tanks over Turkey more than a hundred miles north.

Anonymous American and Israeli intelligence sources have been quoted wildly speculating on the motive for the attack. Among the possible reasons: The site could have held missiles from Iran destined for Hezbollah in Lebanon, the attack could have been a warm-up or a warning for a possible Israeli attack on Iran, or the Israelis believe there was some kind of nuclear cooperation underway between North Korea and Syria.

U.S. government officials have declined to discuss the matter, but Defense Secretary Robert Gates was asked about it on "FOX News Sunday."

(Soundbite of show "FOX News Sunday")

Secretary ROBERT GATES (U.S. Department of Defense): All I will say is we are watching the North Koreans very carefully. We watch the Syrians very carefully.

SHUSTER: Gates' hinted he is taking the story quite seriously.

Sec. GATES: If such an activity were taking place, it would be a matter of great concern, and because the president has put down a very strong marker with the North Koreans about further proliferation efforts. And, obviously, any effort by the Syrians to pursue weapons of mass destruction would be a concern.

SHUSTER: Israel's leaders have offered no explanation for the attack, but a few days ago, it emerged that according to unnamed Israeli sources, the air strike occurred three days after a North Korean ship docked at the Port of Tartous in Syria and offloaded its cargo. Damascus has also been largely silent about the matter. But this week, Syrian government minister Buthaina Shaaban did comment on the allegations of nuclear cooperation with North Korea.

Dr. BUTHAINA SHAABAN (Minister of Expatriate Affairs, Syria): Syria denies anything of the kind and condemns the Israeli attack on our land, on violation of all our airspace. And it's amazing that it's Washington who explains to the world why did Israel do this attack on Syria.

SHUSTER: Syria is not believed to have nuclear weapons or a nuclear weapons program, but it is known there are small experimental nuclear activities underway there. North Korea is not known to have cooperated with

Syria in the nuclear field, but it has worked extensively with Syria on missile technology. North Korea has sold Scud missiles to Syria. North Korean missile specialists are known to have been in Syria and Syrian missile experts have traveled to North Korea.

Joe Cirincione, an expert on nuclear proliferation with the Center for American Progress, has serious doubts about the veracity of the story so far.

Dr. JOSEPH CIRINCIONE (Expert on Nuclear Proliferation, Center for American Progress): This is the most overblown story I've seen since before the buildup to the war in Iraq. There's precious little information available, but it hasn't stop people with political agendas from spinning it at such an absurd level as if these claims are facts.

SHUSTER: The story may have been a factor in postponing a meeting this week of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. That was expected to take place today in Beijing, but the Chinese government abruptly canceled it on Monday. Cirincione says some in Israel as well are also using the air strike story to affect possible future talks with Syria.

Dr. CIRINCIONE: Certain hard-line Israelis who are aimed at preventing a U.S.-Syrian or an Israeli-Syrian dialogue.

SHUSTER: That appears to have been a concern of Israel's president, Shimon Peres, yesterday when he told the foreign press corps that the nervousness, as he put it, between Syria and Israel is over.

President SHIMON PERES (Israel): So I'll go back to the almost and speculations and so on. When we say clearly that we are ready to negotiate directly with the Syrians caucus(ph).

SHUSTER: But today, another story surfaced about Syria that could complicate matters further. Jane's Defence Weekly is reporting that an explosion in the chemical plant in Syria on July 26th actually resulted from efforts to put chemical warheads on scud missiles. At the time, Syria's official news agency reported 15 military personnel were killed in the blast. The magazine reported that Iranian experts there were also killed.

Syria's chemical weapons program has been well known says Robert Einhorn, a former assistant secretary of state for non-proliferation issues now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Dr. ROBERT EINHORN (Senior Adviser, International Security Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies): Syria has a chemical weapons capability. In fact, quite an advanced chemical weapons capability for the Middle East.

SHUSTER: That explosion occurred in Aleppo in western Syria. The Israeli air strike occurred about 200 miles east, but near an area where Syria is known to test missiles.

Mike Shuster, NPR News.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/19/AR2007091901965.html>

[Editorial]

Shock Waves From Syria

Did Israel bomb a secret nuclear facility equipped by North Korea?

Thursday, September 20, 2007; Page A20

THERE'S BEEN no official confirmation of the targets or results of an Israeli air raid in northeastern Syria on Sept. 6. Yet, like a subterranean explosion, the event is sending shock waves through the Middle East and beyond. Syria has protested to the United Nations, though it hasn't been very clear about what it's protesting. On Tuesday [18 September 2007], a front-page editorial in Damascus's main government-run newspaper criticized the United States for not condemning the attack. An Israeli newspaper, meanwhile, noted triumphantly that no nation other than North Korea had come to Syria's defense, rhetorically or otherwise.

What happened? Media accounts are beginning to converge on a report that Israel bombed a facility where it believed Syria was attempting to hatch its own nuclear weapons program with North Korea's assistance. The Post's Glenn Kessler reported that the strike came three days after a ship carrying material from North Korea docked at a Syrian port and delivered containers that Israel believes held nuclear materials. It's not clear whether U.S. intelligence agencies concur with Israel's conclusion, and independent experts have said that Syria lacks the resources for a credible nuclear weapons program.

It nevertheless is beginning to look as if Israel may have carried out the boldest act of nuclear preemption since its own 1981 raid against Iraq's Osirak nuclear complex. If so, its silence is shrewd. It has allowed Syria to avoid a military response and every other Arab state to pretend that nothing happened. So far, the most serious fallout may be China's abrupt and unexplained postponement of scheduled "six-party" talks on North Korea's nuclear program.

The non-news has boosted the previously rock-bottom poll numbers of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. This week he jauntily announced that he was open to peace talks with Syria. Still, the lasting repercussions of the raid have yet to become clear. One question is how the government of Bashar al-Assad will respond to what may have been a devastating Israeli blow -- coupled with what can only be interpreted as silent approval by Syria's neighbors and most of the rest of the world. Will Mr. Assad be frightened out of the cocky aggressiveness that has caused him to sponsor or facilitate terrorism in Israel, Iraq and Lebanon? Or will he choose to escalate?

Another choice is faced by the Bush administration, which hopes to complete an accord with North Korea by the end of the year under which North Korea will disclose all of its nuclear programs and disable its facilities. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said this week that concerns about proliferation only added to the urgency of moving ahead on the deal. That's true -- but it doesn't mean U.S. negotiators can ignore the possibility that North Korea was shipping nuclear equipment to Syria even while promising to dismantle its own program. Pyongyang's dealings with Syria are a legitimate and necessary subject of inquiry when the six-party talks resume -- and they ought to be part of North Korea's promised disclosure.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/20/AR2007092001955.html>

Middle East Volcano

By Charles Krauthammer

Friday, September 21, 2007; A19

On Sept. 6, something important happened in northern Syria. Problem is, no one knows exactly what. Except for those few who were involved, and they're not saying.

We do know that Israel carried out an airstrike. How do we know it was important? Because in Israel, where leaking is an art form, even the best-informed don't have a clue. They tell me they have never seen a better-kept secret.

Which suggests that whatever happened near Dayr az Zawr was no accidental intrusion into Syrian airspace, no dry run for an attack on Iran, no strike on some conventional target such as an Iranian Revolutionary Guard base or a weapons shipment on its way to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Circumstantial evidence points to this being an attack on some nuclear facility provided by North Korea.

Three days earlier, a freighter flying the North Korean flag docked in the Syrian port city of Tartus with a shipment of "cement." Long way to go for cement. Within days, a top State Department official warned that "there may have been contact between Syria and some secret suppliers for nuclear equipment." Three days later, the six-party meeting on dismantling North Korea's nuclear facilities scheduled for Sept. 19 was suddenly postponed, officially by China, almost certainly at the behest of North Korea.

Apart from the usual suspects -- Syria, Iran, Libya and Russia -- only two countries registered strong protests to the Israeli strike: Turkey and North Korea. Turkey we can understand. Its military may have permitted Israel an overflight corridor without ever having told the Islamist civilian government. But North Korea? What business is this of North Korea's? Unless it was a North Korean facility being hit.

Which raises alarms for many reasons. First, it would undermine the whole North Korean disarmament process. Pyongyang might be selling its stuff to other rogue states or perhaps just temporarily hiding it abroad while permitting ostentatious inspections back home.

Second, there are ominous implications for the Middle East. Syria has long had chemical weapons -- on Monday, Jane's Defence Weekly reported on an accident that killed dozens of Syrians and Iranians loading a nerve-gas warhead onto a Syrian missile -- but Israel will not tolerate a nuclear Syria.

Tensions are already extremely high because of Iran's headlong rush to go nuclear. In fending off sanctions and possible military action, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has chosen a radically aggressive campaign to assemble, deploy, flaunt and partially activate Iran's proxies in the Arab Middle East:

(1) Hamas launching rockets into Israeli towns and villages across the border from the Gaza Strip. Its intention is to invite an Israeli reaction, preferably a bloody and telegenic ground assault.

(2) Hezbollah heavily rearmed with Iranian rockets transshipped through Syria and preparing for the next round of fighting with Israel. The third Lebanon war, now inevitable, awaits only Tehran's order.

(3) Syria, Iran's only Arab client state, building up forces across the Golan Heights frontier with Israel. And on Wednesday, yet another anti-Syrian member of Lebanon's parliament was killed in a massive car bombing.

(4) The al-Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard training and equipping Shiite extremist militias in the use of the deadliest IEDs and rocketry against American and Iraqi troops. Iran is similarly helping the Taliban attack NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Why is Iran doing this? Because it has its eye on a single prize: the bomb. It needs a bit more time, knowing that once it goes nuclear, it becomes the regional superpower and Persian Gulf hegemon.

Iran's assets in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq are poised and ready. Ahmadinejad's message is this: If anyone dares attack our nuclear facilities, we will fully activate our proxies, unleashing unrestrained destruction on Israel, moderate Arabs, Iraq and U.S. interests -- in addition to the usual, such as mining the Strait of Hormuz and causing an acute oil crisis and worldwide recession.

This is an extremely high-stakes game. The time window is narrow. In probably less than two years, Ahmadinejad will have the bomb.

The world is not quite ready to acquiesce. The new president of France has declared a nuclear Iran "unacceptable." The French foreign minister warned that "it is necessary to prepare for the worst" -- and "the worst, it's war, sir."

Which makes it all the more urgent that powerful sanctions be slapped on the Iranian regime. Sanctions will not stop Ahmadinejad. But there are others in the Iranian elite who might stop him and the nuclear program before the volcano explodes. These rival elites may be radical, but they are not suicidal. And they believe, with reason, that whatever damage Ahmadinejad's apocalyptic folly may inflict upon the region and the world, on Crusader and Jew, on infidel and believer, the one certain result of such an eruption is Iran's Islamic republic buried under the ash.

Israel's Olmert Seeks to Ease Tensions with Syria

NPR.org, **September 24, 2007**

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Israeli lawmakers Monday that he does not want friction with Syria, as his spokesperson spread the word that Israel has no problem sitting down at a Mideast peace conference with its enemy.

Speaking to a closed meeting of Israeli lawmakers, Olmert said Israel has been monitoring Syrian troop movements in recent weeks. The prime minister went on to say that his country is not interested in violent conflict with Syria and expressed confidence that recent tensions between the nations will subside.

"We're not interested in friction, and I think the Syrians aren't either," Olmert said, according to a meeting participant. "I think the tensions in the area will gradually subside." The participant spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was closed.

Olmert has been trying to ease fear of a possible outbreak in fighting after a reported Israeli airstrike in Syria on Sept. 6. Israel has not publicly acknowledged the incursion, but tensions between Israel and Syria have heightened since the alleged airstrike.

Meanwhile, Olmert spokeswoman Miri Eisin said Monday that Israel supports the U.S. decision to invite Syria to President Bush's Mideast planned peace conference.

"We have no problem with whomever the United States decides to include at the international meeting," she said.

On Sunday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that key Arab nations — including Syria — would be invited to the peace conference this fall. The U.S. hopes the conference will provide the foundation for peace talks meant to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Earlier this month, Syria accused Israel of invading its airspace and dropping unspecified munitions.

Israel has imposed a news blackout on the matter, but Mideast defense officials have told The Associated Press an Israeli airstrike and commando forces on the ground targeted a Syrian technology installation.

Foreign news reports have cited officials and experts as saying the attack targeted either arms meant for Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon or some sort of nonconventional weapon, perhaps a joint Syrian-North Korean nuclear project. Syria has denied both, and North Korea has denied a nuclear link with Damascus.

However, North Korean media outlets have reported that there was an attack.

"Israeli warplanes' intrusion into the territorial airspace of Syria and bomb-dropping are an outright violation of Syria's sovereignty and a grave crime that destroys regional peace and security," South

Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted the North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper as saying on Monday.

Israel has repeatedly criticized Syria for its support of radical Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as the Hezbollah guerrilla group in Lebanon. Syria also is on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

But last week, Olmert called for the reopening of peace talks between the two adversaries without conditions.

Past negotiations broke down seven years ago over Syria's demand for the return of the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel offered to go back to the international border, but Syria insisted on also controlling another small strip of territory — the east bank of the Sea of Galilee, which Syria captured during the 1948-49 war that accompanied Israel's creation. Talks also faltered over the extent of peaceful relations Syria would offer.

Syrian officials have not responded to news of the pending invitation.

From NPR reports and The Associated Press

Israel, Syria and the Glaring Secret

September 25, 2007 17 54 GMT

By George Friedman

What happened in the Middle East on Sept. 6?

The first reports came from the Syrians, who said their air defenses fired at an Israeli warplane that had penetrated Syrian airspace and dropped some ordnance on the country's North. The plane then fled toward the Mediterranean at supersonic speeds, the Syrians said, noting that sonic booms had been heard.

A Syrian delegation was meeting Turkish officials about the same time, and the Turks announced that two Israeli fuel tanks had been dropped inside of Turkish territory, one in Gaziantep province and the other in Hatay province. That would mean the aircraft did come under some sort of fire and dropped fuel tanks to increase speed and maneuverability. It also would mean the plane was flying close to Turkish territory or over Turkish territory, at the northwestern tip of Syria.

The Israelis said nothing. It appeared at first glance that an Israeli reconnaissance flight had attracted Syrian attention and got out of there fast, though even that was puzzling. The Israelis monitor Syria carefully, but they have close relations with the Turkish military, which also watches Syria carefully. We would assume they have intelligence-sharing programs and that reconnaissance in this area could have been done by the Turks or, more likely, by Israeli reconnaissance satellites. Yet, an Israeli reconnaissance flight seemed like the only coherent explanation.

What was most striking from the beginning was the relative silence on all sides. The Israelis remained mum, not even bothering to leak a misleading but plausible story. The Syrians, after threatening to take the issue to the U.N. Security Council, have been less vociferous than one would expect. The United States had nothing official to say, but U.S. sources leaked a series of incompatible explanations. The Turks, after requesting an explanation for the fuel tanks, dropped the matter.

The leaks, which seemed to be coming from the Americans, raised the scope of the operation from a reconnaissance to something more. It was U.S. sources who said up to eight aircraft were involved in the operation. Early on, a leak originating in the United States implied that there might have been Israeli commandos involved as well. U.S. leaks also mentioned that a shipment of cement had been delivered to Syria from North Korea a few days before the incident and implied that this shipment might have contained nuclear equipment of some sort that was the real target of the attack. All three countries were silent officially on the intent of the attack, but the Americans were filling in some blanks with unofficial hints.

The media also were filled with a range of contradictory speculation. One story said this was a dry run for an Israeli air attack against Iran. Another said the Israelis were demonstrating their ability -- and hence the U.S. ability -- to neutralize Syrian air defenses as a signal to Iran that it, too, is vulnerable. Some stories also claimed that new missiles, not nuclear materials, were being shipped to Syria. There were many other explanations, but these were either pure speculation or were deliberately being fed to the media in order to confuse the issue.

Officials finally started to go public last week. Israeli opposition leader and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was consulted in advance and supported Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's action in Syria. U.S. President George W. Bush went out of his way -- commenting directly and through his press secretary -- to make it understood that he also knew a raid had been carried out, but had absolutely nothing to say about it. That drew attention to two things. First, the United States knew what was going on. Second, the United States was going to keep the secret -- and the secret was an important one. Between Netanyahu and Bush, the reconnaissance theory was dead. An important operation occurred Sept. 6. It remains absolutely unclear what it was about.

Another leak appeared via the Sunday Times, this time with enough granularity to consider it a genuine leak. According to that report, the operation was carried out by Israeli commandos supported by Israeli aircraft, under the direct management of Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak. It had been planned since June, just after Barak took office, and had been approved by the United States after some hesitation. The target was in fact nuclear "material" provided by North Korea, according to that leak.

All of this makes perfect sense, save one thing. Why the secrecy? If the Syrians have nuclear facilities, the Israelis should be delighted to make it public. Frankly, so should the United States, since the Bush administration has always argued that nuclear proliferation to rogue states, including Syria, is one of the key problems in the world. The Syrians should be spinning the story like crazy as well, denying the nuclear program but screaming about unprovoked Israeli-U.S. aggression. The silence from one or two parties makes sense. The silence from all parties makes little sense.

Looked at differently, Israel and the United States both have gone out of their way to draw attention to the fact that a highly significant military operation took place in Northern Syria, and compounded the attention by making no attempt to provide a plausible cover story. They have done everything possible to draw attention to the affair without revealing what the affair was about. Israel and the United States have a lot of ways to minimize the importance of the operation. By the way they have handled it, however, each has chosen to maximize its importance.

Whoever they are keeping the secret from, it is not the Syrians. They know precisely what was attacked and why. The secret is not being kept from the Iranians either. The Syrians talk to them all the time. It is hard to imagine any government of importance and involvement that has not been briefed by someone. And by now, the public perception has been shaped as well. So, why the dramatic secrecy designed to draw everyone's attention to the secret and the leaks that seem to explain it?

Let us assume that the Sunday Times report is correct. According to the Times, Barak focused on the material as soon as he became defense minister in June. That would mean the material had reached Syria prior to that date. Obviously, the material was not a bomb, or Israel would not have waited until September to act. So it was, at most, some precursor nuclear material or equipment.

However, an intervening event occurred this summer that should be factored in here. North Korea publicly shifted its position on its nuclear program, agreeing to abandon it and allow inspections of its facilities. It also was asked to provide information on the countries it sold any nuclear technology to, though North Korea has publicly denied any proliferation. This was, in the context of the six-party negotiations surrounding North Korea, a major breakthrough.

Any agreement with North Korea is, by definition, unstable. North Korea many times has backed off of agreements that seemed cast in stone. In particular, North Korea wants to be seen as a significant power

and treated with all due respect. It does not intend to be treated as an outlaw nation subject to interrogation and accusations. Its self-image is an important part of its domestic strategy and, internally, it can position its shift in its nuclear stance as North Korea making a strategic deal with other major powers. If North Korea is pressed publicly, its willingness to implement its agreements can very quickly erode. That is not something the United States and other powers want to see happen.

Whether the Israelis found out about the material through their own intelligence sources or North Korea provided a list of recipients of nuclear technology to the United States is unclear. The Israelis have made every effort to make it appear that they knew about this independently. They also have tried to make it appear that they notified the United States, rather than the other way around. **But whether the intelligence came from North Korea or was obtained independently, Washington wants to be very careful in its handling of Pyongyang right now.**

The result is the glaring secrecy of the last few weeks. Certainly, Israel and the United States wanted it known that Syria had nuclear material, and that it was attacked. This served as a warning to other recipients of North Korean nuclear technology -- most especially Iran. At the same time, the United States did not want to publicly embarrass North Korea, out of fear that the North Koreans would simply chuck the disarmament talks. Moreover, Damascus had no interest in publicizing that it had thoughts of a nuclear program, so it quieted down.

We should note that if this theory is true, and the United States and Israel discovered the existence of a Syrian nuclear program only from North Korean information, this would represent one of the most massive intelligence failures imaginable by both Israel and the United States. Essentially, it would mean that, unless this was the first shipment of material to Syria, Israel and the United States failed to detect a Syrian nuclear program on their own. That is possible, but not likely.

It is a neat theory. It might even be a true theory. But it has problems. The biggest problem is why Syria would be trying to obtain nuclear technology. Sandwiched between Israel and Turkey -- a country that has not had great relations with Syria in the past -- and constantly watched by the United States, the probability of it developing a nuclear capability undetected is infinitesimal, and the probability of Israel not taking it out is nonexistent. Moreover, Syria is not Iran. It is poorer, has less scientific and other resources and lacks the capability to mount a decadelong development effort. Syria actually plays a fairly conservative game, taking its risks in Lebanese politics and allowing jihadists to transit through the country on their way to Iraq. Trying to take on Israel or the United States in a nuclear gambit is not the Syrians' style. But certainly they were caught doing something, or they would be screaming to high heaven.

There has been persistent discussion of nuclear material in Syria, which, if we took the words seriously, would tend to indicate that something radioactive, such as enriched uranium or plutonium, was present. If what was delivered was not equipment but radioactive material, the threat might not have been a Syrian nuclear program, but some sort of radioactive device -- a dirty bomb -- that might be handed off to Hezbollah. The head of Israel's military intelligence was quoted as saying something about the attack having re-established Israel's deterrence power after its failures in the 2006 conflict with Hezbollah. Perhaps the problem was that the material was being transferred from North Korea to Syria on its way to Lebanon, possibly to use against Israel.

That would explain Syria's relative silence. Concern that the deal with North Korea will fall apart might keep the United States quiet. But a Syrian transfer of such material to Hezbollah normally would set

Israel to raging at the Syrians. The Americans might have kept quiet, but the Israelis would have leaked much earlier than this. Israel would want to use the threat as a tool in its public relations war.

Another reason for the silence could be psychological warfare against Iran. The speculation above might be true in some variant, but by remaining ominously silent, the Israelis and Americans might be trying to shake Iran's nerve, by demonstrating their intelligence capability, their special operations ability and the reach of their air power. With the Israelis having carried out this attack, this very visible secrecy might be designed to make Iran wonder whether it is next, and from what direction an attack might come.

Normally such international game-playing would not interest us. The propensity of governments to create secrets out of the obvious is one of the more tedious aspects of international relations. But this secret is not obvious, and it is not trivial. Though it is true that something is finally being leaked three weeks after the attack, what is being leaked is neither complete nor reliable. It seems to make sense, but you really have to work hard at it.

At a time when the United States is signaling hostile intentions toward Iran, the events in Syria need to be understood, and the fact that they remain opaque is revealing. The secrecy is designed to make a lot of people nervous. Interestingly, the Israelis threw a change-up pitch the week after the attack, signaling once again that they wanted to open talks with the Syrians -- a move the Syrians quickly rebuffed.

When events get so strange that interpretation is a challenge, it usually indicates it was intended that way, that the events are significant and that they could point to further instability. We do not know whether that is true, but Israel and the United States have certainly worked hard to create a riddle wrapped in a mystery.

Did N. Korea give Syria nuclear aid?

from the **September 26, 2007** edition

The US will press for details in the next round of six-party talks, to be held Thursday in Beijing.

By Donald Kirk |
Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Seoul

The US faces a dilemma going into the next round of six-nation talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons: how firmly to press North Korea for details of proliferation of its nuclear technology to foreign clients.

Ahead of the Thursday meeting in Beijing, the issue has assumed critical importance with revelations of an Israeli raid early this month on a Syrian base where North Koreans were suspected of imparting not only know-how but also materiel needed for Syria to develop nuclear warheads.

"The US government has some evidence, but they seem to be deciding now is not the right time to talk about it," says Kim Tae Woo, senior research fellow at the Institute of Defense Analyses, affiliated with the South Korean defense ministry.

Indeed, US officials have said almost nothing publicly about what was going on at the base near the Turkish border in northern Syria that according to media reports prompted Israel first to send in commandos and then to bomb it.

Mr. Kim believes that Syria's goal was to get "the technology for enrichment" of uranium, and that North Korea probably supplied uranium fluoride – the gaseous substance from which emerges the highly enriched uranium needed for nuclear warheads.

North Korea's expertise in highly enriched uranium raises another issue for negotiators to consider at the upcoming six-party talks: the exact status of North Korea's highly enriched uranium program.

The chief US envoy, Christopher Hill, says he hopes for "clarity" on the issue at this week's six-party talks at which North Korea's envoy, Kim Kye Hwan, is to list in detail all aspects of his country's nuclear program.

A top North Korean official acknowledged the existence of the program to a delegation to Pyongyang led by Mr. Hill's predecessor, James Kelly, in October 2002, but North Korea since then has denied anything to do with enriched uranium.

North Korea-Syria connection

This week, North Korea may get around the issue of highly enriched uranium, according to analysts here, by admitting that it received advice, and perhaps some centrifuges, from Pakistan in the days

when the Pakistan nuclear program was run by the since-disgraced physicist A.Q. Khan. North Korea can then say it never did anything more to develop warheads with uranium and the Pakistan relationship was short-lived and no longer exists.

North Korea may have more difficulty, however, explaining what was going on at the Syrian base.

"The Israelis must have had pretty good evidence," says Robyn Lim, professor of international relations at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan. "The US had to have been told in advance of the raid, and the Turks would have to have known in advance as well."

But why would North Korea have a team at the Syrian base while six-party talks are about to resume?

"The connection with Syria is ongoing business," says Mr. Kim of the Institute of Defense Analyses. "It's not something that can be disconnected. The US must have been aware of that information for a long time."

Indeed, Syria maintains strong relations with North Korea. A Syrian delegation visited Pyongyang last week.

"There's no doubt Syria has long been interested in the enrichment of uranium," says Kim. "The Syrian delegation in Pyongyang was probably talking about both nukes and missiles."

Professor Lim, a former Australian intelligence analyst, says while North Korea will "pretend to come clean" at the talks, the presumption is the North continues to export missiles to Middle Eastern countries and may well have also been selling nuclear secrets. She sees North Korea as participating in the talks for the sake of the enormous aid that's promised if the North convinces the US, South Korea, China, Russia, and Japan that it has abandoned its nuclear program.

"The talks are designed just to keep enough aid flowing to prop up the regime," she says.

N. Korea could react

Analysts doubt, however, that the six-party talks will fail despite the issues of proliferation and highly enriched uranium. North Korea has already shut down its five-megawatt reactor at its nuclear complex at Yongbyon where it's believed to have made up to a dozen warheads, including one that it detonated last October in its only nuclear test to date.

Mr. Hill "will have no other option" but to raise the issue of proliferation in the talks, says Kim Song Han, a professor at Korea University. Nonetheless, he says, the priority will be to make North Korea disable its Yongbyon facilities, which made warheads with plutonium at their core.

"If the US pushes North Korea to be more detailed," Professor Kim says, "North Korea will react very harshly."

This week's talks will help set the stage for next week's North-South Korean summit in Pyongyang at which South Korea's President Roh Moo Hyun is to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. Mr. Roh says he wants to pursue a "peace system" with North Korea while talking only briefly about the nuclear issue since it's already "being resolved."

Kim predicts North Korea will go through with disablement of its facilities at Yongbyon but remains "pessimistic" about dismantlement – the final stage – and is not certain if inspectors will ever see facilities elsewhere, including the site of the underground nuclear test.

Seven Questions: The World According to John Bolton

Posted September 2007

[EXCERPT]

Negotiations with North Korea are on a knife's edge. Rumors of secret Israeli raids on alleged Syrian nuclear facilities and possible U.S. airstrikes on Iran are roiling political salons from Washington to Riyadh. In this Seven Questions, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton offers some advice for those confronted with a dangerous world.

FOREIGN POLICY: It's been a tense week on the nuclear front, with Syria accusing Israel of invading its airspace, and then North Korea blasting Israel for doing so. You've been one of the only people who have spoken openly about the likelihood that Israel bombed nuclear facilities in Syria. If that were the case, why do you think Israel wouldn't announce it had done so?

John Bolton: Well, I don't think we really know what the target of the Israeli raid was. There seems to be a lot of indication that there was a North Korean-Syrian project in the nuclear field, although obviously the details of that are not known. And what that suggests is that we need very clear answers from the North Koreans in the context of the six-party talks [as to] whether indeed they are proliferating nuclear technology, whether they're outsourcing their program—or just exactly what it is they're doing.

Now, what the Israeli raid actually hit, I don't think people know. I was certainly reacting against the notion that it was an attack on a shipment of missiles bound from Iran to Hezbollah, because I don't think the Israelis would take the risks inherent in an attack on Syrian territory against a target like that. To me, it suggests that it was a higher-value target, and a nuclear facility of some kind would definitely qualify. But what exactly the target is, I don't know myself, and I'm not sure that there's anything but speculation out there at this point. There has been at least some public acknowledgment through official U.S. sources that there are concerns about not just North Korean ballistic-missile cooperation with Syria, which we've known about for some time, but the possibility that there's cooperation on the nuclear front as well.

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/the-magazine/features/222736/we-came-so-close-to-world-war-three-that-day.html>

‘So close to war’

We came so close to World War Three that day

James Forsyth and Douglas Davis

Wednesday, 3rd October 2007

On 6 September, when Israel struck a nuclear facility in Syria

A meticulously planned, brilliantly executed surgical strike by Israeli jets on a nuclear installation in Syria on 6 September may have saved the world from a devastating threat. The only problem is that no one outside a tight-lipped knot of top Israeli and American officials knows precisely what that threat involved.

Even more curious is that far from pushing the Syrians and Israelis to war, both seem determined to put a lid on the affair. One month after the event, the absence of hard information leads inexorably to the conclusion that the implications must have been enormous.

That was confirmed to The Spectator by a very senior British ministerial source: ‘If people had known how close we came to world war three that day there’d have been mass panic. Never mind the floods or foot-and-mouth — Gordon really would have been dealing with the bloody Book of Revelation and Armageddon.’

According to American sources, Israeli intelligence tracked a North Korean vessel carrying a cargo of nuclear material labelled ‘cement’ as it travelled halfway across the world. On 3 September the ship docked at the Syrian port of Tartous and the Israelis continued following the cargo as it was transported to the small town of Dayr as Zawr, near the Turkish border in north-eastern Syria.

The destination was not a complete surprise. It had already been the subject of intense surveillance by an Israeli Ofek spy satellite, and within hours a band of elite Israeli commandos had secretly crossed into Syria and headed for the town. Soil samples and other material they collected there were returned to Israel. Sure enough, they indicated that the cargo was nuclear.

Three days after the North Korean consignment arrived, the final phase of Operation Orchard was launched. With prior approval from Washington, Israeli F151 jets were scrambled and, minutes later, the installation and its newly arrived contents were destroyed.

So secret were the operational details of the mission that even the pilots who were assigned to provide air cover for the strike jets had not been briefed on it until they were airborne. In the event, they were not needed: built-in stealth technology and electronic warfare systems were sophisticated enough to ‘blind’ Syria’s Russian-made anti-aircraft systems.

What was in the consignment that led the Israelis to mount an attack which could easily have spiralled into an all-out regional war? It could not have been a transfer of chemical or biological weapons; Syria is already known to possess the most abundant stockpiles in the region. Nor could it have been missile

delivery systems; Syria had previously acquired substantial quantities from North Korea. The only possible explanation is that the consignment was nuclear.

The scale of the potential threat — and the intelligence methods that were used to follow the transfer — explain the dense mist of official secrecy that shrouds the event. There have been no official briefings, no winks or nudges, from any of the scores of people who must have been involved in the preparation, analysis, decision-making and execution of the operation. Even when Israelis now offer a firm ‘no comment’, it is strictly off the record. The secrecy is itself significant.

Israel is a small country. In some respects, it resembles an extended, if chaotic, family. Word gets around fast. Israelis have lived on the edge for so long they have become addicted to the news. Israel’s media is far too robust and its politicians far too leaky to allow secrets to remain secret for long. Even in the face of an increasingly archaic military censor, Israeli journalists have found ways to publish and, if necessary, be damned.

The only conceivable explanation for this unprecedented silence is that the event was so huge, and the implications for Israeli national security so great, that no one has dared break the rule of omertà. The Arab world has remained conspicuously — and significantly — silent. So, too, have American officials, who might have been expected to ramp up the incident as proof of their warnings about the dangers of rogue states and WMDs. The opposite is true. George Bush stonewalled persistent questions at a press conference last week with the blunt statement: ‘I’m not going to comment on the matter.’ Meanwhile the Americans have carried on dealing with the North Koreans as if nothing has changed.

The Syrian response, when it eventually came, was more forthcoming but no more helpful. First out of the blocks was Syria’s ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Ja’afari, who happily announced that nothing had been bombed in Syria and nothing had been damaged.

One week later, Syria’s Vice-President, Farouk a-Shara, agreed that there had, after all, been an attack — on the Arab Centre for the Studies (sic) of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD). Brandishing a photograph of the Arab League-run plant, he declared triumphantly: ‘This is the picture, you can see it, and it proves that everything that was said about this attack was wrong.’

Well, perhaps not everything. The following day, ACSAD issued a statement denying that its centre had been targeted: ‘Leaks in the Zionist media concerning this ACSAD station are total inventions and lies,’ it thundered, adding that a tour of the centre was being organised for the media.

On Monday, Syria’s President, Bashar Assad, offered his first observations of the attack. The target, he told the BBC disingenuously, was an unused military building. And he followed that with vows to retaliate, ‘maybe politically, maybe in other ways’.

Meanwhile, the Washington Post noted that the United States had accumulated a growing body of evidence over the past six months — and particularly in the month leading up to the attack — that North Korea was co-operating with Syria on developing a nuclear facility. The evidence, according to the paper, included ‘dramatic satellite imagery that led some US officials to believe the facility could be used to produce material for nuclear weapons’. Even within America’s intelligence community, access to that imagery was restricted to just a handful of individuals on the instructions of America’s National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley.

Why are all sides so reluctant to clarify the details of this extraordinary event? ‘In the Middle East,’ noted Bret Stephens, a senior editorial executive at the Wall Street Journal and an acute observer of the region, ‘that only happens when the interests of prudence and the demands of shame happen to coincide’. He suggested that the ‘least unlikely’ explanation is a partial reprise of the Israeli air strike which destroyed Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981.

Another of the ‘least unlikely’ possibilities is that Syria was planning to supply its terrorist clients with ‘dirty’ bombs, which would have threatened major cities throughout the world. Terrorism is a growth industry in Syria and it is only natural that, emboldened by its Iranian ally, the Syrian regime should seek to remain the market leader by supplying the ultimate weapon to Hezbollah, Hamas and a plethora of Palestinian rejectionist groups who have been given house-room in Damascus.

The Syrians have good reason to up the ante now. The Alawite regime of Bashar Assad is facing a slew of tough questions in the coming months — most particularly over its alleged role in the murder of the former Lebanese leader, Rafiq Hariri, and its active support for the insurgency in Iraq. Either of these issues could threaten the survival of the regime. How tempting, then, to create a counter-threat that might cause Washington and others to pull their horns in — and perhaps even permit a limited Syrian return to Lebanon?

But that does not explain why the consignment was apparently too large to be sent by air. Look deeper and you find an array of other highly plausible explanations. The North Koreans, under intense international pressure, might have chosen to ‘park’ a significant stockpile of nuclear material in Syria in the expectation of retrieving it when the heat was off. They might also have outsourced part of their nuclear development programme — paying the Syrians to enrich their uranium — while an international team of experts continued inspecting and disabling North Korea’s own nuclear facilities. The shipment might even — and this is well within the ‘least unlikely’ explanations — have been intended to assist Syria’s own nuclear weapons programme, which has been on the cards since the mid-1980s.

Apart from averting the threat that was developing at Dayr as Zawr, Israel’s strategic position has been strengthened by the raid. Firstly, it has — as Major General Amos Yadlin, the head of Israel’s military intelligence, noted — ‘restored its deterrence’, which was damaged by its inept handling of the war in the Lebanon last year. Secondly, it has reminded Damascus that Israel knows what it is up to and is capable of striking anywhere within its territory.

Equally, Iran has been put on notice that Israel will not tolerate any nuclear threat. Washington, too, has been reminded that Israel’s intelligence is often a better guide than its own in the region, a crucial point given the divisions between the Israeli and American intelligence assessments about the development of the Iranian bomb. Hezbollah, the Iranian/Syrian proxy force, has also been put on notice that the air-defence system it boasted would alter the strategic balance in the region is impotent in the face of Israeli technology.

Meanwhile, a senior Israeli analyst told us this week that the most disturbing aspect of the affair from a global perspective is the willingness of states to share their technologies and their weapons of mass destruction. ‘I do not believe that the former Soviet Union shared its WMD technology,’ he said. ‘And they were careful to limit the range of the Scud missiles they were prepared to sell. Since the end of the Cold War, though, we know the Russians significantly exceeded those limits when selling missile technology to Iran.’

But the floodgates were opened wide by the renegade Pakistan nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is revered in Pakistan as the Father of the Islamic Bomb. Khan established a virtual supermarket of nuclear technologies, parts and plans which operated for more than a decade on a global stage. After his operation was shut down in 2004, Khan admitted transferring technology and parts to Iran, Libya and North Korea. Proliferation experts are convinced they know the identities of at least three of his many other clients: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

In addition to selling nuclear-related knowhow, the Khan network is also believed to have provided Syria with centrifuges for producing enriched uranium. In 2003, concern about Syria's nuclear ambitions was heightened when an experimental American electronic eavesdropping device picked up distinctive signals indicating that the Syrians had not only acquired the centrifuges but were actually operating them.

If Israel's military strike on Dayr as Zawr last month was surgical, so, too, was its handling of the aftermath. The only certainty in the fog of cover-up is that something big happened on 6 September — something very big. At the very least, it illustrates that WMD and rogue states pose the single greatest threat to world peace. We may have escaped from this incident without war, but if Iran is allowed to continue down the nuclear path, it is hard to believe that we will be so lucky again.

[Douglas Davis](#) is a former senior editor of the *Jerusalem Post* and [James Forsyth](#) is online editor of *The Spectator*.

U.S. Rift on Israel Could Stall N. Korea Deal

National Public Radio

All Things Considered: **October 10, 2007**

ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

On to another international matter, one with many more questions than answers right now: Israel's air strike inside Syria last month.

NPR's senior news analyst Daniel Schorr is keeping up with the latest on what's known about the raid, which isn't very much.

DANIEL SCHORR: It was mystifying from the start. On September 6th, Syria claimed that its air defenses had repelled attacking Israeli planes. But there was no word of what, if anything, had been struck. Nor would Israel say anything. And President Bush said emphatically, I am not going to comment on the matter.

With memories of the Israeli bombing of the Baghdad nuclear reactor in 1981, many people wondered whether a Syrian nuclear installation could have been the target, or perhaps nuclear materials transiting Syria on the way from North Korea to Iran. Then finally a week ago, Syria said the target had been an unused military building. Israel limited itself to say it was a military target - unspecified.

What now emerges is that the Bush administration remained hush-hush about the attack because it had prior knowledge of the Israeli intelligence that led to the raid.

The issue has now split the president's advisors. According to the New York Times today, Vice President Dick Cheney led the group urging the United States to reconsider its diplomatic overtures to Syria and to North Korea. Ranged against Cheney were Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates. They counseled caution about accepting Israeli warnings of an immediate nuclear threat from Syria.

Only last week, an American negotiator reached agreement with North Korea about disabling its nuclear facility and urged the North Korean government not to share nuclear weapons material.

Syria is important to the story because if Syria is getting nuclear aid from North Korea, then the Bush administration's policy of peaceful settlement with the Hermit Kingdom could come to a grinding halt. But few know what it was that Israel attacked in Syria, and those who do know are so far, not telling.

This is Daniel Schorr.

Israel-Syria Conflict Reportedly Split White House

National Public Radio

All Things Considered: October 10, 2007

ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

It is still not known precisely what the target was when Israel carried out an air strike inside Syria on September 6th. Neither the Israeli government nor the Bush administration has offered a full explanation of the attack, even though it appears that the Israelis briefed the administration beforehand.

But there have been leaks to the news media that North Korea was cooperating with Syria on something nuclear-related, this according to Israeli intelligence. The incident has sparked a serious clash within the administration, especially in connection with the ongoing diplomatic effort to rid North Korea of nuclear weapons.

NPR's Mike Shuster has been following it all.

And, Mike, first, exactly, what do we know about the attack of September 6th?

MIKE SHUSTER: Unfortunately, Robert, we know almost nothing. We don't know exactly where the target was. Believed to be somewhere in eastern Syria, but there have been reports that it was near Syria's border with Turkey or that it was not near Turkey. It's not known for certain how many Israeli planes attacked, whether there were Israelis on the ground during the action, how many bombs were dropped, and what was destroyed.

SIEGEL: And what have the Syrians said about it?

SHUSTER: Well, the Syrians haven't said much. Initially, they wouldn't confirm it. And eventually, they did. And in a recent interview, Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, said the Israelis bombed an unused military building. Both the Syrians and North Korea have denied any sort of cooperation in the nuclear realm. But I should add here that Syria and North Korea have cooperated for many years - this is known - on missile technology. North Korea has sold plenty of scud missiles to Syria, and North Korean specialists have been - and probably - are now in Syria. So an entirely different scenario has the Israelis bombing a delivery of North Korean missiles to Syria. And then possibly misrepresenting this as something nuclear-related because of faulty intelligence.

SIEGEL: But is there anything solid about the nuclear scenario?

SHUSTER: I'm afraid not. There have been wild assertions that the site in Syria was producing plutonium, but that would have to be a nuclear reactor. The construction of which couldn't have been kept secret for this long. So far, there's been no solid evidence have been made public about this.

This intelligence, though, has been very closely held, even within the administration. And what I keep hearing from reliable and thoughtful experts on North Korea, they have been told by those allegedly in the know that if the intelligence could be revealed, it would be astounding. At the same time, there's

clearly a difference of opinion within the administration about the reliability of this intelligence, with Vice President Cheney, it has said, embracing this intelligence fully and Secretary of State Rice and Secretary of Defense Gates being much more cautious.

SIEGEL: Astounding, implying what exactly?

SHUSTER: Implying something very serious, but nevertheless, this sort of gets whispered down the lane and never is asserted exactly what the intelligence is.

SIEGEL: Well, what we have here is at least a touring circus. Syria is an area of great concern, obviously, the Israel also to the U.S. But we're also talking about the diplomacy, the negotiations hearing on with North Korea on its known nuclear weapons activities.

SHUSTER: That's right. The Israelis brought this intelligence to the administration during the summer, just as negotiations with North Korea over their nuclear weapons program was making what seemed like real progress.

North Korea had committed itself to disabling its known nuclear facilities, providing a full inventory of what it's been doing in the nuclear realm. And it did shut down the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon in July.

But those who opposed compromise with North Korea, who opposed dealing with North Korea, like the former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, were going full throttle against the negotiations with North Korea. Then, the Israeli attack happened on September 6th. And it sure look to a lot of people like this was an effort to undermine the continuing diplomatic efforts with North Korea.

SIEGEL: A hypothetical question. Let's assume that there really is good intelligence of secret North Korea nuclear cooperation with Syria.

If that were the case, why wouldn't the U.S. and Israel want to go public with that?

SHUSTER: I think that's a question that is at the heart of this. You'd think that going public would achieve exactly what the hawks want - the discrediting of negotiations with North Korea and the unveiling of Syria as an aspiring nuclear weapon state. But that hasn't happened. And still, the whole thing remains very murky.

SIEGEL: NPR's Mike Shuster.

Mike, thank you very much.

SHUSTER: You're welcome, Robert.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=15296896>

Analysts: Israel Targeted Syrian Nuclear Reactor

National Public Radio

Talk of the Nation: **October 15, 2007**

NEAL CONAN, host:

This past summer, Israeli aircraft attacked a target in northwest Syria, near the border with Turkey. That's been the subject of speculation ever since. The mystery deepened when, not just Syria, but North Korea, protested the raid. Now, the New York Times reports that the target was the construction site of a nuclear reactor believed to be modeled on a North Korean facility that produces enough plutonium to make one nuclear weapon per year.

The implications of this story include concerns about nuclear proliferation on the one hand, and delicate negotiations with North Korea and Syria on the other.

In a moment, David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent of the New York Times joins us. If you have questions about the story and what it might mean for U.S. relations with North Korea and Syria, our number is 800-989-8255. E-mail is talk@npr.org. And you can find a link to the New York Times story in our blog at npr.org/blogofthenation.

David Sanger joins us here in Studio 3A. Nice to have you back on TALK OF THE NATION today.

Mr. DAVID SANGER (Chief Washington Correspondent, New York Times): Good to be back here.

CONAN: And there's a great deal we don't know about the story. We'll get into that in just a moment. But you remind us in your story of a blunt warning that President Bush issued to North Korea on the subject of nuclear proliferation.

Mr. SANGER: He did. When North Korea set off its nuclear test, the somewhat failed nuclear test, just a year ago last week - I should say a partially successful test - he went downstairs in the White House issued a very blunt statement about how North Korea would be held responsible if it was ever caught exporting nuclear materials or if it was ever caught proliferating nuclear weapons designs.

It's not clear in this case that they did anything or that they did what President Bush warned against. Here's what we know, Neal. We know that the Israelis struck a site, and we know that Israeli and American analysts who looked at the satellite photographs prior to that strike last night came to the conclusion that they thought that that was the beginnings of a nuclear reactor being constructed, one that Syrians had never talked about publicly.

The Syrians had before tried to obtain nuclear reactors from Russia and Argentina. And it looked to be of a North Korean design. But the North Korean design, you know, does not necessarily mean the North Koreans were deeply involved. We know that North Korea and Syria have very healthy trade in missiles and missile technology from many years. And this whole thing has been surrounded in secrecy. It sort of been the great parlor game of Washington, which is what exactly was it that the Israelis struck.

But I think there's a lot we probably still don't know about this, including who supplied the Syrian, and how far along they have gone.

CONAN: This site, about as far from Syria's border with Israel as you can get and still be in Syria, that was part of the confusion because if it was - why would Israel risk a general war - which is what happens when you bomb a site in a neighboring country - why would Israel make that risk? What for? What could possibly be worth it?

Mr. SANGER: Well, that's one of the reasons the people have thought, that this was not just an ordinary kind of missile trade or the kind of thing that's going on for sometime.

You remember, Neal, I think you and I talked about this a few years ago. There was a lot of discussion in Washington about preemption after President Bush issued a new national security strategy in 2002.

Well, preemption looks a little more complicated to the Bush administration now after Iraq, and it was certainly complicated enough that they have not been able to use it in the case of even North Korea or Iran. But to the Israelis, this seemed like it was a moment, I think, to send a message. It was a message to the Syrians, many believed, that say we won't let you get started. It was a message to the Iranians that the - that Israel could if Iran's program got along far enough, might be tempted to do the same. That would be a very difficult operation for Israel.

CONAN: Mm-hmm. And yet, the analogy that everybody draws that you drew in your piece was to the Israeli raid on the Osiraq reactor in Baghdad some years ago. But that was a facility that was nearly completed...

Mr. SANGER: That's right.

CONAN: Represented, at least in Israeli minds, an imminent threat to Israel. There was no way that this embryonic site, whatever it may have been, represented any kind of an imminent threat.

Mr. SANGER: That's right. The Osiraq reactor was about to be fueled and that, you know, then an attack becomes much more complicated because you risk spreading nuclear material around. That was not an issue here if the Israeli and American analysis is right. If in fact it was a reactor, they were basically saying - you will not even going to start down that line, which was what many Israelis believe the position of Israel should have been about Iran years ago. But they're past that point.

CONAN: Mm-hmm. Then, there is the question of intelligence. Intelligence has been wrong - well, not so very long ago and then very important in Syria's ways. This was of an important attack. The Syrians are obviously very upset about it for any number of reasons. How do we know that the Israelis knew what they knew?

Mr. SANGER: You know, intelligence has been wrong before, famously in the case of Iraq. They'll be intelligence failures again in the future. And there have been journalistic failures, which we've also discussed when it comes from writing for the intelligence, so we try to write these with some care. We tried, in our story on Sunday, to explain what the American and Israeli analysts believe they saw that led Israel to make this attack.

Does that necessarily mean that they interpreted the evidence correctly? No, it does not. But, you know, we also all forget that there have been huge intelligence failures in the nuclear side in the other direction, in the case of China and the Soviet Union and...

CONAN: And in...

Mr. SANGER: ...India and Pakistan. We have failed to pick up indicators of nuclear activity until it was way too late so...

CONAN: And Iraq as well.

Mr. SANGER: Iraq was a huge failure in the other direction. In fact, Iraq was sort of the first huge failure in the direction of overestimating how close they were. Oh, you're talking about Iraq in 1991.

CONAN: Back in '91, yes, when they underestimated Iraq's nuclear program and then overestimated it 15 years later.

Mr. SANGER: Absolutely right. And so I try to remind the critics of the U.S. Intelligence Agency and the critics of the New York Times and other newspapers that report on intelligence that we have seen huge intel errors happen in both directions - underestimation and overestimation.

CONAN: We're talking with David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent of the New York Times. 800-989-8255, if you'd care to join us. E-mail: talk@npr.org. Eric is on the line with us from Auburn, New York.

ERIC (Caller): Yeah. I was wondering along these lines, how the Israeli have intelligence? They don't have satellites, I don't believe. So was the U.S. feeding them information? How did they get the information?

CONAN: I believe Israel does have satellites, David Sanger?

Mr. SANGER: They have some new overhead capability, but they share a huge amount of U.S. data. And frequently, they and other countries that share U.S. satellite data see things on our satellite photographs that the U.S. hasn't seen because the U.S. is focused elsewhere, and you can't be looking at every image and every spot. And we believe - but don't know for certain - that in this case, they were using U.S. intel. I don't know whether they were initially, or they came around with. But certainly, there was a lot of U.S. imagery of this site.

CONAN: Good question, Eric. Thank you.

ERIC: Thank you.

CONAN: There is also the debate, which this intelligence set off within the Bush administration, which has been reported on in your piece and in an earlier piece of the New York Times that, well, one of the implications of this, if North Korea is indeed cooperating with Syria on a nuclear weapons program -well, didn't North Korea just agreed to dismantle its own nuclear facilities? And is the United States approaching Syria in a diplomatic vein as well?

Mr. SANGER: That's right. And my colleagues, Mark Mazzetti and Helene Cooper, did some really great pioneering work on this internal debate. There were a couple of levels of debate underway in the Bush administration. One was, simply, even if the intelligence is what the Israelis believed it was, was this project so premature that there was no reason to go out and do a military strike now. That was one level of debate, and that divided across sort of predictable lines in the Bush administration.

The second debate, which was brought up by some people surrounding Vice President Cheney and others who have been deeply suspicious of engaging in negotiations with North Korea is if the North Koreans were exporting these, does that mean that you could trust any agreement you reach with them? The counterargument to that is that these talks would be a way of beginning to restrain North Korean exports.

And if in fact, the North Koreans helped the Syrians - we don't know that for a fact yet - it'd be assumed now when that happened. And it could have been years ago that they sold them a design. Remember, North Korea is first and foremost broke. And when you're broke, you'll sell a lot of things.

CONAN: Mm-hmm. Yet, North Korea - after Syria protested this, North Korea did as well.

Mr. SANGER: That's a fascinating thing. Here you have an Israeli attack on Syria. Did we hear from the Egyptians, the Saudis, people who you might expect to be upset about the fact with Israel went over a border and bombed an Arab country? Not a word. But the North Koreans, sitting on the other side of the world, about a day or two later issued a big protest. We thought that was interesting.

CONAN: And at the same time, Israel, normally not reticent about trumpeting what it might regard as a military success, has said nothing.

They have said nothing and the Bush administration has said a little less than nothing. There was one interesting set of comments by Defense Secretary Gates on one of the Sunday talk shows that was vaguely worded but suggested the North Koreans should be careful about proliferation as a general rule. You know, I've written about North Korea's nuclear programs since 1989 and I have never seen secrecy around a nuclear development or an attack or anything like that, the kind that we have seen around this incident.

CONAN: David Sanger, chief Washington correspondent of the New York Times, is our guest. We're talking about a story he wrote in the Sunday editions of the New York Times, which reported that the target hit by Israeli aircraft this summer in northwestern part of Syria was a embryonic nuclear power plant, maybe. We're talking on about this on TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

And let's see if we can get another caller on the line, Stephen, with us, Stephen calling from Sacramento.

STEPHEN (Caller): Yes, good afternoon.

CONAN: Afternoon.

STEPHEN: I was curious. It seemed the Syrians were very slow to protest this attack. I originally heard a report of it on the Internet Israeli Radio site. It was two or three weeks later before the Syrians seem to say a thing about it.

Mr. SANGER: They did initially say that their airspace had been violated by the Israelis, and they said that relatively quickly after the attack.

CONAN: And had repelled an attack.

Mr. SANGER: Right. Then, President Assad said in an interview about a week or week and a half ago that they hit an empty building and a military site, but that it didn't amount to much. That was a slightly different story than we had initially heard. There's a lot of speculation about why it is they haven't said more. One possibility is that they have spent a fair bit of money trying to invest in air defenses and it doesn't look like it did a whole lot of good on this particular case.

CONAN: Wasn't it an Israeli correspondent also able to go up to the northwestern part of Syria and stand in front of what he was describing as the target of this attack, which was an agricultural facility, which may or may not have been?

Mr. SANGER: You know, we're still having a hard time pinning down exactly where the attack placed. We haven't seen any pictures of the attack itself, and there are a number of coordinates all pretty much in the same neighborhood that people have been looking at as a possible site here. The Syrians invited some reporters up to the town that this was supposed to be closest to and said, look around. Do you see anything that happened here? And, you know, it was nothing.

CONAN: Mm-hmm.

Mr. SANGER: But I think that has something to do with the fact that we may not all be looking in the right place.

CONAN: All right. Thanks very much for the call, Stephen.

STEPHEN: Thank you.

CONAN: And let's go now to Greg. And Greg's with us from South Dakota. Greg, you're on the air.

GREG (Caller): Oh, yes. Yeah, I think you - since I called, you actually started covering something about that the - that maybe the message here is - has more to do with their sort of state-of-the-art defense system in Syria, which the Iranians also have a similar system. And it turned out to be pretty porous, and it's a good message that we can hit you when we want.

CONAN: Nevertheless, an Israeli attack on the Iran, given the distances involved and the countries that they would have to overfly, David Sanger, would be a much more ambitious prospect.

Mr. SANGER: A much more ambitious project. And remember that the Iranian nuclear program doesn't look anything like whatever this was in Syria. Iran has been using centrifuges to try to enrich uranium. They say for peaceful purposes, they have built at least one deeply underground major centrifuge center in Natanz, which the International Atomic Energy Agency has inspected. It would not be an easy thing taking that out.

But most importantly, the Iranians learned a lot of lessons from Osiraq, the Israeli attack on Iraq in 1981, and they have spread out the nuclear facilities considerably. So it would be quite a job for the

Israelis to go to that and they would probably require American help, and it's not at all clear that the U.S. would be willing to provide that help.

CONAN: Hmm. Thank for the call, Greg. One other item that today, the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna issued a statement that they had inquired to Syria about this report of a nuclear power plant on which they were uninformed by Syria. You pointed out in your piece, however, that the Syria would not have been obligated at this stage of construction - if it was a nuclear power plant - to report it to Vienna.

Mr. SANGER: That's right. There was some debate about at what point in time you have to go to the IAEA and say what you're intending to go build. And the IAEA board has interpreted some of their rules, and this is getting way down into the weeds of international law to say the Syrians would have had to notify them, but it's not at all clear that they would have.

CONAN: And finally, as the determination been made that it is - even if North Korea was involved and it was what the Israelis thought it was that the United States should continue its negotiations with North Korea and hope that they are trustworthy and will dismantle their nuclear systems.

Mr. SANGER: You know, the Bush administration spent the entire first term coming up with reasons not to talk to the North Koreans, and it didn't work out so well.

By the time we got in and out of - through the initial invasion of Iraq, the North Koreans had reprocessed their collection of spent fuel and now are believed to have enough fuel for six, eight, ten, maybe a dozen nuclear weapons. So in the first term, they tried to disengage an approach. I think in the second term, they fairly committed to trying the reverse approach.

CONAN: David Sanger, thanks very much for your time today.

Mr. SANGER: Thank you, Neal.

CONAN: David Sanger, the chief Washington correspondent of the New York Times, joined us here today in Studio 3A. Again, there's a link to his article at our blog npr.org/blogofthenation.

This is TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News. I'm Neal Conan in Washington.

US intelligence does not show Syrian nuclear weapons program, officials say

Larisa Alexandrovna

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[EXCERPT]

Cheney hand seen behind leaks of 'misleading' stories

Allegations that a Syrian envoy admitted during a United Nations meeting Oct. 17 that an Israeli air strike hit a nuclear facility in September are inaccurate and have raised the ire of some in the US intelligence community, who see the Vice President's hand as allegedly being behind the disinformation.

A United Nations press release discussing the General Assembly's Disarmament Committee meeting mistranslated comments ascribed to an unnamed Syrian diplomat as saying that Israel had on various occasions "taken action against nuclear facilities, including the 6 July attack in Syria."

The UN has since gone through the tape recordings of the meeting and found that there was no mention of the word "nuclear" at all. According to the UN, the error was one of translation, involving several interpreters translating the same meeting.

Recent news articles, however, continue to make allegations and suggest that a nuclear weapons facility was hit -- something that the Syrian government has denied, the Israeli government has not officially confirmed and US intelligence does not show.

According to current and former intelligence sources, the US intelligence community has seen no evidence of a nuclear facility being hit.

US intelligence "found no radiation signatures after the bombing, so there was no uranium or plutonium present," said one official, wishing to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the subject.

"We don't have any independent intelligence that it was a nuclear facility -- only the assertions by the Israelis and some ambiguous satellite photography from them that shows a building, which the Syrians admitted was a military facility."

Their statements come as officials claim Syria has begun to 'disassemble' the site. An article today quotes former Administration hawk and onetime Bush United Nations Ambassador John Bolton, who links Syria's alleged action with Iran.

Israel has not spoken publicly about the air raid, other than to confirm that it happened. The confirmation came nearly a month after the Sept. 6 bombing, and provided only that "Israeli officials said the strike took place deep inside Syria."

"'Radiation signatures' are just the particular type of radiation that some activity would give off," Dr. Ivan Oelrich, a nuclear weapons expert at the Strategic Security Project at the Federation of American Scientists, told RAW STORY. "For example, a nuclear bomb would produce a lot of radioactivity and a nuclear reactor explosion would produce a lot of radioactivity but if you measure it carefully so you can tell, not just that it is radioactive, but exactly what particular isotopes are contributing, then it is easy to tell the difference.

"If a reactor explodes or is blown up then I can, with careful measurements of the particular types of radiation, tell what the fuel was for the reactor and how long the reactor had been running when it was hit," Oelrich added.

"It gets complicated because you have to take into account how different species are transported in the air, how fast they decay, etc. but it can be done."

An earlier report by Raw Story cited Vincent Cannistraro, Director of Intelligence Programs for the National Security Council under President Ronald Reagan and Chief of Operations at the Central Intelligence Agency's Counterterrorism Center under President George H. W. Bush, as saying that what the Israelis hit was "absolutely not a nuclear weapons facility."

The Central Intelligence Agency, through a spokesman, declined to comment.

Administration said to leak stories to press

One US intelligence source familiar with the events expressed concern about recent news reports describing Syria as having a functioning nuclear weapons program and cautioned against attributing those reports to the US intelligence community.

"The allegations that North Korea was helping to build a nuclear reactor have not been substantiated by US intelligence," said this intelligence official, adding, "but that hasn't stopped Dick Cheney and his minions at the NSC, Elliot Abrams and Steve Hadley, from leaking the information [to the press], which appears to be misleading in the extreme."

[deletia]

Larisa Alexandrovna is managing editor of investigative news for Raw Story and regularly reports on intelligence and national security stories. Contact her at larisa@rawstory.com.

Raid Revelation

Getting briefed on World War III.

By Stanley Kurtz

NRO Contributing Editor

October 23, 2007 6:00 AM

If people had known how close we came to World War III that day there would have been mass panic. That is how a very senior British ministerial source recently characterized Israel's September raid on what was apparently a Syrian nuclear installation. Whether matters were quite that grave is an open question. Yet it does seem clear that the full story of the Israeli raid has not been told, nor its full significance recognized. Now two key members of Congress have raised an alarm about this event, thereby throwing our nuclear agreement with North Korea into question.

Briefings

Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, as senior Republicans on the House Intelligence and Foreign Affairs Committees, respectively, were among the mere handful of members of Congress briefed on the Israeli air strike. What they learned obviously dismayed them greatly, as is evident from "What Happened in Syria?" a Wall Street Journal opinion piece published by Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen this past Saturday.

In that piece, Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen protest the "unprecedented veil of secrecy, thrown over the airstrike" noting that the vast majority of foreign relations and intelligence committee members have been left in the dark on the details of the raid. Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen acknowledge that they have personally been "sworn to secrecy," yet add that: "...based on what we have learned...it is critical for every member of congress to be briefed on this incident, and as soon as possible."

Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen obviously believe that Syria obtained "nuclear expertise or material" from outside state sources. And while they base their concern on press reports, it seems likely that their top-secret briefings confirmed this fact. Notable here is Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen's repeated use of the phrase "North Korea, Iran, or other rogue states" when referring to Syria's possible nuclear collaborators. After their briefing, Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen seem just as concerned about Iranian involvement as North Korean.

Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen protest the administration's willingness to provide the press with anonymous information on background, "to shape this story to its liking," while keeping members of Congress in the dark. "We believe this is unacceptable," they say, noting that the administration has ignored numerous letters from Congress asking that all members be briefed. Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen specifically express concerns about two administration-influenced stories in the New York Times and one in The Washington Post. Finally, Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen threaten to oppose any nuclear deal with North Korea unless all members of congress are briefed on the reasons for the Israeli raid.

While the secrecy that surrounds this issue forces us to read between the lines, two broad factual questions emerge from Hoekstra's and Ros-Lehtinen's oped. First, in what sense has the administration been shaping (or misshaping) the Syria story to its liking? Second, is there more to this story than recent press reports have indicated?

North Korea's Role

Consider one of the articles singled out by Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen, an Oct. 14 New York Times story by David Sanger and Mark Mazzetti.

While this story confirmed that Israel had struck “a partially completed nuclear reactor, apparently modeled on one North Korea has used to create its stockpile of nuclear weapons fuel,” the article also raises doubts: “...American and foreign officials would not say whether they believed the North Koreans sold or gave plans to the Syrians, or whether the North’s own experts were there at the time of the attack. It is possible, some officials said, that the transfer of the technology occurred several years ago.”

Yet the suggestion that North Korean personnel might not have been involved in the ongoing construction of the reactor contradicts a New York Times story of October 9, just a few days before, which said that within the administration “there appears to be little debate that North Koreans frequently visited a site in the Syrian Desert that Israeli jets attacked Sept. 6.” The story on October 9 was that the North Koreans were surely present at the Syrian installation, but that the nuclear nature of the site was less certain. Once nuclear activity at the site was confirmed by the Times on October 14, however, administration sources on background apparently did their best to foster uncertainty about North Korean involvement. In other words, if the Koreans are there, it might not be nuclear, and if it’s nuclear, the Koreans might not be there.

The point is that the administration is subtly attempting to cast doubt on any reported link between North Korea and the Syrian reactor (without directly denying such a link). Otherwise it would become obvious that North Korea is flagrantly violating its nuclear agreement with the United States. Apparently, their secret briefing has led Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen to believe that the administration is obfuscating the reality of North Korean proliferation, in order to preserve the six-party deal.

In fact, from the beginning until the present, press reports have given strong indications of ongoing North Korean involvement in the Syrian nuclear project. One of the first reports (and still arguably the most extensive and important report) on the raid, from the London Sunday Times of Sept. 16, quoted Andrew Semmel, who was the acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation policy. Speaking of Syria’s nuclear project, Semmel was asked if North Korean technicians were present there. Semmel replied, “There are North Korean people there. There’s no question about that.”

Another Sunday Times piece, of Sept. 23, offered further evidence of North Korean involvement. Israeli intelligence had suggested to the administration over the summer that North Korean personnel were at the Syrian site, said the Sunday Times. In fact, Israeli defense sources were said to have taken to referring to the target site as the “North Korean project.” The Sunday Times also noted the unusual stridency of North Korea’s condemnations of an event so far from East Asia. In a sense, the North Koreans were outing themselves by their protests. The Sunday Times also reported that diplomats stationed in North Korea and China, based on intelligence reports reaching Asian governments, believed that a number of North Koreans had actually been killed in the raid.

More recent reports have taken up the same theme. On October 7, Washington Post columnist Jim Hoagland noted that a senior official with access to highly classified intelligence reports said that “...the

Israelis destroyed a nuclear-related facility and caused North Korean casualties at the site....” And October 19, ABC News quoted “a senior U.S. official claiming that the Syrians could not have built

their reactor without North Korean ‘expertise,’ meaning that ‘the Syrians must have had ‘human’ help from North Korea.’”

If these reports are true, Hoekstra’s and Ros-Lehtinen’s concerns about efforts by the administration to lead the press away from the North Korean connection (without explicitly denying it), is completely understandable. Again, Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen appear to fear that the administration’s now dominant policy-making faction (led by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates) is trying to protect the six-party agreement by suppressing the reality of North Korean proliferation.

Iran’s Role

What about Iran? As noted, the persistent and strong emphasis Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen place on possible Iranian participation in the Syrian nuclear program can’t help but make us suspect that their secret briefing contained reports of Iranian involvement. Yet Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen refer to press reports of an Iranian role, and there are some such reports.

Former U.N. ambassador John Bolton has expressed concerns that both North Korea and Iran may be “outsourcing” their nuclear programs in Syria. We know that Syria has served as a conduit for North Korean shipments of missile components to Iran, and there are concerns that North Korean nuclear material may have taken the same route (see Sunday Times, Sept. 16). On Sept. 12, a New York Times report said “The Israelis think North Korea is selling to Iran and Syria what little [nuclear material] they have left.” A useful recent overview of the Israeli raid titled “How close were we to a third world war?” adds an important bit of new information based on earlier reports in the Kuwaiti press. Ali Rheeza Ali, a former Iranian deputy defense minister who defected several months ago, supplied intelligence sources in the West with information about the site targeted by the Israelis. Of course, that knowledge would imply close Iranian involvement in Korea’s nuclear project. (For more on possible Iranian involvement, see my “Deterrence Lost.”)

Distress over North Korean and Iranian involvement in nuclear proliferation to Syria — possibly as a way of hiding their own nuclear programs from the United States — would certainly make sense of Hoekstra’s and Ros-Lehtinen’s public complaint. Yet there may be more at work. The American press reports cited by Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen have so far seemed to confirm only the existence of a “nascent” plutonium reactor modeled on North Korea’s facility at Yongbyon, a construction project that could take as many as three to six years to complete (see NYT Oct. 14). While Syrian wrath at Israel’s destruction of even a nascent nuclear reactor could certainly have led to a retaliatory attack and general war in the Middle East, worries over a potential “world war three” caused by Israel’s destruction of a reactor three to six years from completion seem a bit overblown. These worries might make more sense if there is something more to this story than what American news sources have confirmed.

Warhead?

Several early and unconfirmed reports on the Israeli raid point to the possibility that in the days immediately before the airstrike, the North Koreans may have shipped a cache of fissile material — possibly including a nuclear warhead — to Syria. According to the Sept. 16 Sunday Times, preparations for the attack began when the head of Israel’s intelligence agency, the Mossad, presented

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert with evidence that “Syria was seeking to buy a nuclear device from North Korea.” The fear was that the warhead would be fitted atop one of Syria’s North Korean-made Scud-C missiles, already armed with North Korean designed chemical warheads. “This was supposed to be a devastating surprise,” said an Israeli source, “Israel can’t live with a nuclear warhead.” The Sept. 16 Sunday Times goes on to connect the warhead story with a Washington Post report that the raid was linked to “the arrival three days earlier of a ship carrying North Korean material labeled as cement but suspected of concealing nuclear equipment.”

A “nascent” nuclear reactor, three-to-six years from completion, does not give off radiation. Yet the London Sunday Times reported on Sept. 23 that Israeli commandos seized samples of nuclear material and returned them to Israel for examination. “A laboratory confirmed that the unspecified material was North Korean in origin.” The Washington Post’s Jim Hoagland reported on October 7 that a senior official with access to highly classified intelligence reports said that the Israelis provided the United States with “physical material and soil samples from the site — taken both before and after the raid.” Soil samples are commonly used to confirm the presence of fissile material.

Here is where we begin to see potential contradictions, or at least difficulties. Some stories speak of nuclear material or even warheads, while other stories refer only to an incomplete reactor, and even deny that fissile material was present at all. For example, the ABC story of Oct. 19, claims that “no fissionable material was found because the facility was not yet operating.” The U.S. hesitated to approve the attack, according to this report, precisely because of the lack of fissionable material. While the ultimate nuclear intentions for the site were “unmistakable,” the U.S. apparently worried that it would be challenged without the sort of absolute proof provided by fissionable material.

Reactor and More?

Yet reports that fissionable material of some sort was involved in the raid persist, and there are a ways in which these reports could be reconciled with the ABC story. The October third edition of Britain’s Spectator carried a more detailed account of the fate of the North Korean shipment of “cement” than earlier reports. This is the same article, by the way, in which “a very senior British ministerial source” said we’d come close to “world war three that day.”

According to the Spectator, the Israelis tracked the North Korean “cement” shipment to the same site that had already been under intense Israeli surveillance as a possible nuclear installation (i.e. the incomplete reactor). It was at this point, just days before the attack, that elite Israeli commandoes were dispatched to collect the soil samples that indicated the ship cargo had been nuclear (and, according to the London Sunday Times, of North Korean origin). So it’s possible that the ABC report and the report from the Spectator could both be correct. The U.S. may have worried through the summer months about attacking the nascent reactor because of the lack of fissile material (and also for fear of what a raid would do to the six-party talks). Yet the arrival of the North Korean shipment of “cement” three days before the attack, and the subsequent Israeli soil samples, may have turned the tide and led the U.S. to approve what the Israelis at that point surely felt compelled to do.

Conclusions

Our examination of diverse news accounts of the Israeli raid on the Syrian nuclear facility yields several conclusions. First, there is significant evidence of ongoing and recent North Korean involvement. Especially given the informed criticisms of Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen, apparent efforts by select administration sources to downplay North Korean involvement appear unconvincing. Second,

especially in light of the informed concerns expressed by Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen, but also in light of press accounts, there is reason to fear significant Iranian involvement in Syria's nuclear program, either as a facilitator, as a destination for North Korean nuclear material transiting Syria, or both. Third, there is at least some significant evidence for direct North Korean transfer of fissile material — perhaps even a nuclear warhead — to Syria and/or Iran. That, of course, would constitute the most serious possible violation of the six-party agreement, and would be a grave threat to the security of the United States and the world.

In light of this evidence, should Congress now oppose America's nuclear agreement with North Korea? And along with North Korea, should Iran be held to account in this affair? Perhaps. In any case, based on an analysis of press reports, and on the informed protests of Representatives Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, it's clear that we need more open information before we can confidently sign on to the six-party agreement. At a minimum, the scope of congressional briefings on the Israeli raid needs to substantially increase.

— [Stanley Kurtz](#) is a senior fellow at the [Ethics and Public Policy Center](#).

Phantoms Over Syria

Everything Israel wants you to know about its secret airstrike

by Philip Giraldi

October 22, 2007 Issue

On Sept. 6, Israeli F-15s and F-16s attacked a site near Dayr az-Zawr in northern Syria, though the strike wasn't confirmed for nearly two weeks. The Washington Post reported on Sept. 13 that according to a former Israeli official, "it was an attack against a facility capable of making unconventional weapons." Two days later, Syria had an accomplice: "Israel had recently provided the United States with evidence—known by the code name 'Orchard,'" the Post reported, "that North Korea has been cooperating with Syria on a nuclear facility."

Beyond that, details are sketchy—perhaps deliberately so. On Sept. 19, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged the attack, but said it was "too early to discuss this subject." Pressed at a White House news conference the following day, President Bush twice refused to comment—though he did warn North Korea about selling nuclear weapons or expertise.

American intelligence has been unable to confirm the existence of any Syrian nuclear program, and the Post admitted, "[M]any outside nuclear experts have expressed skepticism that Syria, which has mostly focused on chemical and biological weapons, would be conducting nuclear trade with North Korea." But facts may not be prime property in this situation.

In the intelligence community, a disinformation operation is a calculated attempt to convince an audience that falsehoods about an adversary are true, either to discredit him or, in an extreme case, to justify military action. When such a campaign is properly conducted, information is leaked to numerous outlets over a period of time, creating the impression of a media consensus that the story is true, as each new report validates earlier ones.

We've been here before: the leaking of unreliable information to New York Times reporter Judith Miller was just one example of disinformation used to make the case for the invasion of Iraq. More recently, Iran has been on the receiving end of what appears to be an officially orchestrated but poorly executed disinformation campaign regarding its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now a new operation—brought to us by the old players—may be unfolding.

A chronology of the case against Syria is revealing, and the role of former UN ambassador and leading neoconservative John Bolton is key. Bolton, now at the American Enterprise Institute, has repeatedly clashed with the intelligence community over the issue of Syrian intentions, most notably in 2002 and 2003 when he was undersecretary of state for arms control. At one point, Bolton was forced to strike from a speech language suggesting that Syria had a nuclear program. On another occasion, Bolton's judgments on Syria were challenged by Robert Hutchings, director of the National Intelligence Council, who charged that Bolton "took isolated facts and made much more of them ... cherry picking ... to present the starkest possible case."

On Aug. 31, one week before the Israeli attack on Syria, Bolton wrote an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal that concluded, “We know that both Iran and Syria have long cooperated with North Korea on ballistic-missile programs, and the prospect of cooperation on nuclear matters is not far-fetched. Whether and to what extent Iran, Syria or others might be ‘safe havens’ for North Korea’s nuclear-weapons development, or may have already benefited from it, must be made clear.” Perhaps this was just good timing. Perhaps it was something more—possibly representing information provided by Bolton’s excellent contacts within the Israeli government.

Comments made by a State Department official on Sept. 14, in the wake of the Israeli attack, bolstered the neoconservative argument that Syria is a serious threat. Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear non-proliferation policy, stated that Syria was on the U.S. nuclear “watch list” and that Damascus “might have” a number of “secret suppliers” from which to obtain nuclear equipment as part of a covert program.

Across the Atlantic, on Sept. 16, the Murdoch-owned Sunday Times of London published an extremely detailed story on the attack that clearly derived from Israeli sources. The piece unambiguously portrayed the bombing as “a successful Israeli raid on nuclear material supplied by North Korea.” A Sept. 23 follow-up claimed that before the site was bombed, an Israeli commando unit had seized nuclear material, which had been tested and confirmed to be of North Korean origin. A second story headlined “Snatched: Israeli commandos ‘nuclear’ raid” also appearing in the Times on the same day, under the same byline, provided additional details, noting that Syria, Iran, and North Korea now constitute a new “axis of evil.” It also quoted David Schenker, of the neocon Washington Institute for Near East Policy, who described Syria as a “client” of Iran.

On Sept. 18, Bolton resurfaced, telling an Israeli journalist that the United States would stand behind any preemptive attack by Tel Aviv on neighboring countries believed to have nuclear-weapons programs. The Wall Street Journal added a piece by editorial board member Bret Stephens asserting that the bombing in Syria was a reprise of the 1981 Israeli attack on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor.

By Sept. 21, the Washington Post also appeared to be convinced by the story, featuring a front-page headline “Israel, US Shared Data on Suspected Nuclear Site.” The article stated that Israel provided intelligence to President Bush during the summer indicating that North Korean nuclear experts were in Syria. Bush was reportedly “troubled” by the information. The Post added, citing anonymous sources, that “the United States is believed to have provided Israel with some corroboration of the original intelligence before Israel proceeded with the raid,” but then, farther down in the article, the Post conceded, “The quality of the Israeli intelligence, the extent of North Korean assistance and the seriousness of the Syrian effort are uncertain...” To give the story even greater resonance, leading neoconservative Charles Krauthammer, in his column in the same issue, accepted as fact that Damascus was pursuing nuclear capability and warned that Israel will not accept a “nuclear Syria.”

In the days that followed, the New York Times offered a more measured headline: “Israeli Raid on Syria Fuels Debate on Weapons” and referred to allegations about Syria’s weapons program as “Israel’s private claims,” noting, “American officials have been extremely cautious about endorsing the Israeli conclusion.” Other outlets also picked up the story, but even those that were careful left the impression that Syria was seeking to obtain nuclear weapons, and North Korea was suspected of having supplied materials.

The pieces have a common thread: they rely entirely on information provided by Israeli sources without independent corroboration. And the ongoing play they are getting in the international media, without much critical commentary and without direct attribution to Israel, mark them as classic disinformation.

A review of the sources for the various stories and the descriptions of them reveals a great deal of ambiguity in the claims being made. The frequently cited Andrew Semmel's apparently damning comments are laced with expressions like "possible," "may have," and "may have been." What Semmel is actually saying is that nearly all of the information he has comes from Israel and cannot be verified. The conveniently anonymous sources who claim to the Washington Post that the U.S. is "believed" to have provided corroboration for Israeli intelligence are clearly unable to state whether it did or didn't, rendering the comment little more than opinion. The Post editor who crafted the headline asserting that there was a "sharing" of information was disturbingly clueless or deliberately misleading as there was no evidence produced in the article or elsewhere to indicate that any American intelligence agency could confirm the Israeli allegations. Any "sharing" went only in one direction: from Israel to Washington.

Also lost in the shuffle is the fact that Syria has vehemently denied having any nuclear-weapons program, and North Korea isn't known to have ever exported nuclear technology or material. The prevailing consensus is that Syria does not have an economic or technical base that would enable it to develop a nuclear weapon even if someone handed it the fissile material. The feverish imagination of John Bolton aside, even Syria's enemies concede that there has been no evidence of nuclear-weapons development. It has but a small Chinese-built research reactor that, by one account, is less capable than those in use at a number of American universities.

There are other reasons that depicting Damascus as the latest nuclear aspirant is suspect. Destroying a weapons facility would scatter traces of radioactive material that could be detected, especially since the attack took place close to the Turkish border. No such evidence has been reported. Also notable is the absence of solid intelligence. If Israel knows conclusively that Syria has a nuclear program, surely it would have made its case in the wake of the Sept. 6 raid. Far from doing so, Tel Aviv has kept a security lid on the incident, suggesting that it would prefer to promote the story of a military success against Damascus without being too specific about the details.

Even the Bush White House, generally willing to use any hint of malfeasance to condemn Damascus and Tehran, has been reluctant to confirm the story. It doesn't need to. Official silence—narrated by a compliant press taking uncorroborated dictation—is cementing a public impression. That's the way disinformation works. Done right, no one stops to ask where it came from—or who benefits.

[Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates, an international security consultancy.](#)

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-bolton30102007,0,2674269.story>

PRIMARY SOURCE

Bombing North Korea in Syria?

Former U.N. ambassador John Bolton talks about pre-emptive strikes on Syria and Iran, and a shady North Korean connection in the Middle Eastern desert.

October 30, 2007

John Bolton, the controversial and spectacularly mustachioed former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has a new book out, with the curiously embattled title of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations ." At an Oct. 30 meeting with The Times' editorial board, he said that the book shows how "in September and October of 2004, [Colin] Powell tried to reverse the policy on Iran to be more accommodating to the Europeans, and I was able to stop that, along with some other people. Only to find out when [Condoleezza] Rice came in, she went and changed the policy anyway even though at the time she agreed with my assessment that Powell had been moving in the wrong direction."

Hawky stuff. And plenty more where that came from.

(On North Koreans allegedly helping build nukes in Syria.)

Bolton: The Israeli raid on Syria on September the sixth has already raised questions whether during the entire life of the six-party talks North Korea may have been cloning its Yongbyon nuclear reactor in Syria. Which is a, uh, which is a way of, uh, avoiding inspection even better perhaps than building facilities and caves in North Korea, because if the inspectors are only looking in North Korea, and you've created a facility in Syria, it's not likely they're going to find it. [...]

[T]hese unanswered questions about what the North Koreans are doing in the Syrian desert [are] so important. Because if they were building an entirely new reactor in cooperation with Syria, in cooperation with Iran or whatever, they're really much further along in protecting that technology than allowing inspectors in Yongbyon.

Tim Cavanaugh: What's the evidence of North Korean involvement with the Syrian reactor, the Syrian project?

Bolton: Most of it is circumstantial at this point. And that's one reason why I think it's important that the administration, or the Israelis or somebody, tell us more of what they learned there. The first thing that struck me was that within a few days, maybe even a few hours after the Israeli raid, the North Koreans issued a press release condemning it. You know, because of their deep and abiding interest in events in the Syrian desert.

My gut reaction, and it wasn't anything more than that, was that it probably meant that North Korean personnel had been killed or wounded in the raid. And you know it's a perfectly human bureaucratic response; if your people get killed, you know, you at least can, you issue a statement that condemns the raid. But it would mean that there was a defect that allowed the statement to be issued even before North Korea could say we want silence on the thing. There have since been several very high-level visits between Syrian and North Korea, which is unusual--

Marjorie Miller: Where were those?

Bolton: Between Pyongyang and Damascus.

Miller: But which way; both ways?

Bolton: Both ways. One Syrian went to Pyongyang, and a high-level North Korean official I think recently traveled to Damascus. Um, there were press reports that there had been a North Korean ship, a North Korean flagship that offloaded cargo in Syria a few days before the raid. Um, and I think the official Syrian comment on that was that it was a cargo of cement, which brought back to me the interdiction of a North Korean ship going to Yemen in late 2002, the So San, where Spanish naval personnel interdicted the ship, and the master of the ship said "We're just carrying cement bags," so the Spaniards dug through 15 layers of cement bags until they found crates with a dozen Scud missiles in them. So when I heard "North Korean ship heading to the Middle East with a cargo of cement," that rang that bell.

And now you've seen these, I'm sure these overhead photographs of a facility that a lot of independent experts have said looks suspiciously like the Yongbyon facility in terms of dimensions. [...]

The fact is that it's pretty clear that the reactor has been under construction for some time, and what that means is that if it is a reactor, if it was North Korean in origin, that the North Koreans have been building this facility during the entire duration of the six-party talks. Now there are plenty of things we don't know about it, and I think the most important is whether there were North Korean personnel working at this site in Syria subsequent to the February agreement this year, because that would indicate typical North Korean duplicity in promising to give up their nuclear program when in fact they're cloning it in a different location. [...]

(On pre-emptive strikes to take out nuke plants.)

Michael McGough: Ambassador, is there some middle ground between what we've been doing, which you think is too accommodationist, and then the sort of freelancing approach of the Israelis, to just sort of bomb things? Is there any middle ground to get North Korea and Iran to comply, and to be more transparent about what they're doing with, you know, nuclear programs that may or may not be designed to culminate in a nuclear weapon?

Bolton: Well, I don't think the Israelis were acting in an irresponsible fashion. They obviously had intelligence that told them this was a very high-value target, and given the tensions that we currently have in the Middle East, I don't think they would have taken military action unless they felt it was absolutely critical to go after this target. I have heard, and I think now it's been reported, that the Israelis actually came to us in the spring of this year, and said "We have a problem with this facility," and that they were prepared to take action then. The U.S. said, "Well, we don't want you to do that, we want more information" or whatever, and the Israelis said that they would withhold until, but not later until the fall. Which appears to be what they did by the September the sixth raid.

So I don't think they acted precipitously, and indeed it raises a real question: If this location was actually under construction since 2000, 2001, why it is that we weren't aware of it, and more concerned about it than we have been?

But the issue for states like Iran and North Korea is whether they will ever voluntarily give up their nuclear weapons program, and I don't think -- for different reasons, they're two very different cases -- but I don't think that either one of them are going to be chatted out of their nuclear capability. For both of them it represents a trump card for the regime, and it's the way the long negotiations that we've had in both cases -- the six-party talks in the case of Korea, and the EU three negotiations in the cases of Iran, have really worked to the benefit of North Korea and Iran, respectively. Because the negotiations have given the proliferators what they need most and can't purchase for any price, and that's time. Time is almost always on the side of the proliferators, and for four years now North Korea was advancing its program and Iran was advancing its program. To the point where our options in both cases are very constrained and not very happy ones.

So I'm not saying that that is invariably the case, but in the case of governments like these I think that's the answer.

Miller: Is there a viable military option regarding Iran, and if so who is articulating that outside and inside the administration?

Bolton: I think there is a viable military option, I don't think it's a happy option. I don't like being in this position; my preference would have been to have indigenous forces inside Iran change the regime. Because I think there is historical experience at a time of massive change in regime of governments giving up pursuit of nuclear weapons. When the apartheid government in South Africa was replaced by a democratic government, the new government said we're giving up nuclear weapons. When the Soviet Union fell apart, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus all said, "We're gonna transport, we're gonna give back Soviet nuclear weapons to the Russian federation." And that same possibility exists I think in Iran. But regime change doesn't happen overnight, and because of this four-plus years of failed European negotiation, given the progress that Iran has made scientifically and technologically, we're now close to a point where the use of force may be the only alternative available in a realistic time frame to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons.

This is not, this, and as I say it's a very unhappy option to have to contemplate, but life is about choices, and if the choice is between an Iran with nuclear weapons, and the use of a limited amount of force to prevent that, then I think you have to look at the amount of force.

Miller: But what does that look like? What do you attack, what do you accomplish in a military solution?

Bolton: Well first it doesn't look anything like Iraq. It does not involve the use of American ground forces in anything like the Iraq context. I think what you have to do is break Iran's mastery over the nuclear fuel cycle at one or more critical points.

Bush's North Korea Meltdown

By John R. Bolton
The Wall Street Journal
October 31, 2007

Facts about Israel's Sept. 6 raid on a suspected nuclear facility in Syria continue to emerge -- albeit still incompletely, especially regarding the involvement of the Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea. Important questions remain, such as whether its personnel were present when the attack occurred, and whether they had been working to clone the Yongbyon nuclear facility in the Syrian desert since the North Korean commitment in February (the latest in a long series) to give up its nuclear programs.

Seemingly unperturbed, however, the Bush administration apparently believes North Korea is serious this time, unlike all the others. The concessions continue to flow in essentially only one direction, crossing repeated "red lines" Washington had drawn.

These include: (1) the humiliating U.S. collapse on North Korea's access to international financial markets; (2) accepting a mere "freeze" of Yongbyon (misleadingly called "disablement" by the administration) rather than real dismantlement; (3) failing to ensure enforcement of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718's sanctions, imposed after Pyongyang's nuclear test; and (4) the State Department's palpable hunger to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and the Trading With the Enemy Act's prohibitions, and re-establish full diplomatic relations.

The Bush administration's most serious concession is forthcoming, in which the U.S. will accept, with little or no concrete verification, Pyongyang's imminent declaration that it actually has very little nuclear activity other than what we have long known about at Yongbyon.

Even critics from the left now worry that State is conceding far more than it should. Jack Pritchard, the special envoy for negotiations with North Korea who resigned during Secretary of State Colin Powell's tenure because our policy was too unyielding, said recently that North Korean officials think "they can ask for and get what they want from the Bush administration because [it] is so eager to demonstrate a diplomatic achievement." Mr. Pritchard concluded, "The North Koreans are rubbing their hands together with glee."

Our current Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and other partisans of the six-party talks respond to all internal administration complaints or criticisms by asking, "What is your alternative? What would you have us do otherwise, risk war on the Peninsula?" Herewith, some responses:

First, it is simply inapposite to judge every tactical decision -- to accede or stand firm on this or that subsidiary point -- by forecasting the complete demise of the entire six-party process if North Korean sensibilities are ruffled by occasionally saying "no." Indeed, showing tactical toughness can frequently enhance the long-term prospects for success, not reduce them. Sadly, however, toughness at the tactical or strategic level is no longer the hallmark of our North Korea policy. Weakness is the watchword.

Second, before it is too late, President Bush has to draw a deep line in the sand on verification. The State Department has yet to say anything publicly about how verification will be accomplished,

especially on the North's uranium-enrichment efforts, giving rise to the suspicion that our negotiators don't really have a clue what they mean. The idea of North Korea for years engaged in cloning Yongbyon in Syria (or anywhere else -- Burma, for instance) should be a fire bell in the night. President Reagan's mantra of "trust but verify" in the Cold War days didn't offend anyone, and if it offends Kim Jong Il, that should tell us something. If anything, however, with North Korea, President Bush should reverse Reagan's order: Let's see real verification, and leave trust until later.

Third, consider the severely negative effect these repeated concessions have on our relations with Japan and South Korea. President Bush used to stress that this was a "six-party" process, but now all of the action is bilateral. The State Department's lust to remove North Korea from the terrorism list is having a profoundly negative impact on our treaty ally, Japan, the nation most directly threatened by Pyongyang's nuclear capability. Thomas Schieffer, the Bush administration's ambassador to Japan, reportedly complained recently to the president that he was "cut out of the process." State should explain why it trusts North Korea more than our ambassador to Tokyo, and why we ignore Tokyo's concerns over North Korea's kidnappings of Japanese citizens.

South Korea is facing a critical presidential election in December. The last thing Washington should do is pursue concessionary policies that might enhance the prospects for a new president who follows the same appeasement line as incumbent President Roh Moo-hyun. If South Korea can discard Mr. Roh's rose-colored glasses, our overall prospects will improve considerably, but our unquestioning embrace of North Korea could have exactly the wrong impact in the South's volatile politics.

Fourth, and most importantly, the right response to the North Korean threat is to apply pressure steadily and consistently, rather than hastily releasing it. After its nuclear test, Pyongyang faced growing pressure from the cumulative impact of Chinese anger, U.N. Security Council sanctions, ongoing implementation of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and the U.S. Treasury's continuing financial squeeze.

There was a plan, of sorts, and it was producing some evidence of success. Instead of squeezing harder, such as by encouraging refugee flows out of the North, the administration did a U-turn. It let a desperate North Korea up off the mat, provided tangible economic support for this appallingly authoritarian regime, allowed Kim Jong Il to re-legitimize himself, and undercut the PSI world-wide.

The icing on Kim's cake is that for years -- before, during and after the 2005 and 2007 "agreements" -- North Korea was happily violating its commitments. Instead of focusing China on solving the problem of the regime it has propped up for so long, we absolved China, sidelined Japan, inserted ourselves and started life-support for the administrators of the world's largest prison camp.

This will perpetuate the North Korean problem, not solve it. Any by perpetuating Kim Jong Il's regime, and its continuing threat, it is actually the State Department's policy that poses the greater risk to international peace and security. This is true not only for Pyongyang, but for other would-be proliferators watching our ongoing failure to stop North Korea.

The debate within the Bush administration is not yet over, although time is short before irreparable harm is done. Growing restiveness in Congress among Republicans and Democrats may increasingly become a factor. For President Bush, I can only hope he re-reads his first term speeches on North Korea.

Mr. Bolton serves on the American Conservative Union's Board of Directors, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and is the author of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations," out next week from Simon & Schuster/Threshold Editions.

Making Sense of Israel's Raid Into Syria

National Public Radio

Day to Day: **October 31, 2007**

MADELEINE BRAND, host:

This is DAY TO DAY.

[deletia]

ALEX CHADWICK, host:

I'm Alex Chadwick.

First, to the deepening mystery about Israel's alleged air raid into Syria last month.

A series of satellite photos have come to light in recent days that may or may not show what might or might not be a Syrian nuclear facility that Israel could or could not have bombed last month.

NPR diplomatic correspondent Mike Shuster is here to make sense of what we know and don't know.

Mike, I see deepening mystery. It's already so deep. How can it get much deeper?

SHUSTER: Making sense of it is very difficult, Alex. The only thing that we really do know is that the Israelis did mount an air strike on a target in Syria, somewhere in the eastern desert of Syria on September 6th.

Beyond that, actually, it's all been speculation, speculation that has dribbled out from alleged Israeli and perhaps American intelligence reports about what the site was. It took weeks to focus on what the - what was actually in these alleged intelligence reports. It's - now it appears that the intelligence reports say that it was something having to do with nuclear activity. Beyond that, we don't know really anything about this.

CHADWICK: But I hear the two words North Korea attached to this.

SHUSTER: Yeah. Well, if you attach North Korea to almost any allegation about nuclear activity anywhere in the world, it certainly gets much more attention, and in fact the alleged Israeli intelligence accounts suggested that there might be some kind of a North Korean link, which apparently got the attention of the Bush administration.

CHADWICK: And what about these satellite photos? Now, there have been a series of them.

SHUSTER: Very interesting. Now, we're talking here about commercial satellite imagery that is in the public domain, and some pictures of a site in Syria near the Euphrates River surfaced in August, and then in late October the same site, and in August, there was some kind of construction going on. There

was a large square building. In late October there was nothing there. It had been erased. So this focused attention on whether this really was the site the Israelis had bombed because something had happened to remove the construction that had been there before.

But what we didn't see was satellite imagery from right after September 6th, in the week or 10 days afterwards, which if it had been rubble could have confirmed that there was an Israeli attack and might have given some hints as to what's inside that large building, because we have no public information about what's inside that building or what was inside that building.

CHADWICK: You know, I've seen these photographs, or at least a couple of them. Some expert on the subject said that building looks like it could be a North Korean nuclear sort of building; and I looked at the thing, I said come on, it's a square building. What is...

SHUSTER: I mean, you're exactly right. There is a building that looks like it in Yangbian in North Korea, where there is a nuclear reactor inside North Korea.

But without actual pictures from inside or after the strike before the site was cleaned up, there can't be any definitive determination that this was a nuclear reactor, let alone that it was a nuclear reactor along the lines of a model that the North Koreans might have provided for Syria.

CHADWICK: Okay. Now, these photographs that you're talking about, these are photographs from quite recent past, going back to August. But suddenly people are talking about yet another satellite photograph, also commercial satellite photograph, I think, that goes back years.

SHUSTER: That's right. To 2003. It turns out that there was a photograph of this site in the public domain in 2003, which suggests that construction started there in 2003. And what we've actually learned since that time is that there was intelligence analysis on the part of the U.S. intelligence community about that site in 2003. And the analysts were skeptical that this had anything to do with nuclear activity on the part of Syria.

So this raises the question as to just how good the Israeli interpretation was four years later.

CHADWICK: Well, what is going on in the background that we're not hearing? What are diplomats saying about this? What's the intelligence community saying about this? It's been, what, six weeks now since the alleged raid. What's going on?

SHUSTER: Well, the fundamental question is what was this for? Was this really to destroy a nuclear capability on the part of the Syrians or to send a signal to Iran? And that's what really everybody is talking about, whether the clock is ticking on an Israeli - potential Israeli attack on nuclear sites in Iran.

CHADWICK: NPR diplomatic correspondent Mike Shuster. Mike, thank you.

SHUSTER: You're welcome, Alex.

The Curious Incident in Northern Syria and Its Potential Proliferation Implications

Prepared Remarks by Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director, Arms Control Association

For the Korea Economic Institute Forum, “What If They Did It? North Korea, Syria, and Nuclear Proliferation,” November 1, 2007

Nearly two months after Israel’s Sept. 6, 2007 raid on a facility in Northern Syria, there is suggestive but ultimately inconclusive evidence that it may have been a small reactor still under construction. Opponents of the six-party process toward the verifiable denuclearization of North Korea are suggesting that possible North Korean involvement may provide reason for a shift in policy regarding the six-party talks and the implementation of the steps outlined in the October 3 joint statement.

Indeed, any North Korean assistance involving the export or technical training, advice, services, or assistance related to items on the trigger list of the Nuclear Suppliers Group would violate North Korea’s and the recipient state’s obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1718 of October 14, 2006 “to cease the export” of items “which could contribute to DPRK’s nuclear-related, ballistic missile-related, or other weapons of mass destruction related programmes.”

Furthermore, in the recent six-party talks statement of October 3, 2007: “The DPRK reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how.” While North Korean assistance may have predated the October 3 statement and even the October 2006 Security Council resolution, it would clearly violate the spirit of its commitments.

The reports citing unnamed sources alleging that the facility was a nuclear reactor and that North Korea might have provided assistance raise extremely troubling questions about Syrian and North Korean behavior. However, I believe that even if there is strong evidence of North Korean complicity, it would be imprudent for the administration or the Congress to take actions or make statements that might scuttle the six party process.

We must recall that in the fall of 2002, the administration accused North Korea of pursuing a uranium enrichment program on the basis of preliminary intelligence assessments that were later revised to reflect that the program was not as advanced as previously believed. Nevertheless, the United States decided at the time to cut-off heavy fuel oil shipments that were part of the Agreed Framework – an agreement some in the Bush administration were only too eager to rip apart. As a result, North Korea kicked out IAEA inspectors, restarted plutonium operations, produced enough fissile material for about 10 bombs, and, in 2006, engaged in an orgy of missile flight testing, and set off a nuclear test explosion.

In the final analysis, U.S. policymakers must weigh whether the risk posed by the possible construction of a Syrian research reactor and possible North Korean assistance warrants the possible delay in verifiably dismantling a known and greater threat: North Korea’s own research reactor; reprocessing plant, and accounting for and taking out of circulation whatever nuclear bombs, nuclear bomb material, and uranium enrichment equipment North Korea may have.

This does not mean that the U.S. policymakers cannot be “tactically tough” as John Bolton argues they should, it just means that their response needs to be carefully calibrated and must amount to more than overheated rhetoric and name-calling.

If Syria was indeed building a reactor and if North Korea was involved, there are other steps the United States could – and should – take to hold the DPRK accountable and ensure that Pyongyang provides no further nuclear assistance to other states without derailing the prospects of verifiably dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program and risking the possibility of further North Korean proliferation transgressions. I’ll go into further detail about this in a few minutes.

In addition, if there is or was credible U.S. or foreign intelligence information or other evidence that Syria was engaged in building a reactor, I believe it should have been presented to the IAEA and/or the Security Council for evaluation so that a collective response – and follow up investigation -- could be undertaken.

As a signatory to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty under comprehensive IAEA safeguards, Syria is obligated under the current interpretation of paragraph 42 of its comprehensive IAEA safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/153) to provide design information on new facilities to the Agency as soon as the decision to construct or authorize construction of a new facility is taken (i.e. well before construction actually begins) in order to create confidence in the peaceful purpose of the facility and to provide adequate lead-time for safeguards preparations.(1)

If Israel or the United States had information suggesting Syria was building a reactor or some other prohibited item, it could have informed the IAEA and/or the Security Council, which could then – and could still -- call upon Syria to clarify the purpose of the facility and possibly lead to an IAEA investigation and visit to the site.

This is essentially what the United States did in 2002 with information that surfaced about Iran’s unreported nuclear activities at the Natanz site.

Such an investigation could have been and could still be immensely useful not only in understanding the nature of the facility but also the sources of assistance. We must consider that North Korea may not have been the main or sole supplier of nuclear technology and components. Syria is of course suspected of having received assistance from the A.Q. Khan network.(2)

Utilizing the Agency to draw attention to a possible Syrian violation of safeguards would put Syria on the defensive and strengthen the credibility of the institution as an effective and legitimate instrument in monitoring and enforcing compliance at a time when the Security Council and the IAEA are at odds with Iran.

Such a message might also have been more helpful in persuading Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program, come clean about its nuclear program, and agree to a diplomatic resolution.

In addition, the failure of any state to report any information to the IAEA about possible nuclear safeguards violations, and Israel’s “strike first, ask questions later approach” are also worrisome and unwise and undermine the authority of the IAEA in sifting out the truth in Iran and elsewhere.

Knowns and Unknowns

While there are still more questions than answers at this point, it is important to sift out the “knowns” from the “unknowns.”

Based on that, we might draw some preliminary conclusions, formulate some reasonable hypotheses that might help explain events that have unfolded to date, and consider what should and should not be done in response to these possibilities.

What we “know” is this:

- Syria and Israel have acknowledged there was a strike on a “military facility” in Syria.
- Satellite imagery suggests the facility could have been a small research reactor similar in design to the 5 megawatt North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. Such a facility by itself would not constitute a clear and imminent danger to either Israel or the United States given that Syria would also need to have a plutonium reprocessing facility to harvest plutonium for a weapon. Syria already possesses a very small research reactor under IAEA safeguards.
- We know from commercial satellite imagery that Syria cleared the site after the raid. By itself, this proves little, though it certainly raises suspicions that Syria is trying to remove evidence that the structure could have been used to house a reactor or something else it doesn’t want others to see. The raid itself and Syria’s clearing of the site clearly would complicate any on site investigation by the IAEA or others to determine whether a reactor was under construction.
- Commercial satellite photos also indicate that construction on the main building was well underway in Sept. 2003, which means Syria may have received assistance sometime before that date. This also likely means that the site has been under Western satellite surveillance for some time and it suggests that U.S. intelligence analysts did not believe that it was a reactor or some other missile or WMD-related facility.
- Some press reports quote unnamed officials saying that North Korean nationals were present at the site. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Andrew Semmel also told reporters on Sept. 14: “There are North Korean people there. There’s no question about that,” adding “[j]ust as there are a lot of North Koreans in Iraq and Iran.” Semmel did not clarify what sort of activities the North Koreans were conducting in Syria. This suggests that any information about North Koreans at the site would most likely have come from a human intelligence source or sources, which are not always reliable or precise.
- This is not the first time there has been a controversy over intelligence assessments concerning the Syrian nuclear program. You might recall that Knight Ridder newspapers, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and others reported that in 2003, Undersecretary of State John Bolton was forced to call off congressional testimony because members of the intelligence community were concerned that Bolton was prepared to assert stronger claims regarding concerns over Syria’s pursuit of nuclear weapons than was warranted by the intelligence.(3)
- We know that only the top Congressional intelligence and foreign affairs committee members have been briefed by the U.S. intelligence community on the incident. And two of them, Reps. Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen, complained bitterly in an Oct. 21 op-ed in The Wall Street Journal that “until Congress is fully briefed, it would be imprudent for the administration to move forward with agreements with state proliferators.”

- We also know that Administration officials, while declining to publicly comment on the incident itself, have said that the six-party disarmament deal with North Korea would not go ahead if North Korea was found to be smuggling nuclear arms, equipment or know-how abroad.

Asked at a Capitol Hill hearing on Oct. 25 by Democratic Representative David Scott of Georgia if the issue of the Syrian facility had been brought up in disarmament talks with North Korea, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Christopher Hill said: "Yes, I have raised this issue."

During a Sept. 20 press conference, President Bush was asked a question about the Syrian raid and reports of North Korean involvement to which he said: "to the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop that proliferation, if they want the six-party talks to be successful."

What May Explain the Events That have Unfolded to Date: Two Theories

So, what actually might have gone on and why is the administration maintaining official silence on the matter?

If Syria was building a nuclear reactor or some other nuclear facility and if North Korea was involved, what is the appropriate course of action to prevent further proliferation of the kind, while simultaneously ensuring that North Korea's current commitments under the October 3 implementation agreement for the disablement of its nuclear facilities and full declaration of its nuclear program go forward?

Should Congress be fully briefed? What should be done to uncover what Syria was up to and who might have provided illicit equipment and know-how?

Based on what is in the public domain there seem to be two plausible theories:

Theory 1. Given that the Syrian facility was under surveillance and construction for some time and given that the U.S. intelligence community apparently did not believe that it was a nuclear-related project, senior U.S. officials were not confident enough to confront Syria publicly with the charge. Recall the 2003 debate about how to characterize the Syrian nuclear program. Likewise, given that the information suggesting a North Korean presence at the site would likely have come from a human intelligence source or sources, senior U.S. officials might not have had high enough confidence in the information to publicly accuse North Korea of violating its nuclear non-assistance pledges.

Still, based on statements by Christopher Hill and President Bush, it is clear that the matter has been pursued with the North Koreans privately and that the Bush administration has probably already made it clear that if North Korea wants to see the six-party agreement implemented, including removing the DPRK from the state sponsors of terrorism list, North Korea cannot be engaged in any proliferation activity.

If the administration has not already done so, it should demand that the "complete and correct declaration of all of North Korea's nuclear programs" -- as called for in the Feb. 13 2007 and Oct. 3 six-party statements -- must include a full accounting of all North Korean nuclear-related commerce or technical assistance to other states or non-state actors.

Theory 2. It is also possible that the United States government has information that more clearly demonstrates Syrian nuclear activity at the site and direct involvement by the North Koreans. Even if this is the case, the administration may be forging ahead with the six-party process and taking the matter up with North Korea privately because they correctly understand the value of using the six-party process to verifiably dismantle North Korea's nuclear program and snuff-out its proliferation activities rather than publicly taking issue with North Korea on the matter and risking the possibility that they will deny their involvement, if only to save face.

As Christopher Hill told reporters Sept. 14: "The reason we have the six-party process and the reason we have put together a number of pretty serious countries in this process is to make sure that the North Koreans get out of the nuclear business."

Congress' Role

Under either scenario, it is important that the administration brief relevant Congressional members and committees sooner than later. While there are clearly some members of Congress who will seek to use this incident to undercut support for the appropriation of funds to provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil as called for in the six-party agreement, Congressional support for the administration's policy and the six-party process will likely erode if they are kept in the dark.

Eventually, Congress and possibly the rest of us will find out more about the events surrounding the Israeli raid and the target – either through official channels or from someone like Glenn Kessler. It is important to note that when there are lives at stake, sources to protect, or ongoing intelligence activities underway, there may good reason to delay providing Congress with a full accounting. However, we are now almost two months beyond the Sept. 6 raid and it is difficult to understand why other members of Congress have not yet been briefed.

Furthermore, even if North Korea was engaged in ongoing proliferation activity, it is likely that the administration could persuade Congress that they should not jeopardize the larger aims of the six-party process by withholding support for heavy fuel oil shipments. Rather, the administration could future "benefits," such as removal of North Korea from the state sponsor of terrorism list, if it does not fully account for its nuclear program and cease all foreign nuclear and missile assistance.

Conclusions

So in conclusion, what if North Korea and Syria were colluding on a secret nuclear project?

1. It should be condemned and the IAEA should request access to the site and be provided relevant information from other states as part of an investigation.
2. The Bush administration and Congress should agree to use – not abandon the six party process to ensure that North Korea is no longer engaged in such activities.
3. The Bush administration should brief Congress about the episode in order to solidify support for the six party denuclearization agreement and any actions the administration may pursue through the IAEA Board of Governors and/or the Security Council regarding possible Syrian nuclear activities.

Thank you.

1. Prior to 1992, the phrase in para 42 of the IAEA's comprehensive safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/153), which reads "as early as possible before nuclear material is introduced into a new facility" was translated into meaning that design information for new nuclear facilities needed to be

provided to the Agency "no later than 6 months before the introduction of nuclear material into a new facility". This interpretation was included in the General Parts of the Subsidiary Arrangements that are attached to each comprehensive safeguards agreement.

As a safeguards strengthening measure, the Board agreed to a new interpretation of paragraph 42 proposed by the Secretariat in February 1992 (GOV/2554/Att.2/Rev. 2), which requires that design information on new facilities be provided to the Agency as soon as the decision to construct or authorize construction of a new facility is taken (i.e. well before construction actually begins) in order to create confidence in the peaceful purpose of the facility and to provide adequate lead-time for safeguards preparations. All non-nuclear weapon state NPT parties under comprehensive safeguards were also required to adapt their related Subsidiary Arrangements to take into account the new interpretation.

2. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear Nonproliferation Andy Semmel stated on Sept. 14 that "[w]e do know that there may have been contact between Syria and some secret suppliers for nuclear equipment. Whether anything transpired remains to be seen," further noting that "[w]e're watching very closely."

Semmel's comments mirror a 2004 declassified report to Congress by the director of national intelligence on weapons of mass destruction proliferation. The report, released last year, discusses potential Syrian contacts with the A.Q. Khan network. It indicates that "Pakistani investigators in late January 2004 said they had 'confirmation' of an IAEA allegation that [Abdul Qadeer] Khan offered nuclear technology and hardware to Syria, according to Pakistani press, and we are concerned that expertise or technology could have been transferred. We continue to monitor Syrian nuclear intentions with concern."

3. According to a July 15, Knight Ridder report ("CIA: Assessment of Syria's WMD exaggerated," by Warren P. Strobel and Jonathan S. Landay), "U.S. officials told Knight Ridder that Bolton was prepared to tell members of a House of Representatives International Relations subcommittee that Syria's development of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons had progressed to such a point that they posed a threat to stability in the region. The CIA and other intelligence agencies said that assessment was exaggerated."

James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies
CNS Feature Story

The following story, written by guest contributor Richard Weitz of the Hudson Institute and edited by Leonard S. Specter and Sarah Diehl of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, provides a comprehensive look at international reaction to Israel's September 6, 2007, air strike against a site in the Syrian desert, now widely believed to have been a partially completed nuclear reactor.

Israeli Airstrike in Syria: International Reactions

By Richard Weitz, Senior Fellow and Director of Program Management at the Hudson Institute
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Much remains unknown about the September 6 incident in which Israeli warplanes entered Syrian air space. Not only do commentators disagree about the various motives of the diverse participants involved, but even the basic facts remain in dispute. Neither the Israeli, Syrian, nor U.S. government has offered a detailed description of what occurred. Outside experts and media commentators have filled the data vacuum by offering their own diverse interpretations about what precisely happened that night.

The mystery surrounding Israel's apparent air strike against Syria on September 6 gave observers considerable leeway to interpret the ambiguous event. Syrian leaders describe the affair as an Israeli stratagem designed to bolster the credibility of Israel's discredited military deterrent or disrupt unwelcome peace initiatives in the Middle East. In contrast, most Western media coverage implies that the target either involved a shipment of nuclear technology from North Korea or some other object of proliferation concern that alarmed Israeli officials sufficiently that they felt compelled to act to counter a genuine threat. Some Western analysts, however, speculate that the Israelis acted in Syria primarily with an eye to shaping future developments in Iran.

Background

According to the most common assessments offered in the open-source literature of what the media termed "Operation Orchard," on September 6, 2007, Israeli jets violated Syrian airspace, dropped munitions somewhere in northeastern Syria, and returned home without experiencing any casualties themselves.

The last time Israeli warplanes carried out operations against Syrian ground targets was in October 2003, when they attacked a training camp for Palestinian militants near Damascus. Israeli warplanes also buzzed the Syrian presidential palace during the summer 2006 war in Lebanon, but, on that occasion, did not release any ordnance. Prior to the 2003 operation, Israeli warplanes had not attacked a target on Syrian territory since the October 1973 War.

Several general background factors shaped media and other interpretations of the September 2007 incident. First, longstanding differences over the status of Golan Heights and Syria's support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups have prevented them from negotiating a peace agreement to end their formal

state of hostilities, Efforts by third-party mediators to improve relations earlier this year, before September 6, proved unsuccessful. [1] When faced with obdurate security threats in the past, Israeli leaders have occasionally pursued a preemptive strategy, most notably with a devastating air strike at the beginning of the 1967 War and the 1981 bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq.

Second, for several years, the international media have published and broadcast reports of security collaboration between Syria and North Korea, including cooperation regarding ballistic missiles.[2] (North Korea is also widely thought to have sold ballistic missiles and their related technologies to other Middle Eastern countries.) Although there has been no definitive publicly available evidence of joint nuclear work between Damascus and Pyongyang, nonproliferation experts have long worried that North Korea would sell or otherwise transfer its nuclear materials and technologies to foreign countries or non-state actors such as terrorists or criminals.

Third, the September 6 incident occurred against the backdrop of escalating international tensions over Iran's nuclear program and the threat that its eventual realization could pose to Israel. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner even warned shortly after the air strike that Iranian leaders' stubborn pursuit of nuclear technologies and threats regarding Israel risked provoking another war in the Middle East. [3] Reporters speculate that Israeli fears of Iran's developing a nuclear weapon might have influenced the Israelis decision to attack Syria, especially if they concluded that North Korea might provide Syria and Iran with nuclear materials or technologies.

Fourth, the tepid reaction by the regional Arab governments to the alleged Israeli air strike underscores the extent to which Syria's past interference in Lebanon, ties to Iran, and other foreign policies have alienated the current Syrian regime from Sunni Arab regimes. This isolation might have encouraged Syrian officials to seek to bolster their country's defense capacities through the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Finally, the one-year anniversary of the Lebanon War reminded observers throughout the Middle East of Israel's failure to achieve the expected decisive military victory over Lebanese Hezbollah, a Shiite paramilitary group allied with Syria and Iran. Some Israelis feared that their unexpectedly poor military performance weakened the credibility of Israel's conventional deterrent threats. For this reason, several observers reasoned that Israel perceived the raid against Syria as an opportunity to enhance its deterrent capabilities against Syria and its Lebanese and Iranian allies. [4]

Israeli Censorship Smothers Domestic Coverage

Many observers commented on the unprecedented severity of the Israeli military censorship regarding the September 6 incident. [5] The Israeli government initially refused to acknowledge that the air strike had occurred, remaining silent even after the U.S. government confirmed the air strike on September 11. Israeli military censors permitted Israeli journalists to reference only information and arguments that had previously been published in the Western media. [6]

On September 19, Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli prime minister and current leader of the opposition Likud party, effectively confirmed the strike when he expressed his support for the operation in an interview with Israeli Channel One TV. Netanyahu also divulged that current Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had informed him of the operation "from the start." [7] The sharp rebukes he received from his colleagues might have discouraged other Israelis knowledgeable about the incident from offering their own attributable comments to the media.

It was not until October 3, after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad first spoke of the attack, that the Israeli Air Force acknowledged that it had attacked a military target "deep inside Syria" the previous month. [8] Nevertheless, the military censor issued a rare special directive prohibiting publication of operational details regarding the incident, including the target of the attack and which Israeli forces participated in the mission. [9] Subsequent commentary in the Israeli media continued mostly to cite various theories and facts offered by foreign sources because the Israeli government declined to provide any additional information — whether as official commentary or through informal leaks — about the attack.

Traditionally, the purpose of Israeli censorship has been to conceal military secrets. Commentators speculated on this occasion, however, that the Israeli authorities also wanted to minimize pressure on Syrian leaders to retaliate. [10] Other observers thought that the Israeli government might have sought to avoid a public debate about the reasons for the attack because some U.S. analysts and policy makers reportedly considered the available intelligence of a possible Syrian threat — nuclear or otherwise — insufficient to warrant the preemptive air strike. The alleged air strike occurred at a time when the Bush administration was seeking to promote its contentious proposal for a regional peace conference involving both Israel and Syria. [11]

Some Israeli nonproliferation experts did offer their views on the incident, but only several weeks after the event, and only in comments to the Western media. For example, several Israeli analysts expressed doubt about the popular view that the Israeli Air Force had attacked a nuclear target. They questioned why the Syrians would locate a sensitive nuclear facility in a region so close to Syria's troubled borders with Iraq and Turkey. These Israeli experts also observed that, historically, Syrian officials have felt comfortable relying on chemical — rather than nuclear — weapons as an adequate strategic deterrent against Israel. Efraim Inbar, the director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University near Tel Aviv, commented that the Syrians "have wanted strategic parity for years with Israel. But so far, they went with the cheapest and easiest way, which was chemical weapons." [12]

Other Israeli analysts, however, speculated that the current Syrian government might have felt so threatened by its regional isolation and the hostility of the Bush administration that it wanted to bolster its deterrence capacity by developing a nuclear option. Eyal Zisser, director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, observed that such an alternative "was not on the [Israeli intelligence] agenda before these reports, but this is very logical from the point of view of Syria." [13] Western observers have characterized Bashar Assad, who became president in 2000, as much more of a risk-taker than his cautious father. [14] In any case, an unidentified Israeli source observed that, "We've known for a long time that Syria has deadly chemical warheads on its Scuds, but Israel can't live with a nuclear warhead." [15]

Whatever the motivation, Israeli leaders have given the impression that they consider the operation a success. Amos Yadlin, the head of Israeli military intelligence, reportedly told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that "Israel's deterrence has been rehabilitated since the Lebanon war." [16]

Syrian Denials and Threats

Syrian officials have offered varying interpretations of what happened on September 6. Although the Syrian government complained immediately about Israel's unauthorized intrusion into its air space,

Syrian representatives initially claimed that the warplanes had rapidly retreated back to Israel after they encountered Syrian air defenses. [17] Subsequently, Syrian officials stated that the Israeli warplanes had dropped their munitions on Syrian territory, but had either failed to hit a concrete target, discarding their ordnance over an unpopulated desert region, or had simply destroyed an "empty warehouse." [18] A few days after the incident, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem reportedly showed European diplomats alleged photographs of the target site in order to support his contention that the Israelis had struck nothing. [19]

Syrian Vice-President Farouq al-Shara said that the Israeli Air Force had hit an Arab League agricultural facility. [20] More interestingly, al-Shara warned at a press conference that, "Those who continue to talk about this raid and to invent inaccurate details are aiming to justify a future aggression [against Syria]." He specifically attacked "Arab or international parties that write about things that did not happen and who claim North Koreans or others were killed," accusing those who made such arguments of "trying to conduct psychological warfare against Syria." [21]

Al-Shara also claimed that Israeli officials were taking bellicose actions to restore the credibility of their armed forces following Israel's military defeat (in Syria's view) in Lebanon the previous summer: "They want to rehabilitate the Israeli army after the Lebanese resistance broke it. But what Israel needs is to rehabilitate the Israeli mind, only then will a real opportunity for genuine peace be created." [22]

In his first comments on the topic, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told the BBC in an October 1 interview that the Israelis had bombed an "abandoned army base in the northeast of the country." He warned that "Syria reserves the right to retaliate to the attack," though his remarks left ambiguous whether the retaliation might involve a military counterstrike as opposed to diplomatic countermeasures: "Retaliate doesn't mean missile for missile and bomb for bomb. We have our means to retaliate, maybe politically, maybe in other ways. But we have the right to retaliate." [23] Defense analysts attribute the Syrian leadership's reluctance to retaliate militarily to its regional isolation, Russian opposition to escalatory actions, and to the Syrians' realization that their country would probably lose a conventional war with Israel. [24]

The one constant thus far in the Syrian response has been a resolute denial of rumors that Syria had been constructing a covert nuclear facility at the target site, with or without North Korean, Iranian, or other foreign assistance. In an interview with Newsweek a week after the attack, Imad Moustapha, Syria's Ambassador to Washington, claimed that reports of a North Korean-Syrian nuclear cooperation project were "absolutely, totally, fundamentally ridiculous and untrue. There are no nuclear North Korean-Syrian facilities whatsoever in Syria." Moustapha also denied rumors that the target involved a joint Iranian-Syrian missile plant or a consignment of arms intended for Hezbollah. [25]

Even a translation error at a UN General Assembly meeting devoted to disarmament -- in which the freelance interpreter erroneously made it seem as if the Syrian representative was acknowledging that Israel attacked a nuclear facility — proved sufficient to trigger a rapid and categorical denial that Syria possessed any nuclear facilities. [26] Speaking at a meeting of the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth, Ambassador Moustapha called allegations of Syrian-North Korean nuclear collaboration "an absolutely surrealistic story." He also insisted that, "There is no Syrian nuclear program whatsoever, absolutely not. Syria has never tried to acquire nuclear technology." [27]

The Syrian government remains a party to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which prohibits it from pursuing nuclear weapons. The treaty does allow all signatories in good standing under the treaty to research and develop civilian nuclear energy technologies, but requires such countries, including Syria, to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect all nuclear activities on their territories. The blanket denials issued after the UN misinterpretation notwithstanding, Syria, in fact, has declared one small (30-kilowatt) research reactor located near Damascus to the IAEA. [28] The Syrian government has permitted periodic agency inspections of its operations since it became operational in 1996. [29] Syria has also participated in several technical cooperation programs with the IAEA. [30] Most international experts have traditionally believed that Syria lacks the financial and technical resources to undertake a nuclear weapons program. If North Korea provided Syrian technicians with nuclear technologies, fissile materials, or other assistance, some of these economic and technical barriers to entry into the nuclear club would weaken.

When asked about possible nuclear ties with North Korea in his BBC interview, al-Assad responded that, "We have a relation with North Korea and this is not something in secret...we are not interested in any nuclear activity." [31] Mounir Ali, a spokesperson for Syria's Ministry of Information, likewise maintained that, if the Israelis had struck a nuclear site, "there would have been heavy anti-aircraft guns around, soldiers, radiation, scientists.... But they didn't even kill a goat." [32] Some five weeks after the event, Syrian authorities arranged a tour for foreign journalists of one of the suspected target sites to demonstrate that nothing was amiss. [33] The display reminded one U.S. analyst of similar exhibits arranged by the former Iraqi government when Saddam Hussein was seeking to repudiate suspicions about suspect Iraqi WMD sites. [34]

Several Syrian officials claimed that the Israeli action on September 6 was primarily a public relations ploy aimed at rehabilitating Jerusalem's discredited image as a military power following what Syrians described as Israel's embarrassing defeat during the 2006 war in Lebanon. Deputy President Farouk al-Shara claimed that, "Everything reported about this raid is wrong and is part of a psychological warfare that will not fool Syria." [35] In an October 11 interview with Tunisian journalists, Assad said that the U.S. and Israeli news blackout reflected their embarrassment at having acted on erroneous intelligence: "They are trying to cover up their failure by shrouding it with mystery." [36]

Some Syrian sources also implied that Israel was seeking to dictate the terms of Syria's engagement in regional peace initiatives. Syria's UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari asserted that the timing of the Israeli attack was not coincidental and that Israel's goal was "to undermine the ongoing international efforts aimed at activating the peace process and giving Syria its legitimate role." [37]

The North Korean Dimension

Some observers of the consequences of the September 6 incident have also perceived the uncharacteristically vehement North Korean condemnation of the attack as suspicious given that the event involved two geographically distant countries. A North Korean Foreign Ministry official stated that, "This is a very dangerous provocation little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security...The Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly denounces the above-said intrusion and extends full support and solidarity to the Syrian people in their just cause to defend the national security and the regional peace." [38]

A North Korean spokesperson subsequently accused those individuals alleging covert nuclear cooperation between Pyongyang and Damascus of engaging in "a clumsy plot hatched by dishonest forces who do not like to see any progress at the six-party talks and in the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]-U.S. relations." [39] According to press reports, when Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill, the State Department official in charge of negotiating North Korea's nuclear disarmament, explicitly asked the North Korean delegation to the Six-Party Talks about allegations of North Korean-Syrian nuclear ties, the North Koreans flatly denied them. [40]

Pyongyang's strident response reinforced suspicions of a possible North Korean link to the target. Some observers speculated that to have provoked such a sharp rebuke, the Israelis must have killed a number of North Koreans in the attack, perhaps important nuclear technicians and military experts. [41] This interpretation may be reading too much into the DPRK declaration, however, since the country's government-run media has also condemned Israel in the past for violating Syrian air space, where no North Korean or Syrian fatalities were involved. [42]

Western media commentators also cited the longstanding diplomatic and military exchanges between Syria and North Korea as confirmation of close security relations between the two governments. For over a decade, Syria has worked with North Korea to develop its ballistic missile arsenal. Immediately before and after the September 6 incident, Syria and North Korea held several senior-level meetings. On August 14, the North Korean Minister of Foreign Trade visited Syria to sign the protocol on "cooperation in trade and science and technology," which might encompass military cooperation. [43]

Furthermore, three days before the Israeli attack, a North Korean merchant ship off-loaded cargo at the Syrian port of Tartus. Some commentators suspected the delivery included military material such as conventional weapons or nuclear technologies — perhaps even a nuclear warhead, which would explain why Israeli policy makers concluded they needed to launch an urgent preemptive strike. [44] Two weeks after the alleged Israeli air strike, the second highest official in the North Korean government, Kim Yong-Nam, met a senior Syrian government delegation in Pyongyang. [45] The following month, Choe Thae Bok, North Korea's parliament speaker, visited Damascus. [46]

President George Bush himself has not publicly cited any possible North Korean involvement in a Syrian nuclear weapons program, or repeated earlier warnings that his administration drew a "red line" against the transfer of North Korean nuclear material and technologies to other countries or to terrorist groups. When asked about the North Korean issue at a news conference, President Bush responded ambiguously that, "To the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop that proliferation, if they want the Six-Party talks to be successful." [47] President Bush also refused to confirm any North Korean involvement in the September 6 incident during his October 17 press conference, although he again stressed U.S. opposition to nuclear proliferation. (See side bar) While insisting that the administration was very concerned about any indications of illicit WMD proliferation, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that "We're handling those in appropriate diplomatic channels." [48]

In a television appearance on Fox News, however, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, while refusing to confirm either the Israeli air strike or rumored North Korean-Syrian nuclear collaboration, more bluntly cautioned that, "If such an activity were taking place, it would be a matter of great concern because the president has put down a very strong marker with the North Koreans about further proliferation efforts, and obviously any effort by the Syrians to pursue weapons of mass destruction would be a concern." [49]

The president's refusal to comment publicly on the nature of the Israeli strike might be due to the absence of definitive evidence about a North Korean-Syrian nuclear connection. Critics of the Six-Party Talks, however, claim that the administration does not want to risk disrupting the Korean denuclearization process once again at a time when the North Koreans appeared more cooperative than usual. [50]

Western Commentators Speculate About Nuclear Materials, Arms to Hezbollah, or Preparations for an Israeli Attack on Iran

Despite Israel's silence and Syrian-North Korean denials, many Western media commentators readily speculated that Israel had launched an air strike against an object that the Israelis perceived as presenting a genuine threat. They maintained that Israel would not have risked provoking a war with Syria unless it calculated it had no choice but to destroy such a high-value target. [51]

Nuclear Target. The most popular interpretation was that Israel attacked a component associated with a possible Syrian-North Korean joint nuclear weapons program. For example, a September 18 article in the New York Times cited current and former Israeli and U.S. security experts, who had received Israeli briefings on the incident, as describing the target as a part of "a rudimentary Syrian nuclear program." [52]

According to ABC News, in July 2007, the Israeli government presented the Bush administration with satellite imagery showing a nuclear facility in northeast Syria. The Israelis also reportedly presented other intelligence indicating that North Korea had supplied nuclear technology to Syria. [53] ABC and other sources related that some U.S. policy makers found this evidence unconvincing. Reporters from The Sunday Times wrote that these U.S. uncertainties led the Israeli government to order a commando raid into Syria. Supposedly the Special Forces involved collected nuclear material that Israeli technicians confirmed was of North Korean origin. [54] According to The Times, the White House supposedly approved of the Israeli air strike after receiving this information. [55]

ABC News, however, reported that the Israelis feared that their knowledge of the existence of the Syrian nuclear facility would leak to the press. This concern led them to decide to attack the site despite American unease about the quality of the intelligence, the lack of urgency given the incipient nature of the Syrian nuclear program, and the possible adverse regional diplomatic and security consequences that could result from an Israeli preemptive strike. [56] On October 19, ABC News reported that Israel's confidence in the accuracy of its intelligence increased after Mossad managed to place a mole in the suspect Syrian nuclear facility. According to this report, the spy provided detailed photographs of the facility that, while not showing the presence yet of any fissile material at the site, nevertheless confirmed suspicions raised by other intelligence sources that North Korea was helping Syria construct a nuclear reactor complex. [57]

Emily Landau, director of the arms control and regional security program at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, might have represented Israeli government assessments when she told Western journalists that, "The one lesson that Israel has learned from the Iranian experience is that if you don't take care of something like this at the very initial stages, you're going to have a bigger problem later on." [58]

The New York Times reported that Israeli aircraft destroyed an incipient nuclear reactor that the Syrians were building with North Korean technical assistance. According to this account, the Israelis feared that the Syrians intended to use the graphite-moderated reactor in the same manner as the North Koreans: to produce the plutonium required to build atomic bombs. The New York Times correspondents argued that the Israeli government wanted the attack to show "its determination to snuff out even a nascent project in a neighboring state." [59]

Most recently, on October 23, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) published privately obtained satellite images that show what could have been a nuclear reactor under construction in Syria, just east of the Euphrates River. This location may have been the site Israeli warplanes attacked on September 6. The ISIS analysts also identify several possible similarities between the techniques North Korea used to construct its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and those suggested by the photographs of the Syrian site. [60] U.S. and international experts and officials shown the pictures by the Washington Post stated that "there was a strong and credible possibility that they depict the remote compound that was attacked." [61] The co-author of the ISIS report, David Albright, told the Post that he was "pretty convinced that Syria was trying to build a nuclear reactor," though one of the prominent nuclear experts interviewed — John E. Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org — said he found the ISIS imagery inconclusive. [62]

Practice Strike against Iran. A less common explanation of the September 6 incident was that Israeli warplanes were attempting to rehearse an attack against nuclear facilities in Iran. International analysts sharing this interpretation note that Syria and Iran both rely on similar air defense systems based on Soviet and Russian technologies. [63] For example, Syria recently purchased Russia's Pantsyr air defense system, which Iran is also currently integrating into its own defense network. Although the Syrian network is currently more elaborate, an attack against it could provide insights into how best to circumvent Iranian air defenses. [64]

Several aviation experts writing in Western journals stated that Israeli fighters relied on recently developed American technologies that allowed the Israeli Air Force to hack into Syria's air defense networks and, once inside, monitor and disable its components. [65] Two detachable fuel tanks normally used by Israel's latest generation long-range bomber, the Raam F151, were found inside Turkey near its border with Syria. Attached to the Raam, the tanks extend the aircraft's range to over 2,000 kilometers (km), sufficient to reach targets in Iran. [66] From the perspective of this interpretation, the operation also allowed Israel to gauge neighboring countries' potential responses to an Israeli air strike against Iran, another isolated Middle Eastern country. [67]

If concerns about Iran determined the Israeli response, the Israelis might have hoped to convince Iranian officials that their nuclear facilities were vulnerable to a comparable Israeli air strike, and thereby ensure Tehran's cooperation in international negotiations seeking to clarify the status of the Iranian nuclear program and curb its expansion. Adherents to this hypothesis maintain that, through their public silence, the United States and Arab governments are signaling their approval of this negotiating stratagem. [68] One Western analyst recalled the Chinese proverb that "sometimes you have to kill the chicken to scare the monkey." [69] (A contrary interpretation would be that an Israeli air strike against Syria might lead the Iranians to take additional steps to strengthen their air defenses, harden potential targets, further conceal and disperse sensitive facilities, and pursue other measures to reduce their vulnerability.)

Non-Nuclear WMD. A report in the September 17 issue of Jane's Defence Weekly outlining joint Syrian-Iranian efforts to equip Syrian ballistic missiles with chemical warheads generated some media speculation that Israel conducted an air strike to warn both countries that Tel Aviv would respond vigorously to any possible chemical weapons threat against it. [70] The Syrian armed forces appear to have developed a wide variety of chemical munitions for delivery by missiles, aircraft, and other means. Hundreds of Syrian Scud missiles can attack targets in Israel, including its large population centers, from launch sites anywhere in Syria. [71] According to Jane's, a late July explosion at a Syrian military installation near the city of Aleppo occurred when Syrian and Iranian personnel were attempting to load a warhead containing mustard gas on a Scud-C missile. The New York Times cited a "former intelligence official" as asserting that Syria might have been seeking to develop an "airburst capability for its ballistic missiles" that would considerably increase the destructive capacity of its chemical warheads. [72] Western diplomats also speculate that North Korea has been seeking to compensate for the poor accuracy of the Scud design by helping Syria deploy chemical weapons on the missile. [73]

Conventional Weapons for Hezbollah. An alternative hypothesis, widely reported initially but with declining frequency thereafter, is that the Israeli warplanes attacked a consignment of conventional weapons that Iranians were sending via Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon. This interpretation argues that Israeli policy makers had become so concerned about the unending flow of Iranian arms to Hezbollah that they used the opportunity provided by their transshipment through neighboring Syria to send Damascus and Tehran a powerful warning to end these transfers. [74]

The unusually long and comprehensive Israeli censorship surrounding the incident soon led many commentators to question this interpretation. In particular, they noted that Israeli officials would have logical reasons to publicize the attack in order to underscore Syria's continuing interference in Lebanon's internal affairs in violation of several international agreements. [75]

Arab and Iranian Governments Largely Silent

No Arab government besides Syria has formally commented on the September 6 incident. The Egyptian weekly Al-Ahram accurately commented on the "synchronized silence of the Arab world." [76]

The most prominent declaration by a non-Syrian source occurred after Syrian Vice President al-Shara said that the Israelis had mistakenly bombed the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD). The center issued a formal statement denying the allegation, though without directly criticizing their host government: "Leaks in the Zionist media concerning this ACSAD station are total inventions and lies." [77] A few nongovernmental Arab media sources also discussed the September 6 incident. For example, the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Watan claimed that a U.S. plane covered the Israeli aircraft from a higher altitude. [78] But for the most part the Arab media has simply avoided the controversial subject.

Western commentators took the position that the lack of official non-Syrian Arab condemnations of Israel's action, threats of retaliation against Israel, or even professions of support for the Syrian government or people must imply that their governments tacitly supported the Israeli action. [79]

Iranian officials also have not formally commented on the Israeli attack or Syria's reactions. At an October 9 meeting of the Interparliamentary Union in Geneva, Iranian parliamentary speaker Hadad Alel told reporters that, "The violation of the airspace of Syria by Israeli planes was not meant to be a signal for Iran" because "Israel is not in a position to have the illusion of attacking Iran." [80] Nevertheless, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reportedly sent his nephew, Akbar Mehrabian, to Syria to evaluate the results of the attack first-hand. [81]

China and Moscow Treat Incident as Crisis Management Issue

According to open-source press commentary, the air strike initially led the Chinese government to postpone a forthcoming session of the Six-Party Talks, which seek to secure North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear weapons program in return for various diplomatic and economic benefits. Chinese officials were allegedly concerned that "America might confront the North Koreans over their weapons deals with Syria" and only rescheduled them after they had become convinced the talks would be "constructive." [82]

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov reportedly urged Syria to proceed no further than submitting a letter of protest to the United Nations. [83] The Israeli paper Yediot Ahronot related an unnamed Israeli security official as saying that, after the attack, the Russian government directed Russian merchant ships to beam electronic signals into Israel to assess Israel's information warfare assets and disrupt Israelis' commercial television programs as punishment: "I believe that they sent ships to the region equipped with electronic warfare systems...to try and examine Israel's capabilities in electronic warfare and also to give trouble to those who gave them trouble." [84] Neither the Russian foreign nor defense ministries formally commented on these reports.

Conclusion

Additional information about what actually happened on September 6 would not necessarily clarify the objectives of those involved. Does the Syrian leadership want a nuclear deterrent to induce Israel into negotiations or is it seeking a nuclear shield to hide behind while using Hezbollah as a proxy sword against Israel? Did Israeli leaders attempt to eliminate an incipient Syrian WMD threat or did they primarily aim to send a warning to Iran about presenting Israel with a much more imminent nuclear danger? Is North Korea seeking to circumvent the Six-Party agreement before its implementation or would evidence of nuclear collaboration with Syria simply testify to North Korea's continuing efforts to earn foreign currency even through the sale of WMD technologies to questionable clients? Furthermore, the complexity of these questions increases exponentially when analysts try to discern differences among the various government factions, or the motives of other possible domestic and foreign actors that might influence each government's WMD policies.

The prominence of the allegations regarding various multinational connections among countries of proliferation concern make the incident especially important for those interested in WMD nonproliferation issues. Speculation about North Korean nuclear materials flowing to Syria, North Korean-Syrian collaboration on chemical warheads for ballistic missiles, and possible trilateral cooperation on special weapons that also involves Iran reinforces concerns about the persistence of state-sponsored proliferation networks despite heightened international action against them in recent years and the Bush administration's insistence that such transfers cross various "red lines" defining vital U.S. national security interests.

The incident also highlights a major weakness in the existing nuclear nonproliferation regime. Following the intense media speculation that the target of the Israeli air strike was a nuclear facility in northeastern Syria, the IAEA formally asked Syria and other governments to provide whatever information they might possess about undeclared nuclear activities in Syria. A September 15 statement succinctly summarized the agency's position:

- "The IAEA has no information about any undeclared nuclear facility in Syria and no information about recent reports.
- "We would obviously investigate any relevant information coming our way.
- "The IAEA Secretariat expects any country having information about nuclear-related activities in another country to provide that information to the IAEA.
- "The IAEA is in contact with the Syrian authorities to verify the authenticity of these reports." [85]

In October 2007, a diplomatic source knowledgeable about IAEA activities indicated that the agency had made informal inquiries to Damascus shortly after the incident, but had not received a response from the Syrian government. [86] At present, IAEA experts are reviewing satellite imagery of the site of the alleged attack to determine (after the fact) whether Syria was constructing a nuclear facility at the location.[87] In the meantime, the Syrians are in the process of dismantling the remains of the facility, which will reduce the intelligence value of any possible on-site inspections.[88]

Notwithstanding the IAEA inquiry, the legal status of any possible Syrian nuclear activities is problematic. Although Syria is a signatory of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, as noted the NPT explicitly grants all countries in good standing the right to construct nuclear reactors in order to generate electric power or for other peaceful purposes. In addition, some analysts believe that the NPT does not require governments to declare the existence of reactors during their earliest stages of construction. [89]

Israel's response, if motivated by concerns about a possible Syrian nuclear weapons program, demonstrates that some governments do not consider these safeguards sufficiently strong security guarantees — and will employ controversial unilateral measures, including the use of force, if necessary to address these concerns.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SIX-PARTY TALKS

Nonproliferation experts have long worried that North Korea would sell or otherwise transfer its nuclear materials and technologies to foreign countries or non-state actors such as terrorists or criminals. These concerns intensified with the publication of news reports about possible North Korean assistance to a Syrian nuclear weapons program.

Under the terms of the February 13, 2007 agreement that ended the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks, North Korea pledged to shut down and eventually disable its Yongbyon nuclear complex in return for food, economic aid, and the prospect of normalizing relations with the five other countries participating in the talks, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United States.[1] The terms of the agreement do not formally prohibit North Korea from transferring nuclear weapons-related materials and technologies to third parties, but the follow-on October 6 agreement states that North Korea is

"committed not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how." [2] In addition, the international community — through various UN resolutions and other measures — has declared such transfers impermissible.

After North Korea's October 2006 nuclear test, President Bush issued the following statement: "The North Korean regime remains one of the world's leading proliferator of missile technology, including transfers to Iran and Syria. The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable of the consequences of such action." [3]

In commenting on the September 6 incident, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton speculated that North Korea might have intended to transship nuclear material to Iran through Syria. [4] Bolton also published an op-ed suggesting that Pyongyang might be seeking to conceal its nuclear weapon assets in friendly Middle Eastern countries while it underwent international inspections of its nuclear holdings. [5] Major General Zeevi Farkash, former chief of Israeli military intelligence, told the Western media that North Korea and Syria might have shared a "constellation of interests" in which Syria wanted to strengthen its WMD deterrent and North Korea aimed to disperse its nuclear technologies "to preserve the knowledge it had accumulated and not just throw it away." [6]

Since the September 6 incident, President Bush and other U.S. officials have followed a complex line. On the one hand, while declining to accuse the North Koreans in public of assisting a possible Syrian nuclear weapons program, administration representatives have obliquely warned the North Koreans against transferring WMD-related materials and technologies to third parties. At the same time, they have also maintained that the best method to deal with the North Korean proliferation threat is through continuing the Six-Party Talks. When asked about the alleged transfer at an October 17 news conference, Bush replied: "The best way to solve this issue [of nuclear weapons proliferation] with North Korea peacefully is to put it in — keep it in the context of Six-Party talks. And the reason why is that diplomacy only works if there are consequences when diplomacy breaks down, and it makes sense for there to be other people at the table so that if North Korea were to have said to all of us, we're doing to do x, y, or z, and they don't, that we have other — people other than the United States being consequential." [7]

The governments of China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea have also declined to risk jeopardizing the Six-Party Talks, currently at an extremely delicate stage, by challenging Pyongyang over its possible Syrian connections. South Korean representatives, eager to advance their bilateral and multilateral peace initiatives on the peninsula, have been especially eager to downplay any possible North Korean involvement in the September 6 incident. Senior South Korean nuclear negotiator Chun Yung-woo, besides expressing doubts about the accuracy of Israeli intelligence, cited the clause in the October 3 agreement as a reason why the issue should no longer appear on the agenda of the six-party talks: "After they (North Koreans) pledged they won't do it, what more is there to discuss?" [8]

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All Still Quiet on the Syria Bombing

By Jackson Diehl

Monday, November 5, 2007; A19

It was two months ago tomorrow that Israeli warplanes bombed what Israel and the United States believed was a nascent Syrian nuclear complex along the shore of the Euphrates River. But the political shock waves that should have accompanied that remarkable event -- which was both an audacious act of preemption and a revelation of an apparent Syrian bomb program-- have been bottled up by the decisions of the Israeli government and the Bush administration not to speak publicly about the strike.

Now Israeli and U.S. officials are quietly debating whether to go on the record and allow those shock waves to explode across the Middle East and beyond. At stake are not only Israel's tense relations with Syria, which so far has chosen not to retaliate, but a host of other pressure points: Israeli-Palestinian negotiations; the integrity of the International Atomic Energy Agency; Western leverage over Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad; and -- not least -- the fragile U.S. nuclear bargain with North Korea, which is believed to have aided the secret construction.

For the Israeli government of Ehud Olmert, the decision to suppress news of the strike in September -- including the military censorship of Israel's aggressively free press -- was pretty straightforward. Trumpeting the successful attack not only would have prompted global denunciations of Israel but might have pushed Assad into launching an attack on the Golan Heights or a missile at Tel Aviv. The architect of the attack, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, is a former head of Israel's most elite clandestine commando squad, and he remains convinced that military special operations are best kept secret.

Two months later that calculus hasn't much changed. Barak and Olmert are still worried enough about a Syrian military response to have moved an upcoming military exercise off the Golan; Olmert and other senior officials have been dropping hints about opening political negotiations with Damascus. Olmert knows that full disclosure of the operation would probably blow up the Israeli-Palestinian peace meeting in Annapolis that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hopes to convene this month. Among other problems, Arab states that Olmert and Rice hope will attend would surely cancel if they were obliged to react to an event that they have so far pointedly ignored.

Outside Jerusalem and the State Department, however, pressure for an official account of the raid -- or more important, for the intelligence that prompted it -- is growing. The International Atomic Energy Agency and its freelancing director, Mohamed ElBaradei, want to investigate the alleged reactor site. The agency's experts have been studying aerial photographs and asking U.S. officials for information. In theory, at least, an IAEA probe could compound the blow suffered by Assad by forcing him to explain -- on pain of possible sanctions by the U.N. Security Council -- whether and how Syria violated its commitments under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

So far the Bush administration has refused to cooperate with ElBaradei, who has all but openly sided with Iran in its attempt to deflect U.N. orders to freeze its uranium enrichment. Having debunked U.S. claims about a reborn Iraqi nuclear program in early 2003, ElBaradei would be certain to seize on any ambiguities in the Israeli and U.S. evidence about the Syrian reactor. If he raised doubts that the project was intended to produce plutonium, both Olmert and the Bush administration would be damaged.

There is, however, a petitioner much tougher to resist than the IAEA director: Republican representatives who are demanding that "every member of Congress be briefed on this incident, and as soon as possible," as Reps. Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen put it in a recent Wall Street Journal op-ed. The two House members were already briefed because of their positions as ranking minority members on the intelligence and Foreign Affairs committees; what they heard evidently convinced them that possible covert collaboration between Syria and North Korea needs to be fully aired and debated before the United States proceeds with negotiations to end North Korea's bomb program.

Here some Bush administration officials are sympathetic. They have been frustrated by what they describe as the stubborn resistance of Rice to connect what was discovered in Syria to the North Korean disarmament talks. Rice's North Korean point man, Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill, told Congress last month that Pyongyang had been asked to disclose any cooperation with Syria as part of a promised full report on its weapons programs.

If it answers the question, North Korea may end up blowing the whistle on Damascus. And if it chooses to lie? Then the pressure on the Bush administration to disclose what it knows about the Israeli raid may become irresistible.

http://www.newsmax.com/insidecover/bolton_un_return/2007/11/10/48398.html

Bolton Blasts U.N. at U.N.

Saturday, November 10, 2007 9:09 AM

By: Newsmax Staff

[EXCERPTS]

Former U.S./U.N. ambassador John Bolton returned to U.N. headquarters in NYC on Friday to launch his new book "Surrender Is Not An Option"

Bolton confessed that on many issues he really does not have a current pipeline into the White House, but he did not shy away from commenting on several key issues confronting the Bush administration.

On Israel's recent strike on a suspected secret Syrian nuclear facility:

"This was some kind of Syrian-North Korean joint venture in the nuclear field....So, it would not surprise me that to avoid inspection at Yongbyon (North Korea) they decided to recreate (a clone) near the Euphrates River (in Syria)....So, I could even see this as a three-way joint venture with Iran, North Korea and Syria."

Bolton chastised the White House for maintaining a "gag" order on any comments pertaining to the Israeli strike:

"The administration, I think, has made a real mistake in not allowing more facts to come out. Because, I think it is undercutting its own argument about North Korea's commitment to giving up its nuclear weapons program."

Neither the office of UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, nor the State Department would offer any reaction to the Bolton comments though several officials from the US/UN mission did accompany the former ambassador during his United Nations visit.

Bolton: Annapolis will set us back

Hilary Leila Krieger

THE JERUSALEM POST

Nov. 15, 2007

A former Bush administration stalwart who has become a vocal critic told The Jerusalem Post this week that the planned meeting in Annapolis later this month to push for Israeli-Palestinian peace is "a mistake."

John Bolton, a leading neoconservative who served as the US ambassador to the UN before leaving the administration last winter, spoke to the Post following a lecture Tuesday night on his new book, which takes issue with aspects of American policy toward Iran, North Korea and Lebanon, among others.

"It's a mistake to push ahead with the Annapolis peace conference in November or December," he said, noting that the date hasn't been finalized.

"I just don't see this as the moment to make progress on Israeli-Palestinian matters. And I don't think that a failed conference will simply leave us at the status quo. I think it will set us back, so I think the effort is perhaps well-intentioned but misconceived."

In his talk he referred to an Israeli government with "internal political difficulties" and a Palestinian Authority that's "broken perhaps beyond repair," so any attempt at an "unnatural" reconciliation could leave US influence diminished.

Bolton, who spoke to an audience at the American Enterprise Institute think tank here, where he now holds a position, also strongly attacked the US response to an Israeli attack of an alleged incipient nuclear facility in Syria earlier this fall.

He described "the pall of silence that the administration has caused to fall over Israel's September 6 raid" as "what may be the most disturbing event of recent American history." That's because, in his estimation, the administration was so invested in diplomacy with North Korea that it was willing to make an enormous error by overlooking the proliferation North Korea allegedly engaged in to supply the Syrian site, as well as possible Iranian connections.

"If you're afraid to have this information come out, what does it say about the nature of the diplomacy that's under way?" he asked.

Speaking to the Post, he dismissed concerns that revealing the nature of the attack - which has been shrouded in secrecy in Israel, in part because of military censorship - would increase the likelihood of a Syrian military response.

"I don't think Syria has the military capability and I think they know it," he said.

In his presentation, he called for regime change in Syria and said that the poor Western approach on Iran means that the same option, of regime change or a military attack are the only two remaining alternatives to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In his book, *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad*, Bolton attacks the way the US has conducted its Iran policy. Instead of immediately referring signs of illicit Iranian nuclear activity to the UN Security Council for sanctions several years ago, America allowed Britain, France and Germany to undertake negotiations with Iran.

Because of that, he assesses, "Iran gained almost four years of additional time to perfect an indigenous capacity throughout the entire nuclear fuel cycle, leaving us in a far more vulnerable position than when we started." His chilling summation: "This is the road to the nuclear Holocaust."

Bolton also recounts in detail the formulation of the US position at the UN for dealing with Israel's war with Hizbullah last summer, again faulting the Bush administration for backing down from its original demands. Instead of sticking to the insistence that the conflict not end with a mere cease-fire that would maintain the status quo vis-à-vis Hizbullah and Israel, he says, the administration caved in to international demands and the situation got worse.

"Contrary to everything we had said at the outset of the hostilities, the net result, over a year later, appeared yet again to be just another Middle East cease-fire," he writes, "which was, if anything, somewhat less favorable to Israel, and certainly less favorable to democracy in Lebanon, than before."

Bolton, who has been on the receiving end of harsh criticism for his unrepentant neoconservative stances and outspokenness, quit the government after he failed to make his temporary appointment as UN ambassador permanent when the Senate wouldn't confirm him. Since he left office, he has openly criticized the Bush administration for straying from what he considers its original principles.

He has been particularly disparaging of the State Department, a perennial source of frustration for him, and has suggested it be overhauled.

He also doesn't shy from biting put-downs, lambasting former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan for equating himself to a "secular pope" and UN International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohammad El-Baradei for forgetting that "he works for the member governments of the IAEA and not the other way around."

Bolton's section headings take aim at the IAEA ("How Many IAEA Meetings Does It Take to Screw in a Lightbulb?") and the European Union ("Iran in the Security Council: The EU-3 Find New Ways to Give In") among others.

His book, he said, was partly aimed at providing more information to the public ahead of the 2008 elections.

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/eb301496-93c7-11dc-acd0-0000779fd2ac.html?nclick_check=1

Mystery still surrounds Israel's Syria attack

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Rarely does President George W. Bush bite his lip when discussing "axis of evil" states such as Syria and North Korea.

But for more than two months Mr Bush has done just that when asked about a September 6 Israeli strike on a mysterious Syrian site. So has every other US administration official speaking on the record, as well as the Israeli government itself, fuelling a continuing controversy about the incident.

"This is not my first rodeo," Mr Bush said at a press conference last month after being asked about the incident at least six times. "And I know where you're trying to get me to comment. I'm not going to comment on it, one way or the other."

This uncharacteristically taciturn approach has angered some of the president's Republican supporters, amid a series of newspaper reports that the Syrian site was a nuclear reactor built with North Korean help. But as the weeks since the Israeli raid pass, more questions than answers have surfaced about what precisely the Israelis hit.

The Republican anger has been displayed by legislators such as Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, respectively the senior Republican members of the House of Representatives committees on intelligence and foreign affairs. Among a select handful of congressmen briefed on the incident by Michael McConnell, the US's director of national intelligence, they did not respond to the briefing as intended, calling instead for the administration to come clean publicly about what had occurred.

"Until Congress is fully briefed it would be imprudent for the administration to move forward with agreements with state proliferators," they said in the Wall Street Journal, in reference to the six-party talks on Korea's nuclear programme.

John Bolton, formerly Mr Bush's ambassador to the UN, argues that the administration is unduly preoccupied with reaching a deal in those negotiations and with the forthcoming international conference in Annapolis, Maryland, on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, to which Syria is likely to be invited.

"There's a growing suspicion that the veil of secrecy about Syria doesn't have so much to do with intelligence as with protecting the six-party talks and the Annapolis conference," Mr Bolton says. "Israeli government officials have told me that Secretary [Condoleezza] Rice told them in no uncertain terms that the information [about the attack] better not come from them."

David Albright, a respected former United Nations weapons inspector, has used satellite imagery to argue that the Israelis probably attacked an installation on the Euphrates river at Dawar az Zawr, eastern Syria, which was similar in shape to North Korea's Yongbyon reactor.

"I believe pretty strongly that Israel thinks it attacked a nuclear reactor and that the US didn't say they were wrong," he says, adding that his suspicions were heightened by the recent addition of a pump

house that could supply water for a reactor, and further images that showed Syria razed the site after the Israelis struck.

“The recent photo evidence showing the Syrians clearing the sites indicated that they are clearly trying to hide something,” says Joe Cirincione, a non proliferation expert at the Centre for American Progress. He says that the evidence so far “tilts towards the theory that it was a reactor in Syria but does not establish it”.

But he adds: “There’s no evidence it was an imminent threat,” arguing that if there was a reactor, it was probably years from producing plutonium and that Syria lacks a reprocessing facility to turn its spent reactor fuel into plutonium.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN’s Vienna-based nuclear watchdog, is also not convinced the site was a reactor.

Diplomats in Vienna warn against relying on satellite photos, saying that it is quite possible that the installation was no more than the adjunct of a chemical facility or a shed used to make agricultural equipment. They add that they were surprised that the site lacked a security fence, an unusual omission in a top secret facility.

“I am amazed that people can say they know the function of an installation just because they see its dimensions,” adds Jeffrey Lewis, an arms control expert at the New America Foundation. “It’s a box on a river.” He adds that, far from being in a remote site, the Dawar az Zawr facility is just over a mile from a well-known tourist site in Halabiya, from which rafting trips down the Euphrates can be organised.

Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad says the Israeli aircraft hit a disused military building with “nothing in it”.

The mystery may not continue indefinitely: under the talks framework, North Korea is due to give an account of its nuclear activities by the end of the year. And so far, despite Mr Bolton’s concerns, the events in Syria have not interrupted those negotiations.

“The opponents of the six-party talks wanted to use this strike to kill this deal,” said Mr Cirincione. “But the president isn’t having it.”

Master gambler Kim Jong-il may finally be ready for his last throw of dice

Hamish MacDonald

November 17, 2007

[EXCERPT]

IN THE longest-running poker game in Asia, the master player is starting to lay some of his cards on the table.

This week in Vienna, officials from North Korea began giving some details to American and other counterparts about the secret acquisition of uranium enrichment know-how from Pakistan at the start of the decade.

If their story is convincing, a crisis that only five years ago had worried US and Chinese military planners studying armed intervention may be winding down.

It will depend on how much Kim Jong-il, the reclusive leader of North Korea for the past 13 years, is prepared to show, and how many cards he tries to keep up his sleeve.

Under the six-nation agreement (involving the US, Japan, China, South Korea and Russia) worked out in Beijing in February-March this year, North Korea is to disable its three key nuclear plants by the end of 2007, provide a list of all nuclear arms activity, account for all its fissile material and address US suspicions about a highly enriched uranium effort.

As a reward, North Korea will receive 1 million tonnes of heavy fuel oil or equivalent aid and the US and Japan will move to open normal diplomatic relations.

Provision of a light-water reactor for electricity generation will be discussed at some point, and Pyongyang included in a new regional security agreement.

The four years of negotiations in Beijing were not without last-minute hold-ups. Washington hawks, suspicious of dealings with a regime they view as "evil" and bound to fail, had treasury officials freeze the North Korea's hard currency holdings in Macau's Bank Delta Asia.

Kim upped the ante by conducting his country's first nuclear weapon test in October 2006. Now he is co-operating, having shut down his only reactor at Yongbyon and started talking about uranium.

But there is still a long way to go, points out Korea expert Peter Beck, director of the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, who spoke at Sydney's Lowy Institute this week.

Notably, the North Koreans have to account for about 50 kilograms of plutonium produced since they revved up the Yongbyon reactor in early 2003 after being confronted by President George Bush's Administration about the uranium program.

Nor have the North Koreans been utterly good boys since the Beijing agreement, if they were connected with the mysterious facility in Northern Syria taken out in an Israeli air strike on September 6.

"The imagery was very clear that the Syrians were up to no good," Beck said. "The Israelis are convinced it was a nuclear program and the North Koreans were involved."

The bigger mystery is why Bush and his close neo-con aides have not made more of this breakout. After the 2006 nuclear blast, Bush said the new red line for Kim was any attempt to proliferate nuclear weapons. "Short of firing a weapon at some country, I don't see what red lines they have left to cross," Beck said.

Still, the usual neo-con spoilers of North Korea diplomacy like former arms control director and United Nations ambassador John Bolton, have been pushed out of the picture.

"Obviously Darth Vader [Vice-President Dick Cheney] is still in the background and we don't know when he's going to weigh in," Beck said.

But for more than a year Christopher Hill, the highly active Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, has been given a relatively free hand to engage with Pyongyang, and the State Department professionals are back in control.

Perhaps Cheney is saving his ammunition for Tehran.

Bush says N. Korea talks show 'results'

By Jon Ward

The Washington Times

November 17, 2007

President Bush defended negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program yesterday, saying they have been effective, but he added that the communist regime must give a full declaration of its nuclear activities before the end of the year.

Some regional analysts said the president's remarks indicate that the Bush administration has decided not to move forward with talks unless North Korea discloses a role in helping Syria build nuclear facilities.

"The six-party talks have delivered measurable results," Mr. Bush said, referring to the negotiations among North Korea, the U.S., South Korea, Japan, Russia and China.

Mr. Bush, speaking from the White House alongside Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda during a joint statement, said that although North Korea has begun to shut down its Yongbyon reactor, "hard work remains to be done."

"North Korea has agreed to provide a full declaration of all its nuclear programs and proliferation activities by the end of this year," Mr. Bush said. "Full declaration is one of the next steps North Korea must take to keep the six-party talks moving."

Richard C. Bush, director of the Center for Northeast Asian Studies at the Brookings Institution, said the president appeared to be "laying down a marker."

"I'm not sure that North Korea has agreed to provide a full declaration of its proliferation activities," Richard Bush said. "I suspect that the words 'proliferation activities' are code for the Syria program, and we have decided we need an explanation of what was going on in Syria in order to close any deals."

An Israeli air strike on Sept. 6 in Syria is suspected to have destroyed a partially constructed nuclear reactor of North Korean design, though the U.S. and Israeli governments have pointedly refused to discuss the strike.

The Syrian government has not admitted that it was building nuclear facilities.

An Oct. 3 document that was agreed upon as part of the six-party talks does say that North Korea "committed not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how."

However, when the document discusses the declaration that North Korea will make, it says it "will include all nuclear facilities, materials and programs." There is no mention of documenting proliferation activities.

At an Oct. 17 press conference, Mr. Bush said that "the issue of proliferation has equal importance with the issue of weaponry, and that North Korea has said that they will stop proliferating, just like they have said they will fully disclose and disable any weapons programs."

A State Department official said the U.S. government is "interested in the North Koreans telling us what they have and what they are doing, so we can know what they are telling us they're going to stop."

The Bush administration has been criticized for signing on to the agreement with North Korea in February, clearing the way for the six-party talks to resume after a long standoff. The president's former ambassador to the U.N., John R. Bolton, and others, have said the agreement is ineffectual.

- Nicholas Kralev contributed to this report.

November 19, 2007

Op-Ed Contributor

Diplomacy With the Devil

By DANIELLE PLETKA

Washington

NEITHER George W. Bush nor the national security expert who advised him through his first presidential campaign seemed captivated by the prospect of a Nobel Peace Prize or encomiums from the chattering classes. But something has happened over the last seven years. The allure of a place in history has grown. How else to explain the about-face President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have made on key foreign policy issues from North Korea to the Middle East peace process?

Early in his term, President Bush jettisoned the crown jewels of the Clinton administration's foreign policy — the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the North Korea Agreed Framework. In each case, experts still disagree about whether he was right to do so. But the fact is that Bill Clinton had gone the extra mile in the Middle East and achieved nothing. And revelations that the North Koreans had been cheating on their 1994 commitment to abandon nuclear weapons made manifest the fraud underlying that “breakthrough.”

Seven years into the Bush presidency, however, what was old is new again. The “blackmailing” Pyongyang regime is now one with which the United States can do business. Nevermind that in 2002, American and Spanish warships discovered a North Korean vessel carrying Scud missiles to Yemen or that in 2005 the Treasury Department designated the Macao-based Banco Delta Asia as a “primary money-laundering concern” for its role in North Korea's illegal weapons, counterfeiting and drug businesses.

Now suddenly, Washington eschews comment on North Korean arms sales. And as for Banco Delta Asia, it's back in business and its frozen money has been returned to North Korea. Worse, Ms. Rice has now signed on to a new “Mark II” version of the agreed framework, which has considerably fewer benchmarks for the North Koreans than the Clinton administration deal did.

Ostensibly a commitment by North Korea to disclose and abandon all nuclear programs — including a secret highly enriched uranium program — the deal's vague, open-ended nature promises endless renegotiation. As to why an administration that once insisted upon “complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement” is now O.K. with nebulous “abandonment,” the record is silent.

Back in 2001, the newly minted Bush administration was scornful of Bill Clinton's efforts to build a Palestinian state with a terrorist government in place. Mr. Bush refused to allow Yasir Arafat to darken the White House door and said he would “not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists.” Now Hamas is in control of Gaza, Mahmoud Abbas is the powerless president of a Palestinian Authority and members of his Fatah forces tried to assassinate Israel's prime minister.

Nonetheless, Ms. Rice has been to the region repeatedly and recently sought advice from not just Bill Clinton but, of all people, Jimmy Carter. Next week, she'll be playing host to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel and his Palestinian antagonists at a cozy chat session in Annapolis, Md. (None seem as committed to the meeting as Ms. Rice — originally expected to last three days, it has reportedly been pared down to one.)

The clearest sign of Ms. Rice's eagerness to make deals with Pyongyang and the Palestinians is her willingness to overlook egregious misbehavior by her negotiating partners. Much like the Clinton administration, which disregarded early warning of a uranium enrichment program in hopes of staging a "historic" presidential visit to Pyongyang in 2000, the United States is now ignoring evidence of North Korean nuclear and missile proliferation to the Middle East.

For example, in September Israeli jets destroyed what Israeli and American intelligence assessed to be a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria. Officials who have seen the intelligence tell me the structure was the result of several years of transfers between North Korean nuclear suppliers and Syrian buyers. Ms. Rice's most revealing comment? An explanation that "issues of proliferation do not affect the Palestinian-Israeli peace efforts we are making."

This bizarre rationalization is oddly divorced from reality: how could Israel possibly be indifferent to its neighbors acquiring nuclear technology from America's partner in the new agreed framework? The statement simply invites America's adversaries to capitalize on the administration's desperation. Why not engage in bad behavior if the Bush administration, like the Clinton administration, will look the other way?

By kowtowing to the conventional wisdom of what a secretary of state should do, Condoleezza Rice is making her legacy dependent on the future behavior of a North Korean tyrant and Palestinian pretenders. Ultimately, that will serve neither selfish nor national interests.

[Danielle Pletka is the vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.](#)

Frontline

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INDIA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE

from the publishers of THE HINDU

Syrian signals

JOHN CHERIAN

in Damascus

[EXCERPTS]

Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Naji al-Otari, speaking to the international media in Damascus in the last week of October, said that tremendous pressure was being exerted on Syria to change its domestic and foreign policies. "We will remain steadfast," said Otari. Syrian dissident groups are being nurtured in Western capitals. Washington and Paris are in the forefront of these activities meant to destabilise one of the few remaining secular governments in the region. There have been concerted attempts to link Bashar al-Assad to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

[deletia]

The Israeli air strike in September against a target in northern Syria still generates a lot of comment.

Otari categorically stated that the stories about Israel targeting an alleged Syrian nuclear reactor were part of "Zionist propaganda".

He said that the allegations about North Korean help for Syria's nascent civilian nuclear programme were fabricated by Israel. The International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, has also dismissed the Israeli claims. Many intelligence analysts believe that the Israeli war planes targeted a Syrian arms depot in Deir ez-Zor. Bashar al-Assad said that the target was a small military building under construction.

The raid was also obviously part of the continuing U.S.-Israel psychological warfare against Syria and Iran. The message to Damascus and Teheran is that Israel's air force still carries punch even though its army was humiliated in Lebanon. Washington may also be seeking to signal to the international community that on matters relating to proliferation in West Asia, it would prefer to act in concert with Israel as the nuclear policeperson.

Middle East

A warning shot for Iran, via Syria

By Gareth Porter

Nov 21, 2007

WASHINGTON - Until late October, the accepted explanation about the September 6 Israeli air strike in Syria, constructed from a series of press leaks from US officials, was that it was prompted by dramatic satellite intelligence that Syria was building a nuclear facility with help from North Korea.

But new satellite evidence has discredited that narrative, suggesting a more plausible explanation for the strike: that it was a calculated effort by Israel and the United States to convince Iran that its nuclear facilities could be attacked as well.

The narrative promoted by neo-conservatives in the George W Bush administration began to unravel in late October with the release by a private company of a series of satellite images showing that the same square, multi-storey building that was hit by Israeli planes on September 6 had been present on the site four years earlier. Although the building appears to be somewhat more developed in the August 2007 image, it showed that the only major change at the site since September 2003 was what appears to be a pumping station on the Euphrates and a smaller secondary structure.

Media reports based on leaks from administration officials had suggested that the presence of a water pump indicated that the building must have been a nuclear reactor. But Jeffrey Lewis, a specialist on nuclear technology at the New America Foundation, pointed out in an interview with Inter Press Service (IPS) that the existence of a water pump cannot be taken as evidence of the purpose of the building, since other kinds of industrial buildings would also need to pump water.

The campaign of press leaks portraying the strike as related to an alleged nuclear weapons program assisted by North Korea began almost immediately after the Israeli strike. On September 11, a Bush administration official told the New York Times that Israel had obtained intelligence from "reconnaissance flights" over Syria showing "possible nuclear installations that Israeli officials believed might have been supplied with material from North Korea".

The Bush administration officials leaking this account to the press, obviously aligned with Vice President Dick Cheney, were hoping to shoot down the administration's announced policy, pushed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, of going ahead with an agreement to provide food and fuel aid to North Korea in exchange for the dismantling of its nuclear program.

They had lost an earlier battle over that policy and were now seeking to use the Israeli strike story as a new argument against it.

The officials did not want the intelligence community involved in assessing the alleged new evidence, suggesting that they knew it would not withstand expert scrutiny. Glenn Kessler reported in the Washington Post on September 13 that the "dramatic satellite imagery" provided by Israel had been restricted to "a few senior officials" and not disseminated to the intelligence community, on orders from National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley.

The intelligence community had opposed a previous neo-conservative effort in 2002-2003 to claim evidence of a Syrian nuclear program at the same site. A senior US intelligence official confirmed to the New York Times on October 30 that US intelligence analysts had been aware of the Syrian site in question "from the beginning" - meaning from before 2003 - but had not been convinced that it was an indication of an active nuclear program.

In 2002, John Bolton, then under secretary of state for arms control and international security, wanted to go public with an accusation that Syria was seeking a nuclear weapons program, but the intelligence community rejected the claim. A State Department intelligence analyst had called Bolton's assertion that Syria was interested in nuclear weapons technology "a stretch" and other elements of the community also challenged it, according to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report.

The attack on the site was an obvious demonstration of Israeli military dominance over Syria, generally considered a vital ally of Iran by Israeli and US officials. It was also in line with the general approach of using force against Syria that Cheney and his allies in the administration had urged on Israel before and during the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon in summer 2006.

During the war, Deputy National Security Adviser Elliot Abrams told a senior Israeli official that the Bush administration would not object if Israel "chose to extend the war beyond to its other northern neighbor", leaving no doubt he meant for Israel to attack Syria, IPS reported last December.

David Wurmser's wife Meyrev Wurmser, director of the neo-conservative Hudson Institute's Center for Middle East Policy, told Israel's Ynet News in December 2006 that, "many parts of the American administration believed that Israel should have fought against the real enemy, which is Syria and not Hezbollah". She said such an attack on Syria would have been "such a harsh blow for Iran that it would have weakened it and changed the strategic map in the Middle East".

Both Israeli and US officials dropped hints soon after the Israeli air raid that it was aimed at sending a message to Iran. Ten days after the raid, Israeli's military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin declared to a parliamentary committee, "Israel's deterrence has been rehabilitated since the Lebanon war, and it affects the entire regional system, including Iran and Syria ..."

Although he did not refer explicitly to the strike in Syria, the fact that the Syrian raid was the only event that could possibly have been regarded as restoring Israel's strategic credibility left little doubt as to the meaning of the reference.

That same day, Reuters quoted an unnamed US Defense Department official as saying that the significance of the strike "was not whether Israel hit its targets, but rather that it displayed a willingness to take military action".

On September 18, former United Nations ambassador John Bolton was quoted by JTA, a Jewish news service, as saying, "We're talking about a clear message to Iran. Israel has the right to self-defense - and that includes offensive operations against WMD [weapons of mass destruction] facilities that pose a threat to Israel. The United States would justify such attacks."

On October 7, Washington Post columnist David Ignatius, who enjoys access to top administration officials, quoted an unnamed official as providing the official explanation for the Israeli attack as targeting "nuclear materials supplied to Syria by North Korea".

But then, without quoting the official directly, Ignatius reported the official's description of the raid's implicit message: "[T]he message to Iran is clear: America and Israel can identify nuclear targets and penetrate air defenses to destroy them."

The official's suggestion that the strike was a joint US-Israeli message about a joint policy toward striking Iran's nuclear sites was the clearest indication that the primary objective of the strike was to intimidate Iran at a time when both Israel and the Cheney faction of the Bush administration were finding it increasingly difficult to do so.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specializing in US national security policy. His latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in June 2005.

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Inside Intel / Not a reactor - something far more vicious

By Yossi Melman

Ten weeks have passed since the Israel Air Force attacked in Syria, and there is still no reliable information about the precise target that was destroyed, or about the importance and necessity of the attack. Since Israel keeps maintaining its veil of secrecy, Everything that is known comes from leaks by anonymous U.S. administration officials to several of the major American media outlets. What is almost certain, judging from the leaks, are the following facts: A nuclear site built by the Syrians was attacked, and there was some connection to know-how and technology transferred from North Korea. The prevailing assumption is that it was a 5-megawatt nuclear reactor that was in stages of construction, that would have enabled Syria to produce plutonium to manufacture a nuclear bomb.

This assumption relies first and foremost on an analysis by scholar David Albright, director of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington (ISIS). Albright was part of the United Nations supervisory unit in Iraq that searched for weapons of mass destruction. In recent years, he and his institute have gained a reputation as experts in nuclear proliferation. He is considered close to the U.S. intelligence community and to have connections with the Israeli defense establishment.

A month ago Albright, as well as The Washington Post and The New York Times, published satellite photos of the site attacked in Syria. The photos were taken on August 10, 2007 and reveal a structure built adjacent to a hilly slope, not far from the Euphrates River. Incidentally, it would be interesting to learn who knew already then, about a month before the attack to take photographs of the Syrian structure from the satellite company DigitalGlobe.

A reactor without a dome

Albright compared the structure in Syria to satellite images of a structure located at the Yongbyon nuclear site in North Korea. The dimensions of the two structures are similar - about 48 by 32 meters and lacking a dome. The structure in North Korea is a nuclear research reactor built on the basis of a 1980 Chinese archetype. As opposed to the Western countries, in the Communist bloc countries, reactors commonly have a flat roof and lack a dome. For example, the reactor in Chernobyl, Ukraine, where the radioactive leakage disaster occurred in 1985, had no dome.

The official production capacity of the reaction in Yongbyon, which was fueled with enriched uranium, is 5 megawatts, but the experts estimate that in fact its capacity had been extended. Over the years, particularly during the period when North Korea was not under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it produced plutonium from the nuclear fuel rods. U.S. intelligence estimates that even after the nuclear test conducted about a year ago (a test which failed), North Korea still has reserves of about 40 kilograms of plutonium, which is sufficient to produce 10 atom bombs. This plutonium is not under supervision, and North Korea could have concealed it in its laboratories or sold it to another country - Syria, for example.

Albright's assessments, which hold that what was attacked in Syria was a nuclear reactor, have become

almost an authoritative voice. They have been unreservedly adopted all over the world, Israeli media included.

But Prof. Uzi Even of Tel Aviv University is challenging them here for the first time. On the basis of an analysis of the same satellite photos, which have been published in the media and on Web sites and are accessible to everyone, he believes that the structure that was attacked and destroyed was not a nuclear reactor. Even, a former Meretz MK, is a chemist who until 1968 worked at the nuclear reactor in Dimona (KAMAG - Hebrew for the Nuclear Research Center). For years he has been keeping track of, and writing about, Israel's nuclear policy and the proliferation of nuclear weapons worldwide.

Even's questions relate to several substantive issues. First, in the reactor in Yongbyon, one can clearly see a chimney, which is necessary for the emission of the radioactive gases (incidentally, based on the emission of the gases experts can determine the capacity of the reactor). In the satellite photos of the structure in Syria there is no chimney. It could be claimed that the Syrians may not have had time to build it. This is a reasonable answer, but it is overshadowed by the fact that there is evidence that the structure was under construction already four years ago. There are satellite photos of the site from 2003. In these photos one can clearly see in one of the building walls openings, which disappeared in the 2007 photos. "We can assume that construction began even before 2003," says Even. "In all those years, five years or even more, a chimney had still not been built? Very strange."

No less strange in his opinion is the fact that the "reactor" did not have cooling towers. The pumping station seen in the photos, 5 kilometers from the site, cannot, according to him, be a substitute for such towers. "A structure without cooling towers cannot be a reactor," he says, pointing to the satellite photo from Yongbyon, in which one can clearly see the cooling tower, with steam rising from it.

Another structure essential for a reactor is missing from the Syrian photos: a plutonium separation facility. As mentioned, the reactor is fueled by enriched uranium of fuel rods, which undergo a process of radiation. In order to turn them into plutonium, they have to be processed chemically in a plutonium separation facility.

And there is an additional question. If this was, in fact, a nuclear reactor, whose construction was not completed, clearly it would have taken the Syrians several years until they were able to operate it and produce plutonium. Why was Israel in a rush to attack a reactor that was under construction, years before it would have become operational? Was it willing to risk an all-out war with Syria because of a reactor in stages of construction? (A war Israel was afraid would erupt last summer, even without any connection to the nuclear issue.) This is very unlikely.

To give an example, the attack on the Iraqi reactor in 1981 was carried out very shortly before it would have become operational. From this, we may conclude that a nuclear reactor under construction, which is far from endangering Israel, should not have been a worthy target for attack.

Even more dangerous

All these explanations and others lead Even to believe that what was destroyed was not a nuclear reactor. If this is the case, what was the purpose of the structure?

"In my estimation this was something very nasty and vicious, and even more dangerous than a reactor,"

says Even. "I have no information, only an assessment, but I suspect that it was a plant for processing plutonium, namely a factory for assembling the bomb."

In other words, Syria already had several kilograms of plutonium, and it was involved in building a bomb factory (the assembling of one bomb requires about four kilograms of fissionable material).

Processing the plutonium and assembling the bomb require utmost caution, because plutonium is one of the most toxic and radioactive materials. One microgram can kill one person, and a gram is capable of killing a million people. Handling it requires special lathes, but because of its lethal nature nobody is allowed to come into direct contact with plutonium or with the lathes. That is why there is a need to build labs containing dozens of glove boxes, which isolate and separate the worker from the material and the equipment.

What reinforces Even's suspicion that the structure attacked in Syria was in fact a bomb assembly plant is the fact that the satellite photos taken after the bombing clearly show that the Syrians made an effort to bury the entire site under piles of earth. "They did so because of the lethal nature of the material that was in the structure, and that can be plutonium," he said. That may also be the reason they refused to allow IAEA inspectors to visit the site and take samples of the earth, which would give away their secret.

Another piece of information crucial for reinforcing Even's assumption is the scant attention paid in the Israeli media to an op-ed published last month in The Wall Street Journal by two members of the U.S. Congress, Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Hoekstra is the senior Republican member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and Ros-Lehtinen is the senior Republican member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. They expressed their anger at the fact that the Bush administration "has thrown an unprecedented veil of secrecy around the Israeli airstrike. It has briefed only a handful of very senior members of Congress, leaving the vast majority of foreign relations and intelligence committee members in the dark. We are among the very few who were briefed, but we have been sworn to secrecy on this matter."

They write in the article that Syria received "nuclear expertise or material" from North Korea, and in the same breath they mention Iran, without explaining why. They claim that the administration leaks are intentionally vague: to justify the Israeli attack but also to blur North Korea's part in the affair.

The two Congressmen have a clear agenda: They want the administration to remove the cloak of secrecy and tell the members of Congress and the public the truth about what happened, in the belief that such information will lead the majority in Congress to understand that the negotiations with North Korea should be stopped.

North Korea's consent to shut down the Yongbyon reactor and to allow renewed international monitoring of it (although it is not clear what will happen to the fissionable material in its possession - enriched plutonium and uranium), was achieved after exhausting contacts that lasted for about five years, with China, Russia, the U.S., Japan and South Korea. In exchange, North Korea will receive economic assistance and fuel. Hoekstra and Ros-Lehtinen are apparently aware that revealing the truth about North Korea's role will lead to pressure on the U.S. administration to discontinue the contacts with the regime in Pyongyang. But for exactly the same reason, the administration is not interested in doing so, particularly not at this sensitive time when it is trying to prevent Iran's nuclear program.

And what about Israel? Wasn't it in Israel's interest to publicize what was bombed in Syria? Of course it was. Even more so if this was a plant for assembling a nuclear bomb based on information, technology and fissionable material that Syria received from North Korea, perhaps with the knowledge and consent of Iran, or even more than that.

Then why is Israel insisting on continuing to maintain total secrecy? The only logical explanation (except for the embarrassment of Syrian President Bashar Assad, which doesn't particularly bother Israel), is the desire not to make things hard for the U.S. Administration.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071129/FOREIGN/111290086/1001>

U.S. to hold N. Korea to nuclear promises

By Nicholas Kralev

November 29, 2007

The chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea, concerned that Pyongyang might fail to provide a full declaration of its nuclear-related materials and activities by year's end, as it has promised, will return to the North on Monday, U.S. officials said yesterday.

The envoy, Christopher R. Hill, whose visit will be the second in less than six months, warned of a "crisis" if North Korea's list falls short of a "full disclosure."

Mr. Hill intends to tell the North Koreans what the United States expects to see on the list and plans to press them particularly on two main issues: their suspected uranium-enrichment program and the exact number and type of their nuclear weapons, diplomats said.

"Whatever declaration they make needs to be full and complete with respect to their nuclear program," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. "It's going to be an important element of what they produce as part of their commitments under the six-party talks."

An incomplete list would stall the six-nation process that envisions the North dismantling its nuclear programs in exchange for political and economic rewards from the United States, South Korea, China, Japan and Russia.

"The data declaration will be a critical test of the North's real willingness to give up its nuclear weapons," said Bruce Klingner, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

The uranium-enrichment issue appears to be the most challenging, diplomats and analysts said. Washington accused North Korea of pursuing such a program in 2002, based on information from Pakistan that it had sold the North centrifuges and other related materials.

Pyongyang has repeatedly denied the U.S. claim, and the Bush administration has refused to share proof even with its closest Asian allies.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf wrote about the North Korean purchases from the shadowy network of A.Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani atom bomb, in his autobiography "In the Line of Fire," which he promoted last year on U.S. TV talk shows.

Although the North is said to have admitted to acquiring various materials that could be used in a uranium-enrichment program, it is still refusing to acknowledge possessing centrifuges, the core element in such a program.

"If there is even the slightest doubt in the international community that a uranium-enrichment program exists, the North Koreans will play on that doubt," said Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow in foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution.

"This will probably be a tactical negotiation, though they would be better off making a clean decision" to disclose everything they have, he said.

Mr. O'Hanlon and other analysts said the North Koreans could be holding on to the centrifuges card to force the United States to take them off its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The other thorny issue is the number of the North's plutonium-based weapons. The chief North Korean negotiator, Kim Kye-gwan, has said that neither the number nor the exact type will be disclosed, but Mr. Hill has made it clear he expects to see that information in the declaration.

Another matter — the clarity of which is far from certain — is the North's proliferation activities.

Following an Israeli air strike on a suspected nuclear facility in Syria that may have been housing materials from North Korea, President Bush said Pyongyang had agreed in an Oct. 3 six-party statement to provide "a full declaration of any proliferation activities."

The document in question does say that the North is "committed not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how," but when it comes to the declaration, it says it "will include all nuclear facilities, materials and programs." There is no mention of documenting proliferation activities.

Mr. Klingner said Mr. Bush "may have inadvertently raised the bar."

Mr. Hill said during a stop in Japan yesterday that, in addition to Pyongyang, he would visit the North's main nuclear complex in Yongbyon, whose main facilities are currently being disabled as part of the Oct. 3 agreement.

"I think we are making progress and clearly we have more to do, but I think we are on schedule for getting to the end of the year and getting all our commitments done," Mr. Hill told reporters in Tokyo.

Mystery still surrounds Israel's attack by the Euphrates

von Daniel Dombey (Washington)

FTD.de, 29.11.2007

If it was a Syrian nuclear reactor built with North Korean aid, nobody is talking.

Rarely does President George W. Bush bite his lip when discussing "axis of evil" states such as Syria and North Korea.

But for more than two months Mr Bush has done just that when asked about a September 6 Israeli strike on a mysterious Syrian site. So has every other US administration official speaking on the record, as well as the Israeli government itself, fuelling a continuing controversy about the incident.

"This is not my first rodeo," Mr Bush said at a press conference last month after being asked about the incident at least six times. "And I know where you're trying to get me to comment. I'm not going to comment on it, one way or the other."

This uncharacteristically taciturn approach has angered some of the president's Republican supporters, amid a series of newspaper reports that the Syrian site was a nuclear reactor built with North Korean help. But as the weeks since the Israeli raid pass, more questions than answers have surfaced about what precisely the Israelis hit.

The Republican anger has been displayed by legislators such as Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, respectively the senior Republican members of the House of Representatives committees on intelligence and foreign affairs. Among a select handful of congressmen briefed on the incident by Michael McConnell, the US's director of national intelligence, they did not respond to the briefing as intended, calling instead for the administration to come clean publicly about what had occurred.

"Until Congress is fully briefed it would be imprudent for the administration to move forward with agreements with state proliferators," they said in the Wall Street Journal, in reference to the six-party talks on Korea's nuclear programme.

John Bolton, formerly Mr Bush's ambassador to the UN, argues that the administration is unduly preoccupied with reaching a deal in those negotiations and with the forthcoming international conference in Annapolis, Maryland, on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, to which Syria is likely to be invited.

"There's a growing suspicion that the veil of secrecy about Syria doesn't have so much to do with intelligence as with protecting the six-party talks and the Annapolis conference," Mr Bolton says. "Israeli government officials have told me that Secretary [Condoleezza] Rice told them in no uncertain terms that the information [about the attack] better not come from them."

David Albright, a respected former United Nations weapons inspector, has used satellite imagery to argue that the Israelis probably attacked an installation on the Euphrates river at Dawar az Zawr, eastern Syria, which was similar in shape to North Korea's Yongbyon reactor.

"I believe pretty strongly that Israel thinks it attacked a nuclear reactor and that the US didn't say they were wrong," he says, adding that his suspicions were heightened by the recent addition of a pump house that could supply water for a reactor, and further images that showed Syria razed the site after the Israelis struck.

"The recent photo evidence showing the Syrians clearing the sites indicated that they are clearly trying to hide something," says Joe Cirincione, a non proliferation expert at the Centre for American Progress. He says that the evidence so far "tilts towards the theory that it was a reactor in Syria but does not establish it".

But he adds: "There's no evidence it was an imminent threat," arguing that if there was a reactor, it was probably years from producing plutonium and that Syria lacks a reprocessing facility to turn its spent reactor fuel into plutonium.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's Vienna-based nuclear watchdog, is also not convinced the site was a reactor.

Diplomats in Vienna warn against relying on satellite photos, saying that it is quite possible that the installation was no more than the adjunct of a chemical facility or a shed used to make agricultural equipment. They add that they were surprised that the site lacked a security fence, an unusual omission in a top secret facility.

"I am amazed that people can say they know the function of an installation just because they see its dimensions," adds Jeffrey Lewis, an arms control expert at the New America Foundation. "It's a box on a river." He adds that, far from being in a remote site, the Dawar az Zawr facility is just over a mile from a well-known tourist site in Halabiya, from which rafting trips down the Euphrates can be organised.

Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad says the Israeli aircraft hit a disused military building with "nothing in it".

The mystery may not continue indefinitely: under the talks framework, North Korea is due to give an account of its nuclear activities by the end of the year. And so far, despite Mr Bolton's concerns, the events in Syria have not interrupted those negotiations.

"The opponents of the six-party talks wanted to use this strike to kill this deal," said Mr Cirincione. "But the president isn't having it."

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/syria-israel-peace-talks-plan/2007/11/29/1196037074419.html>

Syria, Israel peace talks plan

Robin Wright

November 30, 2007

RUSSIA and the US are tentatively planning a second Middle East peace conference, in Moscow in early 2008, with major parties hoping to begin a comprehensive peace effort that would include direct talks between Israel and Syria.

Syria's delegate to this week's talks in Annapolis said that Damascus wanted the Moscow gathering to begin negotiations between Syria and Israel over the Golan Heights, a border region seized by Israel during the 1967 War.

"It is our hope that we can revive the Syrian track in Moscow," Syria's deputy Foreign Minister, Fayssal Mekdad, said.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert indicated that he hoped at some point to resume talks with Syria, but cautioned that the time is not yet ripe. He said Syria must change its behaviour, notably its support for Hezbollah.

But the presence of a Syrian delegation in Annapolis "may be the beginning of a reconsideration" on the part of Damascus, he said.

Mr Olmert said US President George Bush indicated privately that he had no objection to an Israeli dialogue with Syria if Israel determined this was in its own interest. Mr Bush's only admonition to the Israelis, he said, was: "Don't surprise us."

After talks at the White House, Mr Bush promised Mr Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas his full support to overcome deep doubts on whether new peace talks could yield an accord next year.

Mr Abbas and Mr Olmert were to return home to confront sharp scepticism from friends and foes alike over the peace drive.

Mr Bush, who called Middle East peace "something we all want", did not invite Mr Abbas or Mr Olmert to speak at the event in the White House Rose Garden, and the three leaders did not shake hands. The muted moment was in sharp contrast to the ebullient 1993 handshake on the South Lawn between the then US president, Bill Clinton, the late Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, and the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The new peace push won a cautious show of support from the 22-member Arab League, whose chief, Amr Mussa, cited "misgivings" but warily welcomed the agreement to thaw negotiations that have been frozen during President Bush's seven years in office.

WASHINGTON POST, With AFP

The Israeli Attack in Syria and The State Department Response

Fri, 2007-11-30 05:37

By Herbert London

The veil of secrecy surrounding the Israel invasion of what is alleged to be a Syrian nuclear facility on September 6 is understandable. Israel is not willing to disclose its military capabilities and technical advantages.

On the other hand, the secrecy is having and will continue to have a profoundly negative effect on United States' diplomatic credibility. Since North Korea was involved in one way or another with the Syrian facility either by providing enriched uranium, nuclear technology or plutonium, it makes sense to discuss Kim Il Jung's pernicious role in exporting nuclear material.

Yet the State Department, leading a discussion in the Six Party talks over North Korea's nuclear capability, does not want to upset the so-called apple-cart by describing North Korea's malevolent influence. Silence in this case is deadly, but the State Department goal is an agreement, however empty the ultimate result might be.

What hasn't been seriously entertained is the influence of silence on the talks in Annapolis and back channel conversations with the Iranians. If the United States chooses to avert its gaze to North Korea's mischief, the message being conveyed is that you can get away with a great deal if you negotiate with the U.S. and offer the illusion of conciliation.

In fact, diplomacy has become a weapon used against this government by our enemies mindful of our energetic pursuit of treaties. This is the twenty-first century version of the Munich Accord with appeasement the goal for State Department officials who do not know how to say "no."

Moreover, the hidden message at Annapolis is the U.S. wants a deal even if it means giving tacit support to terrorists and selling out our allies. What other conclusion can one reach if we are unwilling to blow the whistle on North Korean nuclear exports.

For some who believe it always pays to talk to adversaries (Obama Barack comes to mind), it should be noted that negotiations can serve as a cover for violent acts. In the haste to produce an "understanding" the U.S. can overlook or rationalize any action that might jeopardize a treaty. Yet as history has demonstrated treaties are worthless if one of the parties chooses to ignore its terms. Think of the Kellogg-Briand pact or the Locarno Treaty.

It should be noted that in addition to the dissemination of nuclear material, the North Koreans have provided every rogue state in the Middle East with missile technology to deliver weapons of mass destruction. The SCUD arsenal in Iran, for example, has its provenance in North Korea.

There are times in foreign affairs when silence is golden. As already noted, I can appreciate Israel's reluctance to discuss details of its September 6 attack. But the U.S. is in a different position vis-à-vis North Korea and its involvement with possible Syrian nuclear material. This disclosure warrants transparency in my judgment.

Unfortunately the State Department wants deals more than disclosure. As a consequence, the full story of North Korea's involvement with Syria won't be known in the short term. But there is something we do know: Israel would not have attacked unless the material in question was a direct threat to its security and Syria would not have cleaned up the site unless the material might prove to be an embarrassment.

What we also know is North Korea's involvement in this imbroglio, since a North Korean vessel carrying sensitive material was monitored by Israeli surveillance satellites days before it arrived in Syria. The key question that remains open is why the State Department maintains secrecy about this matter. But, than again, I think I know the answer to this question.

[Herbert London is president of Hudson Institute and professor emeritus of New York University. He is the author of *Decade of Denial* \(Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001\).](#)

Obstacles Loom in NKorea Nuclear Talks

By FOSTER KLUG – Dec 1, 2007

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as the Bush administration marks unprecedented progress in North Korean nuclear disarmament talks, two looming impediments could undermine years of delicate negotiations.

One is a suspicion, especially among U.S. conservatives, that North Korea has helped Syria pursue a nuclear weapons program. Such cooperation would raise the specter of a country that boasts nuclear weapons providing atomic assistance to a nation Washington considers hostile and a sponsor of terrorism.

The other issue is the U.S. claim the North pursued a secret uranium enrichment program, as well as its known plutonium production. A 1994 nuclear deal collapsed after the United States confronted the North with the uranium claim in 2002; years of acrimony and stalemate followed, culminating in a North Korean nuclear test last year.

North Korea is required to provide a list outlining all its nuclear programs by year-end as part of a six-nation disarmament process, and the United States will be pushing for credible details about these two sensitive issues to allow President Bush to move the accord forward.

Bush is looking to North Korean disarmament as a way to burnish a legacy beleaguered by Iraq. A failure could turn into a political issue ahead of next year's presidential and congressional elections.

The North's nuclear declaration will top the agenda of Christopher Hill, the lead U.S. envoy at the nuclear talks, during his trip this week to the country.

"Chris Hill's credibility is really tied to the North Koreans coming clean on some type of uranium program," said Ralph Cossa, president of the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. "If they don't do that, it's going to be extremely difficult" for the administration to sell the deal.

On Sept. 6, Israeli warplanes struck a target in Syria, which, according to media reports quoting unidentified U.S. officials, was a nuclear facility linked to North Korea. Some congressional staffers caution that the reports have not been supported by any public evidence.

At private talks Nov. 16 in New York, attended by current and former U.S. officials and North Korean government representatives, members of the American delegation pressed the North to provide details about any nuclear ties with Syria.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Victor Cha, a former White House adviser on North Korea, and others argued that it would be difficult to take the North off a U.S. list of state sponsors of terror, a crucial North Korean demand in nuclear talks, if there were a lack of clarity about whether the North had provided nuclear cooperation to Syria, according to a person at the meeting. Syria also is on the terror list.

Another participant said the Americans did not appear to have specific information about North Korean-Syrian nuclear dealings, aside from the news reports. The participant described the exchange as people with an interest in the nuclear talks' success trying to share with the North Koreans their anxiety over the reports.

Both people spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private.

U.S. lawmakers wary of the North Korean negotiations have seized on the Syrian issue to urge caution.

Writing in The Wall Street Journal, Republican Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Peter Hoekstra urged the Bush administration to provide information about the Israeli attack. The administration, they wrote, has "thrown an unprecedented veil of secrecy around the Israeli airstrike."

Syria has denied repeatedly that it is building a nuclear facility. North Korea denies accusations it has spread its nuclear expertise beyond its borders.

U.S. diplomats are pressing North Korea for a "serious and credible" nuclear declaration, and Hill has said he expects to have intense discussions about the list during his trip to the North.

North Korea has said it does not have a uranium program; the United States says, however, that in 2002 North Korea's government privately acknowledged a program in talks with Hill's predecessor. The United States alleges the North's uranium program was created with help from a nuclear black market run by A.Q. Khan, the founder of Pakistan's atomic weapons program.

Jack Pritchard, the State Department's chief North Korea expert until 2003, said Hill probably will use the North Koreans' desire to be removed from the U.S. terrorism blacklist to push them to outline their uranium efforts.

North Korea already has begun disabling its main nuclear facilities under an agreement with the other countries at the talks — China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States. Washington hopes to use the North's declaration as a guide to nuclear programs to be dismantled by the end of next year.

Robert Gallucci, a former U.S. diplomat who signed the 1994 nuclear deal with the North, said the current accord is unclear about how to "deal with gaps between what we expect they should be declaring and what they may declare."

If North Korea does not offer a serious declaration, he said, "not only will conservatives — who are all geared up to throw mud at this thing — I think even others of us, who really want a deal to work, will say, 'Well, wait a minute, you really have to achieve some reasonable level of transparency.'"

Israel's wings clipped by U.S. report on Iran

By Dan Williams

December 5, 2007

MYT 5:15:47 AM

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - A public difference of opinion between Israel and its U.S. ally about intelligence on Iran's nuclear capability will make it harder for the Jewish state to launch any unilateral preemptive strike on Iran's nuclear sites.

A U.S. National Intelligence Estimates (NIE) report on Monday said Iran had a nuclear arms project but shelved it in 2003, posing an unprecedentedly overt challenge to Israel's assertions that its arch-foe was bent on acquiring a bomb.

Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert attends a ceremony marking the first night of the Hanukkah festival at a military base near West Bank city of Nablus, December 4, 2007. (REUTERS/Oleg Popov) Though the NIE said Iranian uranium enrichment facilities may produce warheads in the next decade, its refusal to perceive an imminent threat sent shockwaves through Israel, which is more used to having Washington endorse its regional strategic vision.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, faced with doubts by some U.N. Security Council powers on the need to press sanctions against Tehran, urged that diplomatic pressure be intensified.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak suggested that American spies had suffered a "disconnect". He later said Israel would pursue "various options" against Iran, but did not elaborate.

The remarks fell far short of past hints that Israel, which is widely assumed to possess the Middle East's only atomic arsenal, could go it alone and hit Iran if it deemed diplomacy a dead end in removing what it sees as a threat to its existence.

"What this report means is that there will be no preemptive U.S. military action against Iran in the foreseeable future," said a recently retired Israeli government intelligence analyst.

"That means there will be no U.S. 'green light' for Israeli strikes. It looks like a done deal," said the ex-analyst, who declined to be named given the sensitivity of the subject.

The report came amid mounting speculation that President George W. Bush could launch U.S. military action before he leaves office in January 2009, even though Washington says it is committed to resolving the Iranian stand-off diplomatically.

Bush said he read the NIE report as a warning about Iran's latent capabilities: "Iran was dangerous. Iran is dangerous." Israeli media reported that Bush planned to come to Israel in January -- his first visit as president -- to show solidarity.

Whether or not Israel -- which drew brief censure from U.S. President Ronald Reagan by bombing

Iraq's reactor in 1981 -- would set itself a condition of winning Washington's assent to similarly take on Iran is a matter of some debate.

EXPECTING SURPRISES

Israel, which has peace deals with only two of the surrounding Arab states, depends on the United States for \$2.8 billion in annual defence aid and diplomatic backing at the United Nations, where it is often assailed for its treatment of the Palestinians.

"I don't think the Israelis ever asked us permission to do anything," said one senior U.S. official with knowledge of Israel's military affairs. "If they attack Iran, you can be sure it will be in a way that's hugely surprising for everyone."

A retired Israeli diplomat with defence planning experience said secrecy was key. For high-risk missions like a long-range bombing run, he said, "it would be unwise to check in, even with our closest allies, ahead of time".

But Israel would not want angry allies after the event.

The retired Israeli diplomat allowed that the NIE report complicated any Israeli plan to attack Iran, which has denied seeking nuclear weapons and vowed to retaliate for such strikes with missile salvos on Israel and U.S. targets in the Gulf.

"You resort to force of arms when you feel all other options have been exhausted, and then you explain yourself -- both to your own countrymen, as required in a democracy, and to the world at large," the retired diplomat said.

"This report requires that Israel, which now appears isolated and alarmist, work extra hard to build its case."

Top Israeli officials have been meeting regularly with U.S. counterparts for closed-door discussions on Iran. The former Israeli intelligence analyst said the NIE's conclusions suggested Israel has had a problem winning over the Americans: "Surely if we had hard proof that Iran was about to go nuclear, it would have affected the report's conclusions?"

The retired diplomat pointed to Israel's Sept. 6 air strike on northern Syria as a possible precedent for an attack on Iran.

Israel and the United States have not given details on the Syrian target, which analysts speculated was a nascent nuclear reactor. Syria denied having any such project.

"Look at how muted the world reaction was to whatever happened in Syria. If you don't admit anything, then you can't be held to account," the retired diplomat said.

Israel may not be equipped to repeat its Syria or Iraqi sorties in Iran, whose nuclear facilities are distant, numerous and well-fortified.

North Korea and Syria

by Victor Cha

Updated Dec.7,2007 09:35 KST

In the coming days, there is an entirely real possibility that the White House will notify the U.S. Congress of its intention to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, opening a path toward eventual diplomatic normalization with a country that the U.S. has technically been at war with since 1950. This move would reflect a more pragmatically-oriented policy toward the reclusive nuclear state by President George W. Bush in his second term that balanced his strong disapproval of the Pyongyang regime's human rights abuses with practical diplomacy aimed at getting North Korean leader Kim Jong-il out of the nuclear weapons business. His able negotiator Ambassador Christopher Hill has succeeded in utilizing the multilateral six-party talks to leverage U.S. and Chinese diplomatic pressure on the North while also giving Pyongyang ample opportunities for bilateral talks with the U.S. which it so badly seeks. President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have given Hill enough negotiating room to show that Washington is serious about finding a solution to this problem. The policy has garnered unanimous support in Asia and bipartisan support at home. However this policy has not come without cost. Bush's second term flexibility on North Korea has not sat well with the conservative core of the Republican Party and has elicited bold criticism from former senior officials like John Bolton.

The next phase of the negotiations appears to be moving along. North Korea is working methodically through 11 steps to disable the reactor at Yongbyon, and is required to provide a nuclear declaration by Dec. 31. In exchange for this, the U.S., China, Russia, and South Korea would provide energy assistance, and in an apparent side agreement, the U.S. has promised to delist North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and remove economic sanctions that have been in place since the Korean War. Make no mistake, if the North disables and declares by the end of 2007, the Bush administration will have gone further in denuclearizing North Korea than any previous U.S. administration. Pyongyang would no longer be able to make plutonium for nuclear weapons; it will have fessed up on its secret uranium-based nuclear program which led to the breakdown of the Clinton-era agreement; and American and other inspectors would be on the ground in the closed communist state verifying all of this. This would be an unadulterated success.

So what's the problem? The prospect of delisting North Korea from the terrorism list has elicited some grumbling from Japan. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda came to the White House last week to remind President Bush that North Korea needs to come clean on citizens it has abducted from Japan in order to get taken off the list. There is widespread agreement that progress on this issue is needed such that the U.S. does not abandon its most important ally in Asia.

But the real problem is Syria. The silence from all circles has been deafening following the Israeli attack on what is believed to be a Syrian nuclear facility built with cooperation from North Korea. One assumes the silence stems in part from the fact that no one wants to be on record characterizing intelligence, and there are probably debates taking place about the nature of the cooperation and whether it continued after the six-party denuclearization agreements in 2005 and 2007.

Some hardliners within the Bush administration have apparently tried to use the Syria revelations as a deal-breaker for North Korea and move to a containment-type policy. But this neither solves the North Korea nuclear weapons problem, nor the potential proliferation problem. The answer is to stick with the negotiations and to get to the year-end goal of disabling the North's bomb-making capabilities.

The second part of the deal -- the nuclear declaration -- becomes infinitely more crucial, however. If Pyongyang is serious about being removed from the terrorism list, then its declaration must include a full disclosure of any nuclear cooperation with Syria or others. This does not need to be public, for reasons of face, but if and when President Bush notifies Congress of his intention to delist North Korea from the terrorism list, then he needs to be able to assure Congress and the world that Pyongyang is out of any nuclear business with states currently on the list. If he cannot do this, then the U.S. should find a formula short of fully delisting North Korea. The North Koreans, South Koreans, and Chinese might respond that Washington needs to fulfill its end of the bargain and not impose new conditions in order to show political will and commitment. This is a false charge. No party has shown more political commitment to this negotiation than the U.S. to the extent that Bush and Rice may even be overexposed on the policy today. They certainly would be if the North's declaration offered no transparency on Syria.

Victor Cha is Director of Asian Studies and D.S. Song Professor at Georgetown University. From 2004 to 2007 he was Director of Asian Affairs at the White House and deputy head of the U.S. delegation to the six-party talks.

GLOBE EDITORIAL

The conversion of George Bush

December 9, 2007

IF THERE was any lingering doubt that President Bush is moving away from his original, imperious style of statecraft, the personal letter he sent last week to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il should dispel that doubt for good. In the past, Bush said he loathed Kim, calling him a tyrant and a pygmy. Yet in the letter that was hand-delivered to Kim by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, Bush addressed the recipient as “Dear Mr. Chairman” and concluded with the polite farewell formula, “Sincerely, George Bush.”

Such a letter from any of Bush’s recent predecessors would have been unremarkable. Coming from him, however, it heralds a longoverdue and much-needed conversion.

After wasting six years refusing to conduct genuine negotiations with North Korea — years in which that country produced enough plutonium for eight to 10 nuclear weapons — Bush finally rejected the futile policy of administration hardliners and backed Hill’s diplomatic efforts to negotiate an agreement that could lead to the dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear weapons, materials, and facilities.

Bush’s letter to Kim Jong Il was needed at this stage of the process Hill negotiated. North Korea has complied with its initial obligations by disabling its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. Now it must make a complete declaration not only of all its nuclear materials and weapons, but also of past transfers of nuclear goods or know-how to other countries. This commitment takes on special significance if North Korea was involved with the alleged nuclear site in Syria that Israel destroyed in September.

The declaration is due in the next few weeks, though Kim was not expected to come clean all at once. Past practice suggests he is more likely to parcel out the truth in installments, testing Washington’s adherence to its commitments and eliciting the highest possible price, in economic and political benefits, for each disclosure.

Kim’s goal in striking a deal was to end hostile relations with the United States. So, Bush’s letter was meant to show not only that he stands behind Hill’s promises, but also that Kim can achieve normalized relations with the United States if North Korea’s nuclear declaration is “complete and accurate.”

By engaging with the North Korean dictator, Bush is emulating not only Bill Clinton but also his own father, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon, John Kennedy, and Dwight Eisenhower. They negotiated and made deals with Soviet leaders, Mao Zedong, and North Vietnam’s communist regime. From ancient Athens until now, the rules for statecraft have been unalterable. The neoconservative notion that one must never negotiate with evil — but only destroy it — was always a doctrinal delusion. Now that Bush seems to have learned this lesson, he would be well advised to apply it to Iran and Syria.

'Sun, Stand Still'

By: Avraham Shmuel Lewin

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Ze'ev Raz was the leader of the IDF attack force that bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1981. Today he works at Elta Systems LTD, one of Israel's leading defense electronics companies and a subdivision of Israel Aerospace Industries.

The Jewish Press met recently with the former IAF pilot to get his thoughts on the Israeli bombing in September of an alleged nuclear facility in Syria; on Israel's options in dealing with what Israeli leaders still consider a very real Iranian nuclear threat; and on what went through his mind as he carried out one of the most daring military actions in Israel's history.

The Jewish Press: Do you have any special insight into what exactly Israel did in Syria this past September?

Raz: We still don't know what actually transpired in Syria. It seems there was nuclear activity there that originated from North Korea. Of course, if we see an enemy country engaged in nuclear activity, it doesn't mean we automatically must rush in and bomb it. To this day Shimon Peres says – and he bases this on what several nuclear experts told him – that even if we hadn't bombed Iraq 26 years ago, the Iraqis still wouldn't be able to produce a nuclear bomb.

But of course, what went on in Syria in cooperation with North Korea smelled so bad that even a dovish Mapainik like the late Moshe Sharett (who opposed the Sinai Campaign in 1956) would have supported bombing the Syrian facility.

Even before the U.S. released its new intelligence findings stating that Iran allegedly suspended its nuclear program in 2003, Israel seemed undecided about launching a strike a la the 1981 operation in Iraq. What's your view on this?

Any preemptive Israeli strike against Iran would be potentially beneficial to Israel – but also very risky. Why do you think there was such a heated debate in 1981 about whether to approve the bombing of Iraq?

In hindsight it appears that bombing Iraq was the obvious thing to do because it was successful. But try to look at it through the eyes of Ezer Weizman or Yigal Yadin or Yosef Burg in 1981 when they had to make a decision. They said, "Look, we just signed a peace treaty with Egypt, and in the end the Arabs will have a nuclear bomb anyway, you can't stop it forever, and they know we have one so if they try to do something they'll be wiped off the map. So why bomb Iraq? What do you expect Israel to do, go after every country that has an atomic bomb and bomb it?"

This was the thinking of people like Weizman, Yadin, Burg, Shimon Peres and others. They thought the peace treaty with Egypt would break down because of this action. They were mistaken, but no one could know this in advance.

Begin himself didn't know whether bombing Iraq would break the treaty with Egypt, but he said that Saddam Hussein having an atomic bomb was a greater threat to Israel than the loss of a peace treaty with Egypt. My personal opinion, by the way, is that Begin anyway had started having second thoughts about the treaty he signed with Egypt.

So in retrospect you have no doubt Israel was right in bombing the Iraqi reactor?

Now, post factum, it's obvious we had to do it. But again, before we actually did it we really didn't know what the diplomatic fallout would be, nor did we know for sure whether the action would succeed and that all of our planes and pilots would return home safely.

It never dawned on us that the Iraqis would do absolutely nothing to stop us and so many other things would work in our favor.

Considering that in 1981 Israel did not hesitate to tell the world it was responsible for taking out Iraq's reactor, why all the secrecy about what transpired in Syria in September?

That's a very good question. My opinion – I can't prove it but I have no other explanation – is that in 1981 Israel admitted to it because it was right before the elections. I remember distinctly the chief of staff telling us we won't admit to anything and we should keep our mouths shut and act as though we know nothing – just as the government does now with Syria.

Suddenly, the day after the attack, I heard on the radio that Israel said it bombed Iraq. I was in total shock. When I returned from the mission I hadn't even told my family where I'd been.

Some Israelis actually accused Begin, who was in the midst of a very tough fight for reelection, of ordering the raid to drive up his approval ratings.

Yes, I recall there were people who said at the time that Begin approved the action because of the upcoming elections, but in my opinion that is not true and just puts those who said it in a bad light. And I say this as someone who did not vote for Begin.

He approved the attack not because of the elections but because of what I heard our Intelligence tell him. They said, Listen, if you're going to wait until 1982 the reactor will be hot and active and there will be a lot of radiation (like what happened in Chernobyl in 1986), so wipe it out now before it has a chance to become active.

I think he did the right thing.

Look, when we received our reactor in Dimona from France, its output was so low that it didn't have what it would take to build a nuclear bomb. So what did we do? We raised its output. We were sure that eventually the Iraqis would do the same thing – raise the output of their reactor and in the end produce a bomb.

Assuming the Iranians are still, or will soon resume, actively working on developing a nuclear capability, it will be much more difficult for Israel to do in Iran what it did in Iraq in 1981. In light of that, is there any way Israel could deliver the kind of blow that would prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb?

Even if we succeed in an attack on Iran, it will not be long before the Iranians are again actively involved in trying to build a nuclear capability. In fact, an Israeli attack will give them even more motivation to do so. So even if we bomb Iran, the effect will be similar to that of a temporary painkiller.

Of course I hope that if we do attack we will be successful and all our pilots will return home safely. It will be much harder than what we did in Iraq. Among other factors, we didn't have to refuel in the air when we attacked Iraq but you can't fly to Iran and back without refueling in the air.

You know, one of the planes that bombed Iraq was manned by Ilan Ramon, who perished in the NASA space shuttle accident several years ago. He was the youngest one among us and the only one not yet married.

He was our navigator, in charge of fuel, etc. When I was told what we were being asked to do in Iraq, I went to Ilan and asked him if it were possible to return to Israel after the strike without refueling. To get there was no problem, but how about getting back? He said that in fact we didn't have enough fuel, and so we'd have to do all kinds of tricks to get back safely.

Can you describe the feeling you had when you bombed the reactor?

I felt I had a big z'chus, or privilege. It was very difficult for me to become a pilot. I was a weak pilot in the beginning. And now here I was, entrusted with carrying out such a mission. I felt a huge responsibility, as if the whole project rested on my shoulders and if I made the slightest mistake everything would be doomed and I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror. That is why the only thing that was on my mind was to find the target.

It's like the story of the old Chinese hunter who is about to die and calls in his three sons to decide who among them would inherit his bow and arrow.

He asks the first son, "What do you see?"

He says, "I see you and everybody around us, a window, and outside the window there is a tree and on it a bird."

The father says, "No, you're not a hunter."

He asks the second son what he sees. "I see a window and outside the window a tree with a bird on it," he tells his father.

The father says, "You're not a hunter either." Then he asks the third son what he sees and the third son simply says, "I see a bird." The father says, "You are a hunter because a hunter only sees his target."

That is what went through my mind the whole time – "Where is the target, where is the target?"

By the way, none of us thought – not even in the IDF General Staff – that we would all come back alive.

Are you saying that when each of you took off you said goodbye to Israel and goodbye to your life?

Absolutely. Maybe some of us would come back, but we were sure there was no way that everyone would. So as far as each of us, individually, was concerned, it was our last day on earth.

Doesn't that thought go through every pilot on this type of mission?

Yes, but in this case the risk was much greater. And yet things happened there that to this day we have no explanation for. For instance, according to all calculations the Iraqi radar systems were supposed to have spotted us at least 15 minutes before the bombing despite the fact that we flew at very low altitude.

That's why we had eight and not four F-16 fighters, because we thought for sure the Iraqis would spot us and send several MIGs to try to down us. We thought we would encounter heavy resistance.

Don't forget, the Iraqis were threatened by Iran too, so for sure they had their radar system and fighter MIGs on alert. We never thought we would take them by such complete surprise. But they didn't do a thing.

Here is another inexplicable thing: King Hussein was vacationing in Aqaba and saw us on our way toward Iraq. He immediately phoned Amman – our intelligence picked up the whole conversation then – and reported it to them. But those idiots ignored it and didn't do anything.

The way you are describing it, it sounds like an outright miracle.

Absolutely. Of course it was a miracle. How is it possible that even after we bombed the reactor not one plane tried to down us?

I'll tell you something else: It takes an hour and a half to get back from Iraq to Israel and we were flying 40,000 feet above the ground. The General Staff originally wanted us to carry out the bombing after sunset so it would be harder for the Iraqis to attack us on the way back. But I was opposed to that. I thought if we did the bombing after sunset there wouldn't be enough light and our planes would miss their target – so I insisted that the bombing take place before sunset.

As a result, we flew back as the sun was setting. But since the planes were traveling at such a fast speed, the sun was out all the time and never set. It was as though it remained standing in the middle of the horizon.

At that time we pilots all radioed each other reciting the same exact biblical verse – Joshua 10:12: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and moon, over the Valley of Ayalon."

You know, as I am recalling this now I am getting goose bumps.

9 Tevet 5768, December 18, '07

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Ex-US Ambassador to UN John Bolton Speaks on Arutz-7

9 Tevet 5768, 18 December 07 05:52

by Hillel Fendel

(IsraelNN.com) John Bolton, who served as the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations from August 2005 to December 2006, spoke with IsraelNationalRadio's Tovia Singer about the recent Bush Administration intelligence report on Iran's nuclear capabilities. The controversial diplomat said the report was more political than intelligence-based, and that it was meant only to undercut President Bush's policies on Iran.

Singer began by asking Bolton, author of a recent book entitled, *Surrender is Not an Option: Defending America at the UN and Abroad*, "How did you manage to maintain your sanity while working in such a hostile environment as the UN?"

Chuckling, Bolton replied, "It was truly a target-rich environment there, and not the most hospitable. But it was important to have someone stand up for American interests, and make sure that we're not turned into a well-bred doormat there at the UN and that our foreign policy options are not constrained."

Singer: "But it certainly got you in an enormous amount of trouble, for you've always been outspoken, and you're not hostile to the Jewish State, and you believe in the war on terrorism - basically, you drive the left crazy! Why do you do it?"

Bolton: "I like to think that Sen. Joe Biden actually tipped his hand a little back in 2001 when he opposed my confirmation for my first job in this administration as Undersecretary for Arms Control; he said that his trouble with me was that over the years, I have been 'too competent.' They were worried that I might actually change things."

Not Quite an "Intelligence" Report

When Singer said he wanted to bring up the recent American intelligence report that downplayed the Iranian nuclear capabilities and brought great joy to Iran and to the left, Bolton said, "I don't think we should call it an intelligence report, but rather a document of the Executive Branch. It was a highly-politicized document, written by some who are not even intelligence community professionals, but rather from the State Department... In theory, they all work for the President, but they don't like his policies and they think that he's too belligerent towards Iran - though my own personal view is that the President was not tough enough - and this paper was intended to undercut the Bush position. This report has put Bush's policy on the bottom of the ocean."

"Let me just take one specific example to show how distorted it was," Bolton said. "The headlines all over the world after the report were that Iran has no nuclear weapons program - but in fact the document refers only to a halt on weaponization - putting a nuclear device on top of a ballistic missile, which is just a sliver of the all-out nuclear program. It's an important piece, yes, but it's just a small

part. Since 2003 Iran has made steady progress towards all the technology it needs for a nuclear weapon, and it can turn its program back on - if it was ever turned off - in a snap. This report will be very harmful to the cause of stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon."

Bolton went on to say that the job of the intelligence community is merely to "provide the facts, and what we do not need from the intelligence people is their view on how to put those facts into a political policy; for that, we have government leadership. Unfortunately, this report shows that the intelligence community has gone way beyond its legitimate boundaries."

North Korea: A Criminal State

Singer asked why Iran, with its enormous oil reserves, does not just send ten billion dollars over to cash-strapped North Korea and buy a nuclear weapon?

Bolton: "It's possible; North Korea is a criminal state, and would sell anything to anyone for hard cash. But my judgment is that Iran wants a sustained nuclear capability; they want to master everything so that it doesn't have to be dependent on a place like North Korea."

Israeli Censorship on Attack on Syria is Mistake

"I think we should all be paying more attention to the site that Israel struck in Syria back on September 6. You know, you in Israel are operating under extraordinary censorship about that, but I think this is a mistake - we need to get the facts out about what was going on there at that site near the Euphrates River. We need to know more about the nuclear partnership between Syria and North Korea there."

Singer: "Has this report buried the strategy of imposing sanctions against Iran?"

Bolton: "Yes, certainly for the short term. But I have faith in the Iranians that they will soon do something that will tip their hand again and do something to show that they are working towards nuclear capability. I don't think the report will stand for very long, but let's face it, it's done a lot of damage."

Message to Israel

Singer: "You are now speaking to many Jews and non-Jews throughout the Land of Israel, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. Your message to them?"

Bolton: "I think it's important to keep your focus on national security and not get diverted by political rhetoric and the demands of people who are out trying to build legacies for themselves. You have to keep the long-term and your national interest in mind and remember who your friends are."

SPIEGEL INTERVIEW WITH FORMER US DIPLOMAT JOHN BOLTON

'Bush's Foreign Policy Is in Free Fall'

December 18, 2007

Former US Diplomat John Bolton is no longer in office, but he still has a lot to say about American foreign policy. SPIEGEL spoke to him about Bush's softness abroad, Rice having been taken hostage by the liberal State Department, and why it doesn't matter that the world hates the US.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Ambassador, you worked closely with the president and you shared his hawkish views on Iraq. But your new book is fiercely critical of George W. Bush. Why?

Bolton: His foreign policy is in free fall. The president is turning against his own best judgment and instincts under the influence of Secretary (of State Condoleezza) Rice. She is the dominant voice, indeed, almost the only voice on foreign policy in this administration.

SPIEGEL: The popular reading of her looks a bit different. She is presumed to be weak and not particularly efficient.

Bolton: No. Rice is channeling the views of the liberal career bureaucrats in the State Department. The president is focusing all his attention on Iraq and, by doing so, has allowed the secretary to become captured by the State Department. He is not adequately supervising her. It is a mistake.

SPIEGEL: Could it be that your pique really comes from the fact that the president doesn't seem to be listening to neoconservatives like you anymore?

Bolton: The vice president (Vice President Dick Cheney) is still there. But the idea that somehow the neocons were so powerful is a myth -- I mean, it was five or six people, for God sakes. I am not a neoconservative. I am pro-American.

SPIEGEL: You have said that the new moderate foreign policy currently being followed by Bush compromises the security of the United States.

Bolton: Well, I think so. North Korea is going to get away with keeping its nuclear weapons. I think the (National Intelligence Estimate) sends Iran a signal they can do whatever they want...

SPIEGEL: ...You are talking about the recent report by US intelligence services that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003 ...

Bolton: Yes. For 12 hours after the NIE announcement, there was not a word from Iran. They were sitting there in Teheran saying: "What devious trick are the Americans playing on us now?" They couldn't believe it and finally declared victory.

SPIEGEL: In the past, you argued for a military intervention in Iran. Do you still consider that an option?

Bolton: I don't have the same high confidence these intelligence analysts do that, in fact, there was a full suspension of the military program in Iran. This is not like those claims about Cheney pressuring the poor intelligence community to spin intelligence on Iraq. This is politicization from the other side -- people in the intelligence community allowing policy preferences to affect their analysis and judgments about the intelligence.

SPIEGEL: And where is the president? Is he merely a puppet?

Bolton: Look at the North Korean policy. The North Koreans certainly were involved in that facility in Syria that was raided by the Israelis. The North Koreans renege on their commitments and we still negotiate.

SPIEGEL: What do you see as the alternative -- bombing Pyongyang?

Bolton: I'm not running around the world looking for ways to create hostilities. The solution to North Korea is the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. China could influence the North; it supplies 80 to 90 percent of North Korea's energy. The United States have to put pressure on China in order for China to pressure North Korea.

SPIEGEL: Do you have any second thoughts about the American engagement in Iraq?

Bolton: It was right to overthrow Saddam Hussein. It was the regime itself that was a threat. I think in hindsight, what I would have done is turn authority back over to Iraqis much more quickly and say: "Your country, you figure out how to run it."

SPIEGEL: Would you say the world is now a safer place than before the Iraq war?

Bolton: Yes. There is now no possibility that Iraq is going to have weapons of mass destruction. We had the ancillary strategic victory when (Libyan leader) Moammar Gadhafi gave up his nuclear weapons program as well. When he looked at Saddam, he concluded -- incorrectly -- that he might be next.

SPIEGEL: You don't seem to doubt the go-it-alone approach of the United States although anti-Americanism is rising across the world. Doesn't such a negative view of America weaken US power?

Bolton: I don't think so. I have looked at public opinion polls in France in the late 1940s and early 1950s during the height of Marshall Plan aid. They had a very negative attitude towards the United States then. There were negative attitudes towards the United States because of Vietnam. There were negative attitudes about the United States when Reagan wanted to deploy intermediate range ballistic missiles. I don't think the president should base his foreign policy on American public opinion polls, let alone foreign public opinion polls.

SPIEGEL: What kind of foreign policy will the next president pursue?

Bolton: If you get a President (Hillary) Clinton, you might well find, just as after Vietnam, that there is a retraction from Iraq and of American influence in the world. And in a couple of years the Europeans will be complaining about that too. See how long American troops last in Europe under an administration that thinks it is time for America to come home.

SPIEGEL: Is that a threat?

Bolton: No. The European Union can now act like a major power, at least that is what the European Union tells us. So they should do so -- they can experiment with Russia.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Ambassador, thank very much for taking the time to speak with us.

Interview conducted by Cordula Meyer

Can Kim Jong Il Implement the Declaration of His Nuclear Programs?

By Park Hyun Min

[2007-12-19 22:57]



Wu Dawei, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs

With 13 days remaining, North Korea has to disable its Yongbyun nuclear facility and declare nuclear programs by December 31st.

The project to move Yongbyun nuclear reactor's fuel rods to the nearby a cistern for disablement was introduced in the latter half of last week and it will take approximately 100 days for the project to be completed, reported Kyodo New Service.

Nuclear fuel rods amounting to around 8,000 weigh 50 tons total, so it will be difficult to finish the project before March. However, once the project is completed, recharging the reactor will be technologically difficult. Therefore, this can be evaluated as an epochal stage in the disablement process.

The forecast for the delay in the completion of disablement was reiterated by China's top representative Wu Dawei, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Six-Party talks on the 6th of this month, "Due to technical issues, it will be difficult for North Korea's nuclear disablement to be completed by the end of the year."

Further, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has said that the U.S. is not concerned about whether or not disablement will be completed by December 31st. Due to essential technical issues, the U.S. cannot rush the process.

Thus, the U.S. has already widened the breadth of understanding regarding the possibility of the postponement in deadline regarding one or two projects as long as disablement has begun.

President Bush already sent an autographed letter, the first letter he has sent to Kim Jong Il, requesting the North's reporting of good faith within the end of the year.

That is, if North Korea accurately declares the amount of abstracted plutonium and suspicions about the Uranium Enrichment Program (UEP), which turned into a second-round nuclear threat in 2002, as well as the presumed nuclear connection with Syria, the removal of North Korea from the list of terrorism-sponsoring nations, the termination of the application of Trading with the Enemy Act, regime safety, and economic support can be ensured.

North Korea has adhered to the position of “groundless rumors” regarding suspicions of its nuclear expansion and the UEP issue, which were previously introduced.

However, it was expressed that North Korea imported high-level aluminum pipes reaching about 150 tons through a former Russian businessman and Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf also revealed in last year’s autobiography that he handed over “20 centrifuges” to the North.

In actuality, North Korea is known to have said in passing at an informal meeting regarding the importing of aluminum pipes, which is the crux of the UEP issue, “We used them in missile parts or in airplane manufacturing.”

However, experts have evaluated that these aluminum pipes cannot be used as parts of missiles or airplanes. It will be difficult to jump to the “2nd-phase of denuclearization” without a complete declaration of this issue.

In the midst of this, Tom Casey, Assistant Spokesperson for the State Department, said on the 17th (local time), “I know the Chinese are still working on timing for another envoys level meeting but I don't have any dates to share with you at this point.”

The direction of the Six-Party Talks, which has been steadily continuing after the resolution the BDA issue, depends on completion of the “nuclear program declaration” by the end of the year.

Simultaneously, Vice-Minister Wu Dawei embarked on the path to visiting the North on the 17th. It has not been confirmed whether or not the Vice-Minister visited the North as a special envoy, but through this opportunity, the interest in breakthroughs related to the difficult nuclear declaration issue has been increasing.

In the present, China does not have the leverage to persuade the North, but according to the level of North Korea’s declaration of the nuclear programs, this is a critical period on which hangs whether or not the positive momentum of the Six-Party Talks’ can be sustained.

Satisfaction regarding the declaration of the nuclear programs depends wholly on the U.S. Vice-Minister Wu is expected to play a certain kind of a role to find out common grounds between the two sides.

The issue is whether all nuclear programs in the declaration will become objects of abandonment. Can Kim Jong Il implement a decision regarding denuclearization and abandon its nuclear weapons? This will only be possible when Kim Jong Il has the confidence of sustaining its regime by abandoning its weapons.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/23/AR2007122302073.html>

Subverting Bush at Langley

By Robert D. Novak

Monday, December 24, 2007; A15

Outrage over the CIA's destruction of interrogation tapes is but one element of the distress Republican intelligence watchdogs in Congress feel about the agency. "It is acting as though it is autonomous, not accountable to anyone," Rep. Peter Hoekstra, ranking Republican on the House intelligence committee, told me. That is his mildest language about the CIA. In carefully selected adjectives, Hoekstra calls it "incompetent, arrogant and political."

Chairman Silvestre Reyes and other Democrats on the intelligence committee join Hoekstra in demanding investigation into the tape destruction in the face of the administration's resistance, but the Republicans stand alone in protesting the CIA's defiant undermining of President Bush. In its clean bill of health for Iran on nuclear weapons development, the agency acted as an independent policymaker rather than an adviser. It has withheld from nearly all members of Congress information on the Israeli bombing of Syria in September. The U.S. intelligence community is deciding on its own what information the public shall learn.

Intelligence agencies, from Nazi Germany to present-day Pakistan, for better or for ill, have tended to break away from their governments. The Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's World War II predecessor, was infiltrated by communists. While CIA tactics were under liberal assault in Congress during the Watergate era, current accusations of a rogue agency come from Republicans who see a conscious undermining of Bush at Langley.

The CIA's contempt for the president was demonstrated during his 2004 reelection campaign when a senior intelligence officer, Paul R. Pillar, made off-the-record speeches around the country criticizing the invasion of Iraq. On Sept. 24, 2004, three days before my column exposed Pillar's activity, former representative Porter Goss arrived at Langley as Bush's handpicked director of central intelligence. Goss had resigned from Congress to accept Bush's mandate to clean up the CIA. But the president eventually buckled under fire from the old boys at Langley and their Democratic supporters in Congress, and Goss was sacked in May 2006.

Goss's successor, Gen. Michael V. Hayden, restored the status quo at the CIA and nurtured relations with congressional Democrats in preparation for their coming majority status. Hayden, an active-duty four-star Air Force general, first antagonized Hoekstra by telling Reyes what the Democrats wanted to hear about the Valerie Plame-CIA leak case.

There is no partisan divide on congressional outrage over the CIA's destruction of tapes showing interrogation of detainees suspected of terrorism. Hoekstra agrees with Reyes that the Bush administration has made a big mistake refusing to let officials testify in the impending investigation.

Republicans also complain that the National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran has shut down its nuclear weapons program was a case of the CIA flying solo, not part of the administration team. Donald M. Kerr, principal deputy director of national intelligence, said on Dec. 3 that the intelligence community "took responsibility for what portions of the NIE Key Judgments were to be declassified."

In a Dec. 10 column for the Wall Street Journal, Hoekstra and Democratic Rep. Jane Harman, a senior member of the intelligence committee, wrote that the new NIE "does not explain why the 2005 NIE came to the opposite conclusion or what factors could drive Iran to 'restart' its nuclear-weapons program." (Six days later on "Fox News Sunday," Harman called the NIE "the best work product they've produced.")

Hoekstra is also at odds with Hayden over the CIA's refusal to reveal what it knows about the Sept. 6 Israeli bombing of Syria's nuclear complex. Only chairmen and ranking minority members of the intelligence committees, plus members of the congressional leadership, have been briefed. Other members of Congress, including those on the intelligence committees, were excluded. The intelligence authorization bill, passed by the House and awaiting final action in the Senate, blocks most of the CIA's funding "until each member of the Congressional Intelligence committees has been fully informed with respect to intelligence" about the Syria bombing.

In a June 21 address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, Hayden unveiled the "CIA's social contract with the American people." Hoekstra's explanation: "The CIA is rejecting accountability to the administration or Congress, saying it can go straight to the people."

A Chance to Rein In North Korea

By Nicholas Eberstadt

Wednesday, December 26, 2007; Page A21

Last week's presidential election in South Korea presages a sea change in that key U.S. ally's policies toward North Korea. The resounding defeat of the candidates who favored more of Seoul's all-carrot, no-stick approach to Kim Jong Il presents Washington with a horizon of new possibilities for reining in Asia's most troublesome dictator. The question now is whether the Bush foreign policy team will be adept enough to seize this opportunity.

The landslide vote, to be sure, was in large measure a rebuke of President Roh Moo-hyun's inept handling of the economy and polarizing domestic policies. Yet, taken together, the candidates who opposed the "Peace and Prosperity" policy (originally dubbed "Sunshine") toward North Korea in last Wednesday's election received more than 63 percent of the vote -- compared with 35 percent for all those who approved of it. Why the widespread discontent with "sunshine"? Because what had started as a policy of reconciliation with the North had degenerated in practice into almost reflexive appeasement of the "Dear Leader," Kim Jong Il. Unsurprisingly, many ordinary Koreans found that kind of "sunshine" too distasteful, too embarrassing and just a bit too dangerous.

South Koreans winced as their government repeatedly abstained from U.N. votes criticizing North Korea for human rights abuses. They grumbled as they saw their tax-funded "economic cooperation" projects with the North devolve into an economic lifeline for a still-hostile government in Pyongyang. And they worried as the undisguised rift with Washington over "the North Korean threat" created unmistakable strains in the vital U.S.-South Korean alliance.

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South Korea, in short, is ready for a new and more critical approach to engagement with North Korea -- and this is just what President-elect Lee Myung-bak has promised. Lee is no Cold Warrior: He styles himself as a pragmatist who judges by results. Since his election, he has signaled that restoring the health of the U.S.-South Korean alliance and achieving a genuine denuclearization of the North Korean regime are to be top foreign policy priorities. He has also served notice to Pyongyang that it can no longer count on Seoul for a "see-no-evil" spin on events in the North -- much less unconditional handouts.

There would seem to be great promise in this new attitude toward "engagement with the North" -- to say nothing of new vistas for genuine cooperation between the United States and South Korea on the multifaceted North Korea problem.

With Seoul finally willing to criticize Kim Jong Il's gulag "paradise," for example, an effective worldwide human rights campaign in the name of the North Korean people comes much closer to reality. With a South Korean government that no longer insists on sitting on the sidelines, the Proliferation Security Initiative to interdict illicit North Korean revenue (from drug-running, counterfeiting, weapons sales and the like) stands to be much more effective -- and that much more costly to Kim Jong Il. No longer a "runaway ally," South Korea could at last join with the United States

and Japan in a common policy to bring real pressure on North Korea for real denuclearization -- and to impose real penalties for noncompliance.

Today, China can depict its support for the North as joining a South Korean bandwagon. Without the cover of a seemingly all-forgiving South Korean government, China would finally be forced to make hard choices about the Kim Jong Il regime -- within the confines of the six-party talks and beyond.

But is the Bush foreign policy team ready to make use of this long-desired diplomatic windfall from South Korea?

For a variety of reasons (among them the Republicans' loss of Congress in 2006 and the situation in Iraq) the Bush team all but abandoned its previous posture toward North Korea at the end of last year. These days it appears intent on producing only "good news" on the North Korean front. "Good news" about North Korea, for its part, seems to have been defined down to meaning a nuclear deal with Kim Jong Il -- irrespective of the fine print.

If this sounds implausible, consider the actual record of U.S. diplomacy with North Korea over the past 12 months.

Early this year, the U.S. government quietly agreed to help "unfreeze" more than \$24 million in suspect North Korean funds from bank accounts in Macau. Why? Because North Korean nuclear negotiators threatened not to return to the table until their Dear Capo got his money back.

After returning to the six-party talks, the North Korean side then inked an "action plan" in February that promised to provide an accounting of its previous nuclear activities within two months. Here we are at the end of the year with no accounting -- and, so far as one can tell, no worries from the White House, either.

In September word emerged that Israeli jets had leveled a facility in Syria that from the air looked a lot like the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. The Syrian site was reputedly being developed with North Korean assistance. Yet under Washington's new rules of engagement with Pyongyang, the Bush team has scarcely whispered a word about this mysterious -- and potentially grave -- international incident.

And by the way: Have you heard from President Bush's special envoy for human rights in North Korea over the past year? Neither has anybody else.

Last week's election in South Korea should serve as a wake-up call to the Bush administration. With willing new partners in the wings in Seoul, President Bush still has the chance to register some real gains for his legacy on North Korea -- and, more important, for the security of the free world.

Nicholas Eberstadt, the Henry Wendt chair in political economy at the American Enterprise Institute, is a member of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

N.Korea Likely to Miss Critical Deadline

Updated **Dec.26, 2007** 07:04 KST

North Korea is likely to miss an agreed deadline to declare all its nuclear programs and stockpiles and disable nuclear facilities by the end of this year.

A South Korean government official on Tuesday said, "There is no sign yet that North Korea has decided to make an accurate declaration. It's improbable that the North will declare its nuclear programs by the end of the year, with only a week remaining before the New Year."

It is unclear whether the North is positively refusing to make a full declaration of all materials and programs under a Feb. 13 six-nation agreement or whether it is stalling to get a bigger compensation package from the U.S. A positive refusal would derail the entire framework.

Under the Feb. 13 denuclearization deal, the U.S. agreed to strike the North from a blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism and lift sanctions under the Trading with the Enemy Act provided the North disables its nuclear facilities and makes a full declaration to the IAEA.

According to South Korean officials, North Korea is dragging its feet while denying the main U.S. allegations: that it has or had a uranium enrichment program and transferred nuclear materials to Syria. The North's nuclear facilities are, as it happens, being disabled in cooperation with a U.S.-led team. Though the processes will be difficult to complete by the end of the year due to technical problems of extracting spent fuel rods, it will be possible to finish them around February, the South Korean officials added.

A South Korean official said, "We've seen many instances when the North dragged its feet in implementing its promises. An accurate declaration is more important than keeping the deadline." A decision from North Korean leader Kim Jong-il "is needed now more than ever before," he added.

Meanwhile, the North's Workers' Party daily Rodong Shinmun in newly belligerent language on Tuesday accused U.S. "warmongers" of "frenetically preparing behind closed doors for a maneuver to ignite a second Korean War. Such a maneuver makes us suspicious if the U.S. has any real intention to continue the dialogue."

The daily complained about "an aerial war exercise" in the shape of the dispatch of an F-18 hornet strike fighter to South Korea from an overseas base. "Looking at the U.S.' double-dealing attitude, we deeply suspect whether the U.S.' call for dialogue is a disguised tactic." It added, "Nobody knows what kind of shocking incident the U.S. warmongers might ignite to prevent the North Korean-U.S. talks from proceeding further."

The state-run Korean Central News Agency on Sunday quoted Kim Kyok-sik, chief of the general staff of the Korean People's Army, as saying "tensions" remain on the Korean Peninsula due to Washington's persistent "war maneuvers."

According to the KCNA, the North Korean Army chief was addressing a rally to mark the 16th anniversary of Kim Jong-il's inauguration as supreme commander. "The U.S. is still maneuvering

behind the doors to ignite a war of aggression against the North, while clamoring about dialogue and talks in public," Kim Kyok-sik said. Only in July, Kim Jong-il told Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, "In recent days, there are signs that the situation on the Korean Peninsula will likely improve to some extent."

Editor's Notes: Man of the year, 2007... we hope

David Horovitz

THE JERUSALEM POST

Dec. 27, 2007

"Unfortunately, despite our yearning for peace as we reach out to our neighbors, the time has not yet come to sheath our sword. It must remain sharpened and honed, prepared to face any enemy..."

"We will be prepared for the challenges posed to us by the terror organizations and by others who have not yet come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel in the Middle East... We will become stronger in order to deter them. And if need be, we will be prepared to overcome them."

From a letter sent to the soldiers and employees of the IDF by Gabi Ashkenazi on February 14, the day he became the 19th IDF chief of the General Staff.

On September 6, Israeli jets raided a target in Syria whose precise nature has neither been officially disclosed nor unofficially proven.

The remarkable strike, evading Syrian radar and other defenses, prompted a flood of rather confused and embarrassed reactions from Damascus, including an assertion from the Syrian vice president that the target was the harmless "Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands" - a claim which was, amusingly, swiftly denied by said Arab Center.

Almost as remarkable as the strike was the relative silence from Jerusalem. Rather than crowing about the intelligence that had established the need for and enabled the raid and highlighting the pinpoint accuracy of the attack, the political echelon, (almost) to a man, kept uncharacteristically mum.

Much less surprisingly, the IDF, under its relatively new chief of General Staff, had no comment either. Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, who had set the tone for his media interactions months earlier by asking his spokesman's department to cancel the interviews it had lined up for him to mark Independence Day, is more of a doer than a talker.

Amid the strict military censorship that still surrounds that September 6 raid, the most that can be said is that it was of critical importance to Israel's well-being; that the Syrians, according to foreign reports, belatedly got found out doing something nuclear in tandem with North Korea that they had thought would remain undiscovered; and that Israel's silence, in turn enabling Damascene denial rather than humiliation, was crucial in preventing the single strike from escalating into a war.

Although the raid represented an impressive display of Israeli air and other prowess, it would be an overstatement to assert that, at a stroke, it revived an Israeli deterrent capability so battered by our demonstrable vulnerability to rudimentary rocket attack - from south Lebanon during the 2006 war with Hizbullah, and from Gaza to this day.

Nonetheless, it likely gave pause to potential enemies, renewing respect for the IDF's capacity to do the unexpected with exemplary professionalism. Sending his forces into rapier-action deep inside hostile

territory, demonstrating the improved readiness to grapple with enemies that he had promised in his introductory letter, Ashkenazi, a member of the Golani infantry force that participated in the 1976 Entebbe hostage rescue, reconnected the IDF to such past glories.

This is the essence of Ashkenazi's goal for the IDF. "We will become stronger in order to deter [our enemies]. And if need be, we will be prepared to overcome them."

IT IS fervently to be hoped that Ashkenazi, chief of the General Staff for 10 and a half of the past 12 calendar months, is Israel's Man of 2007. If so, we may never know it for certain, for much of his success will lie in the degree to which he is indeed making Israel sufficiently strong as to deter its enemies.

It may be that September's surgical strike - and the avoidance of war - marks the first such success. But Ashkenazi is making his quiet impact more widely, too - gradually correcting the damage done to Israel's military image by the Second Lebanon War, rebuilding the IDF's credibility with the US, and bringing his analysis of regional developments, and consequent Israeli imperatives, to a generally receptive political echelon.

He is not universally acclaimed as a deep strategic thinker. Nor is there full consensus behind his emphasis on ground forces, with some critics sniping that he is preparing the IDF for the last war rather than the next one. But the elegant theorizing of his predecessor Dan Halutz about the universal capabilities of an air force proved so misguided in the Second Lebanon War. And the IDF was exposed more as a rusted than a well-oiled fighting machine. The no-nonsense, keenly intelligent and workaholic Ashkenazi is proving a sobering antidote - the ultimate IDF insider reviving the IDF from the inside.

He inherited a shellshocked military whose failure to decisively prevail against Hizbullah constituted an enemy dream come true and an Israeli nightmare. Our loquacious defense chiefs had assured us early in that conflict that Hizbullah would be largely destroyed within days. And yet more than a month later, the sophisticated might of the Israeli Air Force had failed to thwart the salvos of primitive Katyushas, failed to deter the guerrilla army so unexpectedly resilient in firing them.

Ashkenazi's remedy has been a return to basics: An investigation of what had gone wrong and why, and a determination to rectify it. The most obvious and immediate change lies in the attitude to training. Almost from the day he succeeded Halutz, Ashkenazi has reversed norms under which key units could go years without intensive training, a state of affairs that self-evidently left them ill-prepared for the instant resort to war ordered by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on July 12, 2006.

Frequently out in the field himself, Ashkenazi, who already had the respect of his peers and subordinates, having risen gradually through the ranks to the IDF's top positions, has cemented the reputation of a hands-on, hands-dirty commander.

At the same time, he has credibility among ministers, which helps mightily when defense spending battles are waged. Brought back from the cold to take the post of Defense Ministry director-general by then-minister Amir Peretz, Ashkenazi is now also said to enjoy a good relationship with chief of staff No. 14, Peretz's successor Ehud Barak.

Ashkenazi is still watching Lebanon closely - acutely concerned by the rearming of Hizbullah and by the political shifts that could give it veto power over Lebanese government decisions as critical to Israel as the future deployment of the Lebanese Army and the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate. But other fronts are still more demanding.

LIKE BARAK, Ashkenazi has taken to warning of late that a major IDF incursion into Gaza looks ever more likely so long as the Kassams rain down on Sderot and its environs.

But the chief of the General Staff does not want to invade the Strip. He knows how treacherous it would be for the IDF to fight there, how many lives would be lost, and how rapidly the Kassam crews would reassert themselves the moment the army pulled back.

His recipe would be to ratchet up the constraints on Hamas - to keep border crossings closed, to drastically reduce fuel and electricity supplies, to prevent the Palestinian Authority from sending in funds which wind up in Hamas hands.

He supports any mustering of pressure on Egypt to change its behavior at the border and work seriously to prevent the massive, ongoing smuggling of arms into the Strip and the departure of Hamas activists for terror training. Hence the security establishment's recent dispatch of video footage to the United States documenting Egypt's complicity - a move, as first reported in The Jerusalem Post last week, designed to alert American leaders to Cairo's failures, and thus to condition at least some of the annual American aid package to Egypt on more serious efforts to close down the smuggling tunnels and properly seal the border.

As for the West Bank, Ashkenazi takes seriously the prospect of Hamas replicating its Gaza takeover there. Indeed, like the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), the IDF was not surprised by the ease with which Hamas fighters defeated the US-trained Fatah forces in Gaza, recognizing the greater motivation of the Islamists and the weakness and lack of loyalty and accountability in the Fatah hierarchy post-Arafat. When it comes to internal Palestinian conflict, runs the cold IDF assessment, the Fatah gunmen don't know how to kill or be killed.

Ashkenazi's message to the political echelon is that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his relative moderates in the PA survive only because the IDF maintains full freedom of movement in the West Bank and can thus thwart the threat of the Islamists. Pulling back the IDF, ostensibly to help Abbas, would have the opposite effect.

Aides to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert determinedly talk up the successes in Nablus of the PA's latest small-scale police deployments, express growing satisfaction about improved cooperation with PA security commanders, and thus speak optimistically about the possibilities, in time, for Israel to start to withdraw from the forward positions it has maintained since the outbreak of the second intifada seven years ago and to relinquish territory to PA control. The assessment in Ashkenazi's IDF, by contrast, is that while Israel has every interest in creating the conditions for improved relations with Abbas's PA, a significant IDF pullback in 2008 is plain unthinkable, that the PA forces are anything but capable of imposing security, and that a premature handover of control would render both the PA and Israel vulnerable to an upsurge in Islamic terrorism.

IF ASHKENAZI and Olmert seem a distance apart in weighing PA security capabilities, they may see more eye-to-eye when it comes to Syria. Olmert and his aides have for weeks been highlighting Israel's

readiness for renewed talks. And in notable contrast to US President George W. Bush's recent declaration that he ran out of patience with President Bashar Assad "a long time ago," Olmert took pains to praise Assad for sending a representative to last month's Annapolis conference.

Ashkenazi well recognizes the immense potential benefits of separating Syria from its alliance with Iran - including the consequent isolation of Teheran, the weakening of Hizbullah, the blow to terror groups and the positive repercussions in Iraq - and believes that Assad may be responsive to economic leverage. While the US has been too ready to maintain its huge financial aid to the Egyptians, it may be overly reluctant, in Ashkenazi's thinking, to contemplate drawing in the Syrians via economic leverage. Assad, after all, is waging a constant struggle for survival, and might not be averse to American economic overtures with tremendous potential domestic benefits.

It is worth noting at this point that the idea of Damascus being wooable is far from unanimously accepted. For one thing, it is hard to reconcile the image of a potentially friendly Syria with the fact that the "Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands" constituted so profound and immediate a threat as to have prompted Israel's high-risk bombing raid three-and-a-half months ago.

For another, the critics suggest that there's too much wishful thinking and not enough fact to justify the assessment that Syria might forsake its longstanding alliance with the ever-more powerful Iran in favor of a new, untested partnership with an America that is plainly in Middle East retreat.

NEEDLESS TO say, as Ashkenazi prepares the IDF to defend Israel in a region characterized by growing instability and further potential deterioration, Iran stands out as the key existential threat.

The US National Intelligence Estimate of Iran's nuclear weapons program, with its headline-making assertion that Teheran halted such activities in 2003, is, to put it mildly, not shared in the Israeli military establishment. And it has not impacted Israel's own intelligence estimates.

IDF thinking is that Iran is vulnerable to outside pressures and can be stopped short of military action. But if all else fails, Israel would have to act and could act, though no-one should delude themselves that this would involve a repeat of the single-strike bombing of Saddam Hussein's Osirak facility in 1981. Stopping Iran militarily would require not a one-off action, but a sustained campaign.

Such an action, given Iran's capacity for retaliation and the colossal regional implications, is almost unthinkable. Ashkenazi's ambition is to so revive both Israel's deterrent capability, and its credibility with its allies regarding the nature of the Iranian threat, as to help create the international circumstances in which military intervention against Iran becomes unnecessary.

Of course, if he were able to achieve that, we'd happily laud him as our man of the decade.

U.S. Courts North Korea's Army

New Strategy Recognizes

Military's Pivotal Role

In Nuclear Disarmament

By JAY SOLOMON

December 29, 2007; Page A3

WASHINGTON -- The Bush administration, worried that the North Korean military may block advances in disarmament negotiations, has started an unusual campaign to reach out directly to the communist state's army leaders.

The new strategy comes as Pyongyang is expected to miss an important deadline Monday requiring the North to fully declare its nuclear assets and programs, including the believed pursuit of uranium-enrichment technologies.

But the White House is still expected to provide North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il more time to meet his commitments. And the U.S. continues to support expanding cultural engagement, such as a scheduled February performance in Pyongyang by the New York Philharmonic.

"What is important to us is that when we do get the declaration, whatever day it is, it needs to be full and complete," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said Friday.

Senior-level engagement between the American and North Korean militaries has been significantly limited during the past seven years. Senior U.S. officials say their new outreach to the Korean People's Army, or KPA, stems from their knowledge that Pyongyang's military ultimately controls the majority of North Korea's nuclear assets and installations. These American officials also say their efforts are driven by a lack of certainty over whether North Korea's generals would even honor a request by Mr. Kim for them to turn over nuclear weapons.

"Would the military back Kim Jong Il if he truly wants to give away the program? That's the bottom-line question," said a U.S. official working on disarmament issues. "Maybe [Mr. Kim] doesn't have control of the military."

The official and other North Korea analysts say the KPA has the most to lose if Pyongyang agrees to destroy its nuclear weapons stock. Their development provides the KPA with leverage over the U.S. and Japan, and entrenches the military as the elite power center inside North Korea. Without nuclear weapons, the KPA and North Korea would have only a marginal profile internationally, these officials say, and Washington needs to make clear there are other ways for North Korea to prosper.

The U.S. outreach to the North Korean military has come during a number of recent negotiating sessions between Washington and Pyongyang.

[Kim Jong Il]

American diplomats say they have specifically requested from North Korea's Foreign Ministry the attendance of senior KPA officers at these meetings. And U.S. officials also say they have been

mindful to place American military officers, including a two-star general, on most of their diplomatic missions as a signal to Pyongyang that Washington seeks increased military-to-military engagement.

So far, however, these officials say, North Korean diplomats have rebuked Washington's requests, citing the Foreign Ministry's preeminence in the denuclearization talks. "We need more buy-in from their military," said a senior U.S. official pushing this engagement with the KPA. "The military remains the big question mark for us."

Confidence-building measures are another tool the Bush administration is using to try to soften the North Korean military's hostility to the denuclearization process.

Even as the negotiations continue, North Korea's state-owned media have regularly broadcast propaganda suggesting the Pentagon is using nuclear disarmament as a pretext for a full-scale invasion of the North. Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency reported this week that the "dialogue advertised by the U.S. while seeking confrontation is, in fact, nothing but a military option to disarm its dialogue partner mentally and mount a surprise preemptive attack."

The planned New York Philharmonic performance in Pyongyang is seen as one way Washington can soften its image inside North Korea, say U.S. diplomats. The orchestra is specifically expected to play the "Star Spangled Banner" and other symbols of American culture traditionally demonized by the North. North Korean diplomats view the coming visit of the large U.S. delegation to Pyongyang as a tool with which it can appeal to hard-liners in the KPA and Korean Workers' Party about Washington's intentions, according to U.S. officials.

Lower-level interaction between the U.S. and North Korean militaries occur regularly along the demilitarized zones that still divide North and South Korea. The Pentagon and KPA have also cooperated on searches for U.S. soldiers missing since the 1950-53 Korean War. But the last senior-level engagement came in October 2000 when Mr. Kim dispatched one of the KPA's top three officers, Vice Marshal Cho Myong Rok, to the White House to hold direct talks with President Bill Clinton.

Vice Marshal Cho carried a personal letter from Mr. Kim to Mr. Clinton inviting him to visit Pyongyang. And the two sides signed a nonaggression statement that many in Pyongyang's military viewed as a prelude to a formal peace treaty ending the Korean War, according to U.S. and South Korean officials. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang weeks later, and Mr. Clinton seriously considered going as well before his term expired.

Just months later, however, the detente between Washington and Pyongyang faded with the inauguration of President Bush, who later designated North Korea a member of an "axis of evil," including Iraq and Iran. This diplomatic U-turn made many in the KPA particularly skeptical about Washington's long-term strategic intentions, say U.S. intelligence officials.

Despite Pyongyang's recent negative rhetoric, U.S. officials say North Korea has actually been proactive in disabling the Yongbyon nuclear reactor, another key requirement of the disarmament pace. But North Korea appears to be stalling in declaring all its nuclear assets and programs. Pyongyang has denied in six-party talks that it secretly developed a uranium-enrichment program to produce fissile material alongside the Yongbyon facility, as Washington has charged. And Pyongyang also has denied aiding third countries, such as Syria, in developing nuclear power or weapons programs.

A specific dispute has already emerged between the U.S. and North Korea over the testing of an aluminum tube provided by Pyongyang to international inspectors. According to a U.S. counterproliferation official, the tube tested positive for contamination with a fissile material, suggesting it may have been used in uranium-enrichment work. The official said it was possible the tube was contaminated before being shipped to North Korea but Pyongyang hasn't been forthcoming about the source.

The U.S. is also pushing for clarity on North Korea's suspected cooperation with Syria in developing weapons of mass destruction. Israeli aircraft struck a Syrian facility in September near the Euphrates river, and American officials say intelligence showed a significant number of North Korean personnel working at the site going back years. These U.S. officials say they're not certain that Pyongyang was aiding Damascus in developing a nuclear reactor but that the North Koreans need to account for their activities in the Middle East.

"The North Koreans usually say: Let's just talk about the future not the past," said the U.S. counterproliferation official.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Off the Terror List

December 29, 2007; Page A10

North Korea promised that by December 31 it would declare its nuclear programs and dismantle its facilities. So dictator Kim Jong Il celebrated the holidays by suggesting Wednesday he might slow down disabling nuclear plants if the world's Santas didn't deliver "promised" economic aid to his doorstep. He may welcome the New Year by stiffing the U.S. yet again.

As part of this deal, the U.S. has agreed to consider removing North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. Under U.S. law, such removal would be contingent on the President certifying to Congress that North Korea hasn't provided support for international terrorism during the preceding six-month period. Chris Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator, said that "We will follow the letter of the law in that regard."

If so, we hope he takes a close look at a report just out from the Congressional Research Service. Written by Larry Nicksch and Raphael Perl, the report cites "reputable sources" as saying North Korea has provided arms and possibly training to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka in recent months, both terrorist organizations.

The CRS report cites a French online journal, Paris Intelligence Review, which last year published a detailed account of what it described as an extensive program by Pyongyang to give arms and training to Hezbollah. The aid included instruction by North Korean trainers in the development of underground facilities for storing arms, food and medical installations. This, the French journal said, significantly improved Hezbollah's ability to fight Israel in the 2006 war.

For further evidence of a possible North Korea-Hezbollah link, CRS references an article published last month in the South Korean newspaper, Joon Ang Ilbo. According to Moon Chung-in, a professor at Yonsei University and an expert on security issues, the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, believes that North Korea was the source of "vital missile components" for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The researchers also note reports in September in the Japanese daily Sankei Shimbun of North Korean arms shipments to the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. According to Sankei, North Korea made several attempts this year and last to deliver machine guns, automatic rifles and anti-tank rocket launchers to the Tamil Tigers. The Sri Lankan navy intercepted several North Korean ships carrying the arms, Sankei reported, sinking two of the vessels, capturing North Korean crew members and seizing some arms.

The CRS paper concludes that if the Administration doesn't address the reports of North Korean support of Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers -- and, we'll add, even more disturbing reports of nuclear aid to Syria -- it could "damage the integrity" of the U.S. list of state sponsors of terror. It could also "limit the ability" of the U.S. to deal with "what appears" to be a "rising level of North Korean support for international terror groups."

It is very worth noting that South Korea's President-elect, Lee Myung-bak, who takes office in February, has pledged to get tough on the North. Mr. Bush might have a talk with this new partner about a world in which we make concessions to North Korea, and they -- still -- do nothing to change their intentions.

U.S. intelligence act digs deeper into North Korea's nuclear activities

2007/12/31 03:31 KST

후후 WASHINGTON, Dec. 30 (Yonhap) -- As members of the six-nation talks on denuclearizing North Korea toil to get the country to completely disclose its nuclear stockpile, U.S. Congress plans to dig deeper into exactly what the stockpile contains, and into fresh suspicions of North Korea-Syria nuclear connections.

후후 The Intelligence Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008 limits relevant U.S. fund appropriations until each member of the congressional intelligence committees has been "fully and currently informed" about the Israeli strike of a Syrian facility, allegedly a nuclear-related installation that North Korea was helping to equip.

후후 The legislation also requires the director of national intelligence to submit at least one report within fiscal year 2008 detailing the nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran, followed by two reports in fiscal year 2009.

후후 The House passed the intelligence act on Dec. 13 following a conference committee meeting with the Senate, a process in which the two chambers discuss and agree on any amendments.

후후 North Korea appears most likely to miss the Monday deadline to submit a declaration listing all of its nuclear materials and programs, plus any proliferation activities. The declaration is a key part of a six-nation agreement aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, committed to by South and North Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan.

후후 The true extent of Pyongyang's nuclear activities, however, remains hazy, including how much fissile material it produced and how much of it has been converted to atomic weapons. It's also unclear whether the country was able to enrich uranium, an alternative to plutonium in making weapons, and whether it transferred any of its arms or technology to other nations.

후후 The report from the House-Senate conference indicated concerns by Congress over allegations of North Korea's nuclear cooperation with Syria.

후후 Israel on Sept. 6 struck a Syrian site, claiming it was a nuclear facility being built with North Korea's assistance. Both Pyongyang and Damascus have denied any atomic collaboration.

후후 The section on limiting fund appropriations was added at the House-Senate conference. It prohibits expenditure to less than 30 percent of authorized amount until "the full membership of the congressional intelligence committees are fully and currently informed about an important intelligence matter," the conference report says.

후후 The information provided should include whether any agent or citizen from North Korea or other countries was present at the Syrian site, and any intelligence the U.S. obtained on the matter from foreign governments, it says.

후후 The initial version of the act required a quarterly report from the national intelligence director on North Korea and Iran, but this was reduced in frequency in response to a request from the director to lessen the number of reports required by legislators.

후후 The intelligence reports on North Korea and Iran should include assessments of their nuclear weapons programs, evaluation of the sources on which those assessments are based, and discussion of any dissents or caveats that would reduce confidence in the assessments.

후후 Although the frequency of the reports was reduced, the lawmakers "otherwise concur that it is essential that the intelligence community places a high priority on reporting to Congress on nuclear developments in Iran and North Korea," the conference report says.

후후 ldm@yna.co.kr

Real test looms for N Korea

By Aidan Foster-Carter

Korea analyst

Published: 2008/01/01 15:54:37 GMT

North Korea has missed another nuclear deadline.

Under a deal reached in February 2007, the North Korean regime of Kim Jong-il had agreed to do two things by December 31: disable its Yongbyon reactor site, and provide a full declaration of all its nuclear activities.

But the year ended with work still incomplete at Yongbyon - and stony silence from Pyongyang.

The two Ds are different. Yongbyon was already closed down since July, and the US team supervising its disabling reported full local cooperation.

North Korea has evidently decided to sacrifice these ageing facilities - a cause of concern for almost 20 years - now that they have done their job and given Kim the bomb, as seen in October 2006's small nuclear test.

Deja vu is unavoidable. Under the Clinton-era 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework, Yongbyon was sealed - but not disabled - until late 2002, when the Bush administration accused North Korea of running a separate covert nuclear programme based on highly enriched uranium (HEU).

In an escalating row, North Korea expelled International Atomic Energy Agency monitors and restarted the site, producing more plutonium and so enabling 2006's nuclear test.

Disabling Yongbyon now - with full dismantlement as a future final stage - is meant to ensure no repetition by putting it beyond use (to borrow a term from Northern Ireland).

The current delay seems mainly technical. To extract and remove some 8,000 fuel rods at this decrepit facility simply could not be done safely by year-end.

However, there are now hints that recently Pyongyang has slowed the process due to reported dissatisfaction with what it is - or is not - getting by way of rewards for its co-operation.

This puzzles the other five nations involved in the six-party process - China, the US, South Korea, Japan and Russia.

Most have sent heavy fuel oil and other energy aid, as an agreed quid pro quo.

Only Tokyo refuses, as it still demands a full account of the fate of Japanese abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s.

Pyongyang regards that issue as closed, and relations are at rock bottom.

North Korea also wants to come off the US State Department's list of countries accused of supporting terrorism, and an end to long-standing US sanctions.

Both were specified in last February's breakthrough, but the US reckons Mr Kim has not yet done enough.

While Japan opposes any delisting unless the abductions are cleared up, Washington would not let that objection be a deal-breaker if all else were going smoothly. But it is not.

Three cruxes

The real problem is the nuclear declaration. At least three cruxes may be holding this up.

One is the North's alleged enriched uranium programme. Though the US is now unsure how far this had got, it has proof of purchases from Pakistan's rogue nuclear entrepreneur Dr AQ Khan.

Those transactions need explaining.

A new worry is the Syrian connection. In September Israel bombed a mystery facility there, widely rumoured to involve nuclear cooperation with North Korea (though both deny this).

With nuclear proliferation to the Middle East a double red line for the US, Washington has to know the full truth on this - and be absolutely assured there will be no future repetition, anywhere.

Above all, there is the \$64,000 question: how many bombs and how much plutonium does Mr Kim have, where are they, and will he give them up as did Libya's Muammar Gaddafi?

Coming clean

On each of these three issues there is a clash of systems.

North Korea is a pathologically secret state, even on everyday matters.

Coming clean simply does not come naturally.

And nuclear weapons are Mr Kim's sole trump card.

Unlike Mr Gaddafi, he has no oil or other resources to parlay.

The Libyan route is hugely risky for him.

Military hardliners in the Korean People's Army (KPA) would see it as surrender.

With Mr Kim turning 66 in February and no successor in place, any wrong move could cause political turmoil in Pyongyang.

George W Bush's problem is different.

He is desperate to leave office with a foreign policy success to balance Iraq and Afghanistan, hence last year's U-turn to engage North Korea.

But any deal has to be credible to a hostile Congress, and Republican hawks who remain deeply suspicious of a regime which Mr Bush once notoriously called part of an "axis of evil."

No more Bart

Hence heavyweights like Henry Kissinger have been wheeled out to meet North Koreans in New York, reinforcing the message stressed by the tireless chief US negotiator, assistant secretary of state Christopher Hill.

But personal rapport may not be enough.

Mr Bush even sent Mr Kim a direct letter, urging timely fulfilment of obligations already agreed to.

The point they are all emphasising is that what might be called North Korea's stock, Bart Simpson riposte - nobody saw me/didn't do it/can't prove a thing - will not wash this time.

On uranium enrichment, on Syria, on the nuclear stockpile - on all these the US and others need more than some pro forma story.

This has to be the real deal, or the six-party process becomes a charade.

What if Pyongyang stays silent? The process can brook a certain amount of delay.

Yongbyon's closure last year was three months late, owing to the complexities of unwinding a disagreement over a bank.

Similarly, a couple of months' technical hitch in disabling Yongbyon is no problem.

But the nuclear declaration is another matter.

By February or March, silence or recalcitrance from Pyongyang will put the other five on the spot.

By then, too, South Korea will have a new president: Lee Myung-bak, who takes office on 25 February after his landslide win in December's election.

A moderate conservative, Lee plans to strengthen ties with the US.

Unlike his liberal predecessor Roh Moo-hyun, Lee says he will make Seoul's aid to the North conditional on full nuclear compliance.

Back to the future

That could alter the balance in the six-party process. Initially, an "axis of carrot" troika - China, Russia and South Korea - offset a hardline US and Japan, before Mr Bush's switch to engagement left Tokyo isolated.

But if Pyongyang is defiant, the US, Japan and South Korea may all resume their traditional role as sceptical if not hostile, ranged against China and Russia too playing their old Cold War parts as Mr Kim's big brothers and (albeit reluctant) defenders.

A year hence, regime change in Washington will add a further twist.

Mr Kim may procrastinate in hopes of a Democrat victory, as he did in 2004 hoping John Kerry would defeat Mr Bush.

But he is mistaken if he imagines this would bring a softer US line.

As so often before, in theory the ball is in North Korea's court.

But if Mr Kim refuses or tries to fudge his nuclear declaration, that lobs the problem back to his interlocutors.

At the end of the day, none of them - not even a tetchy Japan - is in any mood or position to back up hostile words with deeds.

Unless China finally loses patience, a nuclear North Korea may be here to stay - for as long as Mr Kim and his rebarbative regime survive.

[Aidan Foster-Carter is honorary senior research fellow in sociology and modern Korea at Leeds University](#)

What America Must Do: Jessica T. Mathews

Foreign Policy Passport

Jan 1, 2008

Jessica T. Mathews tells FP why it's time to talk to Syria.

[EXCERPT]

FP: What do you make of the news blackout on the Israeli attack on Syria in September? Is it, as recent analysis has suggested, that if there were a connection between North Korea and Syria, the White House wants it buried simply because it wants the North Korean deal to stick?

JTM: I think that's probably true, but there are other reasons why they would want to keep it quiet. The Israeli move is illegal under international law and IAEA [rules], and I think the [Bush] administration probably doesn't want to have that discussed.

What's more extraordinary is the fact that it stayed a secret in Israel, where nothing generally stays a secret among people-in-the-know for longer than about two days. I think that the Israelis did feel a threat and had credible intelligence, but I think their desire to reestablish their existential deterrent, which was badly damaged by their military failings in the war in Lebanon, was very important to them. Israel really depends on a belief in their incredibly potent military force that can do anything. I think that when Gen. [Ehud] Barak came back into the government, his No. 1 assignment was to find a way to repair the damage that the war did to the Israeli Defense Forces' reputation. That had everything to do with this raid.

[Jessica T. Mathews is president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.](#)

EDITORIALS & OPINION

Out On A Kim

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

Posted 1/2/2008

North Korea: The communist regime has missed a deadline in the agreed-to process to shut down its nuclear weapons program. Sadly, it's exactly what we've come to expect from Pyongyang.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was supposed to have disabled its nuclear complex at Yongbyon and reported the details of its atomic weapons program by Dec. 31. As of Wednesday morning, the second day of the new year, it had done neither.

Less than a month ago, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, chief U.S. envoy to the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear arms program, expressed confidence that the Yongbyon facility, shut down in July, would be disabled by the deadline. A U.S. team was on the ground supervising the project and Pyongyang was reportedly cooperating.

It seemed Hill was not as confident, however, regarding North Korea making a full and honest declaration about its program. He telegraphed his concerns by publicly insisting that Pyongyang's disclosures must be "complete and correct" and hold "no surprises."

Apparently he should have been uneasy about both.

It was nearly one year ago, in February 2007, when high-living North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il agreed to the arrangement, which included aid to the DPRK, primarily heavy fuel oil, and improved diplomatic relations with nations that had cut or cooled their ties to Pyongyang.

He can't say he has not had enough time to comply.

Yes, disabling a nuclear facility is complicated and laborious. In particular the safe removal of fuel rods has great potential to cause delays. But Kim's regime has shown that it cannot be trusted; concern that it might be dragging its feet to extract more concessions from the U.S. and other nations involved in the talks is justifiable.

One of the rewards Pyongyang is likely seeking is North Korea's removal from the State Department's list of terrorist-sponsoring nations. But that should have to wait until basic changes have been made in North Korea's government. **There can be no faith put in the word of Kim nor in those at the highest levels of his regime.**

For instance, even while Kim was supposed to be cleaning up his nuclear weapons mess, it's possible — perhaps even probable — that North Korea was involved with Syria in some sort of nuclear weapons program. Israel did not fly into Syria in September to bomb an aspirin or "baby milk" factory.

The U.S. response to the missed deadline was right out of the State Department's pantry of milquetoast statements. "We think it's possible for the North Koreans to provide a full and complete declaration, and we hope they will do that as soon as possible," just doesn't have the bite it should have.

There is the frightening possibility that Kim is looking beyond having his regime removed from the State Department list of terrorist-sponsoring states and stalling until he can fill out a potent nuclear arsenal. It would fit his history of failing to keep promises.

With that in mind, the White House needs to engage in tough diplomacy with North Korea, even if the other nations in the talks — South Korea, Japan, China and Russia, none of whom would be comfortable with a nuclear-armed North Korea — seem unwilling to do the same. Decisive U.S. leadership, as it often does, will go a long way in this case.

Our view on nuclear diplomacy: N. Korea misses a deadline

Don't get too tough, too fast on paranoid regime.

Posted at 12:21 AM/ET, January 03, 2008 in Foreign Affairs - Asia - Editorial, Nuclear weapons - Editorial, Politics - Editorial, Politics, Government - Editorial, USA TODAY

Besides the ball dropping in Times Square, something else important was supposed to happen by midnight Dec. 31. The North Korean regime of Kim Jong Il had promised to provide a full accounting of all its nefarious nuclear activities. Kim, being less reliable than the ball, missed the deadline. While that's no cause for celebration, nor is it reason for overreaction.

Kim's nuclear pledge last year was seen as a rare foreign policy breakthrough. In return for coming clean, and as he delivers in dismantling his main nuclear facilities at Yongbyon under U.S. supervision, he is gradually being given a range of rewards. Those include fuel for his impoverished people, nuclear reactors for electricity and less hostility from the United States.

The missed deadline raises the specter of a new crisis and gives ammunition to hawks who say that negotiating with Kim's bizarre regime is pointless. Certainly, if Kim continues to stall, he should be denied the food, fuel, technology and international respect he craves.

For the moment, however, the Bush administration has had an appropriately low-key, skeptical response to the latest delay. Earlier this year, North Korea missed a deadline to start dismantling the Yongbyon facility, but the process eventually went forward.

What is important is that Kim accounts for nuclear weapons and fuel made so far at Yongbyon; whether he has an illicit uranium program, as the United States suspects; and how much help he has given to other rogue regimes, including Libya, Iran and possibly Syria.

To keep North Korea on track requires a mixture of sticks and carrots from the countries involved in "six-party talks" (China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, the United States and North Korea). In the past, Kim has been adept at playing for time and sowing dissension. South Korea has been particularly enabling, but it now has a new president who wants to no longer be soft on North Korea. The role of China, its influential communist neighbor, is particularly important.

Dealing with North Korea can be infuriating. Kim likes to play psychological chicken to wring extra concessions.

Finding the right levers isn't easy. At times, they can be mind-bogglingly petty, given how much is at stake. Kim granted concessions, for example, after his funds of several million dollars for luxury goods were unfrozen. His father warmed up to personal diplomacy from Jimmy Carter, who says they bonded over fly-fishing. So President Bush's recent gambit of sending a letter to Kim holds more promise than earlier bluster about North Korea being part of the "axis of evil."

Threatening North Korea and isolating it even more has a tendency to push this paranoid power to more desperate actions. If Kim continues to flout deadlines, ratcheting up the pressure will become necessary. As the new year begins, however, patience and persistence are the best approaches.

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/01/opposing-view-a.html?loc=interstitialskip>

Opposing view: A diplomatic charade

Unseemly talks with Kim Jong II pose security threat to U.S., allies.

By Nicholas Eberstadt

Posted at 12:20 AM/ET, January 03, 2008 in Foreign Affairs - Asia - Editorial, Nuclear weapons - Editorial, Politics - Editorial, Politics, Government - Editorial, USA TODAY

Once and for all: Can we please stop pretending that Kim Jong II is negotiating with us in good faith? The only surprise about North Korea's latest missed deadline — and broken promise — in the ongoing "six-party talks" is Washington's seemingly unending tolerance for this diplomatic masquerade.

Well into the fifth year of negotiations on denuclearizing North Korea, what tangible results do our arms control conferees have to show for their efforts? Only a temporary shutdown of the North's Yongbyon plutonium facility. (State Department happy-talk notwithstanding, that facility has not yet been fully "disabled," much less "dismantled.")

What about the covert uranium enrichment program, whose exposure back in 2002 triggered today's nuclear drama in the first place? Pyongyang still officially denies its very existence. Indeed, breaking pledges signed last February, North Korea has not yet even bothered to offer an accounting of its past nuclear activities to its "negotiating partners" (China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States).

Our response to that violation has been, yes, a request for more talks! In the no-penalty wonderland of conference diplomacy, it would appear Kim Jong II can blow us off whenever he wants — confident we'll always shuffle back to the table. But the unseemly charade of denuclearization negotiations with North Korea is worse than an embarrassment. It is, in fact, compromising the security of America and her allies.

During the six-party talks, the North Korean government continued to amass plutonium for weapons. Over those same years, Pyongyang went from hinting it had nuclear weapons, to explicitly declaring it possessed nukes, to test-blasting a nuclear weapon.

Viewed without illusion, these vaunted denuclearization talks with North Korea have in practice provided diplomatic cover for Pyongyang to achieve its long-desired status as a nuclear weapons state. And, by the way, any American official who thinks Kim Jong II wouldn't dare sell his nuclear wares abroad is off in a dream world.

The Bush team apparently has no benchmarks for failure in its nuke talks with Pyongyang — so the conferencing continues. But it continues at our peril.

[Nicholas Eberstadt, a researcher at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of *The North Korean Economy — Between Crisis and Catastrophe*.](#)

Nuclear North Korea

Eerie silence

Jan 3rd 2008

SEOUL AND TOKYO

From The Economist print edition

Golly: the Dear Leader won't come clean about his bombs

ANOTHER deadline, another disappointment. Last February North Korea agreed with four of its neighbours and the United States to give up its ambitions as a nuclear power in return for lashings of aid and rehabilitation from its standing as an international pariah. Crucial to the deal was North Korea's subsequent promise to declare all its nuclear activities by December 31st. The deadline came. It went. From Pyongyang, not a squeak.

Though hardly out of keeping for such a secretive, recalcitrant regime, the silence has generated unease, even embarrassment, among North Korea's counterparts in the six-party talks hosted by China, which, typically, described the hold-up as “natural”. But the administration of President George Bush reversed a once hostile policy in the past year in an attempt to prove that engagement with North Korea, even after it let off a nuclear bomb, could work. America's patience will have limits.

For now it will not sound the alarm. After all, an earlier part of the deal, the closure of the Soviet-era nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in July, came three months later than promised. Since then American inspectors have moved into Yongbyon to see that it is disabled and eventually dismantled. December 31st was also meant to be the deadline for Yongbyon's disablement, which was missed as well. But this week America was at pains to stress North Korean technical co-operation. If anything, it said, the delay was because of its own insistence that due care be taken in removing the thousands of fuel rods from the ageing reactor.

A few weeks' delay in the declaration of North Korea's nuclear programmes would be tolerable. Any longer and the six-party process would be in trouble. For the nuclear programmes are the crux of the matter. Declaring them was never going to come easily to Kim Jong Il, North Korea's “Dear Leader”. His nuclear weapons, however few and feeble, provide his only leverage against the world. Yet America is unlikely to stand for any bluff—not least because of suspicions that a Syrian site bombed by Israel in September was a nuclear facility that had North Korean help.

The questions now are not only how much plutonium North Korea has extracted and how many warheads it has made. The Bush administration also wants to know the scale of the programme to enrich uranium to which North Korea admitted in 2002. Earlier claims by America about its scale seem exaggerated; still, it has evidence that Pakistan's nuclear racketeer, Abdul Qadeer Khan (see article), sold the North uranium-enriching gear.

Hitherto, those in the six-party talks have given North Korea the benefit of the doubt: only Japan has been openly sceptical about the North's sincerity—at least until it has come clean about the Japanese kidnapped by the regime in the 1970s and 1980s. Now Mr Kim may face a hardening of the ranks.

However badly Mr Bush needs a foreign-policy success, he will not move towards normalising relations with North Korea before nuclear progress. As for South Korea, President Roh Moo-hyun has until now seen no evil; yet even his foreign minister now admits that dealing with a nuclear North Korea is a Sisyphean task. What is more, Mr Roh steps down next month and his conservative successor, Lee Myung-bak, is no fan of “sunshine diplomacy”. He promotes a harder line to the North: aid and investment from Seoul should follow nuclear disablement.

Mr Kim may yet come clean on his programmes, and denuclearisation continue apace. If he doesn't, it is not obvious what the world can do about it.

U.S. Should Focus More on N.Korean Plutonium

Updated Jan.7,2008 09:28 KST

In a statement issued by a foreign ministry spokesman, North Korea, which missed the end-2007 deadline to declare all of its nuclear weapons and materials, claims it did prepare a list of items to declare and notified the U.S. in November of last year. Since the U.S. says it has received no such notice from the communist country, the comments sound like North Korea's way of saying it has no intention of declaring its nuclear weapons and materials. Yet North Korea did not harshly criticize the U.S. or present new demands.

The basic reason the North Korean nuclear situation has reached a stalemate is because North Korea has failed to declare its nuclear weapons and materials. The problem has become more complicated with North Korea denying the existence of its uranium-enrichment program and allegations that it transferred nuclear technology to Syria. The Pakistani president and Pakistan's chief nuclear scientist have testified they transferred uranium enrichment technology to North Korea. And a Syrian nuclear facility that was destroyed in a bomb attack by Israeli forces is believed to bear a strong resemblance to North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear facility. These are matters that will not be resolved simply by North Korea denying them.

But from South Korea's perspective, these problems are not at the center of the issue of North Korea's nuclear threat. Judging from various testimonies and North Korea's own admissions, it is very likely true that North Korea did come up with a uranium enrichment program. But it will be realistically impossible for the North to produce a nuclear bomb with enriched uranium because it does not have enough electricity to do so. It is also doubtful that North Korea would feel the need to proceed with the uranium enrichment program since it is believed to have already processed quite a large amount of plutonium and produced nuclear bombs using it. This problem surrounding uranium has come to the surface and has been exaggerated due to differences in opinion between hawks and doves within the U.S. government, and now it seems that the issue may have degenerated into a war of justification between the two countries. Although it is important to find out whether North Korea did in fact transfer nuclear technology to Syria, at this point, such efforts, if true, have been halted.

The central issues of the North Korean nuclear threat are how much plutonium North Korea has processed, how many bombs it has made using that material, how much plutonium it has left and where it is keeping it. This is the core of the problem that South Korea and the international community are facing right now.

If the reports that North Korea notified the U.S. that it processed 30 kg of plutonium are true, then this is a truly serious situation. U.S. intelligence officials believe North Korea has processed at least 50 kg of plutonium. If North Korea has scrapped only 30 kg and has hidden 20 kg somewhere, it can produce several nuclear weapons at any time. If that's true, then we will end up with North Korea as a nuclear power, rather than getting it to fully scrap its nuclear programs and weapons. The U.S. must waste no time in focusing on the real threat of North Korea's plutonium and verify whether the communist country has the will to abandon its nuclear weapons program. The issue of enriched uranium can be addressed later.

North Korea: Clouds Block the Sunshine at the Six-Party Talks

by Bruce Klingner

WebMemo #1771

January 10, 2008

North Korea's failure to meet yet another negotiating deadline raises more doubts about its commitment to get rid of its nuclear weapons. Other events of recent weeks raise disturbing new questions about U.S. policy toward North Korea. The Six-Party Talks have reached an impasse due to conflicting interpretations over the level of detail Pyongyang must provide on its nuclear weapons programs, a shortfall brought on by U.S. acquiescence to vague negotiating text. The most recent joint statement called on North Korea to desist, disable, declare, and dismantle its nuclear weapons programs. It appears that Pyongyang has added deny, deceive, and delay to the mix. And it appears that U.S. negotiators, in an attempt to shield the talks, concealed the fact that North Korea made an inadequate declaration.

The magnitude of the dispute between the U.S. and North Korea over critical aspects of the data declaration will make it more difficult for diplomats to continue papering over differences. Instead, the U.S. and its allies must be resolute on insisting that North Korea declare the number of nuclear weapons and amount of fissile material that it has, as well as provide full transparency of its uranium-based weapons program and proliferation activities. Six-Party Talks participants should withhold additional economic or diplomatic benefits for North Korea until it fully complies with these obligations and allows verification inspections. It would also be prudent to prepare contingency measures, including the sanctions called for under U.N. Resolution 1718 and, in the longer term, returning the nuclear impasse to the U.N. Security Council (UNSC).

North Korea's Obligations

North Korea agreed in the October 2007 Six-Party Talks joint statement to "provide a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs...by 31 December 2007." This requirement followed its February 2007 agreement to "discuss with other parties a list of all its nuclear programs [within 60 days]."

Beyond violating the December 31 deadline, North Korea remains in defiance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718 of October 2006. In response to North Korea's nuclear weapons test that month, the U.N. Security Council demanded that North Korea immediately rejoin the Non-Proliferation Treaty and comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) nuclear safeguards. The UNSC also decided that Pyongyang should "abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner...[and provide] access to individuals, documentation, equipments and facilities."

Conflicting Interpretations of Disclosure Requirements

The Six-Party Talks joint statements were flawed because they failed to delineate the extent of North Korea's data declaration requirements. The Bush Administration has stipulated that Pyongyang must fully disclose its nuclear weapons and fissile material, the extent of its program to covertly develop uranium-based nuclear weapons, and any proliferation activity with other nations.

North Korea claims it provided a complete nuclear declaration to the United States in November 2007, one month before the deadline. Pyongyang's official statement, that it "has done what it should do," matches private statements to visiting officials that it does not intend to provide more information. At that time, the expected deficiencies in North Korea's declaration likely influenced the U.S. delegation to decide against formally presenting the document at the next round of negotiations, which would have taken place in early December 2007. The need to keep sensitive details secret is understandable; but to conceal the fact that a declaration was made, and essentially negotiated, undermines the Administration's credibility.

North Korean non-compliance is not a mere inconvenience or speed bump; it is a brick wall that should halt further progress until completely resolved. The data declaration deals with the core requirements of the Six-Party Talks process; namely, full denuclearization and transparency. Described in further detail below, Pyongyang may have already crossed the red line drawn by the Bush Administration on North Korean nuclear proliferation to other rogue nations.

Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop, or Waiting for Godot?

It remains unknown whether North Korea's intransigence reflects standard negotiating tactics or an unwillingness to ever denuclearize. If the former is the case, Pyongyang would be expected to raise the price for its compliance by resurrecting previous demands such as light-water reactors or a non-aggression pact. But the latter seems more likely. Throughout the negotiations, North Korean officials have indicated a goal of gaining international recognition as a nuclear weapons state and giving up only the capability of producing nuclear weapons in the future.

North Korea's defiant posture marks a rejection of Washington's efforts to get the regime to come clean on its uranium weapons program. With the ball back in the U.S. court, two developments have constrained Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill's negotiating room and increased skepticism about the nuclear agreement: the exposure of possible North Korean nuclear proliferation to Syria, thus crossing the U.S.-drawn red line; and the revelation that North Korean aluminum tube samples contained uranium traces.

The big issue now is how low the U.S. will go to maintain momentum in the Six-Party Talks. The Bush Administration, entering its final year and longing for a foreign policy legacy, will be increasingly tempted to accept Pyongyang's half-hearted compliance as sufficient justification to continue negotiations. The Administration adopted a firmer line on the data declaration only following criticism of its stonewalling about possible North Korean nuclear proliferation to Syria.

The U.S. may even claim sufficient progress to justify providing all economic and diplomatic benefits called for in the joint statement and convening a meeting of the foreign ministers. That course of action, however, risks undermining the potential to finally achieve a full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Verification: The Next Test

If the two sides are able to resolve the data declaration imbroglio, the next hurdle will be negotiating sufficient verification measures to prevent a recurrence of North Korean cheating. Several months ago, when there was still optimism over the forthcoming data declaration, a Bush Administration official

downplayed the need for strenuous verification: "Most of it should be pretty quick if it meshes with U.S. Intelligence Community estimates." However, subsequent North Korean statements saying that it had produced 30kg of plutonium--significantly less than U.S. Intelligence Community estimates of 50kg--underscores the need for an extensive verification regime.

The Bush Administration, however, is unlikely to demand requisite verification measures without outside pressure.

What the U.S. Should Do

The United States should take the following steps to induce North Korea to comply with its commitments:

- * Acknowledge the revised declaration when it is offered--however inadequate it may be.
- * Avoid the past U.S. tendency to offer more benefits in an attempt to break the logjam caused by North Korean intransigence.
- * Impose a hiatus on providing any additional economic or diplomatic benefits. Six-Party Talks meetings can continue, but they should not be "business as usual" until North Korea completes its obligations.
- * Do not remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism until it has fulfilled all legal requirements as well as admitted to previous terrorist acts. Reducing these issues to a nuclear negotiating chip would trivialize human rights issues, including the fate of Japanese abductees.
- * Insist on adequate monitoring requirements to verify the data declaration once it is provided. An extensive verification protocol should include a sufficient quota of short-notice, "challenge" inspections of suspect sites.
- * Request that President-elect Lee Myung-bak delineate and announce the linkages between South Korea's ongoing and future economic incentives and the concrete steps North Korea must take toward nuclear compliance.
- * Integrate South Korea's unilateral aid to North Korea into the conditionality of multilateral Six-Party Talks process. Also, any deal should include World Food Program monitoring standards to ensure Pyongyang does not divert humanitarian assistance.
- * Urge South Korea to impose conditionality not only on government-sponsored inter-Korean projects but also on South Korean business ventures, including those proposed during the inter-Korean summit.
- * Call on China to impose conditionality in its economic engagement with North Korea, which is the latter's primary source of unconstrained financial gains.
- * Ask South Korea to join the Proliferation Security Initiative.

* Implement U.N. Resolution 1718 sanctions against Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs, and require North Korea and Syria to divulge the extent of their nuclear cooperation.

* Maintain international law enforcement measures against North Korean illicit activities. Sanctions should be maintained until the behavior that triggered them has abated.

* Closely integrate U.S., South Korean, and Japanese initiatives toward North Korea to enhance negotiating leverage and to secure Pyongyang's full denuclearization.

* Reject requests to convene a foreign ministers meeting or send a special presidential envoy to resolve the impasse.

* If North Korea does not comply with its obligations within two months, bring the North Korean nuclear issue back to the U.N. Security Council.

Conclusion

Six-Party Talks participants need an integrated plan to induce North Korea to comply with its commitments. With the cut-off of unconditional aid and business activity, as well as funding from illicit activities, North Korea would face a fundamental choice between isolation and economic stagnation or conditional engagement with benefits. Negotiations cannot be open-ended and stationary, since that would play to Pyongyang's goal of deferring international punishment and isolation.

Like an errant student, North Korea is handing in its research paper late and demands a passing grade. The U.S. should insist that negotiators don't grade on a curve.

COMMENTARY

North Korea's True Colors

By JOHN BOLTON

January 11, 2008; Page A11

There's more positive news from the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea: Its leaders have refused to make any further disclosure concerning its nuclear programs.

How is this umpteenth violation of the Feb. 13, 2006, agreement in the Six-Party Talks positive? Because at a critical moment on a gravely important issue, North Korea has again shown its true colors, thus providing the United States an opportunity to extricate itself from this unwise and dangerous deal.

Troubles in the six-party talks on Korea emerged long before this most recent public manifestation of Pyongyang's unwillingness to give up anything of consequence concerning its nuclear program. Israel's Sept. 6 raid against a likely Syrian-North Korea nuclear project was a fire bell in the night that the regime was up to its old tricks -- at least for anyone willing to listen. The administration's continuing refusal to allow Israel to make public the true nature of this facility will only come back to haunt it, not only on North Korea, but also on its Middle East policy. If no North Koreans were involved, why not shout it out? If the facility was not nuclear, why not do the same? The significance of the Sept. 6 attack has not faded in Congress, nor will the demands for more public disclosure.

In the aftermath of the Feb. 13 agreement, North Korea had to develop a cover story for its uranium-enrichment activities, as well as a way to conceal its stock of plutonium and actual nuclear weapons. And yet -- despite the seemingly active and continuing collaboration by the U.S. State Department in coming up with a convincing line of patter -- Pyongyang still insists it never engaged in uranium enrichment, producing as evidence melted-down tubes. Melting the tubes was curious in and of itself, suggesting that in their original form they appeared much more like centrifuge equipment than artillery barrels. The regime made a fatal mistake, however, because the metal showed unmistakable traces of highly-enriched uranium (HEU).

Perhaps even the State Department's East Asia Bureau was shocked at this evidence of North Korean duplicity. In any event, the "dual use" dodge was now out of play, and Pyongyang had to be persuaded to come up with a more convincing cover story. Even this they have now refused to do.

The timing is important, because elements within the U.S. intelligence community were questioning the community's 2002 assessment that North Korea had launched a production-scope procurement effort for enrichment equipment. This effort, similar in origin and intent to the recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program, may well have been sidetracked by the findings of HEU, which at least in part reinforced the 2002 conclusions.

Moreover, whatever the North Korean declaration says about its nuclear activities -- assuming just for sport that we actually get a declaration -- it was always only a first step in a long process of verification, and not even the most important one. If North Korea and the State Department, working

together, can come up with something they think will pass the public smile test once it is released, we still need to verify the accuracy and completeness of the declaration. Here is where State has failed most obviously: There has yet to be, 11 months after the Feb. 13 agreement, even a hint of what specific mechanisms will verify a declaration. Unless and until this vacuum is filled, we are going nowhere fast in denuclearizing North Korea.

So, as Kim Jong Il's hero, Lenin, used to say, "what is to be done?"

President Bush can now argue without fear of contradiction that he has done more than anyone could expect to give fantasy a chance, and therefore make a policy course correction. North Korea has dragged out its performance for nearly a year, has less and less incentive to make Mr. Bush look good, and has in sight the possibility of a resumed Clinton administration, or something even weaker. By resuming a tough line on North Korea, Mr. Bush can at least make a future administration's retreat from a tougher, more realistic course, more difficult to explain.

Given the recent South Korean presidential election results, Mr. Bush will soon have a willing ally in Lee Myung-bak, who will be inaugurated on Feb. 25. After 10 years, a realist will once again occupy Seoul's Blue House, one who will support a tougher American line rather than oppose it.

Mr. Bush should meet with Mr. Lee as soon as practicable, and urge South Korea to join the Proliferation Security Initiative, a genuinely important Bush administration legacy. This will help squeeze the North, by adding South Korea's considerable knowledge and capabilities in the waters around the Korean Peninsula.

It will also reinforce Japan's continuing tough line under Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda -- given president-elect Lee's apparent willingness to confront North Korea on its horrifying oppression of its own citizens and its international record of kidnappings. If South Korea now joins with Japan in pressing the North hard on the kidnappings, Japan is less likely to bend under State Department pressure. This should certainly provide ample reason for the U.S. not to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism for the remainder of the Bush administration.

Aligning Japan and South Korea with the U.S. will allow President Bush to increase the pressure on North Korea internationally by resuming financial sanctions and other "defensive measures." It would also help put the spotlight back on China, which has the real economic leverage to force a change in North Korea's nuclear policy, if it chose to exert it.

We are long past the point of allowing China to cover for Kim Jong Il without any cost in its relations with the U.S. Getting China to take concrete steps against North Korea's nuclear capabilities through increased economic and political pressure would be a true diplomatic success for the Bush administration in its waning days.

Hiding the evidence

Reconstruction effort at bombed Syrian site likely aimed at covering up evidence

Ronen Bergman

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Israel Opinion

A person who is closely familiar with what happened in Syria back in September 2007 estimated Saturday night that the renewed construction work at the bombed Syrian site is not a joint Syrian-North Korean attempt to reestablish an atomic project – through which Pyongyang aimed to supply Syrian President Bashar Assad with nuclear weapons' production means.

Rather, he estimated that the reconstruction work is part of the effort to hide what was at the site prior to the bombing.

According to assessments, these efforts are being undertaken mostly for fear that the International Atomic Energy Agency would request to visit the site. According to the estimate, it is unlikely that the Syrians will attempt to reconstruct the secret project at the exact same location and in the exact same manner, after it was uncovered in such an embarrassing fashion. If the Syrians would want to reconstruct the project, they will secretly set it up in a completely different location.

Satellite images showed that following the bombing, the Syrians engaged in massive efforts at the site and cleared the ruins of the facility that was targeted by the Air Force. Now they are building something out there that looks very much like the giant structure that was there before.

The objective of this effort, according to estimates, is two-fold: First, reinforce the official Syrian declarations that the building targeted by the Air Force was meaningless, and there we see a copy being built and it is clear that it is not a nuclear facility. Second, this enables more extensive work below the structure in order to remove from there any remnants of what was at the site before, without the sensitive feelers of Israeli and American spy satellites hovering above being able to see and document it.

Calm may be deceptive

And on the same subject, but from a different angle, sources who are following developments in Syria warn that the danger of an all-out war in the wake of the September bombing has apparently passed – yet the calm may be deceptive. We should not be underestimating Assad's hurt pride.

In the summer of 2001, after the Air Force bombed Syrian targets in Lebanon twice in response to Hizbullah activity, Syria changed its approach to Hizbullah and from being a transfer point for Iranian weapons it turned into being the organization's main arms supplier.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Helsinki, Redux?

January 21, 2008

Listen to the U.S. State Department, and the six-party talks with North Korea are working: Pyongyang has agreed to abandon its nuclear program, China and South Korea are stepping up their diplomatic roles, and all Washington needs is patience.

Enter Jay Lefkowitz, President Bush's Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea, with a reality check. In a speech Thursday in Washington, Mr. Lefkowitz said "it is increasingly clear" that the Bush Administration will end with North Korea remaining "in its present nuclear status." In other words, Pyongyang will not honor its promises.

Mr. Lefkowitz offers a few reminders: North Korea has ignored two deadlines to disclose the details of its nuclear program, announced it will strengthen what it calls its "war deterrent," and is suspected of having proliferated some kind of nuclear technology to Syria. He added that China and South Korea have been "unwilling to apply significant pressure on Pyongyang" and have supplied large amounts of aid "even though it is often diverted from those in need to the regime elite and military."

To reorient U.S. policy, Mr. Lefkowitz proposes a Helsinki process for North Korea, echoing Ronald Reagan's successful effort to undermine the Soviet Union almost three decades ago. Under this plan, Washington would tie aid to verifiable progress on human rights and disarmament. "The key is to make the link between human rights and other issues explicit and non-severable, so that it cannot be discarded in any future rush to 'get to yes' in an agreement," Mr. Lefkowitz says.

Mr. Lefkowitz's analogy with the Soviet Union is not perfect. Kim Jong Il has demonstrated that he has more in common with Stalin than Mikhail Gorbachev. Mr. Lefkowitz is correct, however, to say the six-party talks aren't working and that a more "holistic" approach is needed. In addition to linking aid to improvements in human rights, he suggests restricting North Korea's access to the international banking system, a tactic that proved effective until it was rejected by the State Department. He is also right that the newly elected President in South Korea will likely take a tougher line toward Pyongyang -- especially if encouraged to do so by Washington.

Mr. Lefkowitz's words bear special notice because he is close to Mr. Bush, who appointed him, and to whom he reports. A State Department spokesman said Friday that his "comments certainly don't represent the views of the Administration." Then again, maybe they do.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/23/AR2008012303282.html>

Slowly, but Surely, Pyongyang Is Moving

By David Albright and Jacqueline Shire

Thursday, **January 24, 2008**; A19

The optimism with which the October agreement with North Korea was welcomed has faded amid accusations that the North again is not keeping its commitments. First came word that "disablement" of nuclear facilities was slowing. Then there was the missed Dec. 31 deadline for North Korea to declare the full scope of its nuclear program, including its plutonium stockpile and uranium enrichment activities. And earlier in the fall, North Korea was accused of helping Syria construct a nuclear facility in its desert, reportedly a reactor.

The finger-wagging, told-you-so naysayers in and out of the Bush administration should take a deep breath. There is no indication that North Korea is backing away from its commitments to disable key nuclear facilities and every reason to expect this process to unfold slowly, with North Korea taking small, incremental steps in return for corresponding steps from the United States and others in the six-party discussions.

Disablement of the five-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon slowed in part because the United States decided that unloading the irradiated fuel rods as fast as North Korea proposed could needlessly risk exposing the North Korean workers to excessive radiation. North Korea is unloading the rods and making steady progress on the other aspects of disablement at the Yongbyon site. Could it be happening faster? Probably, and North Korea would point out that promised shipments of heavy fuel oil are also slow in coming.

North Korea's nuclear declaration was to be received by Dec. 31. On Jan. 2, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said the United States was still "waiting to hear" from the North. Pyongyang responded that the United States had its declaration. After some tail-chasing, it emerged that North Korea had quietly shared an initial declaration with the United States in November. According to media reports, this declaration stated that North Korea had a separated plutonium stockpile of 30 kilograms and denied that it had a uranium enrichment program.

Does this quantity of separated plutonium make sense? Yes. In short, 30 kilograms is at the lower end of the range of plutonium that we have assessed North Korea could have separated. This estimate is based on what we know about how long its reactor operated to build up plutonium in the fuel rods and how much plutonium was chemically extracted from this fuel at the nearby reprocessing plant.

What about any enriched uranium? There is no question that North Korea has committed to providing the other nations in the six-party discussions with information about its uranium enrichment efforts and should be held to that commitment. But we should not lose sight of an uncomfortable fact -- that U.S. policymakers misread (at best) or hyped information that North Korea had a large-scale uranium enrichment program. There is ample evidence that North Korea acquired components for a centrifuge-enrichment program, but few now believe the North produced highly enriched uranium or developed its enrichment capabilities in the manner once claimed by the United States.

The success or failure of this latest agreement with North Korea must not hinge on the uranium issue.

This is an interesting and relevant part of its nuclear program, but it is still a footnote in the context of its plutonium production.

Reports that North Korea has cooperated with Syria on a hidden nuclear program are troubling but must also be kept in context and, until additional information is available, should not be allowed to undermine the agreement. It is possible that North Korea was selling sensitive or dual-use equipment to Syria's nuclear program. The best argument for holding the deal together is that it brings North Korea into the fold, bit by bit, making it harder for it to slip back into the arena of illicit deals and keeping a bright light on its activities. As for the "box in the desert" that Israel bombed in September, it is gone now and whatever has replaced it is almost certainly not a reactor.

Accusations in the Israeli media that North Korea transferred plutonium to Syria, where it was to be placed into bombs, are baseless. The transfer of such material for weapons would be a casus belli with dire consequences for both countries, and this surely is understood by both Kim Jong Il and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

North Korea is looking to the United States to keep its promises on delisting it as a terrorist state. Unfortunately, given the climate in Washington and the perception that North Korea is slow-rolling the declaration process, this is unlikely over the near term. Pyongyang should be realistic in its expectations.

For Washington, and the unfairly maligned advocates of the six-party process, the task is to maintain laser-like focus on taking the next step toward fulfillment of the October agreement, with the goal of moving to the disarmament phase, and not allowing these hard-won steps to be drowned out by the noise of detractors.

David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector, is president of the Institute for Science and International Security. Jacqueline Shire is a senior analyst at ISIS and a former State Department foreign affairs officer.

The door has closed on Syrian-Israeli negotiations

By Itamar Rabinovich

Commentary by

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

The prospect of a Syrian-Israeli peace settlement looms over the Arab-Israel and larger Middle Eastern arenas as a potentially significant but ever elusive issue. On the eve of the Annapolis conference, the dormant Israeli-Syrian track seemed infused with new life; a few weeks later it appears blocked yet again.

Such fluctuations are not new to this track. At the height of the post-Madrid peace process, when the Clinton administration and four Israeli prime ministers actually gave the Syrian track preference over the Palestinian track, several intense efforts were invested in achieving a Syrian-Israeli deal. They ended in failure and tilted the peace process toward the Palestinians and Jordan.

During the first six years of the current decade, the Israeli-Syrian track seemed to have lost all relevance due to the convergence of several developments: First, President Hafez Assad's death and his son and successor's failure to establish himself as an authoritative figure; second, Ariel Sharon's ascent to power in Israel and his determination to focus on the Palestinian issue and reluctance to withdraw from the Golan; third, the transformation of the Syrian-Iranian alliance and partnership of the 1990s into an unequal relationship between an Iranian senior and a Syrian junior partner; and fourth, the deterioration of Syria's relationship with the Bush administration, initially in 2003 over Iraq and then, in 2005, over Lebanon.

The Bush administration's and the American president's personal animosity toward Syria and President Bashar Assad was such that when Sharon's successor, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, began to tinker with the idea of renewing negotiations with Syria, he was told in no uncertain terms by Washington that the Bush administration objected to a diplomatic initiative that would help Syria steer its way out of isolation and rebuild its legitimacy in the international arena.

But as noted above, this seemed to change on the eve of the Annapolis conference. It may seem odd that a conference devoted to the Palestinian issue would serve to revive interest in the Syrian track. But in the event, it was precisely the State Department's fear that Syria would sabotage the quest for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement that led to the renewal of a limited American-Syrian dialogue.

An understanding was worked out that consisted of three elements. First, Syria would participate in the Annapolis conference, thus enhancing its legitimacy. Second, Annapolis would still be solely devoted to the Palestinian issue, but clear references would be made to the need for a "comprehensive" settlement and to Syria's own turn farther down the road. And third, Syria tightened control over its border with Iraq and may also have promised to help resolve the political institutional crisis in Lebanon.

This trend was reinforced by parts of the Israeli government, particularly those linked to the security establishment that called for renewal of negotiations with Syria. Some of their arguments echoed the reasoning of the 1990s: It was easier to conclude an agreement with a state like Syria than to resolve

the complex national conflict with the Palestinians. Other arguments were new, shaped by current realities: Beyond resolving the bilateral conflict, a deal with Damascus would detach Syria from Iran and Hizbullah, transform the strategic equation in the region and diminish if not eliminate the challenge faced by Israel in and from Lebanon.

In fact, intermediaries were employed by Israel to explore the prospect of such a deal with Syria, but to no avail. Assad's position is clear and unchanging: Syria is willing to renew negotiations based on the foundation built in the 1990s. Furthermore, it is not satisfied with the hypothetical, conditional "deposit" presented then by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin but wants a "commitment" to withdraw from the Golan in return for a "cold peace." Such an agreement must be bilateral, and "preconditions" concerning relations with Iran or other parties are unacceptable.

The narrow opening offered by Annapolis now seems to have closed. The main reason is Lebanon, where Syria continues to meddle, intimidate and even kill in order to preserve and restore its position. This is totally unacceptable to President George W. Bush, who sees the survival and success of the Siniora government as a high priority. With this frame of mind, and in view of the priority the president and his secretary of state assign to completion of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations before the end of 2008, the prospect of American willingness to invest in the revival of a Syrian-Israeli negotiating track is remote.

In Israel, Prime Minister Olmert, bracing for the publication of the Winograd Report and fighting to keep the right-wing parties in his coalition (unhappy as they are with the ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians), is hardly likely to open yet another political front with the powerful (and presently dormant) Golan lobby.

It is important to remember that this discussion of the ups and downs of the Israel-Syria diplomatic option is being conducted in the ominous shadow of potential military escalation. Assad has stated several times that while he is seeking to renew negotiations with Israel he is also building a military option. Israel's destruction of a nuclear reactor in its early stages in northeastern Syria last September 6 served to demonstrate how determined and far-reaching Syria's quest for "strategic parity" with Israel can be.

Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's former ambassador to Washington and chief negotiator with Syria, is the Ettinger professor of contemporary Middle Eastern history at Tel Aviv University. His new book, "The View from Damascus," is due this spring. This commentary first appeared at bitterlemons-international.org, an online newsletter.

Don't dump Olmert

By Uri Dromi

Published: January 31, 2008

JERUSALEM:

Ten months ago, when the Winograd Commission issued its interim report on the handling of the 2006 Lebanon war, there were calls for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to step down. There are again now that the final report is in: According to polls published Thursday, 57 percent of the Israelis believe Olmert should go.

Though I was never one of Olmert's fans, I thought then that he shouldn't step down, and I still think so now.

Since the interim report came out, two comprehensive books on what we call the Second Lebanon War were published, which left no stone unturned. Therefore this week's report didn't tell the Israeli public anything it had not known before: that in the years preceding the war, there was a complacency with regards to the growing threat of Hezbollah; that years of policing the West Bank and Gaza had weakened the Israeli Army's preparedness for real war; that the military placed too much reliance on the capabilities of air power and technology to achieve victory; that the civilian leaders, Olmert and then-Defense Minister Amir Peretz, were inexperienced, acted hastily and made mistakes that cost the lives of soldiers and civilians. Israelis are perfectly aware of all this, and more.

Israelis, however, differ on the question of whether Olmert should follow the example of his partners in the Lebanon blunder - Peretz and former Chief of Staff General Dan Halutz - and resign. Those wishing to see heads roll argue that war is the ultimate test of national leadership, and once a nonpartisan, serious commission has declared that Olmert failed that test, he should go.

Others believe that while Olmert's performance in the war was poor indeed, the results of the war are far from being a total failure.

The strategy of Hezbollah - taking the north of Israel hostage by the threat of the Katyusha rockets - was challenged and eventually shattered. By taking Israel to war in the summer of 2006, Olmert restored Israel's deterrence, even if he did it in a flawed way. Just look at the calm on the Lebanese-Israeli border for the last 18 months. It seems that Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, is not so keen any more to invoke the wrath of the Israeli Army.

Furthermore, since 2006 there has been a vigorous effort to fix the flaws exposed within the army and Israeli society.

The army is not the same, experts agree. The generals who were there during the war resigned, accumulated rust has been chipped away, training has been doubled, military doctrines reexamined, old equipment replaced.

Olmert himself, bruised by the war, seems to have learned his lessons. If foreign sources are correct, then last September Israel, under his leadership, destroyed a partly constructed nuclear reactor in Syria apparently modeled on a North Korean one. If there is one thing Israelis are concerned about today more than the last Lebanon war, it is the nuclear threat. So Israelis may be wondering whether their prime minister isn't the right man for the job after all.

Then there's the peace process. Forcing Olmert to resign now would throw Israel into political mayhem for a long period. President George W. Bush's commitment to an Israeli-Palestinian accord by the end of 2008, though not highly realistic, will immediately be declared null and void.

The chaotic situation in Gaza, the dependence of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on a stable Israeli partner and the fragile relations between Israel and Egypt all demand a cool-headed Israeli leadership - not a cut-throat election campaign.

Will Ehud Olmert survive his Battle of Winograd?

It depends on how much credit Israelis will be willing to give him and on their assessment of the alternatives. Writing about the interim report on these pages in May 2007, I concluded that the "Israelis, while not happy with their prime minister, prefer for the time being to carry on with him rather than rock the boat even further." I think they still do.

Uri Dromi is the director of the Mishkenot Shaananim conference center in Jerusalem. He was the spokesman of the Rabin and Peres governments between 1992 and 1996.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/31/AR2008013102628.html>

In North Korea, Process Over Progress

By Michael Gerson

Friday, February 1, 2008; A21

By my count, at least five former high-level Bush administration officials are deeply disillusioned with the current policy on North Korea.

This brewing discontent broke into open revolt two weeks ago when Jay Lefkowitz, the special envoy on North Korean human rights, committed the gaffe of stating the obvious: North Korea is not serious about nuclear disarmament. The current six-party talks will do little to change that fact. And the price we are paying to pursue those talks is silence about the suffering of a brutalized, friendless people.

Afterward, even some of Lefkowitz's supporters complained that he had ventured "out of his lane." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice slapped the special envoy down hard, noting to reporters that he "doesn't know what's going on in the six-party talks." Lefkowitz's speech was quickly scrubbed from the State Department's Web site.

But Lefkowitz spoke after 2 1/2 years of frustration. The East Asia bureau at the State Department, headed by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, has consistently viewed the raising of human rights as an impediment to the serious work of negotiating with Kim Jong Il. The Korea desk tried and failed to exclude Lefkowitz from important policy meetings with the president. It attempted unsuccessfully to weaken the North Korea section in the State Department's annual human rights report. Human rights groups generally view Hill with great suspicion.

Some State Department officials working in nonproliferation and intelligence reportedly share Lefkowitz's dissatisfaction. But, as one former Bush official made clear to me, "Rice's treatment of Jay shows that you need to stay quiet if you want to stay in government."

Even critics of the current approach believe that the agreement reached last February was worth a try. After testing a nuclear weapon, North Korea was under serious international pressure. The U.N. Security Council passed a tough resolution that included economic sanctions. So North Korea promised to move away from its nuclear ambitions in stages, beginning with a freeze on work at its plutonium reactor and enrichment complex -- though some experts suspected that the plant was already nearing the end of its useful life. In return, the North Koreans received pledges for 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil.

The problem has come in the months since. Having begun the path of negotiations, the State Department has consistently moved the goal posts closer to keep North Korea at the table. The second stage of compliance was supposed to be the permanent "disablement" of the plutonium complex, which is now interpreted as disablement that is irreversible for a year. Some experts believe it is actually reversible in a few months. To keep the process going, America has returned money that the North Koreans gained from money laundering, drug trafficking and proliferation.

And North Korea's nuclear disclosure, due at the end of 2007, was not even close to adequate. Kim declared 30 kilograms of plutonium but did not even mention uranium enrichment, weapons

components or proliferation to Syria. This is a far cry from Libya's full disclosure in 2004, in which that nation sent its most sensitive nuclear program materials to a facility in Tennessee.

North Korea feels little pressure as a result of its noncompliance. China seems relieved that Kim hasn't recently misbehaved and urges patience. The South Korean government continues to hold up its end of a protection racket: To keep the peace, South Korea provides North Korea with aid, which is diverted to strengthen North Korea's military, which threatens South Korea, which gives more aid to keep the peace.

This is the problem of State Department "realism." Negotiations that begin as a means become the end itself -- a kind of blind and dreamy faith in the magic of the process. Any form of criticism or coercion disappears, because "the North Koreans won't negotiate under pressure" -- when, in the past, the North Koreans have negotiated only under pressure.

Kim's goal in the six-party talks is clear: He wants to trade a single, aging nuclear complex for the easing of sanctions. By all accounts, North Korea's supreme leader has the mentality and social skills of a troubled 13-year-old -- but he seems to be doing remarkably well in these negotiations.

The alternative is not to end the talks or impose a blockade. It is, as Lefkowitz pointed out, to pursue a more sophisticated diplomacy familiar from the Cold War. Tie the improvement of relations to both security and human rights. Encourage the new South Korean government to demand more North Korean openness in exchange for resources and cash. Push the United Nations to identify North Korean entities for sanctions. Above all, talk about the rights of North Koreans once again, so the prisoners and the dead are not forgotten.

michaelgerson@cfre.org

http://www.forbes.com/home/business/2008/01/31/nuclear-north-korea-biz-wash-cx_0201oxford.html

North Korea: We Can Work It Out

Oxford Analytica 02.01.08, 6:00 AM ET

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il said Wednesday his country would cooperate on implementing agreements reached at multilateral talks.

Kim pledged to renew his government's commitment to the deals when speaking with a visiting senior Chinese Communist Party official yesterday, according to Chinese press reports.

However, until these most recent remarks, progress last year with North Korea--both in multi-party talks and through strengthened ties with South Korea--has stalled. Now, in changing political circumstances, global relations with North Korea may begin to deteriorate once again.

Sung Kim, director of the U.S. State Department's office of Korean affairs, visited Seoul, Beijing and Pyongyang for three days earlier in the week. His aim is to jump-start the six-party negotiations on North Korea's nuclear programs; the talks have stalled since Pyongyang failed to meet a 2007 year-end deadline to disable its Yongbyon nuclear site and declare all its nuclear activities.

Disabling

Yongbyon closed in July; since then, disablement to put it beyond use has proceeded under U.S. supervision. Safety concerns made the year-end deadline non-feasible, but Pyongyang has recently slowed the removal of fuel rods from the facility from 80 to 30 per day, claiming that other parties are delaying the delivery of promised energy aid, and diplomatic relations have stalled.

Declaration

The resistance of North Korea to reveal the details of its nuclear programs is even more problematic. North Korea says it has already given the U.S. a list--in November 2007--but **Washington remains far from satisfied on three key issues:**

--HEU: Pyongyang is suspected of pursuing or having pursued a second nuclear program, using highly enriched uranium (HEU), in addition to its known plutonium-based facilities.

--Syria: **Some suspect a link between North Korea and a plant in eastern Syria, bombed by Israel last September, raising nuclear proliferation issues.**

--Bombs: All nuclear weapons and fissile material have to be declared in accordance with commitments Pyongyang has made.

Clarity

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il can have no doubt about what is required after close liaison between the lead U.S. negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan. As with disablement, a slight delay with the declaration would be tolerable, but worries persist.

Kim Jong-il may be unable to persuade hard-line generals to give up their nuclear deterrent; he may expect the world will have to accept a de facto nuclear North Korea, as it has with India and Pakistan. He may even be holding out for a better deal from the next U.S. president when Bush leaves office a year from now.

U.S. Differences

Confusing signals have been coming out of the United States:

On Jan. 17, Jay Lefkowitz, appointed special envoy on human rights in North Korea before the U.S. switch to engaging with Pyongyang last year, called North Korea a "serial proliferator...not serious about disarming in a timely manner."

Lefkowitz said the country would still have nuclear weapons Bush's term ends. He remarked that Seoul and Beijing could do more to influence Pyongyang, and suggested U.S. policy might also be under review.

The U.S. State Department swiftly disavowed these views, but they struck a nerve. If Kim reneges, neo-conservatives--who opposed engagement all along--will claim vindication, and the multilateral talks may unravel as governments ponder how best to handle a defiantly nuclear North Korea.

To read an extended version of this article, log on to Oxford Analytica's Web site.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=18664297>

Seymour Hersh on Israel's 'Strike in the Dark'

National Public Radio

Talk of the Nation: February 4, 2008

LYNN NEARY, host:

When Israel launched a seemingly unprovoked attack on Syria last September, the media in Europe and the United States, according to unnamed sources, reported that Israel had destroyed a nuclear reactor which was under construction. But there are still many questions about the attack and its target.

New Yorker staff writer Seymour Hersh spent months talking to U.S., Syrian and Israeli officials and a number of other intelligence authorities. In the latest issue of the New Yorker, he writes that whatever was being instructed at that Syrian facility probably had little to do with nuclear weapons, and that the bombing may have been a warning signal to Iran about its nuclear intentions.

Mr. Hersh joins us now in Studio 3A. Good to have you with us.

Mr. SEYMOUR HERSH (Staff Writer, New Yorker): Glad to be here.

NEARY: First of all, why was that facility in Syria thought to be a nuclear reactor in the first place?

Mr. HERSH: Well, the Israelis will tell you that it was a large building. It was along a river. It had the physical dimensions of a reactor that was similar to the size, length and width of a reactor in North Korea.

And I think their attitude in Israel was they had some other intelligence. They had reason to believe North Koreans were there. They say they have empirical data that they have not made public. And that's the rub of the story. They have data that they have not made public that would prove it, but they're not making it public.

Their best ally in the world, the Americans, our government, is also clearly involved in some of the planning for this raid - that I can establish, I did establish rather easily - and we're not talking about it publicly.

Syria complained quite a bit in the beginning about it and then stayed relatively mute. They didn't do much about it. And so it's become sort of a conundrum. The press went, as you said - look, who am I to be talking about anonymous sources?

NEARY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. HERSH: I've written, spent much of my career writing about anonymous sources. But the people I talk to, basically, are people inside who are critical of policy. In this case, the policymakers themselves were giving the various newspaper reporters - the correspondents who cover the State Department and the White House - they were giving him their version without saying that this - there's been no official statement by the United States or Israel at all.

NEARY: Yeah.

Mr. HERSH: And that's the story, it seems to me. We're talking about an act of war.

NEARY: Yeah.

Mr. HERSH: And we're talking about three major countries that won't talk about it.

NEARY: Well, I was really curious about a lot of things that you wrote about. But I was really curious about why Syria has been relatively quiet, as you said, about this, and apparently sort of got rid of any evidence that may have been there as to what actually was in this facility.

Mr. HERSH: Well, what they did was this. They said nothing - very little. They complained. They wrote a letter to the U.N. Essentially, what they did find, yes, indeed, there were Koreans there and, yes, indeed, there was a military building being constructed. It wasn't finished. The best I get it was partially done, was slowed up, I think, because of our war in Iraq obviously. They started it before the war and finished it - just went back to it this spring.

I think they were sensitive about the fact there were South Koreans.

(Soundbite of coughing)

NEARY: North Koreans.

Mr. HERSH: North Koreans. I think, also - I should say think because the only thing we know is that the president, Bashar Assad, publicly said it was an unfinished military building. But beyond that, they've said nothing else.

What I was writing - what I'm reporting in the New Yorker this week is pretty much new. The question is: Is a building that has some military significance with North Koreans there, does that justify a raid across the border, an act of war?

And I can tell you, the amazing thing for me about the way people in the Middle East think about things - and you have to understand we're different. We do think differently. When Hezbollah, the Party of God, the Shiites in Lebanon captured two Israeli prisoners, the response from Israel was 34 days of bombing with America sort of looking on, saying nothing.

Here, Israel goes across the border, bombs something - it's not - you know, a building, whether it was nuclear or not, and nobody in the world says anything.

NEARY: Yeah.

Mr. HERSH: So there is a double standard at work. I think for Syria also, it's very hard to acknowledge they did nothing. It's a matter of shame for them that they did not respond. They took the hit.

But beyond that, the ultimate bigot - for me, the focus, of course is, as an American, I - what's my country doing in this game? Why are we spinning stories anonymously, not talking publicly? And what I discovered in doing the reporting - I did played border reporter for months on this. Every single fact - I should say that many of the salient facts that were pushed by the various anonymous sources - a boat showed up, called the el-Hamid(ph) three days before it landed in a port in the Mediterranean in Syria with hot stuff in it. That boat, when you check it out, had been into - had been in North Korea in 10 years...

NEARY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. HERSH: ...was a tramp steamer, essentially not very useful. And it could not possibly have been the boat that the Israeli press and the American press reported it was. And so you find so many other disconnects in the

story. And yet, the story is still there. If you ask anybody to read accounts, it's Syria had a nuclear reactor that was destroyed by Israel; (unintelligible) another day in the world.

And I quote a man, Morton Abramowitz, who is - was an ambassador for the American government and was the head of intelligence in the Bush years. Morton Abramowitz, who was now a director of the international crisis group, said, you know, what's going on with us? An act of war? Violation of a border, a raid, and nobody says anything and no - so that was the motive.

The motive in this - doing this story is just to say, you know, there are standards.

NEARY: Yeah.

Mr. HERSH: Yeah - excuse me.

NEARY: Well, why - you've said the United States was involved in - what was the United States involvement and what was the motivation for the U.S. involvement?

Mr. HERSH: What I know from inside - and I have contacts inside. And what I know from inside, in the Pentagon, at the JCS level, and also into the vice president's office, this mission, this raid was being discussed in the summer before it took place. It took place last September 6th.

In the late summer, there was talk and planning of going into Syria with Israeli planes monitored by American intelligence aircraft and taking a sweep - a good look at their radar. The defense intelligence agency reported last year that Syria had upgraded its radar, not to the point where the Iranian - as good as the Iranians - but to a level getting close. So the idea was just to go - as my friends knew it - to go and take a look and knock down their radars, take a look and see how they responded, copy as much as we can, learn as much. And lo and behold, about 10 days afterwards, my guys, who thought it was a radar raid, began to hear this talk about hitting a nuclear reactor.

And in fact, the Israelis had no intention of doing anything but going in and hitting a nuclear reactor. And if you ask me what I really think about this, I think the Israeli government had some very high level contact - off the record if you will, perhaps with the vice president, perhaps even with the president - in which they said what was going on but did not tell the American system.

We have an amazing situation in this country, where we do have the - particularly the vice president, will operate outside the chain of command.

NEARY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. HERSH: He will move forces, he will make orders, move - make military decisions, and not tell the appropriate generals in the chain of command. He deals directly - Dick Cheney deals directly with our joint special operations command, for example, that the three-star general runs. And he gets in the phone and says go do this and that. And the rest of the officers have to scramble and find out what's going on. We - you know, again, the concept behind the story, really, was to say we have to hold everybody to a high standard here.

NEARY: But if it wasn't a nuclear reactor that was under construction, what was this building?

Mr. HERSH: Best guess was there was - the Syrians have decided a long time ago that - the trouble with having chemical warfare reactor weapons, if you use it against Israel, the Israeli response is nuke. You're incinerated. So the real issue for them was, years ago, I think they made a decision - I was told this - to go what they call asymmetrical.

If you remember, when Israel invaded Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, they fired rockets. Well, Syria is going to do the same thing. They've been manufacturing low-level, low-yield rockets that can - they're probably going to be better than the ones Hezbollah had. They're going to be able to hit - go deep into Israel perhaps as far as Tel

Aviv, from the Golan Heights and from the areas in the north. And the idea is just to shower Israel in response with rockets.

They can't match Israel man for man, if the Israelis decided to attack. What makes the invasion or the attack last September so interesting, there have been a summer of tension over the Golan Heights. And in the middle of this, Israel makes a strike. I, frankly, I still sit here and I think about it. I say, have we become so unnerved(ph) and so numbed by the seven years of this government that there's no - even not much of a corner for outrage when somebody goes across the border? Yes, Israel is an ally of ours and it always will be. But that doesn't mean we have to countenance a raid across the border.

NEARY: We're talking with Seymour Hersh about an article he wrote in the New Yorker about an Israeli attack on a Syrian military facility and the many unanswered questions about that.

If you have any questions from Mr. Hersh, the number is 800-989-8255. Or you can send an e-mail to talk@npr.org.

What about the role of the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency? And Syria didn't ask them to come in and do any inspection today. And what was their take on whether or not this really was a nuclear facility?

Mr. HERSH: They - their opinion based on the satellite imagery, the same imagery that an America was accepted as fait accompli, the IAEA's experts - and you know they use a lot of overhead, they do a lot of analysis because they monitor compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty - they didn't see any evidence there was a building. Somebody - I quoted somebody as saying, "a building is a building." They didn't see any evidence of any nuclear reactor there.

On the other hand, I did see some senior officials in Syria. I quoted the vice president: "If I saw people actually higher, not on the record." And a very senior intelligence general did say to me at some point when I asked him about this, why didn't you go and invite the IAEA into? He said, they never asked to come. That's not true. They did ask to come.

NEARY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. HERSH: And so the Syrians, I must say, to put it mildly, fell all over themselves into response. They didn't - there wasn't a straight answer out of what was going on. Within a few days, they gave...

NEARY: That's what's so peculiar to me about this. It contains...

Mr. HERSH: Well, you know, those countries are so weird. The New Yorker is an incredible checking department. Almost everything that gets written, even from all my anonymous sources, these sources are contacted and approved and go - we go through the notes. We want to make sure we're totally accurate, not being unfair to anybody - try and check with the Syrian. The foreign minister, the head of intelligence - it's just a - they're just in another planet.

The checking department just couldn't get anybody to respond. They were going to the ambassador here, trying to verify what I was writing. And the - we always kind of end up using my notes, but the idea is not to, to get beyond my notes, do independent verification above and beyond what I produce.

It's very hard. They're just - the foreign minister said one thing. The head of intelligence said another thing. Their press agency said a third thing. Nobody even admitted a building had actually been bombed for almost four weeks after the event inside Syria. It was hapless.

And that does - they are so - I won't say difficult. They're just in a different planet when it comes to what we do in the West with their 24-hour cable television, et cetera.

NEARY: We're talking with Seymour Hersh of the New Yorker. And you're listening to TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

Now, you - it seems to me, at the end of your article, you came to the conclusion - or you indicated that what this really may have been about was kind of a warning signal to Iran about its - what it's doing with its nuclear capability.

Mr. HERSH: I can say this, that one of the selling points inside the White House for doing the exercise just in terms of lighting up the radar was let's show the Iranians that we can - we're going to go study the Syrian radar, and that'll help us understand what could happen to us if we go into Iran. We can't go into Iran and do what we did in Syria, because the Iranians will do something. It's a country of 70 million.

Syria, you can just walk over. They're a small country, small army. The Israelis have been penetrating their airspace, and I will tell you right now American combat soldiers and special operators have been crossing the border all the time. We just sort of - Syria is not - it's just sort of taken as not somebody who's going to stick, you know, a fork in our eye as the Iranians might if we did something like this.

But then, the bottom line came out to be this that for the Israelis, many of them believe there was something there. They did not want to wait around. There's a building, and they didn't like it. There was a building and they saw Koreans there. They had intercepts. They heard the Koreans yakking away. That was enough. And they're not going to wait and see what it is going there. Maybe it's going to be nuclear, maybe it's going to be missile - we're going to take it out. That's their reasoning.

Also, it has other advantages. One, it demoralizes the Syrians. It reminds the president of the Syria not to get too cocky after the victory last summer of his ally, the Lebanese Hezbollah, somewhere a year and a half ago. And Israel believed that Assad got very puffy, full of himself after the Hezbollah took down Israel in that big fight during the summer of '06.

The other factor was, of course, domestically it was terrific. Olmert needed something. This raid, once it became not officially known but unofficially in the chatter class, gave him a lot of publicity, and there was a lot of support for it.

Mention the word, anybody in the Middle East with a nuclear weapon, any Israeli attack is always applauded. And most significantly, in terms of the White House, in terms of the vice president, why he would support something like this, according to my friends, is it's a message for the Iranians: Look out. We're not done. There may have been a very negative National Intelligence Estimate, negative in terms of the Israeli point of view because it said there's no ongoing weapons program, but don't think we're not coming. We're capable of coming.

And that was a message too. I think we're in a real crisis in this country. For those people who want to do something about Iran, they're really flailing now. The NIE has undercut it totally. I don't think America could do it. I think probably half the Joint Chiefs of Staff would resign or do something anyway.

NEARY: Let's see if we can take one call in here from Chuck. He's in San Francisco. Hi, Chuck.

CHUCK (Caller): Hi. This seems to be an example of a phenomenon that I find very troubling, which is the - what seems like the increasing frequency of proxy fighting proxies, like, if Israel is bombing Syria so the United States can send a message to Iran, it seems like more and more, what was, you know, Hamas and Hezbollah, being a proxy for Iran and, you know, the Pakistani intelligence forces kind of operating through forces in Afghanistan.

If you can kind of separate yourself from accountability for your actions and you empower other parties to act for you, doesn't this kind of open a whole can of worms that could be very dangerous?

Mr. HERSH: Well, absolutely. You've just described the reason - I think one of the great underlying reasons that we have so many contract employees, you know, particularly fighting the war for us, like Blackwater did. In Iraq, which has a separation of responsibility, I don't think there's any question. If Israel takes any aggressive action against, let's say Iran or even dramatically against Hezbollah again, that the United States will not be far behind in - just in terms of, as you say, maybe even using the Israelis as a proxy. But certainly, sharing the ideas and pumping up funds in support for the Israeli forces doing the actual military action, you're totally right in my book.

NEARY: All right. Thanks for your call, Chuck.

CHUCK: Thank you.

NEARY: And just one last question. We don't have much time, but you've mentioned the North Koreans - and I'm not sure we explained completely what the North Koreans were doing there at that site.

Mr. HERSH: Well, there's certainly were North Koreans intercepted. I learned this from basically, believe it or not, from the Syrians, initially. There - in Syria - when I go to Syria, I'm watched a little bit. I'm taking interviews with - accompanied to people's office. I did see some people - I've been there many times. That's what I do for a living. And I saw a senior officer who just, you know, without anybody knowing I was there, I went to his home. And he said to me, look, they were doing construction. There may have been high-level technicians, too, involved, and if there were rockets involved.

And basically, they were there. They were chattering away on phones back home, sending fax messages and money sent home. They were intercepted, and the Syrians are pretty sure the Israelis intercepted it. I've learned from the Americans they were there. And I think it was embarrassing for the Syrians. That was the fact they didn't want to advertise. And that's maybe another reason they didn't talk.

NEARY: All right.

Mr. HERSH: It's all mystifying.

NEARY: All right.

Seymour Hersh is a staff writer for the New Yorker. His article is in the February double issue, out today. Thanks so much for being with us.

This is TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

Analysis: Iran's secret Syrian plan

Posted in: Opinions

Written By: OLIVIER GUITTA

Article Date: Feb 5, 2008 - 3:22:39 AM

Israel has been providing intelligence and satellite images to the U.S. about a secret Syrian nuclear program for several months, according to media reports. Discussions between Israel and the United States took place last summer regarding a possible strike. But when Israel found the matter so pressing that when they realized the U.S. was not ready to act, on September 6 they attacked a Syrian nuclear site. Hence the question: what is Syria really up to or more to the point what is Iran up to?

First, let's start with an underreported explosion that occurred in a Syrian military base outside Aleppo on July 26. Jane's Defense Weekly reported, citing Syrian defense sources, as saying the explosion took place during a test to fit a "Scud C" missile with a mustard-gas warhead. It quoted the sources as saying the explosion occurred when fuel caught fire in the missile production laboratory.

But there might be another explanation. Kuwait's Al Seyassah newspaper recently reported that a Shiite Lebanese religious cleric claimed the Iranians were allegedly supervising a chemical weapons manufacturing program and that tens of Iranian experts and engineers died as a result of that explosion. He also said Israelis attacked the base. He added that Western officials told him they received proof from Israel on the Syrian chemical weapons program. Even if Israel's involvement is not proven, what remains sure is that it must be very happy that a chemical weapons facility in Syria has been partly destroyed.

Now regarding the September 6 strike; while we may never know what really occurred, what remains sure is that the situation is direr than one could imagine and that most likely, Israel did not just bomb a nuclear site in the early stages. Indeed, the silence of the international community and especially the Arab world after the attack is a first, and it shows the gravity of what happened. Even though Syria and its Iranian sponsor are detested, and in the case of Iran feared, in the Muslim world, the fact that there was no condemnation of Israel at the U.N. could be interpreted as a tacit relief that Israel acted.

Another proof of what transpired came from ranking Republicans on the House Intelligence and Foreign Relations committees, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Peter Hoekstra, who were briefed on the Israeli strike and sworn to secrecy. They wrote an op-ed in the October 20 Wall Street Journal clearly underlining the seriousness of the situation regarding both the North Korean and Iranian involvement in the Syrian arms program.

Finally, the fact that the Bush administration (including President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and most notably Defense Secretary Robert Gates) has been ramping up the rhetoric and taking action against Iran (including the latest sanctions against the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) in the past week, might also be linked to what really happened in Syria.

The Syrian story is far from over: in fact, on October 23, Al Seyassah ran a story about potential new secret nuclear sites in Syria. According to Western sources cited by the paper, it is possible that Syria is developing other nuclear sites with the help of North Korea, Iran and Iraqi experts, the latter who fled

their country at the start of the Iraq war in 2003. In fact, observation satellites have allegedly located in Syria at least two other sites similar to the one destroyed by Israel last month.

Iran's handwriting is all over the wall from the chemical to the nuclear arms program in Syria. Indeed, in research conducted last year as part of an article published in Washington's The Examiner, this reporter delved into Syrian's secret nuclear program, making the point that Syria might actually be "Plan B" for Iran. By helping develop nuclear sites in Syria, strikes on Iran might turn out to be useless. This was a smart strategy until Israel bombed the Syrian nuclear site on September 6 and made the world notice.

* Olivier Guitta is a foreign affairs and counterterrorism consultant in Washington DC and the founder of the newsletter The Croissant. (www.thecroissant.com)

IAEA special inspections after Israel's raid on Syria

By Fiona Simpson |

11 February 2008

"The Israelis are already attacking our allies. It is time to teach them a lesson or else Syria will be next."

-- Statement attributed to Soviet Defense Minister Dimitriy Ustinov at a cabinet meeting immediately following Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor.

Several months have passed since Israel attacked what was rumored to be a partially constructed nuclear facility in Syria. The facility--allegedly undertaken with North Korean assistance--has remained a subject of speculation, its existence officially unconfirmed. Israel, the United States, and Syria (apart from a letter of protest to the U.N. Security Council and U.N. secretary-general) have remained nearly silent on the subject. Save for North Korea, the same holds true for the rest of the international community.

Although unconfirmed, the rumors have started a discussion about the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Syria's obligation to the IAEA under its comprehensive safeguards agreement, concluded in accordance with its obligations under Article III of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which Syria belongs. Other related questions have been asked regarding whether the IAEA has the authority to dispatch inspectors to Syria on the basis of the allegations.

Background. In 1992, in an attempt to respond to the discovery of Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapons program, then-IAEA Director General Hans Blix called for the safeguards system to possess more "teeth." As part of this effort, at a February 1992 meeting, the IAEA Board of Governors reaffirmed the IAEA's right to conduct special inspections under the comprehensive safeguards agreement to be concluded by all non-nuclear weapon states belonging to the NPT. At the same meeting, the board expanded the requirement on the provision of nuclear facility design information beyond that called for under paragraph 42 of INFCIRC/153, which required information to be provided "as early as possible before nuclear material is introduced into a new facility."¹

Instead, the board called for revisions to existing subsidiary arrangements to be incorporated into both new and old safeguard agreements.² These revisions would oblige states with comprehensive safeguard agreements in force to provide preliminary information to the IAEA as soon as a decision has been made to construct, authorize to construct, or modify a facility. Finally, in an interesting coincidence, the February 1992 board session also approved the text of the comprehensive safeguards agreement for Syria, which would enter into force on May 18, 1992.

Safeguard obligations and the question of special inspections. The potential implications of the raid--i.e., the possibility that Syria had quietly been constructing a nuclear facility--brought all three of these board decisions into the spotlight. By the end of 1997, Richard Hooper, the then-director of the Division of Concepts and Planning in the IAEA's Department of Safeguards, wrote in the IAEA Bulletin, "The early provision of design information now is incorporated in all new and most existing subsidiary arrangements." Syria, whose safeguards agreement entered into force after the board

decision to revise the subsidiary arrangements, would therefore need to inform the IAEA as soon as it decided to construct a facility, if such construction was underway.³

In order to clarify whether the allegations against Syria had any basis, the IAEA secretariat (i.e., the director general) does possess the authority to invoke the special inspections component of INFCIRC/153. According to this document, the IAEA is empowered to make special inspections to either verify the information contained in special reports (not applicable in this case) or "if the agency considers that information made available by the state, including explanations from the state and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the agency to fulfill its responsibilities under the agreement."⁴ Those responsibilities are defined at the document's outset: ". . . to ensure that safeguards will be applied, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, on *all* source and special fissionable material in *all* peaceful nuclear activities within the territory of the state, under its jurisdiction, or carried out under its control anywhere for the exclusive purpose of verifying that such material is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices."⁵ [Emphasis added.]

The controversy here lies in the language referring to the IAEA's responsibilities as the application of safeguards to nuclear material only. (Notably, the NPT's language is slightly broader, referring to the goal of safeguards as preventing the diversion of "nuclear energy" from peaceful uses.) However, if evidence was presented to the IAEA indicating that Syria was building a facility and hadn't informed the IAEA of its decision, questions would invariably arise as to whether there could be confidence that safeguards were being applied to all nuclear material within the state. Above all, it's the phrase "if the agency considers" that's most significant, as it gives the IAEA, on paper at least, a reasonable amount of latitude. According to the agreement, the authority to invoke special inspections follows from the IAEA's perception of whether or not it can carry out its safeguards mandate; the justification for special inspections presupposes a relatively flexible interpretation thereof.

But, in practice, the invocation and the implications of special inspections are more complicated, with the IAEA obliged to balance its safeguards mandate against the sovereignty and rights of its member states. The IAEA has only formally invoked special inspections twice--in 1992, at Romania's request to clear up outstanding discrepancies that occurred under Nicolae Ceausescu's regime, and a year later, when the IAEA became aware of inaccuracies in North Korea's initial report, due in part to information provided by the United States. North Korea refused to allow the IAEA to carry out the special inspections, which the board had approved, leading to a report to the U.N. Security Council on North Korean noncompliance.

Against this backdrop, it's not surprising that the IAEA director general stated in the case of the raid against Syria, "If countries have information that the country is working on a nuclear-related program, they should come to us. We have the authority to go out and investigate." As noted, satellite photos appear to show a building similar to North Korea's 5-megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon.⁶ But those photographs are subject to interpretation, and others who have examined the images consider them inconsistent with the allegations. In any event, it's highly unlikely that the IAEA would have invoked special inspections on the basis of media reports, allegations, and a quickly razed site (on which new, and likely non-nuclear, construction is now underway)--not simply because its credibility could be damaged if nothing were discovered, but because of the IAEA's sensitivity to antagonizing some member states by dispatching or seeking to dispatch inspectors on the basis of what remain allegations by others.⁷

More to the point, under the safeguards agreement, any disagreement concerning the need for additional access between the IAEA and the state entitles the state in question (in this case, Syria) to request that the board consider it.⁸ The board's member states, wary of inspections of the kind indicated above (and many of them historically touchy about the use of outside intelligence by the secretariat), tend to stay conservative on such matters in the best of times, let alone at a time when political sensitivities, such as those that currently exist over the question of Iran's nuclear program, are high.

Moreover, while the board reaffirmed the IAEA's right to conduct special inspections in 1992, it added that such inspections should be invoked "rarely." A rejected request for special inspections would be worse for the IAEA's credibility than special inspections that had never been invoked. In addition, the memories of Israel's 1981 raid on Iraq's nearly completed Osirak reactor and more importantly, its aftermath, shouldn't be overlooked as a factor in the IAEA's somewhat diffident response to recent events.

As opposed to its 2007 raid on Syria, Israel conducted a public campaign to explain why it bombed Osirak. The day after the attack, it presented a letter to the president of the U.N. Security Council, outlining its reasoning--namely, Iraq intended to use its NPT membership as a cover to develop nuclear weapons and that IAEA safeguards weren't adequate to detect such activity. Within months, the Israeli government released a publication that further detailed its thinking.⁹ Outside of Israel, an emergency meeting of the Arab League Council was convened in Baghdad, which concluded with a resolution calling upon the United Nations to impose sanctions on Israel. Unlike the 2007 conference, in which the raid on Syria went unmentioned, the 1981 IAEA General Conference became a forum for member states to express their anger with Israel and ended with a successful vote for the IAEA to suspend all technical assistance to Israel and consider suspending Israel's IAEA membership rights unless it placed all its facilities under IAEA safeguards. In an address to the U.N. Security Council on the subject, then-IAEA Director General Sigvard Eklund labeled the attack on Osirak as an attack on the IAEA's safeguards system--a viewpoint Washington directly rebutted during the 1981 General Conference.¹⁰

A year later at the General Conference, a narrowly approved vote on Israel's credentials took place. In response, the United States, Britain, and several other Western delegations walked out with the U.S. delegation head stating, "This pattern of abusing the U.N. system to carry on political vendettas is corrosively dangerous."¹¹ Washington then suspended its IAEA membership for five months--a suspension that entailed a freeze on U.S. funding to the IAEA. Two months after the U.S. walkout, Blix, then the new IAEA director general, reportedly said that if the suspension of U.S. participation stretched into the following year, "it could cripple our operations."¹²

Thus, the fact that the reaction to the Syrian raid has been far more cautious isn't simply because the raid remains publicly unclear; the IAEA's reluctance to push the issue onto the board's agenda also reflects an understanding of how costly this could prove to be--both figuratively and literally. Therefore, while the IAEA has the authority to invoke special inspections in the context of the raid on Syria, the chances of it acting upon that authority are slim and will remain so in the absence of concrete evidence. Syria's decision to raze the bombed building hasn't helped matters for the IAEA in this regard.

Conclusion. At first glance, it may seem as if the raid on Syria provided an opportunity for the IAEA secretariat to allay concerns by invoking special inspections and, in so doing, testing the board on its

1992 proviso that such inspections were to be rarely used. But in the wake of the international community's silence, the allegations of a partially constructed nuclear facility in Syria remain confined to media reports, which often quote unnamed sources. And the lack of concrete evidence to bring before the board increases the likelihood that such a move would backfire, resulting in the board rejecting the request for inspections and, like the Osirak case, raising the inevitable ire of some member states and increasing the politicization in the board. Therefore, Israel's raid on Syria doesn't represent the best opportunity to test the board on what the 1992 reaffirmation of the IAEA's right to conduct special inspections means in practice.

However, it does raise the question of the IAEA's practical authority in this regard. As of January 22, only 86 states have an Additional Protocol to their NPT safeguards agreement in force. The Additional Protocol, which greatly expands the IAEA's rights of access to information and locations in a state, allows the IAEA to provide credible assurance that there aren't undeclared nuclear materials or activities in a state, and not simply regarding the non-diversion of declared nuclear material. Clearly, special inspections wouldn't be viable, practical, or a politically feasible quasi-substitution for the tools and access granted under the Additional Protocol, particularly since the Board of Governors still formally considers the Additional Protocol a voluntary undertaking.

But without an Additional Protocol, as its director general likes to point out, the IAEA cannot provide credible assurance about undeclared nuclear material or activities within a state. Moreover, although required under the NPT, 30 states (also as of January 22) haven't brought even the basic safeguards agreement into force. As international concerns regarding nuclear black markets and other clandestine nuclear activities increase, and until the Additional Protocol is universal and mandatory--a controversial subject itself--it may be that questions similar to those currently being asked about Syria will arise--whether or not in the wake of some kind preemptive military action. While the vagueness of the allegations about Syria don't provide the best foundation upon which to do so, at some point, the IAEA and some of its member states may eventually need to be prepared to push its board on the interpretation of the IAEA's right to conduct special inspections. The raid on Syria provides them with an opportunity to start thinking carefully about this now.

¹ The text of INFCIRC/153 (corrected) provides the basis for negotiating safeguards agreements between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and non-nuclear weapons states parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); "The Structure and Content of Agreements Between the Agency and States Required in Connection with the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons," INFCIRC/153 (corrected), Vienna, 1972.

² Subsidiary arrangements to safeguards agreements are the "document containing the technical and administrative procedures for specifying how the provisions laid down in a safeguards agreement are to be applied." IAEA Safeguards Glossary, 2001 Edition, Section 1.26, IAEA, 2001, pp. 8-9.

³ The specifics of safeguards agreements and subsidiary arrangements concluded between the IAEA and the Syria aren't public. However, Syria's comprehensive safeguards agreement is understood to incorporate the revisions called for by the Board to Code 3.1 of its subsidiary arrangements (i.e., the early provision of design information). See also David Albright, Paul Brannan, and Jacqueline Shire, "Syria Update: Suspected Reactor Site Dismantled," (PDF) Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), October 25, 2007. Syria hasn't concluded an Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement, which would have allowed the IAEA wider access. Like other states of the region, it has traditionally linked the conclusion of an Additional Protocol with Israel's accession to the NPT and the establishment of a Mideast nuclear-weapon-free zone.

⁴ Special reports are made if any unusual incident or circumstances lead the state to believe that there is or may have been a loss of nuclear material in excess of specified limits or if changed circumstances have made the unauthorized removal of nuclear material possible; See INFCIRC/153 (corr.), Part II, paragraph 73(b).

⁵ Ibid., Part I, paragraph 2.

⁶ Albright, Brannan, and Shire, "Syria Update" (PDF).

⁷ William J. Broad, "Syria Rebuilding on Sites Destroyed by Israeli Bombs," New York Times, January 12, 2008.

⁸ INFCIRC/153 (corr.), Part II, paragraphs 77 and 21.

⁹ "The Iraqi Nuclear Threat: Why Israel Had to Act," (Jerusalem: Government of Israel, 1981). The report discussed the Iraqi hostility to Israel, the nuclear threat it would eventually pose, and the perceived inadequacy of the safeguards as they would be applied to the reactor.

¹⁰ Sigvard Eklund, "Address to the U.N. Security Council Meeting," June 19, 1981, reprinted in "Peaceful Nuclear Development Must Continue," IAEA Bulletin, December 1981, pp. 4-5. Eklund claimed, "From a point of principle, one can only conclude that it is the agency's safeguards system which has also been attacked"; The U.S. head of delegation, Deputy Energy Secretary Kenneth Davis asserted, "The United States Government . . . cannot support the view that the Israeli action constituted an attack on the agency and its safeguards regime or that it caused damage to that regime." See "Statement by U.S. Representative Kenneth Davis to the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency: Resolution Condemning Israel for Attack on Iraqi Nuclear Facility," Documents on Disarmament, (New York: United Nations, 1981), p. 454.

¹¹ Henry Giniger, Milt Freudenheim, and Katherine J. Roberts, "The World in Summary; Mideast Politics; In Atomic Forum," New York Times, September 26, 1982. The report quotes Davis.

¹² Judith Miller, "Head of World Arms Agency Sees Peril In Curbs," New York Times, November 17, 1982.

A New Middle East, After All

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

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[EXCERPT]

America's retreat from democratic Lebanon has been somewhat counterbalanced by Israel's bombing raid against the suspected nuclear site near Dayr az-Zawr, in Syria, which surprised and silenced both Damascus and its key backer, Tehran. But even here, the reaction in Washington is distressing. The Israelis exercised preemption, and the Bush administration--which has made preventive war an official part of America's post-9/11 doctrine--remained silent. The administration seems little inclined to dispute Israeli intelligence, but even if it thought the Israelis were wrong about North Korean involvement in this suspected nuclear site, the signal from the raid is exactly the one the president and the vice president were trying to send the Iranians about their nuclear facilities if they didn't stop uranium enrichment. It's hard to imagine a more helpful event for European and American Iran diplomacy, with its good-cop, bad-cop approach, yet Washington let it fall flat. It appears the administration went easy on Damascus partly for the illusory promise of Syrian participation in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process--which shows how far it has reverted to a pre-9/11 understanding of the Middle East.

Hardliners Target Détente with North Korea

Suzy Kim and John Feffer

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Editor: Emily Schwartz Greco

The Bush administration's approach to North Korea was once quite consistent with its overall foreign policy. There was name-calling, a preference for regime change, and an emphasis on military solutions. Not surprisingly, then, the relationship between the United States and North Korea, like so many other tense stand-offs, deteriorated over the last seven years. The United States accused the third member of the "axis of evil" of money-laundering, missile sales, and a secret program for the production of nuclear material. For its part, North Korea responded tit for tat at the rhetorical level. And, in October 2006, it upped the ante by exploding a nuclear device. If the United States were not tied up in other military conflicts, and eyeing Iran to boot, a war in Northeast Asia might have been higher on the administration's to-do list.

But all of that appeared to change in 2007. Chastened by military failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, anxious about the vulnerability of the Republican party on foreign policy issues in 2008, and accused of having allowed North Korea to "go nuclear" on its watch, the Bush administration reversed its hard-line policy. Washington agreed to negotiate seriously with Pyongyang, provide it with incentives on the road to denuclearization rather than only at the end of the process, and meet face to face when necessary.

The results of this turnabout were dramatic. The February 13, 2007 agreement in the Six Party Talks – among the United States, the two Koreas, Japan, China, and Russia – not only illuminated a path toward a denuclearized Korean peninsula. It also outlined steps toward the normalization of political relations with Pyongyang, a replacement of the Korean War armistice with a peace treaty, and the building of a regional peace structure for Northeast Asia.

Many conservatives were aghast that the Bush administration, after six years of ABC (Anything But Clinton), was essentially exhuming the Clinton administration's engagement policies toward North Korea. From their perspective, the Six Party Talks were only supposed to be a holding pattern until the regime in Pyongyang finally collapsed through a combination of outside pressure and internal weakness. When the Six Party Talks instead produced a breakthrough agreement, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton denied any achievement and declared, "I think the six-party talks failed." He then recycled his earlier position: "I think the only solution is the enhanced isolation of North Korea, ultimately bringing the regime down and peacefully reuniting the peninsula."

So far in 2008, progress toward implementing last year's February 13 agreement has slowed. North Korea has begun shutting down its Yongbyon plutonium facilities and readmitted inspectors, and the United States has sent about 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and 5,000 tons of steel products for its power plants. Nevertheless, disagreements remain. North Korea missed the first deadline for delivering a complete declaration of its nuclear program, and a second one looms at the end of February. Meanwhile, the United States has yet to remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Even if these hurdles are cleared, several more remain. It is not yet clear whether North Korea will

entirely give up its nuclear deterrent or whether the United States will remove all economic sanctions and extend diplomatic recognition.

The fragile *détente* between North Korea and the United States might succumb to its internal challenges. But hard-line opponents don't want to leave it to chance, and so are marshalling their arguments to strangle this hopeful development in its cradle.

Criticisms of engagement policy fall into several categories. Some critics, like Bolton, continue to hold onto the old Bush strategy of isolation and regime change because, they argue, North Korea cannot be trusted to abide by any agreement. Other critics focus on North Korea's nuclear program itself, both its internal characteristics and purported external cooperation with countries such as Syria. A third set of criticisms focuses on the February 13 agreement itself and identify flaws, ambiguities, and blind spots, particularly around the question of verification. Another group focuses instead on North Korea's human rights record. And finally there are conservative critics in Japan and South Korea who are attempting to undermine *détente* from the sidelines.

In short, the negotiators trying to implement the agreements reached in the Six Party Talks face a host of internal and external challenges. The hard-line criticisms can be addressed. But it's not certain whether engagement supporters in Washington or in Pyongyang have sufficient political capital to push the process forward in 2008.

The Nuclear Challenge

North Korea's nuclear program has long been a mystery. It's never been clear how much fissionable material the country has produced. Although the country froze its plutonium facilities as part of the 1994 Agreed Framework, it is unclear how much time and resources it devoted to pursuing a second path to a bomb, namely highly enriched uranium (HEU). Even the October 2006 nuclear test remains a puzzle. Some experts have declared it a failure, while others speculate that North Korea succeeded with a low-yield experiment.

For a small and relatively weak country, mystery can be very useful, and North Korea has been reluctant to disarm itself of such a weapon. The current conflict over the country's declaration of the full extent of its nuclear program is a case in point. North Korea claims that it already provided full information in November, in advance of the December 31 deadline. But the United States is not satisfied with the amount of plutonium that North Korea has declared or with the government's contention that it never set up a HEU program.

These points are negotiable. The amount of plutonium that North Korea has reportedly declared – 30 kilograms – is at the low end of U.S. estimates, so this is well within negotiable range. Getting agreement on the amount of reprocessed plutonium in North Korea's hands involves some massaging of the numbers, which is what happened in 1994 as well. The HEU program, meanwhile, is more a matter of saving face than dismantling a viable program. The Bush administration wants to demonstrate that its 2002 accusations, which derailed the 1994 Agreed Framework, had some merit. North Korea, however, wants to demonstrate that it did not violate the spirit of that agreement. Both sides have moved closer to agreement. The U.S. government has already admitted that its initial estimates were exaggerated. And experts suggest that evidence of uranium residue in aluminum tubes that North Korea provided to investigators, which would suggest actual enrichment, is the result of contamination from

Pakistani material. Christopher Hill has all but admitted that North Korea didn't use these tubes for uranium enrichment.

Syria Connection

What might not be negotiable, however, is the Syria connection, which hardliners have seized on to prove that North Korea remains an incorrigibly rogue power.

In early September, the U.S. media reported on Israeli military strikes against Syria that destroyed what might have been a nuclear facility. Some reports suggested that the facility had been built with North Korean assistance and that North Korean engineers had even died in the bombing. If the media reports were correct, North Korea had crossed the critical red line established by the Bush administration (after Pyongyang crossed the earlier red line when it tested a nuclear weapon). And yet, the Bush administration didn't raise a fuss at all. It instead allowed the State Department to go about its business. With hardliners like Bolton and the State Department's senior arms control and security official Robert Joseph no longer on the inside, the State Department has had more maneuvering room to pursue an engagement policy.

But congressional opponents of engagement certainly raised a fuss about the purported Syria connection. "We regret that the administration has ignored numerous letters from Congress asking that all members be briefed on the Israeli airstrike," wrote Peter Hoekstra (R-MI) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Failing to disclose the details of this incident to the legislative branch, preventing due diligence and oversight -- but talking to the press about it -- is not the way to win support for complex and difficult diplomatic efforts to combat proliferation by rogue nations." The congressional representatives cautioned the administration not to move forward on any agreements with North Korea until this matter was cleared up.

The Syria connection remains sufficiently mysterious that engagement opponents will be able to exploit it at any point when it seems that détente is moving forward. As Bolton has put it, "The idea of North Korea for years engaged in cloning Yongbyon in Syria (or anywhere else -- Burma, for instance) should be a fire bell in the night."

But the notion that any country would be interested in a clone of Yongbyon is quite farfetched. After all, North Korea's facility is itself based on a rather old English model -- the Calder Hall design -- and Syria could just as easily have skipped North Korea and gone back to the original. That is, if Syria were in fact building a nuclear plant, which is still not verified. As Seymour Hersh reports in *The New Yorker*, a former senior U.S. intelligence official with access to the current intelligence says that "We don't have any proof of a reactor -- no signals intelligence, no human intelligence, no satellite intelligence."

Bolton slips in a sly suggestion that North Korea is cloning Yongbyon elsewhere. In briefings with its Asian allies in early 2005, the United States similarly accused North Korea of providing Libya with uranium hexafluoride. But it turned out that the U.S. government had misled its allies. North Korea had provided the material to Pakistan, which already has a nuclear program, a business transaction that the United States had known about for years.

As such, there still remains no evidence that North Korea is engaged in nuclear proliferation, whether in Syria or elsewhere. North Korea is certainly short of cash, and nuclear know-how and materials are

valuable commodities. But no one knows the true marketability of North Korea's program, and certainly it would pale in comparison to what North Korea could earn from giving up its nuclear program wholesale.

Trust, Then Verify?

If North Korea provides a declaration of its nuclear programs that U.S. negotiators can live with, and the United States then proceeds to remove the country from the state sponsors of terrorism list, the process moves on to the next level. At that point, North Korea is supposed to submit to a more intrusive inspection regime and begin to give over all of its nuclear material.

Opponents of engagement are readying their arguments, and they largely focus on the question of verification. The Heritage Foundation's Bruce Klingner, for instance, compares the verification protocols from the Cold War with what is being proposed in the Six Party Talks and finds them wanting.

“To verify the extent of North Korean plutonium production, inspectors must be allowed to conduct short-notice challenge inspections of suspect sites as well as to take samples of fissile material,” he writes. “North Korea's refusal in 1992–1993 to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to access two suspect nuclear sites precipitated the first nuclear crisis. The agency has never gained access to the sites.”

In fact, during the lead-up to the first nuclear crisis in the early 1990s, North Korea allowed an initial inspection by Hans Blix of the International Atomic Energy Agency and produced a 150-page document detailing its uranium mining sites and nuclear power plants. “It turned out that the North Korean list closely matched Western estimates of the scope of its nuclear program,” writes Michael Mazarr in his study, *North Korea and the Bomb*. True, North Korea refused to allow the IAEA to visit the two suspect sites, claiming that they were conventional military facilities. But the real problem was that after allowing six IAEA inspections and providing the detailed list of its programs, North Korea hadn't gotten anything out of the deal: “no economic aid or investment, no broader political contacts with Washington or Seoul or Tokyo, not even the ability to verify that U.S. nuclear weapons had been withdrawn from the South,” Mazarr concludes.

The current demand that North Korea submit to an intrusive inspection regime as a precondition for moving forward with engagement recapitulates this earlier conflict.

Before it throws open its mostly highly secretive sites, North Korea wants some sign that its longstanding enemies – the United States, Japan, and South Korea – have changed their adversarial policies. South Korea has largely done so. But the United States has only sent over some heavy fuel and rescued a few North Korean sailors who were attacked in the Red Sea by pirates. Japan, still obsessed with the abduction issue, has shown no sign of changing tack.

The verification procedures that the Agreed Framework established are still applicable to the dismantlement of the Yongbyon facility. They worked during the 1990s, and there is no reason to doubt that they will work again. Expanding verification to short-notice inspections of all suspect sites throughout the country can only be achieved through give-and-take negotiations and the building of trust, not through fiat.

Human Rights

If negotiators manage to settle all the outstanding disputes over the nuclear issue, other stumbling blocks loom. Perhaps the most vexing is the issue of human rights. The debate over human rights in North Korea as it intersects with policy discussions over engagement inevitably focuses on the prudence of linking human rights concerns with political issues such as nuclear negotiations and normalization of relations. Central to this debate is not whether there are human rights violations in North Korea. No doubt North Koreans endure major human rights violations. As economic migrants or political refugees who have crossed into China, North Koreans face dire living conditions. They are in danger of being discovered not only by the authorities but also by anyone wanting a reward for turning in undocumented immigrants. For those remaining in North Korea, the list of human rights concerns is long, ranging from the full spectrum of civil and political rights to social and economic rights.

The heart of the matter is: how should these rights be protected and by whom? The answer largely revolves around the issue of regime change. Some, like Bolton, argue that North Korean human rights can best be protected if the regime is toppled. Others, like the German doctor Norbert Vollertsen, go so far as to encourage large refugee outflows to foster the collapse of the regime.

But human rights organizations such as Amnesty International have been leery of linking human rights to such political agendas throughout its long history of human rights activism precisely because such strategies only serve to detract from the issue in several ways. Political agendas take the focus away from human rights and play into geopolitical power struggles. In the short term, they provoke harsher measures that directly affect the most vulnerable. In the North Korean case, this was seen in the crackdowns by Chinese authorities after high profile bids for asylum in the scaling of embassy compound walls. Such strategies foster distrust rather than cooperation. Proponents of regime change seem oblivious to the even greater potential threat to human rights in the chaotic aftermath of regime collapse. In short, most human rights organizations believe that human rights should not be used as a political tool.

A negative example of what happens when human rights are linked to political agendas is the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004. This legislation authorizes \$24 million for each of the fiscal years between 2005 and 2008 for assistance to North Korean refugees, promoting human rights, democracy, and freedom of information inside North Korea. In addition, the bill mandated the appointment of a special envoy for human rights in North Korea, a position subsequently filled by lawyer Jay Lefkowitz.

On the surface, it seems that the legislation stands up for human rights, alleviating a major humanitarian crisis. However, it has another objective. During a speech given to the Heritage Foundation on April 19, 2007, Lefkowitz emphasized the need for increasing flows of information into and out of North Korea by smuggling in radios so that North Koreans might listen to programs like the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. "While all of these are crimes in North Korea, and getting caught could subject the offender to extreme forms of punishment, the long-term trend has been a steady increase in the porosity of the country," he casually stated. "In the struggle for human rights in North Korea, we not only can help try to save the lives of the North Korean people, most immediately, but we can also try to help make the region and the world safer by helping to bring about a similar transformation [as in the Soviet Union]. In this way, human rights can be a means to a greater end." Lefkowitz leaves little room for doubt that this "greater end" is the collapse of the North Korean regime.

More recently on January 17, Lefkowitz seemed to consign the Six Party Talks to premature death in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute. He declared that North Korea, despite four years of nuclear disarmament talks, will likely still have its nuclear weapons when the next U.S. president takes office in 2009. He accused Pyongyang of not being “serious about disarming in a timely manner,” pronouncing that “North Korea has not kept its word.” Revealing the longstanding split within the administration on how to deal with North Korea, his statement was hurriedly taken off from the State Department’s website, and its author quickly put in line by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. “[Lefkowitz] doesn’t know what’s going on in the six-party talks, and he certainly has no say on what American policy will be in the six-party talks,” she said sternly. “I know where the president stands, and I know where I stand, and those are the people who speak for American policy.”

Lefkowitz deliberately overstepped his bounds to undermine the nuclear talks by linking them to human rights. “Security issues and human rights issues are linked inextricably,” he has said. “They both derive from the nature of the regime, and any long-term effort by the international community to alleviate security concerns in northeast Asia will have to seek to modify the nature of the [North Korean] regime.” Although his job is to press for human rights, Lefkowitz views his role through the prism of national security and regime change. His apparent misunderstanding of his own job presents one of the strongest cases against linking human rights with political agendas.

Japan

Opposition to détente with North Korea isn’t confined to the United States. In both South Korea and Japan, hard-line conservatives have adopted many of the arguments concerning North Korea’s weapons program, verification procedures, and human rights. But they also have other agendas.

The outrage in Japan over North Korea’s admission that its agents had been responsible for kidnapping 13 Japanese citizens during the 1970s and early 1980s hardened into a conservative movement in Japan that opposes engagement with North Korea. North Korea returned five of the 13 abductees to Japan soon after the announcement and pronounced the rest dead. However, conservatives in Japan insist that no progress can be made in normalizing relations between the two countries until the return of the remaining eight along with an unknown number of others, claiming that they are still alive. The confusion over the status of the eight abductees revolves around DNA tests performed on the alleged remains, which came back as those of unrelated people.

However, in February 2005, a world-renowned scientific journal, *Nature*, concluded that such analyses of cremated specimens are highly inconclusive and easily contaminated by those coming into contact with them. More to the point for Koreans of both the North and South, however, is that the issue of abduction cannot bypass the history of hundreds of thousands of Koreans forcibly conscripted by Japan during its colonization of Korea to serve Japan’s imperial interests as forced laborers, soldiers, and most notoriously as “comfort women,” many of whom were abducted. Japan’s call for justice for Japanese abductees rings hollow next to its stubborn resistance in dealing with its own past.

South Korea

Although Lee Myung-bak, South Korea’s new president-elect, asserts continuity with previous policies, he’s also quick to point out his pragmatic approach toward North Korea. His foreign policy, dubbed the “MB Doctrine,” focuses on a for-profit version of engagement that promises bold economic support to

help increase North Korea's per-capita income to \$3,000 within 10 years if it abandons its nuclear weapons program. Tapping into frustrations expressed by many South Koreans at what appears to be stalled progress in North Korea's opening, Lee has pledged to "move away from the unilateral policy of appeasement that has been implemented without principle and embrace a strategy of reciprocity as a means to induce North Korea's genuine opening."

Of course, the quid pro quo is the complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program. One sign of Lee's more hard-line approach is his plan to eliminate the Unification Ministry, which has been the locus of South Korea's engagement policy during the last decade.

On the other hand, capitalizing on his victory at the polls, Lee has come out more strongly than outgoing President Roh Moo-hyun in agreeing to unconditional meetings with North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il. "If a summit between the leaders of South and North Korea will help persuade the North to give up its nuclear programs and benefit both the South and North, I can do it anytime," Lee has said.

As a former chief executive at the Hyundai conglomerate, Lee has pledged to run his administration more like a business. With an eye to investing in China and the former Communist bloc, Lee may be hedging his bet that economic incentives will be the key to enticing North Korea out of its hermit status. On January 17, Lee confidently announced that his administration will "exert all-out efforts to promote dialogue and exchanges with North Korea. If the North abandons its nuclear program, the South will take the initiative in raising an international cooperation fund amounting to about \$40 billion and provide a comprehensive aid package to upgrade five sectors in the North—the economy, finance, education, the infrastructure and living conditions."

There are similarities among hard-liners in the United States, Japan, and South Korea. They all see human rights as the thin edge of the wedge to open up North Korea and transform, if not eliminate, the regime. They are skeptical that North Korea intends to denuclearize or abide by any international agreements. They are critical of engagement policies for being asymmetrical. Nevertheless, South Korean hardliners are different because, unlike their counterparts in other countries, they must continue to live on the Korean peninsula with North Korea. As such, they generally recognize that the alternative to engagement is economic stagnation at best and at worst the outbreak of hostilities devastating the lives of millions – all of which will have direct impact on the lives of South Koreans. Whatever his pedigree as a conservative, Lee Myung-bak understands that there is no viable alternative to engagement.

In 2006, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), one of South Korea's largest NGOs, issued a statement on behalf of a coalition of human rights organizations in the country. PSPD criticized the politicization of the North Korean human rights issue within the UN, calling for mutual cooperation rather than the imposition of political pressures. Most importantly, it emphasized the need to establish peace on the Korean peninsula by resolving the relationship between the U.S. and North Korea as a precondition to improving the human rights situation in North Korea. "In approaching the human rights issue in the DPRK," the statement reads, "the right to peaceful survival on the Korean peninsula is essential to the promotion of all other rights." Engagement is a prerequisite for peace and human rights.

Pushing Engagement Forward

Over the last year, hard-line opponents to engagement with North Korea have largely been quiet. Special Envoy Lefkowitz has made a couple of speeches, but he has been slapped down by, of all people, Rice. John Bolton and other former administration officials have done what they can from outside the tent, but the louder they criticize the Six Party Talks, the more they underscore their own lack of influence. The hard-line Japanese politician Shinzo Abe, who made his reputation on the abductee issue, has been replaced by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who is much less willing to use the abductee issue to win support at home. President-elect Lee Myung-Bak in South Korea, his conservative bona fides notwithstanding, embraces some kind of engagement policy with the North.

The ineffectuality of the hard-line faction, however, might have less to do with a lack of political influence than a perceived lack of need. The hardliners have not strenuously exerted themselves to bring down the Six Party Talks perhaps because they believe that if they wait long enough the negotiations will, like North Korea itself, eventually collapse from within. Although the State Department is committed to reaching agreement with North Korea – and rebutting its critics on the right – it is also peculiarly blind to its own intransigencies. Although North Korea meets all the requirements for removal from the state sponsors of terrorism list, by the State Department's own criteria, the administration refuses to take this first step – even though it is a revocable decision compared to North Korea's full declaration of its nuclear programs. The State Department continues to hold firm on its HEU allegations, even though the only tangible proof rests with Pakistan – the claims of President Pervez Musharraf and the proliferation czar A. Q. Khan. The Bush administration has been unable or unwilling to extract documentary proof from its putative ally. With the State Department so ambivalent in its commitments, hardliners don't need to expend their own political capital to wreck engagement.

The State Department also faces the difficult legacy of the Bush administration's overall foreign policy. In the last seven years, U.S. foreign policy throughout much of the world has failed to garner the trust necessary to enable negotiations with North Korea to proceed in good faith. What Washington needs is a step-by-step process of building trust. Otherwise, American diplomacy will ring hollow. Engagement is a prerequisite for fruitful progress not only on human rights, but much more.

What's at stake is an end to more than half a century of hostilities in U.S.-North Korea relations, 20 million North Korean lives, and a peaceful and prosperous East Asia. The United States has to commit to the long haul. It's time to give engaged diplomacy a chance.

Suzy Kim, a contributor to Foreign Policy In Focus, is the former international secretary of MINKAHYUP Human Rights Group in Seoul, Korea, and is currently a visiting assistant professor of East Asian Studies at Oberlin College. John Feffer is the co-director of Foreign Policy In Focus (www.fpif.org) at the Institute for Policy Studies. They are both members of the Alliance of Scholars Concerned about Korea (www.asck.org).

Six Parties, Zero Progress

By Dan Blumenthal

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ARTICLES

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The State Department is engaged in heavy-duty spin to keep alive the clearly failing Six Party Talks on North Korean disarmament. But no amount of spin can hide the fact that whoever becomes president in 2009 will face a North Korean problem worse than that which Bill Clinton bequeathed to George W. Bush.

Last week, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Christopher Hill, State's top Asia diplomat, had to explain away the fact that Pyongyang has missed its deadline for fully declaring all of its nuclear weapons programs. Even more difficult was fudging the very open question of continuing North Korean proliferation.

Just the day before, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell testified that the intelligence community has "moderate confidence"--intelligence speak for "we have evidence"--that North Korea has an ongoing uranium enrichment program. McConnell further assessed that Pyongyang has produced enough plutonium for up to half a dozen nuclear weapons, and has the ballistic missile capability to hit the continental United States with those weapons. In short, notwithstanding State Department spin, North Korea has nuclear weapons and the ability to use them against the United States and her allies. There is little prospect that current U.S. policy will change North Korea's nuclear status.

Then there is the subject of proliferation. U.N. Security Council resolutions, Six Party Talk agreements, and U.S. warnings are supposed to prevent Pyongyang from proliferating any weapons of mass destruction or ballistic missile technology. But it seems pretty clear that when Israel struck a site in Syria in September 2007, it was because North Korea was helping ramp up a Syrian WMD program of some sort. All Hill had to say to Congress on this matter was that the State Department takes the issue of North Korean proliferation seriously--diplomatic talk meaning we're not planning to do anything about it.

The real state of play, then, is that North Korea will not fully declare, much less disable or dismantle, its nuclear weapons programs, and it has continued to proliferate. To mask this noncompliance, the State Department will talk optimistically of the next phases of diplomacy, continuing to provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil, removing it from the list of state sponsors of terror, even negotiating a peace treaty and full normalization. In short, no amount of evidence of North Korea's bad intentions will deter the Bush administration from declaring diplomatic victory.

This policy collapse on North Korea has happened at a rapid clip. It was just a year and a half ago that Bush told an audience in Singapore that we would "hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such actions" if it shared WMD technology. If Pyongyang was not helping Syria with a WMD program, then the administration should say so forthrightly to help save its faltering policy.

After North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear tests in 2006, the administration got tough, with two strong U.N. resolutions and financial sanctions that hurt Kim and his cronies directly. President Bush then decided to give the regime he loathes one last chance to come clean, after decades of lying and cheating. Assistant Secretary Hill got it exactly backwards when he told senators on February 6 that "we" have much work to do in getting

Pyongyang to rid itself of its nuclear programs. The burden is on Pyongyang to come clean. "We," meaning Washington (plus Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, and Moscow), must verify that they have done so and punish them if they have not.

Besides creating a more dangerous Korean peninsula, the Six Party process has caused a breach with our most important ally, Japan, which wanted to take a tougher line. What's more, China is making its own plans and arrangements to deal with an unstable and nuclear North Korea. Beijing, too, has little faith in the talks and has drawn up military plans to intervene in North Korea to protect its own interests. All parties are concerned about China's intentions, which they are keeping to themselves. If North Korea does collapse, American, Japanese, and South Korean war planners will have to consider the possibility of dealing with a unilateral Chinese intervention. China's trade with the North tripled between 2000 and 2005--with an eye toward gaining more influence over the future disposition of the peninsula.

The Six Party Talks, supposedly a model of multilateral diplomacy, have thus caused each party to act more unilaterally. Washington is essentially conducting its own negotiations with Pyongyang. Japan, a little less confident of U.S. protection, is showing a keener interest in having its own military capabilities to defend against North Korean missiles. And China is taking military and economic measures of its own to live with or perhaps even control an unstable, nuclear regime on its borders. The situation is, in short, more precarious than when this new round of diplomacy began.

President Bush, who has shown a remarkable steadfastness on Iraq, keen not to bequeath a Middle East disaster to his successor, still has an opportunity to change course in Korea. South Korea's new president, Lee Myung-bak, seems willing to be less conciliatory to Kim Jong Il and repair relations with Japan and Washington. South Korea has little interest in seeing a Chinese satellite state to its north. But Lee is getting mixed messages from Washington. He can't take a tougher line if Washington sticks to its "agreement at any price" course.

Rather than tying the hands of the next president, President Bush could start taking a more realistic approach to North Korea. First, Washington can halt its economic largesse until North Korea makes a full, and verifiable, declaration of its nuclear programs. Any talk of de-listing North Korea as a terrorist state or of normalizing relations is inappropriate given North Korea's continued bad behavior. **Second, the Bush administration should tell the truth about North Korea's proliferation. If Pyongyang proliferated, it is time to once again sanction, squeeze, isolate, and perhaps even quarantine it.** Third, the administration should focus its time and energy on building a common approach with South Korea and Japan. Washington shares with its democratic allies an interest in a democratic, unified peninsula. All three parties should ramp up efforts to take in the refugees still pouring out of North Korea.

The prospect of real change in North Korea under Kim is next to zero. All three countries should thus reestablish a strong deterrent posture that will be necessary as they work toward the only real, albeit long term, solution: a unified Korea free of Kim Jong Il and his ilk.

[Dan Blumenthal](#) is a resident fellow at AEI.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/opinion/28thu1.html?ref=opinion>

Editorial

A Little Nuke Music

February 28, 2008

The New York Philharmonic's concert in Pyongyang was a tantalizing taste of what might be in America's relationship with North Korea. It was also a reminder of the missteps and dangerously wrongheaded judgments that have kept the two countries apart and at saber-point for more than a half century.

The Philharmonic drew sustained applause and even some tears, playing Gershwin, a beloved Korean folk song and the two countries' national anthems. The concert would have had even more significance if it could have celebrated continuing progress toward shuttering North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

That effort unfortunately has stalled, and the fault — at least this time — is undeniably Pyongyang's. It would take a serious diplomatic push by the Bush administration and the leaders of China, Russia, Japan and South Korea to ensure that it does not fall apart.

North Korea agreed last year to disable its Yongbyon nuclear reactor and produce a "complete and correct" accounting of all its nuclear activities, facilities and weapons-usable material by the end of last year. In exchange, it was to get 950,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and start down the road toward normalizing diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and others.

While North Korea is disabling the reactor, it has not turned over the promised list. That has revived serious doubts about whether it would ever abandon a program that has already tested a nuclear device and produced fuel for 10 or more weapons. Russia's delay in delivering some of the promised fuel oil may be a factor, but there are more serious disputes as well.

North Korea has said it would produce the accounting, but first it wants Washington to remove it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and lift certain sanctions. Washington says the sequencing can be worked out if Pyongyang is prepared for full disclosure.

The Bush administration has a long history of using any excuse to scuttle any diplomatic deal, but in this case it is right. Pyongyang clearly agreed to full disclosure and the deadline. Since then serious questions have also arisen about Pyongyang's nuclear cooperation with Syria. That must also be disclosed.

President Bush wasted years refusing to deal with North Korea, and that expanded stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium is the result. Having belatedly embraced diplomacy, the president deserves credit for not overreacting — for continuing negotiations and fuel deliveries — despite fierce criticism from members of his party, including former members of his administration.

The United States and its partners should continue to explore creative solutions to the impasse and stand ready to lift sanctions and quickly take North Korea off the terrorism list if it fulfills its obligations. China, North Korea's chief benefactor (and frequent enabler), must press Pyongyang to

keep its commitments. Plans by South Korea's new president to link economic integration to nuclear progress could be important leverage.

If the stalemate drags on, the United States and its partners may have to get tougher and implement United Nations sanctions that they are now choosing to ignore. North Korea needs to know that the international community has patience — but that such patience has limits.

<http://media.www.jhunewsletter.com/media/storage/paper932/news/2008/02/28/NewsFeatures/Bolton.Condemns.Handling.Of.Nuclear.Proliferation.Issue-3243071.shtml>

Bolton condemns handling of nuclear proliferation issue

By: Kate Kelberg

Posted: 2/28/08

John Bolton, former United States ambassador to the United Nations, addressed a very small audience in Shriver Hall yesterday.

Bolton, a Baltimore native, spoke on the effects of nuclear proliferation on national security and safety around the world. His speech was part of this spring's Foreign Affairs Symposium.

Bolton began his speech immediately condemning the Bush administration's handling of the proliferation issue. North Korea, which he called "a fundamentally criminal regime" is particularly dangerous as a nuclear regime because it "would sell anything to anyone ... I believe if Al-Qaeda came up with the money to pay for [a nuclear ballistic weapon] they would sell it to them."

North Korea, aware of the fear this possibility inspires in western powers, has exploited their position of power since the late '90s, continually promising to cease nuclear programs in exchange for economic and political gains, and then never following through on their commitments.

This has set up a pattern in which "first [North Korea] negotiates, then it renegotiates to get what it wants. The trouble is that North Korea is lying about its programming [and getting away with it] because its negotiating partners are so eager to keep negotiations alive," Bolton said.

"Any other country in the world would have long ago been shut down" for the threat North Korea poses to international safety, Bolton said.

Bolton blamed the problem on "lazy journalists" who reported that North Korea is conceding when all evidence suggests otherwise.

Bolton discussed the recent Israeli discovery of a North Korean nuclear facility in the Syrian desert.

Although little has been released publicly about the discovery, Bolton found reason to believe Syria and North Korea were working together to build this factory.

Syria has remained silent on the issue.

"Syria knows how to fill a security council chamber with agitated people," Bolton said, adding that for some reason they didn't.

Bolton suggested the only explanation for their silence is that they were working with the North.

That silence of other countries in the region also suggests that the Sunni-Arab region is becoming a satellite of an Iranian nuclear revolution, Bolton warned.

Yet world powers continue to disregard the threat, Bolton believes this Iranian nuclear revolution deserves. He angrily referred to the 2007 National Intelligence Estimates, the United States' authoritative assessments of national security. The 2007 NIE misrepresented the information American Intelligence had gathered.

"It was written in a very politicized way and had an intended policy outcome," he said.

In terms of substance the report was not very different from previous NIEs. There was one key difference however - the first sentence of the document stated, "In 2003, Iran halted its nuclear weapons program."

This sentence, Bolton argued, was the only thing that got any attention from the press, however the foot note explaining the incredibly narrow definition of "nuclear weapons program" did not.

Bolton found it irrational to disbelieve that Iran is actively pursuing nuclear proliferation. In the past, the Iranian government has claimed they are only experimenting with nuclear materials for benign purposes.

Iranian leaders said they wanted nuclear power as an alternative energy source for the fear that they were running out of oil and natural gases.

Bolton cited a recent study that concluded if Iran continued to both consume and export oil and natural gases at its current rate, they would run out of these energy sources in the next 300 to 400 years - making their fear unbelievable.

"I could go on and on with examples like this. There's very little doubt Iran is producing nuclear weapons and there's very little doubt that Syria would have engaged in North Korea's [program] without Iranian support," Bolton said.

And Iran and North Korea working in tandem would be a very dangerous combination. Two things are required to build weapons of mass destruction: the technical capabilities, which North Korea possesses, and the financial resources Iran has from its oil reserves.

The two countries share "the same interest in hiding nuclear activity from international inspectors."

Bolton reiterated his desperate claim that this was a dire situation that our administration and administrations across the world were failing to address properly.

We either must immediately put a stop to this activity or, "get used to the idea of an Iran and North Korea with nuclear weapons," he said.

Bolton also warned of a "chain reaction" in the middle east should the western powers let Iran get away with building nuclear weapons.

"Each country [that develops nuclear weapons] inspires more than one country to do the same," he said. It is a very scary situation that can only be prevented by "a more robust program against proliferation."

Is Syria a Candidate for Nuclear Proliferation?

Author: Tariq Khaitous, Postdoctoral Fellow
Monterey Institute for International Studies
James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies
March 2008

Syria's Nuclear Ambitions-Cause for Concern

Over the past decade, there has been concern in the international community that Syria would develop a secret nuclear program. These concerns were heightened after allegations of a Syria-North Korea nuclear collaboration, which was followed by an Israeli air incursion in September 2007. Israeli officials allege that North Korea was secretly assisting Syria in the development of a military nuclear program.[1] Syria and North Korea both denied these reports. Syrian officials accused Israel of using the claim as a pretext for violating Syria's airspace. Syrian newspapers reported, "[The allegations] recall those false claims that the Americans and the British circulated about Iraq's nuclear programs." [2] The North Korean foreign ministry condemned the accusations as "unskillful conspiracy" and "groundless." [3]

So far, there is inadequate evidence to conclusively prove that Syria is pursuing a secret nuclear program, with or without Pyongyang's assistance. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) addressed the lack of evidence in a January 2008 interview in the newspaper Al Hayat, where IAEA Director Dr. Mohammed El Baradei stated, "So far, we have not received any information about any nuclear programs in Syria." [4]

Syria has been a member of the International Agency Energy Atomic (IAEA) since 1963. In 1969, it ratified the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear state. Syria has one nuclear research reactor at Deir el-Hajjar not far from Damascus. It is a 30kW miniature neutron source reactor that was built by China in 1991 [5]. Since it became operational in 1996, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has periodically inspected the reactor. [6] Syria has never conducted uranium enrichment activities. Since 2003, Damascus has been seeking nuclear partnerships, particularly with Russia, to acquire research reactors and desalination plants. However, no official agreement has been reached.

Even if Syria's nuclear capabilities are limited and restricted to civilian use, Syria's ability to pursue a military nuclear program remains within reach. The West considers Syria's nuclear activities a cause for significant concern, especially taking into account the fact that for some time Syria has had the expertise and capacity to develop a chemical weapons program. [7] A recent satellite image shows that Syria is undertaking new construction on the site bombed by Israel. Press reports state that the new building is similar in design to the suspected nuclear reactor that was destroyed by Israel. [8] Syrian officials denied these interpretations of the satellite image and insisted that the site is a military base. [9] When asked whether the site contained a nuclear reactor or not, Dr. El Baradei said, "The IAEA wanted to inspect the site but the Syrian brothers refused." [10]

The Syrian attitudes towards nuclear weapons and possible motivations for pursuing nuclear weapons must be understood in terms of the broader security situation in the Middle East. Due to Syria's close

ties to with Iran and North Korea, and its historically adversarial relationship with Israel, it is viewed as a potential candidate for nuclear proliferation. Its military relationships with Iran and North Korea could play a part in its decision to pursue a nuclear weapons program that would counter perceived threats from Israel and the United States.

Syria's Potential Motivations for Developing Nuclear Weapons

There are several reasons why Syria would develop nuclear weapons. Its primary reason is its perception that Israel poses a military threat. The main motivation for Syria to develop nuclear weapons is the Israeli nuclear arsenal. Syria insists that Israel's nuclear program is a security threat.[11] The inability of the United Nations (UN) to force Israel to join the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear state only increases Syria's frustration. The Syrian government has consistently denounced Israel, as its nuclear facilities are the only ones in the region that are not under IAEA control. Syrian Chief of Staff General Hihmet Al-Siabi expressed his concerns over Israel's nuclear weapons stating, "Syria would strive to achieve strategic equality with Israel including nuclear parity." [12] Damascus, like other Arab capitals, believes that Israel's nuclear program is instigating an arms race that undermines peace and security in the region.

This adds to Syria's view of Israel as a threat that is the result of Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights since the War of 1967. This is one of the most persistent disputes between Syria and Israel. The negotiations between the two countries remain deadlocked. Syria wants Israel to withdraw completely from the Golan Heights without any conditions. At best, Israel would accept a partial withdrawal. The two parties also disagree on how to achieve the withdrawal due to a disagreement over territorial borders defined in the past.[13] Moreover, the countries diverge on how to restart the negotiations. Israel suggested beginning a new set of negotiations without pre-conditions. Syria has insisted that negotiations restart based on negotiations in 2000. These were the last Israeli-Syrian discussions and were followed by the collapse of the peace talks led by the United States. During the November 2007 Israeli-Arab summit in Annapolis, Maryland, Syria wanted to raise the issue again. It was able to pressure the participating states to put the Golan Heights on the table for negotiations. However, it did not achieve the collective support it was expecting, and it failed to re-open negotiations with Israel.

On a broader regional strategic level, Syria is also concerned over the current security environment in the Middle East. Since the invasion of Iraq by U.S. forces, Damascus has felt itself in a vulnerable position, as U.S. troops are now at Syria's doorstep, in Iraq and Turkey. Syrian officials fear that their country could be a future target of U.S. aggression, and are concerned about the regime change agenda of the United States being applied to the Assad regime. On March 1, 2003, a few days before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, President Assad expressed his concerns over the increasing U.S presence in the region. In an emergency speech addressed to the members of the Arab League, the Syrian leader said, "We are all targeted [...]. We are all in danger." [14]

Friction with the United States over Lebanon has also increased Syria's threat perceptions. Since the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri, Syria has been under pressure from the United States to be transparent and cooperate fully with the UN investigation into the assassination. Washington is working closely with the other members of the Security Council to set up a tribunal to try the suspected killers.[15] Washington is also concerned over Syria's passive role in allowing foreign fighters to infiltrate Iraq via Syria's borders. These foreign fighters then join extremist

groups in Iraq. In addition, United States has long denounced the support that Syria provides to Hezbollah and Hamas.

Finally, there is deterioration of the relationships between Syria and Arab states in the region due to Syria's alliance with Iran, its involvement in Lebanon, and its support for Hezbollah. These factors have weakened ties between Syria and the other Sunni Arab regimes. If the major Arab states of the region, particularly Egypt and Saudi Arabia, pursue nuclear programs in order to counter a future nuclear Iran, it is possible that Syria would seek to do the same, not necessarily to support its strategic ally Iran, but to strengthen its own defense capacities in a volatile region.

Allegations of Nuclear Weapons Activity

In recent years there have been numerous revelations regarding the nuclear smuggling network run by Dr. A.Q. Khan, but questions remain over the extent of his dealings with various recipient states. Press releases in 2004 reported that Khan's network might be involved in sensitive nuclear activities in Syria, Iran, Libya, and North Korea. Former United States Undersecretary of State John Bolton referred to Syria when he said that the Khan Network had "several other" customers who may want the bomb.[16] In the summer of 2004, Middle East newspapers reported that U.S. intelligence agencies had proof that the Khan network sold Syria nuclear technology and components of Pakistani centrifuges that could be used for military programs.[17] However, IAEA Director Dr. Mohamed El Baradei dismissed the allegations. He reported that there were no connections between Khan's network and Syria. Dr. El Baradei said, "No country had provided any hard evidence that would implicate Syria as a customer in the black market set up by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's atomic weapons program [...]. This is something I read in the paper. Nobody came to us with any information [about Syria]."[18]

Although Syria is party to the NPT, and has called several times for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, it has long been cited as a potential candidate for nuclear proliferation.[19] In 1979, Syria was accused of developing a secret nuclear program for military purposes and of not being transparent with the IAEA regarding the extent of its nuclear activities. Syria denied the accusations and declared that its nuclear policy was oriented for peaceful research rather than military purposes. Nevertheless the United States and Israel have consistently expressed skepticism over such assertions by Damascus, and the two countries have opposed all sales of nuclear technology to Syria that might be used in the development of a nuclear weapons program.[20]

North Korean Ties

The most recent incident surrounding Syria's suspected nuclear program was the reported Israeli air incursion into Syria in September 2007. Neither Syria nor Israel has been forthcoming about the exact nature of the incident. Some media sources claim that the target was actually a military stockpile of weapons that was supposed to be delivered to Hezbollah. Others described it as a training base for Palestinian militants. However, the report causing the most concern was that the target was a nuclear reactor that Syria was using to develop a secret nuclear program with the support of North Korea. North Korea has called the allegation "preposterous misinformation." [21] Nonetheless, Syria has had a long military relationship with North Korea, and has cooperated with it on its ballistic missile program and purchased launchers and components. Immediately after the Israeli attack, the Syrian regime attempted to mitigate rumors about its nuclear activities. It invited international journalists to observe that there was neither a military base at Deir ez-Zor nor presence of nuclear materials. Mehdi Ahmed,

director of the Deir ez Zor Center, who was guiding the tour of the journalists said, "You see, around us are farmers, corn, produce, nothing else [...]. The allegations are completely groundless, and I don't really understand where all this WMD (weapons of mass destruction) talk came from,"[22] However, no one was allowed to access the bombed site. The journalists reported that the area was a sleepy Bedouin city but no real evidence proved that the target was a nuclear reactor.

Israeli Concerns

Israel realizes that Syria is not a nuclear threat for now, since its nuclear capacity is not sufficient to build a nuclear weapon. However, the goal of the air incursion was most likely related to the Iranian crisis, given Israel's deep concern over Iran's nuclear intentions. Despite the recent U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that declared that Iran gave up its nuclear weapons program in 2003, it appears that Israel may launch a pre-emptive attack if Iran refuses to halt its nuclear program. During a parliamentary meeting on January 18, 2008, Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert said that, "Israel clearly will not reconcile itself to a nuclear Iran [...]. All options that prevent Iran from gaining nuclear capabilities are legitimate within the context of how to grapple with this matter."[23] Therefore, the attack was a message not only to Syria, but also to Iran, that if Israel could attack Syria's nuclear site, Iran's nuclear facilities could also be targeted. Israel thus wants to show other Middle Eastern states that it is able to take unilateral measures to strike any other suspicious nuclear installations in the region.[24] However, Iranian officials demonstrated that they do not consider the raid as an indicator of Israeli capacity and willingness to strike Iran. During the annual meeting of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Hadad Alel said, "The violation of the airspace of Syria by Israeli planes was not meant to be a signal for Iran, because Israel is not in a position to have the illusion of attacking Iran."[25]

At the same time IAEA Director, Dr. Mohammed El Baradei denounced the Israeli attack as undermining the Agency's global atomic work. He said, "Israel took the law into her own hands and that, neither the U.S. nor Israel provided evidence that the site was a secret nuclear installation." He regretted the Israeli action and added, "If a country has information that another country is developing a secret nuclear program, the IAEA should be contacted because we have the power to investigate the issue."[26]

The Israeli aggression was also aimed to reinforce Israel's military deterrence in the region. After the Israeli-Lebanon war of 2006, Syria and Iran welcomed the harsh resistance of Hezbollah against the Israeli army and claimed that Israel was defeated. Hezbollah had shown that its militants were able to penetrate Israeli territories when it killed eight soldiers and kidnapped two others. They also prove themselves to be a strong force when faced with the most well equipped army in the region. Iran and Syria view Israel's 2007 air strike as an attempt to restore the credibility of its conventional forces after the stalemate with Hezbollah. Syrian foreign minister Farouq Al Shara said, "The raid was aimed at boosting the morale of the Israel Defense Forces in the wake of the Second Lebanon War."[27]

Syrian news sources also voiced opinions on the goal of the raid. One newspaper, Al Asr, said "[The aim was] to frighten Syria, make it feel the sentiment of war, push it to break its alliance with Iran, stop its support to Hezbollah and the Palestinian resistance, force it to sign a 'free' peace agreement with Israel without full withdraw from the Golan Heights and to prevent the voluntary militants to cross its borders to join the resistance in Iraq."[28]

However, Israel's officials denied the comments in the press and media. They insisted that the incursion aimed to destroy a Syrian nuclear reactor that was secretly assembled with the assistance of North Korea, without giving any proof of existence of a reactor.[29]

The Iranian Connection

Concerns have also been expressed in the West over any Iranian involvement in Syrian nuclear activities. According to London-based Jane's Defense Weekly, Iran and Syria "signed a strategic accord meant to protect either country from international pressure regarding their weapons programs." [30] It added that some Syrian diplomatic sources said that Syria agreed to hide Iranian weapons materials in the event that Iran was subject to military aggression or UN sanctions. Under the accord, Syria would continue to support the Lebanese Hezbollah with weapons and logistics. Iran had always provided military support to the Shiite movement. About 15,000 Iranian missiles were delivered by Syria to Hezbollah. During its war against Israel in July 2006, Hezbollah militants launched more than 3,000 rockets into Northern Israel. The intension of the accord is also to strengthen the Iranian-Syrian alliance and challenge economic sanctions that may eventually be imposed by the West. Jane's also reported that Iran would help Syria financially to resist UN sanctions imposed after the assassination of Hariri.

Furthermore, Iran also admitted to supporting the Syrian military with the technology needed to develop WMD, as well as conventional arms, training, and logistics. Iran will also help Syria develop its ballistic missiles and chemical weapons capabilities. Jane's reported that under the same accord, Iran will take the opportunity to test "advanced weapon systems in Syria during a military confrontation."

At the same time, in June 2007, the official Iranian state news agency (IRNA) reported that President Assad called Tehran to establish "better cooperation" in "the confrontation with the Zionist regime and the USA." [31] During the most recent visit of President Mahmoud Ahmadenijad to Damascus in January 2008, President Assad renewed his support for Iran's nuclear program. When asked of his opinion towards Iran's ambitions, he said, "Those countries which oppose Iran's right to gain peaceful nuclear technology have no convincing and logical reason... Clearing the region from mass destruction weapons should first start from Israel because it is the only country in the Middle East which owns nuclear weapons." [32]

With this strategic alliance that seems to have acquired a nuclear dimension, the Iranian regime appears to be including Syria in its nuclear plans to bolster Tehran's position in the Middle East. In turn, Syria would gain from Iranian nuclear expertise. This alliance will also help Iran divert international attention away from its nuclear aims and gain more time to proceed with its nuclear program. It would also put the United States in a difficult situation given the multiple fronts of violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Palestine.

Conclusion

Even if Damascus is considered a potential candidate for nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, Syria's current nuclear capacity indicates that it is focusing its nuclear energy primarily on civilian research. At present Syria does not seem to have the capability for clandestine nuclear activities. It has neither the financial capacity nor the required infrastructure to develop a nuclear device. Furthermore, the Assad regime's most immediate concerns are UN investigations and Resolution 1757 of the Security Council that established a Special Tribunal to investigate the murder of former Lebanese

Prime Minister Hariri. Embarking on any sort of suspicious nuclear activities would have a major impact on non proliferation efforts in the Middle East. It would also be a great rationale for the United States to seek regime change in Syria.

Thus, calculations of the broader security environment in the Middle East are an integral part of nuclear decision-making of the leadership in Damascus. Several factors impact the direction Syria takes with respect to its nuclear ambitions. These include maintaining good relations with other major regional powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Finally, it is unclear whether Iranian-Syrian cooperation will actually extend to Iran defending Syria militarily in the event of an attack. The role of Iran's relations with Syria will continue to be a major contributing factor should Syria ever decide to pursue a nuclear weapons capability.

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U.S. Hard-line Policy toward DPRK Slammed

Pyongyang, **March 5 [2008]**(KCNA) -- These days the U.S. conservative hardliners are talking nonsense that the points agreed at the six-party talks have not been properly implemented due to the "delaying tactics" of the DPRK and, accordingly, the Bush administration should stick to its hard-line policy toward the DPRK, not appeasing it. They are even blustering that it is seriously "mistaken" if it calculates it can produce a better agreement with the next U.S. Administration.

Commenting on this, Rodong Sinmun today terms this a provocative move to scuttle the six-party talks and lay an obstacle in the way of settling the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula in a bid to deteriorate the existing hostile relations between the DPRK and the U.S. and bring the situation on the peninsula to an extreme pitch of tension.

The U.S. conservative hardliners are not seeking the negotiated settlement of the nuclear issue on the peninsula but working hard to attain their sinister aim with a strong-arm policy by shifting onto the DPRK all the responsibilities for the delayed implementation of the points agreed at the six-party talks, the commentary says, and goes on:

They are blustering that the new U.S. regime would never pardon the DPRK while talking nonsense that it is delaying the implementation of the above-said points. This is a short-sighted and foolish ruse to frighten and stifle it with pressure and blackmail.

It is preposterous and ridiculous for them to float rumor that the DPRK pins any hope on the next U.S. president. It is a very wrong way of thinking for them to regard their one-sided hard-line policy toward the DPRK as a cure-all.

They had better clearly understand that if the U.S. opts for the one-sided hard-line policy toward the DPRK, the bilateral relations will reach an extreme phase and everything go up in smoke.

The DPRK does what it should do and refrains from what it should not do no matter what others may say. The U.S. conservative hardliners are sadly mistaken if they calculate they can wrest any concession from the DPRK with a strong-arm policy.

They would be well advised to discard a foolish delusion and behave with reason in the realistic way of thinking.

U.S. Rivals Overseas Now Bide Their Time

Thorniest Issues Will Face A New Administration; Seeking Better Deals?

By JAY SOLOMON

March 13, 2008; Page A8

WASHINGTON -- As fall elections grow closer, many of President Bush's fiercest overseas foes appear to be adjusting their foreign-policy strategies for the next administration.

The dynamic could undercut some of the White House's most pressing foreign-policy initiatives, including campaigns to disarm North Korea and to stabilize Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Even American efforts to reach deals with friendly nations -- such as an agreement to share nuclear technologies with India -- risk running out of time. The fallout could leave the next president with immediate foreign-policy dilemmas, in addition to the war in Iraq.

The Republicans' presumptive candidate, Sen. John McCain, has pledged to maintain a hard line on regimes such as those in Iran and North Korea, but there is a perception internationally that his foreign-policy agenda will be much more nuanced than Mr. Bush's. Both Democratic candidates still seeking their party's nomination, Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, have campaigned on the platform of aggressively engaging some of the world's most hostile regimes, such as Iran and Syria, in order to stabilize the Middle East.

Officials in Tehran and Damascus already have made public statements saying they are going to wait for new U.S. leadership before deciding whether to try to improve ties with Washington. "The conditions of the U.S. government are such now that it is harmful for us to resume relations," Iran Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told Iranian students in a speech earlier this year. "We have never said that they will be cut forever."

Last month, the Bush administration successfully lobbied the United Nations Security Council to pass a new round of economic sanctions aimed at pressuring Tehran into negotiations over the future of its nuclear program. Many diplomats, say the sanctions are likely to be too weak to force Iran to the negotiating table, and few expect the White House to be able to pass a fourth round of sanctions against Iran in its remaining 10 months in office.

In Geneva today, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill is scheduled to meet with North Korean negotiators to push forward a tentative denuclearization pact agreed to by Washington and Pyongyang more than a year ago. Mr. Hill's mission follows a successful trip by the New York Philharmonic to North Korea last month, which has fueled hopes of a greater willingness by the communist state to open to the West. Pyongyang has largely dismantled its Yongbyon nuclear reactor, which has been used to produce bomb-making fuel.

There remains mounting concern inside the Bush administration that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il may seek to draw out the current negotiations in a bid to extract more concessions from a future U.S.

administration. These diplomats note that Pyongyang has already missed by 10 weeks its initial deadline for declaring all its current and past nuclear activities, as called for by the agreement. And North Korea's lead negotiator, Kim Kye Gwan, didn't show up for a scheduled meeting with Mr. Hill in Beijing last month.

State Department officials express optimism that Mr. Hill can successfully press Pyongyang this week to clarify two key parts of its nuclear program: its alleged assistance to Syria and its attempts to develop highly enriched uranium. These officials say the U.S. is seeking to offer Pyongyang a face-saving alternative through which to declare its programs. But should Mr. Hill fail, they acknowledge the next administration could immediately be faced with the challenge of a North Korean leadership possibly unwilling to give up its nuclear arsenal for any price. "My fear is that the North Koreans are trying to get what they can and then delay things," said a U.S. official working on counter-proliferation issues. "They may think they can get a better deal" down the line.

In the Middle East, the Bush administration's efforts to pressure and woo Syria into helping stabilize the region also risk foundering. In November, the White House invited Damascus to a peace summit in Annapolis, Md., calculating that Syrian President Bashar Assad may assist Washington's efforts to promote deals in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories in return for U.S. support of direct dialogue between Syria and Israel over the disputed Golan Heights region. But increased instability inside Lebanon and the Palestinian territories in recent months has led many Western diplomats to conclude the overture failed.

The Bush administration has responded in recent weeks by placing sanctions on some of President Assad's closest confidants while working with Arab states to try to curtail investment into Syria. But Damascus is still expected to weather the storm while seeking direct dialogue with whichever candidate replaces Mr. Bush. "There's likely to be another year in Lebanon without a president as the Syrians continue to block a political settlement," says an Arab diplomat involved in the Syrian diplomacy.

Even Washington's much touted efforts to promote nuclear cooperation with India seem to be running out of time. More than two years ago, President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to a tentative deal in which the U.S. would supply nuclear fuels and technologies to New Delhi in return for greater international oversight of India's nuclear programs. Indian communist parties, however, have subsequently sought to block ratification in India's parliament.

U.S. congressional leaders say they must begin debate on the deal's final authorization by June in order to complete the process in Washington's political calendar. But U.S. officials say there remains opposition in India and New Delhi needs to conclude agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency on safeguards.

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

OPINION

Salvaging Our North Korea Policy

By JOHN R. BOLTON

March 17, 2008

There are signs, albeit small ones, that the Bush administration may be reaching the end of its patience with the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. These signs could prove illusory. But as it nears its end, the administration has a serious responsibility: It must not leave its successor with an ongoing, failed policy. At a minimum, President Bush should not bequeath to the next president only the burned-out hulk of the Six-Party Talks, and countless failed and violated North Korean commitments.

Since they were conceived in spring 2003, the Six-Party Talks have stumbled around inconclusively. And for the last 13 months, Pyongyang has ignored, stalled, renegotiated and violated the Feb. 13, 2007 agreement.

Throughout all this "negotiation," which has mostly consisted of our government negotiating with itself, North Korea has benefited enormously. It's been spared the truly punishing sanctions that concerted international effort might have produced. In large part because of the appeasement policies of the two previous South Korean governments, Pyongyang has not felt the full impact of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) on its outward proliferation efforts. The U.S. has muzzled its criticism of North Korea's atrocious oppression of its own citizens. And, perhaps most humiliatingly of all, the U.S., in a vain effort at chasing the mirage, gave up its most effective pressure point -- the financial squeeze -- allowing Pyongyang renewed access to international markets through institutions like Banco Delta Asia.

In fact, the protracted Six-Party Talks have provided Kim Jong-il with the most precious resource of all: the time to enhance, conceal and even disperse his nuclear weapons programs. Time is nearly always on the side of the would-be proliferator, and so it has proven here. In exchange for five years of grace to North Korea, the U.S. has received precious little in return.

Pyongyang is now stonewalling yet again on its promise to disclose fully the details of its nuclear programs, including its uranium enrichment efforts and its outward proliferation. The successful Israeli military strike against a Syrian-North Korean facility on the Euphrates River last September highlighted the gravity of the regime's unwillingness to do anything serious that might restrict its nuclear option.

President Bush should spend the next 10 months rectifying the Six-Party concessions and put North Korea back under international pressure -- efforts that would be welcomed by Japan, and South Korea's new, far more realistic President Lee Myung-bak. Here are the steps to take:

- Declare North Korea's repeated refusal to honor its commitments, especially but not exclusively concerning full disclosure of its nuclear programs, unacceptable. This is the easiest step, and the most obvious. It can happen immediately. Accept no further partial "compliance," as the State Department

continuously tries to do. **Make public what we know about the North's Syria project,** and its uranium enrichment and missile programs, so our 2008 presidential candidates can have a fully-informed debate.

- Suspend the Six-Party Talks, and reconvene talks without North Korea. Although the talks could be jettisoned altogether, continuing them without the North allows Japan, South Korea and the U.S. to begin applying real pressure to China, the one nation with the capacity to bring Pyongyang's nuclear program to a halt. China has feared to apply such pressure, worried that it could collapse Kim Jong-il's regime altogether -- an accurate assessment of the regime's limited staying power. Nonetheless, the effect of Chinese reticence has been to preserve Kim and his nuclear program. It is vital that China know this policy is no longer viable.

- Strengthen international pressure on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Ramp up PSI cooperation with South Korea. Remind Russia of its own voluntarily-assumed obligations as a PSI core member. Remind China as well to comply with the sanctions imposed on North Korea by U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1695 and 1718 (which followed the North's 2006 ballistic missile and nuclear tests), and honor its other counterproliferation obligations. Tell them we will be watching with particular care, and that Chinese failure to increase pressure on North Korea will have implications in Sino-American bilateral relations. We can make this point privately to China rather than trumpet it publicly, but it should be made without ambiguity.

- Squeeze North Korea economically. Return the regime to limbo outside the international financial system, and step up action against its other illicit activities, such as trafficking in illicit narcotics and counterfeiting U.S. money. These and other "defensive measures" are nothing more than what any self-respecting nation does to protect itself, and the U.S. should never have eased up on them. Even now they can have a measurable impact on Kim Jong-il's weak and unsteady regime.

- Prepare contingency plans for humanitarian relief in the event of increased North Korean refugee flows or a regime collapse. Both China and South Korea have legitimate concerns about the burdens they would face if the North collapsed, or if increased internal economic deprivation spread instability. America and Japan should make it plain that they will fully shoulder their share of providing humanitarian supplies and assistance if either happened. Moreover, President Lee should increase pressure on Pyongyang -- by reiterating that South Korea will fully comply with its own constitution and grant full citizenship to any refugees from the North, however they make their way to the South.

Doubtless there are other steps. President Bush will not likely be able to solve the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Nonetheless, he still has time to implement policies that will allow him to leave office with the nation back on offense -- thereby affording his successor the chance to vindicate a return to the original Bush administration national security strategy.

North Korea and Syria: The US wants to know more

By David Ignatius

Daily Star staff

Saturday, March 22, 2008

For many months, Bush administration officials have been imagining a valedictory conclusion to their long-running negotiations with North Korea: Pyongyang would make a "complete and correct declaration" about its nuclear program, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would travel to North Korea to celebrate normalization of relations with a former member of the "axis of evil."

But the North Korea breakthrough isn't happening, and administration officials know they are running out of time before Bush leaves office. The New York Philharmonic has come and gone from its February 26 concert in Pyongyang - without Rice there to add a nimble-fingered piano accompaniment, as some US officials had hoped.

An agreement remains tantalizingly close: The North Koreans are currently disabling their reactor at Yongbyon, which was a key part of the denuclearization agreement announced last October. And there are hopes that if Pyongyang will finally deliver the promised nuclear declaration, then negotiations can move to a final (and even more difficult) phase of bargaining over destruction of North Korea's handful of nuclear weapons and an estimated 30 to 40 kilograms of plutonium.

What is blocking this breakthrough is North Korea's refusal to explain its nuclear relationship with Syria. This remains one of the murkiest foreign-policy issues of the past year, but administration policymakers, intelligence officials and other analysts recently shed some new light on what happened.

The mystery centers on Israel's bombing on September 6, 2007, of a facility in Syria. This was to be the site of a nuclear reactor, US officials believe. North Korea had made a secret agreement to provide technical knowhow and some materials for the reactor, although not fissile material. The Israelis destroyed the reactor site - but neither they nor the US made any public statement about the attack.

The silence in the United States and Israel led some analysts to think that the Bush administration was afraid of blowing up the six-party talks with North Korea - by disclosing the evidence of Pyongyang's role as a proliferator. That may have been a small factor, but I'm told that the larger issue was a fear in Israel - especially, it is said, with Defense Minister Ehud Barak - that disclosure would wreck the chances for serious peace negotiations with Syria, which the Israelis were exploring through back channels.

For Israel and Syria, it appears, last September was a classic Middle East moment of talking and fighting simultaneously. Since then, hopes in Israel for a breakthrough with Syria appear to have faded.

Back to the North Korea negotiations: Christopher Hill, the US assistant secretary of state for East Asia who has deftly managed the six-party talks, began demanding an accounting of the Syria connection last fall. The North Korean response, as recently as Hill's March 13 meeting in Geneva with North Korean negotiator Kim Gye Gwan, has essentially been: "We never did it, and we won't do it again." That is, the North Koreans have promised that they have no current nuclear cooperation with Damascus

and won't have any in the future, but they won't discuss what may have happened in the past. That's not enough, Hill has insisted.

American officials have begun to confirm publicly that they have hard intelligence about North Korean proliferation. Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, said in February 7 testimony to the House Intelligence Committee: "While Pyongyang denies a program for uranium enrichment and also denies its proliferation activities, we know North Korea continues to engage in both." In a telephone interview this week, a senior intelligence official confirmed the Syria nuclear connection, saying: "Our suspicions are justified and valid. A lot of due diligence was done on this. People are confident."

Hill expressed the administration's frustration over North Korea's foot-dragging in comments to reporters last week. "We are at a point where we really do need to make progress soon to wrap up" the current phase of negotiations, he said. He complained that the North Koreans "seem to think I have nothing better to do in my time or in my life than to keep asking them questions." Hill has privately rebuffed Pyongyang's request for another round after the Geneva session, saying that there's no point in meeting if the stalemate continues.

A full peace agreement with North Korea remains a worthy prize. It would stabilize a dangerous region and cement the cooperation between China and the US that made the six-party talks possible. But as with so many of its foreign-policy goals, the Bush administration is nearly out of time. It doesn't make sense to break off the talks when they are so close to success, but then, it doesn't make sense to continue with a charade, either.

Israel Fears New Korean Nuclear Factor But Remains Silent

Written by David Harris

Published Monday, April 07, 2008

[Analysis] It is no secret that Israel believes North Korean scientists were working in Syria to help develop a nuclear program – a project Israel destroyed when it launched an aerial attack on an installation in northern Syria on September 6 last year.

Right now, there is a debate in Israel as to whether to go public concerning that airstrike. So far no official information has been published by Jerusalem, with foreign media coverage being the main vehicle for knowing what happened. For the record, Syria vehemently denies the “factory” in question was a fledgling nuclear facility.

If one believes the latest reports in the Hebrew media, Israeli Intelligence believes the North Koreans have now turned their attention to Iran, with the level of aid, if anything, considerably greater than that given to Damascus. Washington is pressuring Pyongyang behind the scenes to end its association with Tehran.

However, in public, neither the Bush administration nor the Olmert government is openly criticizing North Korea. And that has absolutely nothing to do with United States Mideast policy or with Israel’s relations with its Arab and Muslim neighbors.

The lack of frankness about the Korean involvement in Syria and Iran is all about the Bush legacy and the U.S. approach to Southeast Asia. The deal brokered by Washington with North Korea is arguably the key success story of the Bush administration (some would say its only success). President George W. Bush, his team of negotiators led by Christopher Hill and the State Department do not want to see that deal collapse. Any public attack on Pyongyang could lead to a u-turn by the Koreans and a return to a potential arms race involving China, Japan and South Korea.

So, while some in Israel, led by the Defense Ministry, are pushing for more openness about Israel’s recent operation in Syria, the diplomatic wonks in Washington are urging Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to ensure the gag order on his cabinet members remains in place.



A Mystery in the Middle East

April 8, 2008

By George Friedman

The Arab-Israeli region of the Middle East is filled with rumors of war. That is about as unusual as the rising of the sun, so normally it would not be worth mentioning. But like the proverbial broken clock that is right twice a day, such rumors occasionally will be true. In this case, we don't know that they are true, and certainly it's not the rumors that are driving us. But other things — minor and readily explicable individually — have drawn our attention to the possibility that something is happening.

The first thing that drew our attention was a minor, routine matter. Back in February, the United States started purchasing oil for its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). The SPR is a reserve of crude oil stored in underground salt domes. Back in February, it stood at 96.2 percent of capacity, which is pretty full as far as we are concerned. But the U.S. Department of Energy decided to increase its capacity. This move came in spite of record-high oil prices and the fact that the purchase would not help matters. It also came despite potential political fallout, since during times like these there is generally pressure to release reserves. Part of the step could have been the bureaucracy cranking away, and part of it could have been the feeling that the step didn't make much difference. But part of it could have been based on real fears of a disruption in oil supplies. By itself, the move meant nothing. But it did cause us to become thoughtful.

Also in February, someone assassinated Imad Mughniyah, a leader of Hezbollah, in a car bomb explosion in Syria. It was assumed the Israelis had killed him, although there were some suspicions the Syrians might have had him killed for their own arcane reasons. In any case, Hezbollah publicly claimed the Israelis killed Mughniyah, and therefore it was expected the militant Shiite group would take revenge. In the past, Hezbollah responded not by attacking Israel but by attacking Jewish targets elsewhere, as in the Buenos Aires attacks of 1992 and 1994.

In March, the United States decided to dispatch the USS Cole, then under Sixth Fleet command, to Lebanese coastal waters. Washington later replaced it with two escorts from the Nassau (LHA-4) Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), reportedly maintaining a minor naval presence in the area. (Most of the ESG, on a regularly scheduled deployment, is no more than a few days sail from the coast, as it remains in the Mediterranean Sea.) The reason given for the American naval presence was to serve as a warning to the Syrians not to involve themselves in Lebanese affairs. The exact mission of the naval presence off the Levantine coast — and the exact deterrent function it served — was not clear, but there they were. The Sixth Fleet has gone out of its way to park and maintain U.S. warships off the Lebanese coast.

Hezbollah leaders being killed by the Israelis and the presence of American ships off the shores of Mediterranean countries are not news in and of themselves. These things happen. The killing of Mughniyah is notable only to point out that as much as Israel might have wanted him dead, the Israelis

knew this fight would escalate. But anyone would have known this. So all we know is that whoever killed Mughniyah wanted to trigger a conflict. The U.S. naval presence off the Levantine coast is notable in that Washington, rather busy with matters elsewhere, found the bandwidth to get involved here as well.

With the situation becoming tense, the Israelis announced in March that they would carry out an exercise in April called Turning Point 2. Once again, an Israeli military exercise is hardly interesting news. But the Syrians apparently got quite interested. After the announcement, the Syrians deployed three divisions — two armored, one mechanized — to the Lebanese-Syrian border in the Bekaa Valley, the western part of which is Hezbollah's stronghold. The Syrians didn't appear to be aggressive. Rather, they deployed these forces in a defensive posture, in a way walling off their part of the valley.

The Syrians are well aware that in the event of a conventional war with Israel, they would experience a short but exciting life, as they say. They thus are hardly going to attack Israel. The deployment therefore seemed intended to keep the Israelis on the Lebanese side of the border — on the apparent assumption the Israelis were going into the Bekaa Valley. Despite Israeli and Syrian denials of the Syrian troop buildup along the border, Stratfor sources maintain that the buildup in fact happened. Normally, Israel would be jumping at the chance to trumpet Syrian aggression in response to these troop movements, but, instead, the Israelis downplayed the buildup.

When the Israelis kicked off Turning Point 2, which we regard as a pretty interesting name, it turned out to be the largest exercise in Israeli history. It involved the entire country, and was designed to test civil defenses and the ability of the national command authority to continue to function in the event of an attack with unconventional weapons — chemical and nuclear, we would assume. This was a costly exercise. It also involved calling up reserves, some of them for the exercise, and, by some reports, others for deployment to the north against Syria. Israel does not call up reserves casually. Reserve call-ups are expensive and disrupt the civilian economy. These appear small, but in the environment of Turning Point 2, it would not be difficult to mobilize larger forces without being noticed.

The Syrians already were deeply concerned by the Israeli exercise. Eventually, the Lebanese government got worried, too, and started to evacuate some civilians from the South. Hezbollah, which still hadn't retaliated for the Mughniyah assassination, also claimed the Israelis were about to attack it, and reportedly went on alert and mobilized its forces. The Americans, who normally issue warnings and cautions to everyone, said nothing to try to calm the situation. They just sat offshore on their ships.

It is noteworthy that Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak canceled a scheduled visit to Germany this week. The cancellation came immediately after the reports of the Syrian military redeployment were released. Obviously, Barak needed to be in Israel for Turning Point 2, but then he had known about the exercise for at least a month. Why cancel at the last minute? While we are discussing diplomacy, we note that U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Oman — a country with close relations with Iran — and then was followed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. By itself not interesting, but why the high-level interest in Oman at this point?

Now let's swing back to September 2007, when the Israelis bombed something in Syria near the Turkish border. As we discussed at the time, for some reason the Israelis refused to say what they had attacked. It made no sense for them not to trumpet what they carefully leaked — namely, that they had attacked a nuclear facility. Proving that Syria had a secret nuclear program would have been a public

relations coup for Israel. Nevertheless, no public charges were leveled. And the Syrians remained awfully calm about the bombing.

Rumors now are swirling that the Israelis are about to reveal publicly that they in fact bombed a nuclear reactor provided to Syria by North Korea. But this news isn't all that big. Also rumored is that the Israelis will claim Iranian complicity in building the reactor. And one Israeli TV station reported April 8 that Israel really had discovered Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, which it said had been smuggled to Syria.

Now why the Bush administration wouldn't have trumpeted news of the Syrian reactor worldwide in September 2007 is beyond us, but there obviously were some reasons — assuming the TV report is true, which we have no way of establishing. In fact, we have no idea why the Israelis are choosing this moment to rehash the bombing of this site. But whatever their reason, it certainly raises a critical question. If the Syrians are developing a nuclear capability, what are the Israelis planning to do about it?

No one of these things, by itself, is of very great interest. And taken together they do not provide the means for a clear forecast. Nevertheless, a series of rather ordinary events, taken together, can constitute something significant. Tensions in the Middle East are moving well beyond the normal point, and given everything that is happening, events are moving to a point where someone is likely to take military action. Whether Hezbollah will carry out a retaliatory strike or Israel a pre-emptive strike in Lebanon, or whether the Israelis' real target is Iran, tensions systematically have been ratcheted up to the point where we, in our simple way, are beginning to wonder whether something has to give.

All together, these events are fairly extraordinary. Ignoring all rhetoric — and the Israelis have gone out of their way to say that they are not looking for a fight — it would seem that each side, but particularly the Americans and Israelis, have gone out of their way to signal that they are expecting conflict. The Syrians have also signaled that they expect conflict, and Hezbollah always claims there is about to be conflict.

What is missing is this: who will fight whom, and why, and why now. The simple explanation is that Israel wants a second round with Hezbollah. But while that might be true, it doesn't explain everything else that has happened. Most important, it doesn't explain the simultaneous revelations about the bombing of Syria. It also doesn't explain the U.S. naval deployment. Is the United States about to get involved in a war with Hezbollah, a war that the Israelis should handle themselves? Are the Israelis going to topple Syrian President Bashar al Assad — and then wind up with a Sunni government, or worse, an Israeli occupation of Syria? None of that makes a lot of sense.

In truth, all of this may dissolve into nothing much. In intelligence analysis, however, sometimes a set of not-fully-coherent facts must be reported, and that is what we are doing now. There is no clear pattern; there is no obvious direction this is taking. Nevertheless, when we string together events from February until now, we see a persistently escalating pattern of behavior. In fact, what we can say most clearly is that there is escalation, without being able to say what is the clear direction of the escalation or the purpose.

We would like to wrap this up with a crystal clear explanation and forecast. But we can't. The motives of the various actors are opaque; and taken separately, the individual events all have quite innocent explanations. We are not prepared to say war is imminent, nor even what sort of war there would be.

We are simply prepared to say that the course of events since February — and really since the September 2007 attack on Syria — have been startling, and they appear to be reaching some sort of hard-to-understand crescendo.

The bombing of Syria symbolizes our confusion. Why would Syria want a nuclear reactor and why put it on the border of Turkey, a country the Syrians aren't particularly friendly with? If the Syrians had a nuclear reactor, why would the Israelis be coy about it? Why would the Americans? Having said nothing for months apart from careful leaks, why are the Israelis going to speak publicly now? And if what they are going to say is simply that the North Koreans provided the equipment, what's the big deal? That was leaked months ago.

The events of September 2007 make no sense and have never made any sense. The events we have seen since February make no sense either. That is noteworthy, and we bring it to your attention. We are not saying that the events are meaningless. We are saying that we do not know their meaning. But we can't help but regard them as ominous.

OPINION

Bush's North Korea Capitulation

By JOHN R. BOLTON

April 15, 2008; Page A19

President George W. Bush is fond of comparing himself to Ronald Reagan. But as he meets with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in Washington this week, his policy regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons program looks more like something out of Bill Clinton's or Jimmy Carter's playbook.

In dealing with the Soviet Union on arms control, Reagan was famous for repeating the Russian phrase, "Doveryai, no proveryai" (trust, but verify). Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev reportedly once complained to Reagan, "You use that phrase every time we meet." To which Reagan smilingly replied, "That's because I like it so much."



This administration appears to have forgotten that concept altogether. Although the Six-Party Talks have been sliding into dangerous territory for some time, the Bush administration has repeatedly said that North Korea's complete, verifiable disclosure of its nuclear program was a sine qua non of any deal. No longer.

Last week in Singapore, U.S. chief negotiator Christopher Hill and his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye Gwan reached a deal that rests on trust and not verification. According to numerous press reports and Mr. Hill's April 10 congressional briefing, the U.S. will be expected to accept on faith, literally, North Korean assertions that it has not engaged in significant uranium enrichment, and that it has not proliferated nuclear technology or materials to countries like Syria and Iran.

Indeed, the North will not even make the declaration it earlier agreed to, but merely "acknowledge" that we are concerned about reports of such activities – which the United States itself will actually list. By some accounts, the North Korean statement will not even be public. In exchange for this utter nonperformance, the North will be rewarded with political "compensation" (its word): Concurrent with its "declaration," it will be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and freed from the Trading With the Enemy Act.

President Bush has repeatedly told Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley not to make him look weak on North Korea. If the president accepts the deal now on the table, things will be far worse than that.

Although the U.S. public is not yet fully aware of every detail of this agreement, the administration's public and private comments effectively admit the substance. While briefing Congress, Mr. Hill said he expects the North's release from the long-standing U.S. constraints to be "simultaneous" with its "acknowledgment," which he described as a "win-win" concept.

The generals in Pyongyang must love that assessment. They can also relax, since they won't have to worry about concealing their ongoing nuclear work from any verification follow-up.

Our chief negotiator conceded, without blushing, that North Korea "won't allow snap inspections," which apparently justifies the Bush administration's immediate surrender. Indeed, Mr. Hill derided concerns about the North's enrichment effort by saying, according to an attendee, "Some people imagine there is a building somewhere with a secret door they can open and find a group of scantily clad women enriching uranium."

So much for legitimate concerns about U.S. security and the equally legitimate concerns of our allies. Despite cryptic comments by Secretary of State Rice to the contrary, there is no verification mechanism whatever to explore and monitor the truth of what North Korea will say. We will be taking their word.

Ironically, the only hang-up is that North Korea is still lying about how much plutonium it has accumulated, proffering an amount well below what U.S. intelligence believes to be the case. In short, the Bush administration is focusing on what it thinks it knows (plutonium), ignoring what could be the far more dangerous activities (uranium enrichment) it has reason to suspect.

This is the same mistake as the drunk searching for his car keys near a lamppost, even though he admits to a passerby they are not there. Why keep looking near the lamp post? "Because the light is better," the drunk replies.

One can only imagine what Ronald Reagan would have said in his 1980 campaign, if Jimmy Carter had fallen so low. Similarly, in 1999, former Secretary of State James Baker called Clinton administration policy on North Korea "appeasement," writing in the New York Times: "Once again, we have been played for fools. . . . [I]t is hard to fathom how anyone could put credence in any agreement by North Korea."

Perhaps President Bush could at least read Secretary Baker's Times's op-ed before he signs off on this deal. Even Jack Pritchard, the Bush administration's former chief North Korea negotiator – who resigned five years ago because he believed our policy was too harsh – is critical of the current approach.

Our allies South Korea and Japan will long remember this impending act of American fecklessness. South Korea's President Lee, who was voted into office last December, campaigned extensively on requiring the North to meet its commitments. As he meets with President Bush this week, his countrymen must be wondering why the North's commitments mean something in Seoul but not in Washington.

Japan emphatically wants Pyongyang to account for the Japanese citizens kidnapped over the decades. On April 12, Japan extended its own economic sanctions against the North. Nonetheless, despite the absence of any resolution of these repeated acts of North Korean terrorism, the U.S., until now Japan's closest ally, is poised to remove the North from the terrorism list.

Pyongyang's escape from accountability could break down international counter-proliferation efforts. What possible reason will Iran now have to be transparent about its nuclear activities? If North Korea can get away with deception and be rewarded, why should Iran not do the same? In Libya, Moammar Gadhafi will kick himself for giving up his nuclear weapons program in 2003. This deal with North Korea is troubling enough, but the worst news is still to come.

Last fall, President Bush rejected the idea of giving North Korea a pass on uranium enrichment and proliferation. Now, in the waning days of his term, he seems poised to accept it. If he does, and if this deal proceeds, we can well and truly say: "President Bush, you are no Ronald Reagan."

Mr. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations" (Simon & Schuster/Threshold Editions, 2007).

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Six-Party Giveaway

April 16, 2008; Page A18

Kim Jong Il has done it again. The North Korean dictator rarely makes a promise he doesn't break, and sure enough, that includes his latest nuclear disarmament pledge. He can thank his enablers in Washington for letting him get away with it.

Kim's strategy was entirely predictable on February 13, 2007, when North Korea pledged to give up its nuclear ambitions in exchange for diplomatic recognition and foreign aid. After years of broken promises, missile launches and nuclear tests, there was little reason to think Kim would treat this promise any differently than he had previous ones. At the time, we called it faith-based nonproliferation, and now that's turning out literally to be the case.

After months of demanding that the North live up to its promise to provide a "complete declaration of its nuclear programs" – as specified in the document Pyongyang signed – the U.S. is now backtracking. Last week in Singapore, U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill and his North Korean counterpart reached a compromise that media reports say will take the North's assurances on faith.

Washington appears ready to accept a declaration that refers only to the North's plutonium program. It would exclude any mention of its clandestine uranium enrichment program – which it bragged about in 2002 but now claims never existed. Nor would it explain the North's proliferation of nuclear technology or materials to Syria, Iran or elsewhere.

A Financial Times report quotes an anonymous U.S. official, almost certainly Mr. Hill, as saying a "full admission" isn't necessary. "This is a regime that is incapable of certain things, and it is incapable of doing that." This is diplomacy as psychotherapy. In other words, the U.S. will give a pass to Pyongyang for lying about Syria and uranium while assuming that the North is now telling us the truth about its plutonium stockpile. This turns Ronald Reagan's slogan on its head: Trust but don't verify.

The revised nuclear deal hasn't been formally announced, and President Bush could still nix it. South Korea's new President, Lee Myung-bak, who will be in Washington later this week, has the moral standing to persuade Mr. Bush of the dangers here. Since taking office at the end of February, Mr. Lee has talked tough on the subject of North Korean accountability. Pyongyang has responded by testing short-range missiles that could reach the South and threatening to reduce Seoul to "ashes."

Allowing the North to renege on its pledge to account fully for its nuclear programs is also a slap at Japan, another U.S. ally in range of Pyongyang's missiles. Tokyo has been pushing North Korea for information about the Japanese citizens it abducted in the 1970s and '80s. If Pyongyang doesn't have to account for its nuclear weapons or its uranium program, why would it feel inclined to account for a few Japanese nationals?

In the waning days of the Bush Administration, there seems to be an attitude that any deal with Pyongyang is better than no deal. But a "disarmament" accord that gives the North a pass on

proliferation and uranium is more than worthless. In addition to propping up Kim's regime, the Administration is setting a standard for nonproliferation that is so low that it may well allow rogue regimes to keep their weapons while getting credit for giving them up. This is dangerous.

A Deal With Pyongyang?

Once again, North Korea may gain concessions from the Bush administration while evading its own commitments.

Friday, April 18, 2008; A26

FOR MONTHS, the Bush administration has insisted that North Korea would have to fulfill its year-old commitment to disclose all of its nuclear programs in order to receive further economic and political concessions from the United States. The disclosure is important because Pyongyang has until now denied that it pursued uranium enrichment or helped Syria with a nuclear reactor, even though there is strong evidence that it did both. A truthful statement would indicate that the regime of Kim Jong Il was serious about giving up its weapons and not just trying to extort aid from the West as it has in the past.

Yet the Bush administration appears to be close to a deal under which North Korea would be excused from disclosing its work with uranium and proliferation activity. Instead, The Post's Glenn Kessler reported, it would merely "acknowledge" -- possibly in private -- a U.S. statement of concern about those activities. According to a package crafted by Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, the North would disclose only its plutonium stockpile, by far the most dangerous part of its nuclear program. In return the United States would make two major concessions: North Korea would be removed from the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism and be exempted from the Trading With the Enemy Act.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was still saying yesterday that "the outcome we and our partners require is a full account from North Korea of all its nuclear programs, including any uranium and nuclear proliferation activities." But the reality is that the Bush administration is letting an intransigent regime off the hook. Administration officials explain Ms. Rice's statement by saying that the North Koreans would eventually "account" for their uranium and proliferation by accepting a process of verification. But that process will be prolonged, if it succeeds at all. In the meantime Mr. Kim will pocket the latest U.S. concessions without making the "full and complete declaration" of nuclear programs that Ms. Rice previously said would be required.

In a meeting with members of Congress and in statements to reporters, Mr. Hill has argued that the first priority must be the plutonium stockpile, since it can be used to make weapons. In contrast, U.S. officials believe that while North Korea obtained equipment for uranium enrichment, it does not now have such a program. Yet there are also problems with North Korea's preliminary declaration on plutonium, which is well below U.S. intelligence estimates. Ms. Rice suggested that the amount of plutonium, too, will have to be confirmed by the verification process.

If the United States were able to reach its goal of having North Korea surrender its plutonium, substantial concessions would be justified. But senior administration officials say they don't expect that the Kim regime will turn over its plutonium in the coming nine months. That raises the question of why President Bush would allow North Korea to evade full disclosure. Mr. Hill's deal would preserve the negotiating process -- but what does the Bush administration stand to gain from it? All along the risk has been that North Korea would repeatedly extract economic and political favors from the United States without giving up its nuclear arsenal. The latest deal would seem to greatly increase the chance that that will be the legacy of Mr. Bush's diplomacy.

Detering the Undeterrable

By Charles Krauthammer

Friday, April 18, 2008; A27

The era of nonproliferation is over. During the first half-century of the nuclear age, safety lay in restricting the weaponry to major powers and keeping it out of the hands of rogue states. This strategy was inevitably going to break down. The inevitable has arrived.

The six-party talks on North Korea have failed miserably. They did not prevent Pyongyang from testing a nuclear weapon and entering the club. Now North Korea has broken yet again its agreement to reveal all its nuclear facilities.

The other test case was Iran. The EU-3 negotiations (Britain, France and Germany) went nowhere. Each U.N. Security Council resolution enacting what passed for sanctions was more useless than the last. Uranium enrichment continues.

When Iran's latest announcement that it was tripling its number of centrifuges to 9,000 elicited no discernible response from the Bush administration, the game was over. Everyone says Iran must be prevented from going nuclear. No one will bell the cat.

The "international community" is prepared to do nothing of consequence to halt nuclear proliferation. No one wants to admit that. Nor does anyone want to contemplate the prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of one, two, many rogue states.

We must. The day is coming, and quickly. We must face reality and begin thinking how we live with the unthinkable.

There are four ways to deal with rogue states going nuclear: preemption, deterrence, missile defense and regime change.

Preemption works but, as a remedy, it is spent. Iraq was defanged by the 1981 Israeli airstrike, by the 1991 Persian Gulf War (which uncovered Saddam Hussein's clandestine nuclear programs) and finally by the 2003 invasion, which ended the Hussein dynasty, père et deux fils.

A collateral effect of the Iraq war was Libya's nuclear disarmament. Seeing Hussein's fate, Moammar Gaddafi declared and dismantled his nuclear program. And if November's National Intelligence Estimate is to be believed, the Iraq invasion even induced Iran to temporarily suspend weaponization and enrichment.

But the cost of preemption is simply too high. No one is going to renew the Korean War with an attack on Pyongyang. And the prospects of an attack on Iran's facilities are now vanishingly small. What to do?

Deterrence. It worked in the two-player Cold War. Will it work against multiple rogues? It seems quite suitable for North Korea, whose regime, far from being suicidal, is obsessed with survival.

Iran is a different proposition. With its current millenarian leadership, deterrence is indeed a feeble gamble, as I wrote in 2006 in making the case for considering preemption. But if preemption is off the table, deterrence is all you've got. Our task is to make deterrence in this context less feeble.

Two ways: Begin by making the retaliatory threat in response to Iranian nuclear aggression so unmistakable and so overwhelming that the non-millenarians in leadership would stay the hand or even remove those taking their country to the point of extinction.

But there is an adjunct to deterrence: missile defense. Against a huge Soviet arsenal, this was useless. Against small powers with small arsenals, i.e., North Korea and Iran, it becomes extremely effective in conjunction with deterrence.

For the sake of argument, imagine a two-layered anti-missile system in which each layer is imperfect, with, say, a 90 percent shoot-down accuracy. That means one in 100 missiles gets through both layers. That infinitely strengthens deterrence by radically degrading the possibility of a successful first strike. Even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad might refrain from launching an arsenal of, say, 20 nukes if his scientific advisers showed him that there was only an 18.2 percent chance of any getting through-- and a 100 percent chance that a retaliatory counterattack of hundreds of Israeli (and/or American) nukes would reduce the world's first Islamic republic to a cinder.

Of course, one can get around missile defense by using terrorists. But anything short of a hermetically secret, perfectly executed, multiple-site attack would cause terrible, but not existential, destruction. The retaliatory destruction, on the other hand, would be existential.

We are, of course, dealing here with probabilities. Total safety comes only from regime change. During the Cold War, we worried about Soviet nukes, but never French or British nukes. Weapons don't kill people; people kill people. Regime change will surely come to both North Korea and Iran. That is the ultimate salvation.

But between now and then lies danger. How to safely navigate the interval? Deterrence plus missile defense renders a first strike so unlikely to succeed and yet so certain to bring on self-destruction that it might -- just might -- get us through from the day the rogues go nuclear to the day they are deposed.

We have entered the post-nonproliferation age. It's time to take our heads out of the sand and deal with it.

letters@charleskrauthammer.com

Editorial

Now He's Ready to Deal

April 19, 2008

President Bush's latest compromise for ending North Korea's nuclear program is agitating critics — outside his administration and in. It is an imperfect solution. But imperfect may be all one can expect after Mr. Bush wasted so much time refusing to consider any compromise at all.

For six years, Mr. Bush rejected any meaningful negotiations. The result? Pyongyang kept adding to its plutonium stockpile — it now has enough for eight or more bombs — and tested a nuclear device.

When Mr. Bush finally agreed to try diplomacy — and gave a serious diplomat, Christopher Hill, the room to negotiate — Washington correctly insisted on a “complete and correct” accounting of all North Korea's nuclear activities as an important step toward dismantling the program. Now Mr. Bush is willing to accept less.

The North Koreans won't have to come clean — at least for now — on their fledgling uranium-based weapons program, which American officials believe has been shut down. **Nor will they be required to publicly admit to selling Syria the technology and know-how to build a nuclear reactor. Israel destroyed that project last September.** Instead, officials say, the United States will stipulate what it knows about these programs, and Pyongyang only has to “acknowledge” these “concerns.”

Of course, if a Democratic president had made similar compromises, hard-line Republicans probably would have called for impeachment. That said, Mr. Hill may be right that this is the only chance to push the process to the next step: getting North Korea to dismantle its plutonium-based reactor at Yongbyon and eventually surrender all its nuclear fuel and weapons.

That is the clear and present danger. The North Koreans have already shut down Yongbyon — an important but insufficient accomplishment.

Presuming the current compromise comes together — the two sides remain divided over the size of North Korea's plutonium fuel stocks — North Korea would be removed from America's list of terrorist states and from sanctions under the Trading With the Enemy Act and receive a large shipment of heavy fuel oil.

All of this is especially frustrating when one considers how much safer the world would be if Mr. Bush had picked up where President Bill Clinton left off in 2001. In those days, the North Koreans only had enough plutonium for one or two bombs. Activities at Yongbyon were frozen under a 1994 agreement. Mr. Bush and his aides detested that agreement, and as soon as they discovered Pyongyang was trying to build a uranium-based weapons program, they declared that diplomacy pointless.

The hard-liners are right on one thing: No commitment from North Korea should ever be taken at face value. We're not convinced it will ever trade its nuclear capability, even for vastly better diplomatic and economic ties with the world.

That is why the emerging deal will require the most transparency and verification possible, including full access to its plutonium production records. The Bush administration must push harder on this. And if North Korea is found cheating, the world will have to impose even tougher sanctions.

As we said, it is an imperfect solution. But, presuming the deal isn't weakened even more, it may be the only choice.

Samore: More Fluid U.S. Stance on N. Korea Nuclear Weapons

Interviewee:

Gary Samore, Vice President, Director of Studies, and Maurice R. Greenberg Chair

Interviewer:

Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor

April 23, 2008

Gary Samore Gary Samore, vice president of the Council on Foreign Relations, says the Bush administration has agreed to a compromise on demands for North Korea to confess the extent of its uranium-enrichment activities. Samore, a senior arms control negotiator in the Clinton administration, says the compromise is to allow the United States “to get into what it considers to be the most important element of the deal, the negotiation over the actual elimination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons.”

What’s the status of negotiations with North Korea? A year ago, it looked like we had an agreement. Now critics are saying the Bush administration is giving away the store and selling out.

For over a year the talks have been stuck over the issue of North Korea making a declaration of all of its nuclear activities. The main question there is North Korea’s refusal to acknowledge a secret uranium-enrichment program and then more recently, its nuclear assistance to Syria. So the administration has made a compromise with North Korea. In the compromise the North Koreans will declare how much plutonium they’ve produced over the years and instead of North Korea having to directly acknowledge the uranium-enrichment program and their assistance to Syria, the United States will make a statement expressing its belief that these activities have taken place and the North Koreans will not refute or challenge that U.S. statement.

In exchange for that, the United States will take North Korea off the list of state sponsors of terrorism and remove some of the Trading with the Enemy Act sanctions. Most importantly, once the declaration issue has been resolved, the two sides will begin the serious negotiations over the so-called third phase, which is the plan to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear facilities and eventually eliminate its nuclear weapons. Basically the Bush administration has made a concession or compromise on the North Korean declaration in order to get into what it considers to be the most important element of the deal, the negotiation over the actual elimination of North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

Now, there is a State Department delegation on its way to Pyongyang as we talk. What is it supposed to accomplish?

My understanding is that they are talking about the verification provisions, especially for North Korea’s plutonium declaration. North Korea, as I understand it, has declared or will declare that it’s produced about thirty kilograms of plutonium. That’s at the low end of U.S. estimates for how much plutonium they have produced over the last twenty years. It will be absolutely essential to have some confidence that’s an accurate number, because the natural suspicion is that North Korea will under

declare what they have so that can keep some in secret for possible nuclear weapons. The team that is going to Pyongyang, headed by Sung Kim, who is the director of the Korea office at the State Department, will be to talk about what kinds of measures the North Koreans will allow to verify that their statement of thirty kilograms is accurate. That's going to be very tricky.

In the past North Korea has rejected intrusive inspection methods designed to try to determine how much plutonium it had actually produced. In fact that was the cause of the original nuclear crisis in 1992. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) wanted to visit some suspected nuclear waste sites, which would have shown evidence of North Korean reprocessing, and the North Koreans refused to let the IAEA go to those sites. Then they left the Nonproliferation Treaty [NPT] and that's what led to the whole crisis during the Clinton administration [which led to the signing of the Agreed Framework in 1994].

Now I've read that the United States has estimated North Korea has produced as much as fifty kilograms.

We don't know. These are estimates based on how long the reactor is operated. You have to take into consideration that when you reprocess you don't get all the plutonium out of the spent fuel. Some of it is lost. If the reprocessing facility is sloppy, which I wouldn't be at all surprised in this case, you could lose 20 or 25 percent of the plutonium in the waste stream. Nobody really knows how much plutonium the North Koreans actually produced.

To get some sense of plutonium, it takes about eight kilograms to make a bomb?

It really depends on the design. Again, we don't know how efficient the North Korean design is, but something on the order of six to eight kilograms per bomb is probably a pretty conservative estimate for the kind of design we think North Korea is most likely to utilize.

So we're talking about the possibility that they might be secretly keeping enough plutonium to make a couple of bombs.

That's the natural suspicion—that the North Koreans have lied about their nuclear program over the decade. The natural suspicion is that they would underreport the amount of plutonium; they would falsify records; they would coax their scientists to give us a false story. So unless we have an independent means of verifying, which means sampling from the reactor the waste that was produced in the reprocessing plant. Unless you get those kinds of physical samples to carry out a real forensic investigation, the verification is not going to be very strong.

What do you think is going on in North Korea? You would think they would have a lot to gain from joining the world of nations, by getting trade and everything else that would help their economy.

Especially now. They've had a very bad harvest so they are looking at the likelihood of serious food shortages, maybe as bad as they experienced in the mid-1990s. At the same time the North Korean regime wants to hang on to their nuclear weapons, so they are playing the same game they have always been playing, which is to make concessions to limit their nuclear capabilities in exchange for political and economic compensation, while at the same time hold off and resist pressure to actually give up their nuclear weapons.

I expect that if these third-phase negotiations begin you will see a similar kind of process, where the North Koreans agree in principle to give up their nuclear weapons once peace and prosperity has been established on the Korean peninsula and U.S-North Korea relations are fully normalized. So in other words, they will set conditions which are not likely to be met anytime in the near future.

Let's come back to this compromise that U.S. negotiator Chris Hill reached with the North Koreans. This is one that is getting criticized by former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton and other conservatives. Did the Bush administration cause its own problem by taking such a tough line back in 2002 and 2003?

The Bush administration was correct when it reached the conclusion that North Korea was cheating on the Agreed Framework by pursuing a secret uranium-enrichment program, but the way it handled the confrontation with North Korea was very clumsy. North Korea took advantage on our focus on Iraq to leave the NPT and to produce more plutonium and to basically walk away from the Agreed Framework. Then the Bush administration realized that it needed to negotiate but unfortunately it was too late to roll back what the North Koreans had already done.

Now the Bush administration has frozen any further North Korean plutonium production and it has created a good diplomatic framework for the next U.S. administration to pick up the talks. It's unlikely that you'll see a deal reached on the third phase during the rest of this administration because North Korea is likely to demand things, like the light-water nuclear-reactor project, that so far the Bush administration has not been willing to give. But at least the talks will get started and will put the next administration in a better position to pick them up and hopefully bring them to a conclusion.

I haven't seen much said by any of the candidates about North Korea in particular; am I missing something?

No, that's right. As long as the situation seems to be under control, as long as the negotiations are proceeding, it's really not a major foreign-policy challenge, especially given all the big problems in the Middle East, Iraq being the first.

If you were in the new administration would you recommend that they do anything different?

The Bush administration has provided a good diplomatic framework for trying to work out an agreement with the North Koreans to eventually give up their nuclear weapons, even though I am skeptical that the North Koreans will actually carry out that commitment. The next administration just has to pick up where this administration leaves off. The big issue, which is sort of out there for these third-phase negotiations, is whether we agree to resume the light-water reactor project. You will remember that in the original Agreed Framework, the North Koreans were to get nuclear power in exchange for giving up nuclear weapons.

We were supposed to supply a light-water reactor?

It was mainly funded by the South Koreans and Japanese but the United States also had to support it because the design was a U.S. design. That project of course was suspended when we found out that North Korea was cheating. The North Koreans are saying they still want that light-water reactor because they need the electrical power.

But for them to get a light water reactor we have to be absolutely certain about what their nuclear situation is?

That's why the verification is so important. The declaration that the North Koreans have made was always intended to be an initial declaration and the understanding was that unless you verified it, the initial declaration wouldn't be worth very much. So these talks that are going on in Pyongyang are critically important for the plutonium question; even more difficult will be how to verify eventually the status of the uranium-enrichment program because we know so little about that. At least in the case of the plutonium program we know where the facilities are, so we can go visit the facilities and take physical measurements. In the case of the enrichment program, we don't even know where it is.

And they've denied it all?

Well, yes, they've sort of denied it. Apparently they acknowledged it during the 2002 meetings with [James] Kelly [assistant secretary of state for Asian affairs], or at least that's what our side claims. But the official position of the North Koreans is that they deny it. The evidence that they had or still have a secret enrichment program is very strong. We just don't know how advanced it is.

Are we worse off now regarding North Korea? They've had a nuclear test and built a couple of bombs. Who's at fault here? The Bush administration, or the North Koreans?

The fundamental fault rests with Pyongyang. They are the ones that decided to renege on the Agreed Framework, although the way the Bush administration handled the discovery of their cheating was not the most effective way to go about it. Taking on Iraq and North Korea at the same time created an opening for the North Koreans to walk away from the Agreed Framework with impunity.

Caving in to Pyongyang

April 24, 2008

THE WASHINGTON TIMES EDITORIAL - The more details that come out about the Bush administration's approach to negotiations with North Korea, the more disturbing the deal looks. Last week, administration officials indicated that they were backing away from their insistence that North Korea fully admit its nuclear activities. The White House said that its requirements for a full declaration from North Korea about its past actions would no longer include proliferation matters. Since North Korea signed an agreement last year agreeing to come clean about its nuclear activities, the White House had been saying that these would include proliferation — or the transfer of knowledge about uranium enrichment or nuclear materials to other countries. North Korea is suspected of helping Syria build a plutonium-processing facility for nuclear weapons which was destroyed by Israel in a Sept. 6 airstrike.

Dennis Wilder, the senior White House official on East Asia, said April 17 that Washington is handling the North Korea proliferation issue in a "different" (i.e., more conciliatory) way from other requirements that North Korea declare its past nuclear activities. The Bush administration's latest approach to Pyongyang, supported by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, would enable North Korea to avoid coming clean about its earlier nuclear activities. North Korea will make a formal declaration about its plutonium-based weapons program and then "acknowledge" in a confidential side agreement U.S. statements regarding the communist's regime program to build nuclear weapons using highly enriched uranium and its proliferation activities with Syria.

The Bush administration yesterday said publicly that North Korea was helping Syria build a plutonium-based nuclear reactor, but that Pyongyang has ceased all assistance and promised not to resume providing it. How the United States verifies this in dealing with a totalitarian police state like North Korea is anyone's guess.

But State Department spokesman Sean McCormack claims that the emerging agreement with North Korea does not represent a U.S. concession. For example, he maintains that even if North Korea did not fully account for its uranium enrichment efforts, the agreement would still permit inspectors access to all of Pyongyang's nuclear facilities in order to verify that it had stopped its weapons programs. "We don't know where the facilities are. That's totally untrue," former Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton told us yesterday when we read him Mr. McCormack's statement. "All it gives us is [access to] Yongbyon," he said, referring to North Korea's main plutonium processing facility.

But North Korea's decision to jettison Yongbyon is not much of a concession because that facility is probably at the end of useful life anyway, Mr. Bolton said. One major flaw of the agreement is that it lacks a mechanism permitting snap inspections of suspected covert facilities. In essence, Washington will be reduced to taking North Korea's word, Mr. Bolton added, likening the Bush administration's North Korean deal to something Jimmy Carter would put together.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Florida Republican, has sent a detailed letter to congressional appropriators challenging a panoply of U.S. concessions to North Korea, among them

steps to relax economic sanctions against Pyongyang despite the fact that it continues to threaten South Korea and apparently remains engaged in counterfeiting U.S. currency. It's time for more members of Congress to join Mrs. Ros-Lehtinen in doing some serious oversight work regarding the concessions being made to North Korea.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june08/nuclear_04-25.html

Transcript

Originally Aired: April 25, 2008

Analysts Mull N. Korea's Link to Syrian Nuclear Site

RAY SUAREZ: Finally tonight, the evidence of North Korean nuclear cooperation with Syria. Judy Woodruff has the story.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Top U.S. intelligence officials briefed members of Congress and reporters yesterday about North Korea helping Syria build a nuclear reactor.

A key piece of evidence: an 11-minute video showing the Syrian facility. Here's a brief excerpt.

VIDEO NARRATOR: This photograph shows the top of the reactor vessel in the reactor hall before concrete was poured around the vertical control rod and refueling tubes.

Note the similar arrangement of vertical tube openings in the top of the Syrian reactor on the left and North Korea's Yongbyon plutonium production reactor on the right.

We assessed the Syrian reactor was similar in size and capacity to this North Korean reactor. Only North Korea has built such gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactors in the past 35 years.

Uncertainty over weaponization

JUDY WOODRUFF: This latest intelligence comes at a sensitive time, as the U.S. and other nations are in talks with North Korea over Pyongyang's nuclear program.

For an assessment of this intelligence and its significance, we get two views. David Albright is president of the Institute for Science and International Security, which studies nuclear programs worldwide.

Henry Sokolski is executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, which is a Washington research organization.

Gentlemen, thank you both for being with us. And I'm going to start with you, David Albright.

Now that you've had a day to look over this evidence put forward by the administration and by intelligence officials, how persuasive is it?

DAVID ALBRIGHT, Institute for Science and International Security: I think the information is very persuasive that Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor, and it was taking great steps to hide it from visual observation, it was getting help from North Korea, and it appeared quite determined to get it to operate.

Where I think the information is lacking is certain key things that would conclusively show Syria was engaged in trying to make nuclear weapons, things like you have to have a facility to separate plutonium in order to make a nuclear weapon.

There is no information about how Syria was going to actually get the uranium fuel to run the reactor, which is a little bit like finishing a car but not having any gasoline to run it.

And so there remain several questions where you have to be careful before you accuse Syria of having an active nuclear weapons program.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Henry Sokolski, how do you size up the evidence?

HENRY SOKOLSKI, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center: Well, I agree with all the comments made, but it's perhaps a different take, which is it certainly looked like a duck and it walked like a duck. And I think what you can't find is always a problem. We tend not to find fuel-making facilities all the time.

How far along the project was is, perhaps, a matter of open dispute, but, boy, they were definitely gunning for plutonium production. There's no question of that. And you wait long enough, you'd have another Iran crisis for sure.

JUDY WOODRUFF: When you say "we often," I think you said we often don't find uranium fuel facilities, what are you referring to?

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Well, or processing facilities. I remember being in the Pentagon, and we debated for nearly a year as to what a photographed reprocessing plant at Yongbyon in North Korea was, whether it was a textile plant or not.

So even when it's in plain sight, we have disputes as to what's going on. And frequently it's not in plain sight.

You can hide some of these facilities, as we've found in the case of Natanz, which is the Iranian enrichment program, and it being out of sight for quite a while until it's fairly far along.

So I think even this plant took a long time to find. That's one of the most remarkable things about this story is we didn't picture it ourselves until late in the game.

JUDY WOODRUFF: David Albright, what about this argument that if it walks, quacks like a duck, it must be?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: That's the kind of argument, unfortunately, that got us into a lot of trouble in Iraq and also in Iran. So I think you have to be very careful and find the evidence.

And particularly, if Syria is accused of having an active nuclear weapons program, that is different than accusing them of having a secret reactor, and particularly in a region where there's lots of tension...

JUDY WOODRUFF: What's the difference?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: Well, the difference is, is that it's a much greater violation of the nonproliferation treaty if you can show that they were actively trying to build nuclear weapons, and particularly if it was further along.

Right now, Syria wasn't loading fuel into that reactor, because then the bombing showed that and the work after the bombing. And so they hadn't violated major international treaties.

But if they were -- if you can prove they were engaged in making nuclear weapons and you can have evidence of that, then it's a very serious issue. And in a region where -- or particularly with Syria bordering Israel, you have to always worry in these cases that it could escalate into a military confrontation.

JUDY WOODRUFF: But very quickly, why would they have been building a facility to make plutonium if they weren't going to do something lethal with it?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: Well, one is we don't know the purpose. I mean, it looks like they were building it to get plutonium. And you would think that it's probably for nuclear weapons.

But the point I'm making is that things can change and they can fail. For example, maybe they were going to depend on North Korea to provide the uranium, but North Korea was no longer going to provide that uranium, and they would have ended up with a machine that could never operate.

Role of North Korea under debate

JUDY WOODRUFF: Let me move to the question, Henry Sokolski, of why North Korea, if North Korea -- and the evidence seems, I guess, you're both saying it's pretty clear to you that North Korea was involved in this -- why were they helping the Syrians? What were they getting out of it?

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Well, you know, lots of speculation. The intelligence officers said cash. There are any number of other possibilities, including everything from, well, maybe they hoped to continue to produce material there.

I mean, we don't know. This is one of the reasons why we don't try to gauge our policies or our verification system to intent, but rather to capabilities.

It's one of the things that the international inspectors, who were totally caught flat-footed on this, as well -- they just look for undeclared activity that's out of sorts. And this clearly was in that category.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Why do you think, Henry Sokolski, the administration is just now saying -- because this happened last September in 2007.

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Yes.

JUDY WOODRUFF: The administration was aware activity...

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Yes.

JUDY WOODRUFF: ... were underway. Why are they putting it out now? And what does it is about U.S. policy going forward toward North Korea?

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Really good question. I think the folks that want to push the further discussions and perhaps even dropping North Korea from the list of terrorist countries for U.S. trade purposes figure, well, maybe we need to just get this out of the way so that we can move ahead.

Hawks and critics of this approach point to this transgression, because actually North Korea was supposed to fess up to all of its export of nuclear activities last December. And they point to this and say, well, maybe we should kill the talks.

I'm not sure we really know who's winning this debate in the administration. My guess is that it'll end up with the talks continuing, but the focus of the talks being on getting the North Koreans to fess up to a lot more than they have.

More pressure to be put on DPRK

JUDY WOODRUFF: Well, we know that Christopher Hill, who's the chief administration negotiator with the North Koreans, he was quoted yesterday as saying that any cooperation that did exist no longer exists.

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Yes, there you go.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Does that say anything to you, David Albright?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: I think the evidence points in that direction. I mean, even the CIA, when it was talking about this to the journalist, was talking about any assistance after the bombing was on damage assessment.

I mean, we know the North Koreans were near the site, probably at the reactor, and so they were looking at what happened, for sure. But I think what is important, though, is that, in engaging North Korea, negotiating with them, and being tough about it is that you want to get North Korea to stop this kind of activities.

We have no guarantee they're not selling something to another country. And so it's very important to try to draw North Korea in, into the negotiations, and insist in a verifiable manner that they stop this kind of illicit nuclear trade.

JUDY WOODRUFF: And very quickly, Henry Sokolski, by making this public, is that likely to have that effect on -- is this likely to have that effect on the North Koreans?

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Well, temporarily. I don't think any pledge from these folks amounts to much because we can't really verify until very late in the game after they cheat. And they have a record of seeing things very differently with regard to their obligations to anything they sign.

So I wouldn't get your hopes up on this one. And that's the reason why fessing up will be the focus from here on out for a while.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Final word here?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: Yes, I think they've said many things that have been verified to be true. I mean, they have shut down their plutonium production...

JUDY WOODRUFF: The North Koreans?

DAVID ALBRIGHT: The North Koreans have shut down their plutonium production capability and they're not making plutonium for nuclear weapons anymore, and that's verified, and that's true.

So on illicit trade, they are caught, and that can be verified. And more scrutiny internationally is very important to thwart and deter the North Koreans.

HENRY SOKOLSKI: You don't need a deal to do that. And I think we're going to have to start thinking bigger than whether or not we can prevent things by getting pledges from the North Koreans.

This is the 11th *[sic]* bombing of a nuclear reactor in the Middle East. Where we head it in general is a much bigger, more important question.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Well, certainly an interesting story, and we thank both of you for helping shed some more light on it. David Albright with me, Henry Sokolski, thank you both. We appreciate it.

HENRY SOKOLSKI: Thank you.

DAVID ALBRIGHT: Thank you.

The curious Syrian nuclear affair

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Just over five years ago, a US secretary of state, Colin Powell, made more than two dozen claims to the United Nations Security Council about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. In the build-up to war, many found it a compelling performance. But all Mr Powell's assertions were subsequently shown to be without foundation. He might as well have shown the world a video game.

Not long after that, Israel started hawking "evidence" uncovered by its spies that Saddam Hussein had moved his WMD to Syria. It got some takers – but nothing more has been heard of this chimera.

Thursday's Central Intelligence Agency presentation to the US Congress – making the case that North Korea supplied Syria with a nuclear reactor able to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons – was also compelling. It would also appear to justify retroactively the Israeli air strike on the site in Syria's eastern desert last September. But given the US and Israel's recent record in these matters, it could also be just another dog and pony show.

Taken purely on its own terms, the US claim raises many questions. Where was Damascus going to get the fissile fuel for this alleged reactor? Where was the plutonium separator, or reprocessing facility for spent fuel? Where is the evidence for a weaponisation programme? Why, moreover, did the US (and Israeli air force) bypass the IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog?

None of this means we should believe the Syrians. They have said little more than Israel – which refuses to comment – beyond claiming the site was a military depot. Bashar al-Assad's regime is not trustworthy. Damascus has a long history of pursuing its aims through violent surrogates such as Hizbollah and Hamas, and of murdering its opponents, especially in Lebanon.

Its usual defence – "do you think we would be that stupid?" – can only be answered in the affirmative after the government sanctioned a recruiting station for volunteer fighters in Iraq just yards away from the US embassy in Damascus in 2003. But that does not mean these specific allegations are true.

This affair is very odd. The CIA's decision to go public now backs Pyongyang into a corner at a critical moment in the six-power talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament – leading some to detect the hand of Bush administration hawks such as Dick Cheney.

But it also follows the assassination in Damascus of top Hizbollah (and Iranian) operative Imad Mugniyeh. The air strike and the hit could also be interpreted as warnings to Iran to cease its regional meddling and nuclear ambitions – and maybe scare Damascus off its alliance with Tehran. One video show in Washington does not shine a light through the regional murk. But it should remind us there is too much dry tinder out there for anyone to be careless with matches.

http://blog.washingtonpost.com/earlywarning/2008/04/syrias_nuclear_weapon_so_what.html

William M. Arkin on National and Homeland Security

Syria's Nuclear Weapon: What to Do

By William M. Arkin

April 25, 2008; 11:40 AM ET

The "news" that North Korea and Syria were cooperating in the development of nuclear weapons, a "charge" the Bush administration made yesterday, is not news to anyone who has been closely following the September incident in which Israel mysteriously attacked a remote facility in Syria. It may not even be true.

I say may not be true because it is important to understand that the intelligence -- both American and Israeli -- is limited and even elliptical, and though I don't doubt that the two countries cooperate on weapons of mass destruction -- Hezbollah's main long-range missile used against Israel in the 2006 war was a Syrian/North Korean hybrid -- getting the goods regarding clandestine nuclear developments, and then proving that the intent is to develop nuclear weapons, is incredibly difficult.

In fact, the whole question of nuclear weapons is so prone to hyperbole that if the actual intent is to dissuade nations from developing nuclear weapons, the best road is transparency and accountability -- not bombing, exaggeration and mystery.

On Sept. 6, Israel mounted a secret raid on a facility deep inside Syria, a bombing attack that the country has still barely even acknowledged and one that Israeli and U.S. officials, until yesterday, have been practically silent about.

Anyone who has been following the story knows of the North Korean connection. Syria of course has denied everything; North Korea has denounced the preemptive strike. Iran has protested. Et cetera.

Because of the exaggeration and intelligence failures relating to Iraq, these countries almost get away with their denials. Yes, the International Atomic Energy Agency (which administers the non-proliferation regime) and the United Nations oppose the illegal development of nuclear weapons. But because of the intelligence failures in the past -- and because of the exaggeration that accompanies the atom -- the goal of non-proliferation is undermined and a lot of people are confused about the truth.

The question regarding Syria, North Korea, Iran and (at least retrospectively) Iraq is this: What to do?

Yesterday the Bush administration made the claim that Syria was "within weeks or months" of completion of a nuclear reactor -- which of course is not nuclear weapon. Part of the problem here is the exaggeration that goes into describing (and understanding) a nuclear weapons program. Even if Syria managed to complete a plutonium production reactor, and then managed to operate it for the months would be needed to manufacture the materials it needed, and then managed to machine that plutonium, and then design and fabricate a nuclear weapon, many months if not years would go by. Such a program would be detected, proven and probably thwarted by the international community.

In other words, to bomb a single unfinished possible reactor last September was a panicked and flawed response. It did not further the ultimate goal of non-proliferation. In the war of persuasion, in the

international battle to improve the rule of law, the actual goal is undermined, for the "illegality" of Syria developing nuclear weapons in the first place is based upon law, actual or societally accepted. Turning to preemption and just taking the law into one's own hands achieves nothing.

Editorial

North Korea Redux

April 25, 2008

It is more than a little suspicious that the ever-secretive Bush administration has suddenly decided to go public with what it knows about North Korea's nuclear connection with Syria. After seven months of refusing to acknowledge Israel's air strike last Sept. 6 on a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor, the intelligence community has now provided Congress with video images showing North Koreans inside the secret facility.

It is another example of this administration insisting that information be withheld for national security reasons — until there is a political reason to release it.

So why now? It is no secret that Republican hard-liners are outraged over a State Department-negotiated deal intended to eventually shut down North Korea's nuclear weapons program. They are desperate to stop it, either by getting President Bush to pull back or provoking the easily provoked North Koreans into doing something stupid, like walking out of the talks.

Thursday's presentation to certain Congressional committees will also make it harder to win approval for aid to dismantle North Korean nuclear facilities — an essential part of the agreement.

As we said recently on this page, the deal is imperfect, not least because it does not require Pyongyang to come clean on the Syria deal. But at this point it is probably the best chance of moving North Korea toward a much more important goal: fully accounting for and eventually giving up its plutonium stocks and weapons. The North Koreans have already shut down their reactor at Yongbyon — the source of their plutonium — but there is a lot more work to be done.

North Korea's willingness to sell nuclear technology and know-how to Syria is extremely worrisome. Israel's attack has at least ensured that the Syrian reactor will not be a threat. As for Pyongyang's promises to forsake any future sales, that must be vigilantly monitored and verified along with all of its nuclear activities. Scuttling the agreement now will guarantee less transparency, not more, and will only increase Pyongyang's nuclear appetites and its incentive to sell more of its wares.

For six years, President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney refused to seriously negotiate with North Korea. The result? North Korea tested a nuclear device and went from having enough plutonium for one or two weapons to eight or more. We've seen that movie. The world can't afford a sequel.

Geopolitical Diary: The Syrian Nuclear Mystery Evolves

April 25, 2008 | 0223 GMT

The Bush administration briefed the U.S. Congress on Thursday about the reasons behind the Sept. 6, 2007, Israeli raid on Syria. According to the secret briefing — the content of which, of course, not only was leaked immediately (as was intended) but was essentially confirmed by a White House spokeswoman — the target was a nuclear reactor, able to produce plutonium, that had been built with the assistance of North Korea. The administration showed a videotape, apparently produced by Israeli intelligence, showing faces that were said to be in the facility and to be clearly Korean.

What is important to note is this information is not new. It is a confirmation of the story leaked by the administration shortly after the attack and also leaked by the Israelis a bit later. The explanation for the attack was that it was designed to take out a reactor in Syria that had been built with North Korean help. There are therefore three questions. First, why did the United States go to such lengths to reveal what it has been saying privately for months? Second, why did the administration do it now? Third, why is the United States explaining an Israeli raid using, at least in part, material provided by Israel? Why isn't Israel making the revelation?

It has never been clear to us why the Israelis and Americans didn't immediately announce that the Syrians were building a nuclear reactor. Given American hostility toward Syria over support for jihadists in Iraq, we would have thought that they would have announced it instantly. The explanation we thought most plausible at the time was that the intelligence came from the North Koreans in the course of discussions of their nuclear technology, and since the North Koreans were cooperating, the United States didn't want to publicly embarrass them. It was the best we could come up with.

The announcement on Thursday seems to debunk that theory, at least to the extent that the primary material displayed was U.S. satellite information and the Israeli video, which was said to have been used to convince the United States of the existence of the reactor and of North Korean involvement. So why didn't the administration condemn Syria and North Korea on Sept. 7? It still seems to us that part of the explanation is in the state of talks with North Korea over its own program. The North Koreans had said that they would provide technical information on their program — which they haven't done. Either the United States lost its motivation to protect North Korean feelings because of this or the Bush administration felt that Thursday's briefings would somehow bring pressure to bear on North Korea. Unless the United States is planning to use these revelations as justification for attacks on the North Koreans, we find it difficult to see how this increases pressure on them.

More interesting is the question of why the United States — and not Israel — is briefing on an Israeli raid. Israeli media reported April 23 that the Israelis had asked the Americans not to brief Congress. The reason given was that the Israelis did not want the United States to embarrass Syria at this point. As we noted on April 23, there appeared to have been some interesting diplomatic moves between Syria and Israel, and it made sense that revealing this information now might increase friction.

If this read is true, then it would appear that the United States briefed deliberately against Israeli wishes. Certainly, the Israelis didn't participate in the process. One answer could be that the United States is unhappy about Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's moves on Syria and wants to derail them.

The United States wanted Syria out of Lebanon. The Israelis have a more complex view of their presence. In some ways, they see the Syrians as a stabilizing force. And they certainly aren't eager to see Bashar al Assad's government fall, since whatever might replace the al Assad government would probably be worse from the Israeli point of view. That would mean that the Israelis would want to take out the reactor, but not necessarily rub the Syrians' nose in it.

So there are two plausible answers to Thursday's show. One is to increase pressure on North Korea. The second is to derail any Israeli-Syrian peace process. The problem is that it's hard to see why North Korea is going to be moved by the official declaration of what Washington has been saying from the beginning. The second would assume that U.S.-Israeli relations had deteriorated to the point that the United States had to use this as a lever. That's tough to believe.

The senior Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, Peter Hoekstra, said after the briefing, "This administration has no credibility on North Korea. A lot of us are beginning to become concerned that the administration is moving away from getting a solid policy solution to 'let's make a deal.'"

So that seems to undermine the prep for strike theory. That leaves tension between the United States and Israel as the last standing theory. Not a good theory, but the last standing one.

North Korea's Syrian Connection

By Bill Powell

Friday, Apr. 25, 2008

Throughout his entire first term and most of his second, U.S. President George W. Bush has tried pretty much everything to get North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il to come out of his cage. He has tried to coerce him with economic sanctions and schoolboy bluster—a policy course that ended on in the autumn of 2006, when Kim tested a nuclear weapon, precisely the opposite of the result Bush intended. Since then, the Administration has tried bribery, offering blandishments like food and free fuel oil in hopes that in return North Korea would stand down its nuclear program. Kim has responded a bit—his nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, which produced the fissile material for the North's estimated 8 to 10 nuclear bombs—is slowly being shut down. But Kim has refused to detail all the other components of his nuclear program, including an alleged uranium enrichment effort, and he has continued to sell North Korean nuclear expertise into a buyer's market of rogue states.

Exasperated, the Administration yesterday unveiled North Korea policy version 3.0. Bush is now trying to shame North Korea into complying with what it had agreed to do in talks with the U.S. and four other negotiating partners (China, Russia, Japan and South Korea). In a convincing presentation to reporters in Washington, the Administration produced damning photographic evidence of what has been whispered about for seven months now: North Korea was intimately involved in helping Syria build a plutonium-fueled nuclear reactor, "basically a copy of Yongbyon," one Administration official told TIME.

Last year, on Sept. 6, Israel put an end to that project, bombing it out of existence. Ever since, there has been a cone of official silence placed around what had happened, with neither Jerusalem nor Washington nor anyone else confirming the operation. Two months ago, in Seoul, I pressed a senior South Korean negotiator in the six-party talks for information about the Syrian-North Korean connection. He squirmed a little and said it was his impression that the so-called al Kibar site was just a "missile factory," not a nuclear facility. That, we learned yesterday, was false.

There were reasons for the seven months of silence. Bush Administration officials say they were worried that Syria might start a new war in the Middle East if they were publicly fingered after the attack. In other words, it was one thing for Israel to send bombers into Syrian airspace and obliterate a massively expensive nuclear reactor that had been under construction for years. Syrian President Basahr Assad could apparently accept that. But talking about it in public? Now that was really going to hack the Syrians off — so much so they might start a war against Israel that they would almost surely lose.

No. The major reason for the silence, say former Administration officials and Asian diplomats, was an ongoing struggle over the Bush Administration's North Korea policy. The State Department, led by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the U.S. point man for North Korea talks, still believe the only sensible path is the one they have been on for the last two years: trying, oh so patiently, to come to a deal with Kim that will at least eliminate his regime's plutonium program and the weapons it produced. Everything else, they believe, is secondary, a "sideshow," says a South Korean diplomat.

Set against them are the North Korea skeptics, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, who believe North Korea has no intention of giving up its nukes, no matter what diplomatic agreements it signs. The most vocal of this group is Bush's former UN representative John Bolton, who likens the State Department to a drunk searching for car keys near a lamppost, even though he knows the keys were lost in the bar. Asked by a passerby why he keeps looking near the lamppost, the drunk replies: "Because the light is better."

The hawks were delighted with yesterday's presentation about the Syrian connection, hoping that the North will be so angered by it that Kim will abandon the six-party talks, bringing down the curtain on what Bolton and others believe has been a feckless effort by the State Department. But Administration officials insist they don't expect that to happen. They believe North Korea 3.0 — the "shame on you" policy — may pay off. "I doubt they're walking away," says one diplomat involved in the talks. Yes, they say, North Korea's obvious and serial proliferation is a huge problem. That's why getting Pyongyang to mothball its plutonium program has already been a significant accomplishment. Convincing Kim to surrender his stash of weapons, and whatever plutonium it has left over, would be another big step forward, and should remain the focus of the Administration's policy.

Consider the reason given at yesterday's briefing in Washington for the North's motivation in helping Syria build a reactor: "Cash," said a CIA official. The North is a gangster state. It earns hard currency anyway it can— including selling weapons and its expertise in producing them. The point of the diplomacy is give Kim sufficient incentives—both economic and diplomatic—to get to a point where he and his regime don't need to do that anymore to survive. A return to what used to be called, in the early years of the Bush Administration, a "strangulation" strategy, only increases the incentive for Kim to behave badly, with very little hope that the Pyongyang government will disappear anytime soon, not so long as China, the North's only real ally, is doing what it can to forestall collapse.

Dealing with Kim's regime is an arduous, sometimes humiliating process. Christopher Hill privately has let it be known that it drives him nuts to be portrayed as aiding and abetting such an odious crowd. But bribing Kim is the only realistic strategy. When the next Administration takes over in January, with its own North Korea policy, it's going to come to the same conclusion, whether the President is named Obama, Clinton or McCain.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/25/AR2008042503007.html>

Yielding To N. Korea Too Often

By Winston Lord and Leslie H. Gelb

Saturday, April 26, 2008; A17

The Bush administration gives plausible reasons for a bad nuclear deal with North Korea.

The proposed deal would lift key U.S. legal sanctions against the North while Pyongyang shelves many of the commitments it made in a prior agreement.

The United States would stomach North Korea's latest evasions because, for all of its risks, the deal at hand offers some movement on the most immediate problem, reducing North Korea's plutonium capabilities, and it keeps the door open to diplomatic solutions to eliminate Pyongyang's nuclear weapons.

But these reasons are not enough. If the administration accepts North Korea's hedging and renegeing once again, it will increase, not decrease, the likelihood of confrontation down the line.

Yes, sometimes Washington must hold its nose, make concessions and tolerate ambiguity. But not now. Not when it waters down compliance with a painfully reached prior agreement. If President Bush allows Pyongyang to brush away its pledges, he will reinforce its instinct for bluster and blackmail.

This latest tug of war began promisingly, with a joint statement agreed on in six-party talks in September 2005. In essence, it stipulated easing some American economic sanctions in return for Pyongyang's disabling its nuclear facilities and accounting for past activities.

The most recent U.S. statement of the North's primary obligations, made last Oct. 3, gave this update on Pyongyang's performance: North Korea was committed to "a complete and correct declaration of all its nuclear programs -- including clarification regarding the uranium issue -- by the end of the year." On plutonium, North Korea reportedly has stated levels at the low end of U.S. intelligence estimates. On uranium, Pyongyang has provided nothing. It merely "acknowledges" American assertions.

In diplomatic parlance, "acknowledge" rarely means "accept"; usually, it means "we hear what you say."

North Korea pledged to disable all its existing nuclear facilities. By most reports, progress did occur but is slowing. The Dec. 31 deadline for disabling the facilities at the Yongbyon plutonium plant was missed.

North Korea had committed "not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how." The issue today is Pyongyang's evident role in a Syrian nuclear reactor that was bombed by Israel last September. Washington has until now correctly demanded a full explanation of this and other nuclear activities. Once again, Pyongyang has provided no information and merely proposes to "acknowledge" American assertions.

Despite these failures, the Bush administration seems ready to make a bilateral deal by which it would accept these "acknowledgments" and fulfill the U.S. commitments to cease applying the Trading With the Enemy Act and -- over the vociferous objections of our closest Asian ally, Japan -- remove North Korea from our list of state sponsors of terrorism. (While this would make Pyongyang eligible for economic benefits, the practical effects remain unclear.)

American officials rationalize this cave-in by asserting that the plutonium issue, which remains unresolved, is paramount. They count on correcting deficiencies on all issues in the next phase of negotiations and through verification. The latter, by the administration's own admission, will be extraordinarily difficult. Such an approach is slippery with any negotiating partner; with North Korea, it is perilous.

It is one thing to compromise in order to craft an agreement, keep difficult negotiations going and not let the best be the enemy of the good. It is another thing to let the other side breach compromises already reached.

President Bush's remarks at his meeting with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak last weekend suggest that he still may stiffen his stance. We hope so. Our fear, however, is that Bush, feeling the glow of a rare foreign policy accomplishment, may proceed to cement a legacy. He should consider the criticism he would heap upon his successor if he or she were to ink such a deal.

The two of us can hardly be counted as conservative die-hards opposing deals with Pyongyang. We believe that Washington and its allies are rightly committed to exploring even the remotest chance that Pyongyang might give up its nuclear weapons. While reaching for that larger goal, our negotiators can seek to cap North Korea's nuclear inventory and head off proliferation.

We oppose both abandoning the September 2005 agreement and allowing Pyongyang to eviscerate it. Better to let the talks continue than to make one-sided concessions. Better to sharpen North Korean compliance or -- failing that -- to string out our own.

Bush can sustain international unity by making clear that his goal is to hold Pyongyang to its 2005 commitments. This is the only way to preserve American credibility and bargaining leverage. It is also the only way to maintain political support in Washington for these difficult negotiations.

This is the legacy Bush should bequeath to his successor.

[Winston Lord was ambassador to China under President Ronald Reagan and assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific under President Bill Clinton. Leslie H. Gelb was assistant secretary of state for politico-military affairs under President Jimmy Carter and is a board senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.](#)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/26/AR2008042601660.html>

Belated Disclosure

The Bush administration releases evidence regarding Syria's nuclear reactor, eight months after it was destroyed.

Sunday, April 27, 2008; B06

THE FACT that Israel bombed a secret Syrian nuclear reactor built with the help of North Korea was widely if unofficially reported within days of the strike last September. But the Bush administration's decision to go public with the considerable evidence it had about the reactor has placed that extraordinary event in a new political context. The disclosure, which administration officials said they initially withheld because of fears of triggering hostilities between Israel and Syria, was nevertheless overdue. As a member of the U.N. Security Council, the United States is obligated to report evidence that other states are violating international law against nuclear proliferation.

Experts pointed out that the U.S. disclosures, including pictures from inside the reactor, did not include evidence that Syria had obtained fuel or built the reprocessing facility that would be needed to convert plutonium from the reactor into bomb material. But Syria's failure to report the reactor's existence to the International Atomic Energy Agency, as required by the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and its quick demolition and burial of the reactor's remains after the attack require explanation -- and in its absence, sanction. IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei will be tested by the investigation he announced on Friday. Already he has politicized his position by trying to thwart Western pressure on Iran about its illegal nuclear program. Will Mr. ElBaradei hold Damascus accountable for its blatant violation of international law, or will he simply blame Israel and the United States? So far he has chosen the latter course -- and thereby given cover to the many governments who will want to do the same.

That answers are needed, too, from North Korea is an immense understatement. The regime of Kim Jong Il pledged to disclose all of its nuclear programs as one of the opening steps of a disarmament process. Now we know that North Korean technicians were continuing to work on the Syrian reactor after Pyongyang made its commitment in February 2007. Yet the Kim regime still refuses to report on its help to Syria. According to a deal under discussion with the Bush administration, it would merely "acknowledge" -- and then only in private -- U.S. "concerns" about proliferation.

Bush administration officials say they hope the disclosure of evidence about the reactor will prompt North Korea to be more forthcoming. They also acknowledge that they were under pressure from Congress to act before removing sanctions on Pyongyang as part of the new agreement. The question for the administration remains why it would grant further concessions to North Korea before Pyongyang comes clean about its proliferation to Syria as well as any other deals it may have made. The State Department argues that such an "accounting" will come through a verification process.

Officials also say that by sustaining the "six-party" diplomacy, they are gradually opening a totalitarian state to change. Still, the process won't work unless North Korea truly intends to disarm, rather than merely extort aid and political favors from the West. What's needed is a diplomatic strategy that forces Mr. Kim to choose between his weapons and engagement with the outside world. That's why dropping the requirement for a full disclosure by Pyongyang is risky -- it encourages the regime to believe it can avoid that decision.

<http://www.juancole.com/2008/04/more-on-syrian-reactor-bombing-from.html>

Informed Comment
Thoughts on the Middle East, History, and Religion
Juan Cole is President of the Global Americana Institute

Sunday, April 27, 2008

More on Syrian Reactor Bombing; From an Informed Reader

An informed reader writes:

What little information provided in the CIA videotape concerning the destruction of the purported Syrian reactor only provokes more questions.

The alleged reactor is described, because of its dimensions and shape, as a duplicate of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. The reactor at Yongbyon is a rough copy of an old British design. It is graphite-moderated and cooled with gaseous carbon dioxide. Its core is composed of a large number of highly-purified graphite blocks. For example, each of the first two Magnox reactors at Windscale in the UK used 2,000 tons of graphite. Even if this purported Syrian reactor vessel were half the size of one of the original UK reactors, it would require roughly 1,000 tons of graphite. That's 14,400 cubic feet of highly-purified graphite. Would all official entities fail to notice the production and transfer of that amount of highly-refined graphite to Syria?

The voice-over on the CIA videotape asserts that the reactor in Syria was "nearly completed." If the plant were "nearly completed," those graphite blocks would have been substantially in place. Bombing and fire would have spread bits of carbon all over the site, or scattered whole blocks of graphite around the site. The "after" photos didn't seem to indicate that this happened.

If the reactor were substantially complete, neutron-absorbing boron-10 carbide (or possibly cadmium alloy) control rods would have been installed. Had those been burned or exploded in the bombing, those, too, would have left a chemical signature on the hills surrounding the site and in the prevailing winds. As far as I know, this hasn't been discussed.

Then, too, there is the matter of fuel rods. Syria is reported not to have uranium yellowcake stocks in appreciable quantities. (One particularly large phosphorite field, the Charkiet formation, is known to contain uranium, but the phosphate fertilizer plant built to process that ore was done by a Swedish company which would certainly alert the IAEA if there were non-compliant diversion. Moreover, Syria has cooperated with the IAEA in the past to develop its commercial uranium extraction processes, but those have not progressed, according to SIPRI.) There's no evidence presented that Syria has built fuel processing and fuel rod assembly facilities. That would suggest production elsewhere, and such production can be tracked. So, if it was almost complete, where are the fuel rods?

The primary weapons benefit of such a reactor is its ability to be refueled on the fly, so to speak (it's necessary to get the fuel rods out of the reactor before the optimum quantity of plutonium-239 is degraded by neutron capture to less suitable isotopes), so, why does U.S. intelligence say they have "low confidence" that the plutonium that might be produced is for nuclear weapons? It must be that

Syria does not have the necessary fuel processing, fuel rod assembly and spent fuel reprocessing plants, and there's no evidence of bomb-manufacturing facilities (all this infrastructure should ideally go forward concurrent with fuel production to produce a bomb in the shortest period of time); does this suggest that the purpose of the facility might not be nuclear in nature, or that it was nuclear, but would have had a non-weapons purpose? If there's no evidence for the existence of the rest of a weapons-making complex, how credible is the claim of "near completion" of a reactor which is well-suited for producing plutonium?

So far, the government's primary evidence seems to be a photo of a North Korean who is reputed to be NK nuclear scientist Chon Chibu, standing next to someone "believed to be his Syrian counterpart" (quote from the London Times). That photo, as well as others, likely was provided by the Mossad, so its provenance is in question. Given that the Israelis bombed the site, one can't evade the reality that they're an interested party in the matter.

What is shocking in this assertion is the lack of physical evidence available for independent inspection, and the apparent complete failure of U.S. authorities to seek international inspection via the IAEA before the Israelis bombed the site in question, despite the fact that the U.S. was apparently aware of Israeli intentions well ahead of time. Syria has been a ratified signatory of the NPT since 1969, making it obligated to accept inspections. If, as the CIA asserts, the Syrian facility has been under construction since 2001, there was more than ample time to inform the IAEA of a signatory's possible failure to abide by the treaty. Repeated unannounced overflights of Syrian territory by Israeli jets in recent years indicates long-term planning of this mission.

Possibilities? The Bush administration might prefer to use this event to imply nuclear weapons production on Iran's part, because it is an ally of Syria, or the claims of North Korean assistance might provide cover for eventually abandoning the six-nation talks involving North Korea and provoking them in some way. Suggestions that the Israelis wanted to use the bombing raid to penetrate and compromise Syria's Russian-built air defenses preparatory to a future attack on Iran are not wholly out of the realm of possibility.

It's possible that the Syrians were building a bomb-fuel reactor with North Korean assistance, and imagined, wrongly, that they could escape detection. Certainly, North Korea's economy is so awful that they would be desperate for revenues. But, there's no physical evidence of such activity which has been independently verified, and the Bush administration's record on this sort of thing is, well, dubious, at best. Nor can one discount Syria's previous cooperation with the IAEA, and the necessary evidence would have come from an IAEA inspection. It's also possible that the Syrians were building something military in nature that they wanted kept secret, and which had nothing to do with a nuclear program, but which alarmed the Israelis, anyway, such as an early warning facility, ground-based laser, something along those lines.

The CIA video depends heavily upon computer models, and those models add substantial pieces of equipment not shown in the photos of the "nearly completed" facility. Remember that Colin Powell depended upon artists' renderings of "mobile bioweapons labs" instead of physical evidence, and that Rumsfeld used cartoonish illustrations to show lavish al-Qaeda complexes, replete with living quarters, office space, truck parking and ventilating systems, like the Islamist equivalent of Cheyenne Mountain, buried inside Tora Bora. Those, too, were never found.

One more final consideration: the Yongbyon reactor, from the descriptions by inspectors in 1994, is a real hunk of junk, by contemporary standards. The inspectors could tell from the condition of the spent fuel rods that there were many operating problems and shutdowns because of problems. Nuclear safety at the site was marginal to non-existent. The bomb test using plutonium from it was very likely a fizzle yield. If the Syrians got a duplicate copy of the Yongbyon reactor, as the CIA claims, they were very likely wasting their money.

Comments:

[Selected]

At 2:13 AM, Anonymous Anonymous said...

The real question is: If any suspicion surrounding the nuclear reactor's state of construction, purpose and provenence existed, WHY NOT JUST VISIT IT???

At least give Syria the chance to obfuscate and dissemble before lobbing bombs.

At 5:19 PM, Anonymous cobaltbob said...

Why, if Syria is so innocent, did they not lodge a complaint after the bombing?

Why did they instead just silently and very speedily clean up the mess?

Why no real howl of protest of Israel's actions by it's Arab neighbors?

The bombing may have been premature. Doesn't mean it wasn't necessary.

At 5:30 PM, Anonymous Anonymous said...

Let me start by saying I am not one to believe much of what comes from the Bush Administration. I have a degree in chemical engineering and know just a bit about reactor design. If that wasn't a nuclear reactor, then what was it?

If the images are to be believed, then the reactor vessel took up a rather large percentage of that building leaving little room for other processing equipment. If the facility was to generate a product other than heated water and plutonium enriched spent reactor fuel, one would expect to see more processing equipment.

It should be noted that if it was a reactor, it would take more than a year to fully react the reactor fuel leaving time to build a reprocessing plant.

At 9:57 PM, Anonymous Andy said...

Your "informed reader" is, I'm afraid, not so informed. Here are only the most blatant and obvious errors:

The alleged reactor is described, because of its dimensions and shape, as a duplicate of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. The reactor at Yongbyon is a rough copy of an old British design. It is graphite-moderated and cooled with gaseous carbon dioxide. Its core is composed of a large number of highly-purified graphite blocks. For example, each of the first two Magnox reactors at Windscale in the UK used 2,000 tons of graphite.

First, the Syrian reactor is not a "duplicate" of Yongbyon but it is the same basic design. Secondly, the British reactors "informed reader" refers to are actually not the British MAGNOX reactors, but the older Windscale piles. Piles are the simplest reactor design and don't use any sort of containment and so are more prone to fires. Then there is the rhetorical question: Would all official entities fail to notice the production and transfer of that amount of highly-refined graphite to Syria? Sure that's possible. Iran, for example, secretly imported 500 tons of uranium yellowcake in 1991 and uranium is much more controlled than graphite. Even still, one might ask in response, "Why would Syria, at great expense, build a graphite moderated reactor if it did not have a secure source of graphite?" The same question can be asked with regard to the reactor's uranium supply. Why would a relatively poor country like Syria go to the great expense of building a reactor it could not use?

"Informed Reader" continues:

If the plant were "nearly completed," those graphite blocks would have been substantially in place. Bombing and fire would have spread bits of carbon all over the site, or scattered whole blocks of graphite around the site. The "after" photos didn't seem to indicate that this happened.

If this were a pile-type of reactor, then the above comment would be true. But in MAGNOX-type reactors, the graphite is contained in a steel pressure vessel, which is in turn contained in a thick reinforced concrete bioshield. We can see from the post-strike satellite pictures that the round outer bioshield was probably damaged, but was not significantly breached much less blown apart and was later buried after the rest of the building was dismantled. The pressure vessel inside that bioshield (containing the graphite) likely was damaged as well, but not enough to cause graphite to fly about outside the facility nor cause it to catch fire.

"Informed Reader" continues:

The primary weapons benefit of such a reactor is its ability to be refueled on the fly, so to speak (it's necessary to get the fuel rods out of the reactor before the optimum quantity of plutonium-239 is degraded by neutron capture to less suitable isotopes), so, why does U.S. intelligence say they have "low confidence" that the plutonium that might be produced is for nuclear weapons?

The "low confidence" statement is a bit confusing at first. There are two basic judgments the intelligence community (IC) uses - what the IC **knows** and **what** the IC judges. The "low confidence" assessment is based on the former - IOW, the IC doesn't have much evidence of activities like

reprocessing and specific work on nuclear weapons. At the same time, however, the IC judges that this reactor is most likely part of a nuclear weapons program because of its design and Syrian activities and secrecy both before and after the strike. IOW, building this particular type of reactor, and building it covertly is at least strongly indicative of a nuclear weapon's program, even if little real evidence of weaponization work yet exists. As an analogy, suppose you saw your spouse enter a hotel room hand-in-hand with someone else when he/she was supposed to be at the store. You would naturally and rightly conclude your spouse was having an affair, even though you did not look in the room for confirmation that illicit sex was indeed occurring. IOW, you would have "low confidence" on a pure evidentiary standard that sex took place, even though the circumstances (entering a hotel room with another person, and lying about it) are quite convincing by themselves. Similarly, the mere existence this reactor and the Syrian actions before and after the strike to cover up any evidence is equivalent to seeing your spouse enter a hotel room with another stranger.

"Informed Reader" continues:

If, as the CIA asserts, the Syrian facility has been under construction since 2001, there was more than ample time to inform the IAEA of a signatory's possible failure to abide by the treaty.

As the text of the DNI briefing indicates, the IC knew of this structure for some time but didn't get the first indications that it was a reactor until the Spring of 2007. So, at most, the US had a couple of months and much of that time was undoubtedly spent confirming and verifying the information along with reanalysis of old information in light of the new.

That said, I would have much preferred informing the IAEA at the time even though the Agency's authority to demand access to the site was limited because Syria is not a party to the NPT's additional protocol.

At 7:07 PM, Blogger Rowan Berkeley said...

let me just caution that "the U.S. was apparently aware of Israeli intentions well ahead of time" was itself, initially, only an Israeli claim. CIA may be pretending it is true, or at least not denying it, without its actually being true at all. I personally don't believe they told the US before the attack. There is no evidence they did, and I think it's implausible. There is an extraordinary strand in the current hasbara of exhibitionistic arrogance, which amounts in some cases to saying "The US told us not to do it but we went ahead anyway" - an absurd, truly absurd, claim. Here it is, in fact - Yossi Melman:

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/978107.html>

Last update - 22:55 27/04/2008

Getting carried away

By Yossi Melman

Even though briefing Congress and the press kept Central Intelligence Agency Director, General Michael Hayden, busy last week, he still found time last Thursday to meet with senior officers in the agency and to praise them.

He told them that they could be proud of the team effort and cooperation that exposed Syria's secret construction of a nuclear reactor, and complimented them for their skillful intelligence gathering and its careful analysis. Even though it is obvious the CIA only revealed a smidgen of all it knows, it seems that the director got a little carried away with his praise.

The CIA had intelligence about the construction of the suspicious structure in Syria from the onset, most likely since 2001. It seems that most of the information was based on spy satellite photos. This intelligence was bolstered by information received following the investigation into the activities of Dr. A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear program, who was exposed as a major proliferator of nuclear technology.

Khan confirmed he had visited Syria in the past and offered his knowledge and wares.

All this should have raised an alarm with the CIA that something nuclear was taking place in Syria. But according to U.S. media reports late last week, the Americans caught on only in Spring 2007, after receiving photographs of the reactor and its environs, which were taken by Israeli agents.

The photographs, according to the reports, confirmed without a doubt that the site was a nuclear reactor.

However, even then Bush administration officials - first and foremost Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice - sought to dissuade Israel from attacking the reactor. According to reports, the administration tried to convince Israel that it could use the information to pressure Syria into concessions in Lebanon, to stop its support for Hamas and to stem its involvement in rebel activities in Iraq.

However, Israel - according to reports that are based on senior administration sources - refused.

The reports state that for Israel the construction of the reactor constituted an "existential threat"; therefore, Israel demanded that it be allowed to take the only action possible: to destroy the reactor in a military operation, prior to the introduction of nuclear fuel that would enable the Syrians to produce plutonium.

<http://emptywheel.firedoglake.com/2008/04/27/syriana/>

Syriana

By: Professor Foland

Sunday April 27, 2008 1:02 pm

(While I have been trying to find a resolution to MI's DNC delegation in the last few days, the Admin put on their nukes in Syria dog and pony show. Partly because I didn't have the time to do the Syria presentation justice, and partly because Professor Foland--whom you know from his great comments--has a lot more expertise on this area than I, I asked him to do a post assessing the presentation. Thanks for the really informative post, Prof! -ew)

If there's one thing I've learned over the course of this Administration, it's that if Dana Perino one day announces that the sky is blue, I will be forced to assume that an alien invasion has commenced with the total ionization of Earth's upper atmosphere.

With that in mind, there's an awful lot of cognitive dissonance for me in analyzing the evidence on the raid (apparently named "Operation Orchard" by the Israelis) on a Syrian desert site (apparently named "Al-Kibar"). Having started my own blog motivated by "the incredible amount of lies & hyperbole on the Iran situation of early 2006", I don't find it easy to accept anything this Administration puts forth as evidence. I'm having all this difficulty because the pictures they showed last Thursday are clearly pictures of a nuclear reactor.

In what follows, I will lay out the history of what we've known about Operation Orchard and al-Kibar, what the latest photographs show, and what questions we should probably be asking.

A little bit about what I know. My training is in the experimental science of particle and nuclear physics; post-moniker-choice I left academia for more recent experience in applied device engineering in the field. This means I am not a detailed expert on the engineering design of nuclear reactors or weapons, but I do have basic familiarity with the field. I'm not an image analyst, so I'm not going to comment very much on whether the shadows in the pictures all line up the way they should. (Of course, if something very technically wrong appeared in the pictures, I'd certainly be posting "zOMG those aren't dilithium crystals!".)

It should also be said that any sort of technical look at the images and videos presupposes that the images are what they are purported to be--taken on the ground at the site in Syria. I'll return to the question towards the end; but in the meantime, for the sake of argument the provenance is granted.

Finally, I'm trying to be careful to distinguish evidence that is conclusive from evidence or reasoning that is suggestive or even powerful. I do have an opinion on whether this was part of a weapons program; but I don't feel my opinion was compelled by the available evidence.

What We Knew Before Thursday

1. Israeli jets flew over Syria on Sept. 6 ("Operation Orchard")
2. Syria lodged no particularly strong protests

3. No radioactivity was released as a result of the overflight (I could find no news stories to this effect--but that's precisely the point. Within a few hours of Chernobyl, radioactivity readings were going nuts in Europe.)

4. There was a 47 meter x 47 meter x 24 meter structure ("Box on the Euphrates") erected a few hundred meters from the Euphrates River at 35d42m28s(N), 39d49m59s(E).

5. This structure was destroyed between August and October

6. A new building, 60 meters x60 meters x 15 meters was erected on top of the old site between October and January

7. An apparent water-treatment facility 5 km to the northeast was built prior to August, and connected by pipe to the rebuilt site after October

8. American intelligence had noticed the buildup at the site in 2003 but did not conclude it was threatening.

9. American officials were exchanging intelligence with Israel in advance of the Sept. 6 strike

Note I'm trying here to be as precise as possible about what was known. For instance, it's pretty clear that 1,4, and 5, taken together, add up to "Israeli jets destroyed the structure." But the site coordinates given here were (highly informed and ultimately correct) speculation on the part of the folks at the independent institute ISIS, who spent many hours in the yeoman's work of poring over 2000 square kilometers of satellite images to find the likely site of (4). Neither the US, Israel, nor Syria ever provided or confirmed the location of the site before Thursday.

I'm being careful about this because for a while there was considerable confusion about the location of the strike. There are two other largish buildings and an airfield in the vicinity; and there have been reports that the Israeli jets also overflew Turkish airspace. (According to Defensetech, the Turkish border is where Syrian air defenses were weaker, and Israeli jets chose to enter Syrian airspace there.) There were early reports of a strike on an agricultural phosphorus facility or even a port facility; and even speculation that the raid had strick nothing or had failed in its mission.

What The Video Shows

The CIA briefing video now clearly confirms the ISIS location; the imagery there is of the same canyon. The "Box on the Euphrates" is in fact "Al-Kibar". The animated video segments are virtual reality; they are relatively accurate concerning the local geography (a canyon off of the Euphrates) and size of the building, but they are a model and should not be taken as primary evidence in any way.

Here was the question posed in the comments at armscontrolwonk back on October 26, 2007:

Finally, let's assume for a minute that there was a large, round, reinforced concrete cylinder inside that building. Are there any alternatives for such a facility besides a reactor?

Nobody produced an alternative. Note that the pressures on the interior of the reactor vessel are equivalent to a water depth of about 400 m.

There are four significant stills, all purported to be taken at the Syrian site:

1. A degraded satellite photo taken soon after the raid showing a large circular structure in the center of the building
2. A still taken during construction, outside and under tarps, of components of what appear to be a steel reactor pressure vessel for a reactor
3. A still taken from inside the main building, showing the rebar structure of a large cylindrical tank. nb swimming pools are made with a single layer of rebar, and even diving wells are only 5 m deep
4. A still taken from inside the main building, showing the rod heads. (Note: the height of the facility must include sufficient headroom for removal of fuel rods and control rods).

Taken together and granting provenance, to me these stills are conclusory: that's what a nuclear reactor looks like. Alternatives must provide a good engineering reason to have a cylindrical multiply-ported steel-lined concrete vessel, at least 16" thick and 5m deep, quadruply reinforced with rebar, topped by a geometrically regular pattern of rod ports.

Some Other Notables from the Video

- * A satellite picture showing early structure stages which were later covered by a "curtain wall" that gave rise to the final Box-on-the-Euphrates shape
- * A ground-level photo showing the "inside building" under the curtain wall, looking much like Yongbyon
- * A picture showing two people standing for a picture, one of whom also attended US-North Korean Nuclear Talks. Did you hear Mohammed Atta met Czech intelligence?

What We Can Reasonably Assume

If the provenance is granted, then it is safe to assume that the Syrians were building, but not yet operating, a nuclear reactor capable of plutonium production at the site of the Box on the Euphrates, and that they have rebuilt a second structure atop the destroyed remains of that reactor. It is safe to assume no radiological traces will be present to damn the Syrians. One may safely assume that absent extremely intrusive IAEA inspections (which I suspect are unlikely), the reactor core components will never be physically recovered. The reactor components are broadly consistent with being a magnox reactor similar to such reactors built by the UK, France, and North Korea. One may also assume that US officials made no substantial attempt to dissuade the Israelis from the strike.

Is It A Weapons Program?

So, with the provenance caveat, this was a nuclear program. Was it a research program, an energy program, or a weapons program? The evidence we have to date is that the reactor could have served any of the purposes--remember, it may not have been complete. Magnox designs have in the past been used to produce weaponizable plutonium. They have also been used for research, and for power. Nothing in the presented evidence is conclusive to me, one way or another.

There does not seem to be any hint so far of a plutonium reprocessing facility. If the intent is to produce plutonium, the uranium fuel rods, after being in the reactor for some time, must be removed. Some of the uranium will have transmuted into plutonium. The rods need to be dissolved, the

plutonium removed, then the untransmuted uranium recovered for reinstallation into the reactor. No building has been identified that might serve as a reprocessing center. Magnox reactors in particular have some special problems, so that reprocessing facilities tend to be located nearby.

The CIA's Three Conclusions

The CIA video begins and ends with three "key conclusions." The conclusions are in italics, followed by my take.

Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons, was not configured to produce electricity, and was ill-suited for research.

If you grant the photo provenance, the construction of a nuclear facility is very well attested by the evidence presented, and certainly consistent with magnox. Magnox designs are gas-cooled and graphite-moderated. I don't know enough to say conclusively that it is consistent solely with a magnox design. The operational capability in August 2007 is a reasonable inference if the only purpose was for plutonium production, but is not specifically attested to by any presented evidence. The facility would have been capable of producing plutonium for a weapon. No evidence presented leapt out to me as "ill-suited for research". The electrical-configuration question is attested by an apparent lack of local power lines, but logically this may be related to the operational capability question. (i.e. perhaps it was an unfinished facility.) Note that the briefing does not present a conclusion that this was for a weapons program--because there's no evidence on that question one way or the other.

The reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 before it was loaded with nuclear fuel or operated

That the site was destroyed before nuclear reactions were initiated is well-attested in the public evidence.

We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities, both before and after the reactor was destroyed. Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.

I find this conclusion very weak; nothing presented made this seem any stronger than a simple assertion. It was asserted that there is considerable evidence; none was presented. The North Korean Yongbyon complex is said to be the precursor design for the Syrian al-Kibar reactor. The statement "only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the last 35 years" is a little bit misleading; the time period of 35 years was chosen because 40 years ago the UK built them. In fact the North Korean Yongbyon design is actually copied in turn from a British design (specifically, Calder Hall). The UK still operates several of this magnox design even today. A country with little technical ability and scant resources will find much to like in the magnox design: it requires unenriched uranium, low input power, modest technical requirements (mainly in graphite purification), and relative ease of operation. The design is also very thoroughly described in the literature, being relatively obsolete. Finally, as Cheryl Rofer has noted, the detailed design of the control rod and fuel rod ports is actually different in the photos of al-Kibar than in existing photos of the 25 MWt reactor at Yongbyon.

Provenance

If the pictures are of the site, then Syria was building an undeclared nuclear facility. So--were they of the site?

Now we're in the world of shadows, angles, oblique transformations, Photoshop, etc. I can't tell you the answer.

I'll just make a few observations on the subject:

- * A number of colleagues have expressed a surprising level of skepticism concerning the provenance. Not specific "for reasons X and Y I think these photos were taken somewhere else", but basic variants of "you've seen how these people operate, why should we believe these photos are real?" This was surprising even to yours truly, who thinks Dana Perino would lie about meteorology.
- * A scientific experiment that is gunning for a big result generally leaves a trail of less remarkable results first, which establish that the experiment is capable of measuring other things that it ought to be able to measure and which have been previously established. That's because scientists expect others to be very skeptical--so they build in a reinforcing chain, back to what's already known, in their arguments from the beginning. In the case at hand, knowing there would be skepticism about the provenance (especially given the history), if I'd been the briefing officer, what would I have done? I would have found and presented a series of photographs that put together a traceable chain of features from the local terrain down into the reactor core. That's because the local terrain is easily independently verified, by commercial satellites and even Russian/Chinese satellites. One way (but not the only way) would be to have a series of photographs from outside, in the door, along the halls, into the main hall. They claim to have a very large volume of photographs of which only a few are shown. It troubles me nobody thought it important to put together that chain, because it would have reduced the space of skepticism to "it's a photoshop world". Instead, there are only a few photos, all tightly cropped. (Source protection seems inane here. The steel liner image, and the interior rebar image, can already likely be dated to within a week or so by the relevant Syrian authorities.)
- * To me, the difference wrt the Powell Iraq presentation, is that in that case, a lot of inconclusive images were shown as "illustrations" to go along with bald assertions about what unshown intelligence concluded. Here, the conclusions can be drawn directly from the photos--to the extent they are genuine.
- * The satellite still photo, described as still photo #1 in "What the Video Shows", is particularly key to the provenance. I'm willing to bet that airspace (space?) over the al-Kabir sight was crowded with reconnaissance satellites for several weeks after the strike. If the satellite image were flatly inconsistent with, say, Russian images, I imagine the Russians would take great joy in exposing an American forgery.
- * The use of a forgery in making a case for WMD's is not unknown in this administration.

And with those, pass along an observation from a colleague:

We're outsourcing our intelligence-gathering to agencies (e.g., the Israeli government) that clearly have an institutional bias, so we cannot be certain of whether the raw intelligence can be trusted or not. It's bad enough that we

cherry-picked intelligence to go to war in Iraq, but we're at risk here of having those cherries picked by others and delivered to us...

There are some convincing satellite images of the cylindrical vessel, and there is generally wide availability of third-party satellite images that could likely falsify what's shown. So given the lack of specific contrary evidence, and despite significant reservations, if you put a gun to my head and said I had to pick, on "preponderance of evidence" I'd go with a genuine provenance. It's not even close to "beyond a reasonable doubt".

IAEA, NPT, and the UN

One of the many tragedies of the Iraq war is that the formation of UNMOVIC in the run-up seemed like a possible model for a more intrusive anti-proliferation regime. Could it have provided a path to a more effective set of additional protocols to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? We'll never know.

Mohammed El-Baradei has censured the US and Israel for providing their information only now at such a late date. (Please note, he has not censured them for the truth or falsity of the information.) The IAEA can only barely demand access now to the site; Syria is not going to grant access; and even with access, the relevant evidence has been demolished and buried under a building. Had IAEA been notified instead of scrambling the F-16's, the IAEA might have had a chance to prove its relevance. And a successful proof of relevance would have been good for the world, thought perhaps not for UN-haters centered in Washington, DC. (In fairness, one should also weight that with the possibility of an unsuccessful proof of relevance...)

In the comments on Friday, klynn provided a nice timeline of UN and IAEA related actions since the strike.

The US administration, having been pre-warned by the Israelis, made a policy choice not to notify the IAEA. One can speculate why, but really it's incumbent upon the administration to explain to Americans why they made that choice.

Rhetorical Links to Iran

I feel confident that we are going to be hearing a lot more of this sort of thing (Adm. Mike Mullen):

It should serve as a reminder to us all of the very real dangers of proliferation and need to rededicate ourselves to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, particularly into the hands of a state or a group with terrorist connections.

In case that was too subtle for you, the SAO at the CIA press briefing was a little less coy in spelling it out:

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: **With respect to Iran**, the Syrian episode reminds us of the ability of states to obtain nuclear capability covertly and how destabilizing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East would be.

(Emphasis mine.) Iran was also mentioned in this briefing as "potentially interrelated", "the same kind of cooperation between North Korea and Iran", and "But is there something going on there that resembles this program that we we're talking about in Syrian, in Iran?" It would be irresponsible not to speculate, don't you think?

In the same Syria briefing, Iran also was mentioned in the context of the declassified NIE:

But our unfortunate choice of words in our NIE caused you all in the press to misrepresent what we were trying to explain. Three parts of the program; they halted one narrow piece of it, which was a secret program – weapons-head design. They continue with fissile material; they continue with ballistic missile systems for delivery. So we don't know where it is at the moment.

(Emphasis mine.) This made me nearly choke on my breakfast. Are they really using this Syria episode to retract the crystal-clear statements in the Iran NIE?

Steinn Sigurdsson at Catdynamics has some thoughts on what the Israeli willingness to strike al-Kibar might signal for the upcoming planned turn-on of the Iranian Arak facility.

Learning More

The original source for much of the information about the al-Kibar site has been the Institute for Science and International Security. There has also been very credible analysis by the posters and commenters at armscontrolwonk, and in a series of posts by Cheryl Rofer at whirledview. There have also been some very interesting threads at moonofalabama, but I simply have not followed the commentary there long enough to have any idea how reliable it is relative to the others I know well. The Federation of American Scientists has a 735-page tome of pretty much every press report, image, satellite photo, or commentary that has related to the al-Kibar site. The FAS is an outstanding site in general for technical security information. Globalsecurity provided a very complete and credible analysis back in November. And I provide occasional commentary on matters nuclear at my own place, nuclearmangos.

Summing Up

The CIA has published pictures that clearly show interior, unplaceable shots of the steel and reinforced concrete components of a nuclear reactor pressure vessel, an interior and unplaceable shot of a nearly completed reactor core, and a placeable satellite image of the damaged al-Kibar structure showing a large round structure in the center of the building. To me it is not conclusive, but more likely than not, that the provenance is genuine and the images indeed show an undeclared nuclear facility at the Syrian site of al-Kibar.

Questions We Need To Be Asking

The nuclear situation in the Middle East is going to get more complicated as a result of actions on all sides of this--Syrian, American, and Israeli. American servicemen and women most of all, but all of us ultimately, will surely in the coming months be bearing greater risks than we did before.

* We deserve an answer to why American policy makers made the policy choice to pursue this through means other than the IAEA.

* We deserve an answer to the question what impact bypassing and undermining the IAEA was expected to have in our difficult situation with respect to Iran.

* Reporters need to be asking "pull on the thread" type questions, even where there's no specific reason for doubt. Some of this went on in the CIA briefing (i.e. "were American capabilities involved in the Sept. 6 raid?") but reading the transcript you can practically hear the reporters turning to one another and saying, "These are not the droids we are looking for."

* We deserve an answer to the question of what national technical means of verification the US can make available to the IAEA to settle the question once and for all should access to the site be gained.

* We deserve to know how, why, and when the first agnostic American assessment of the nature of the site was changed to an assessment that it was a nuclear reactor.

* And finally, we deserve better than having to guess whether these images have an indisputable provenance. Given what's at stake, and the history of our village with wolves, this administration owes it to us to prove it.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Plutonium on the Euphrates -- II

April 29, 2008; Page A12

We finally know what Israel bombed in the Syrian desert on September 6 last year, and it isn't pretty. After seven months of silence, the Bush Administration confirmed last week that the target was a nuclear reactor being built with the aid of North Korea.

The prospect of nuclear technology in the hands of another terrorism-sponsoring state is scary enough. Worse is the notion that Syria's reactor is no big deal. That's the interpretation being shopped in Washington by anonymous Administration officials, presumably at State, who have been quoted as saying the CIA has "little confidence" that the goal was to build a bomb.

The no-big-deal thesis expounded by the President's men directly contradicts their boss. After briefing Congress behind closed doors, the White House put out a statement expressing "confidence" that "this reactor was not intended for peaceful activities." CIA Director Michael Hayden said yesterday an operational reactor could have produced enough plutonium to make one or two nuclear bombs.

No one disputes that the Syrians were cooperating with the North Koreans on a nuclear facility like the one currently being shut down at Yongbyon as part of the six-party denuclearization process. The previously classified intelligence shows striking similarities between the Syrian facility, going up at a desert site called Al Kibar, and Yongbyon. Other evidence includes photos of a man identified as a North Korean nuclear expert in Syria.

Nor does anyone – other than the Syrians – deny that Damascus was disguising Al Kibar from the world. The secret reactor is also a violation of Syria's obligation as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Given this background, it would be folly for anyone concerned about the national security of the U.S. to conclude that Syria's intention wasn't some sort of nuclear program, or capacity.

It is also disturbing that the Administration first tried to persuade the Israelis that Syria's outlaw actions could be settled with diplomacy, and then sat on its conclusions for seven months after Israel bombed the site.

This kind of behavior is typical of the "arms control process" that Mr. Bush has embarked on with North Korea, where violations get explained away or ignored if the violator merely promises not to do it again. Pyongyang's nuclear aid to Syria was still going on after its February 2007 pledge to give up all its nuclear programs and stop proliferating.

Meanwhile in Tehran, it's easy to imagine what the mullahs are making of all this. Washington may be talking tough again about Iran, but its leadership can see what North Korea is getting away with. If Pyongyang can pursue a nuclear program with impunity – and in violation of its promises – why not Tehran?

The same goes for Iran's support of the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, accused Iran on Friday of stepping up arms transfers and training support to insurgents fighting American troops in both countries. But Iran has been killing American soldiers, directly or indirectly, for years and suffered no consequences. Why should it believe it's any different now?

As the news of North Korea's violations in Syria became public, Chris Hill, chief U.S. negotiator with Pyongyang, kept up his happy talk about the nuclear deal, calling the latest talks "productive." The Administration has already agreed to let North Korea renege on its promise to provide a full accounting of its nuclear program. It is widely expected soon to start the process of removing the North from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and the Trading With the Enemy Act.

By insisting that the nuclear accord proceed even as the latest information of Pyongyang's proliferation becomes public, Mr. Hill and his boss, Condoleezza Rice, are making the President look foolish. The intelligence about the Syrian reactor came out largely because of pressure from Congress, which demanded to know what happened on September 6 before it would consider whether to allow the sanctions on North Korea to be lifted.

This affair was not well handled from day one. Now Mr. Bush is allowing his diplomats to put about the belief that he values any deal over no deal. That leaves it to Congress to blow the whistle.

Operation Orchard

Late last week, two senior US intelligence officials and a senior administration official provided background briefings to Congressional committees and the media on what they said was the evidence of North Korean involvement in a covert Syrian nuclear reactor. The facility was destroyed by Israeli air strikes last September, in an operation dubbed "Operation Orchard" that was subject to an Israeli news blackout.

“What we’re going to discuss is a nuclear reactor,” one senior US intelligence official told (.pdf) the media. “It was constructed by the Syrians in the eastern desert of Syria along the Euphrates River on the east side. The Syrians constructed this reactor for the production of plutonium with the assistance of the North Koreans.”

“Our evidence goes back an extended period of time,” he continued. “In the spring of last year, we were able to obtain some additional information that made it conclusive. And so, we engaged in this policy process of now that we have the evidence, what do we do about it? The evidence concluded a nuclear reactor, as I mentioned, constructed by the Syrians, started probably in 2001, completed in the summer of 2007. And it was nearing operational capability.”

(You can read the transcript of the intelligence officials' full remarks here (.pdf), and see the video the officials presented here.)

The briefing had been much anticipated. Since the Israeli air strikes last September, hawks opposed to US negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear program had argued that if Israel or the US revealed what Israel had hit in Syria, North Korea would be exposed as proliferating nuclear technology abroad and in violation of the spirit of the negotiations.

Calling the State Department’s diplomatic efforts with Pyongyang "feckless," noted hawk, former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton, wrote in a Wall Street Journal oped August 31, 2007 – intriguingly precisely one week before the Israeli Air Force operation: “We know that both Iran and Syria have long cooperated with North Korea on ballistic missile programs, and the prospect of cooperation on nuclear matters is not far-fetched. Whether and to what extent Iran, Syria or others might be ‘safe havens’ for North Korea's nuclear weapons development, or may have already participated with or benefited from it, must be made clear.”

But though skeptics of US-North Korea diplomacy such as Bolton had long pushed for the information on what had been struck in Syria to be disclosed, when the briefing came late last week, some media reports suggested the timing of the briefing was intended not to scuttle the US-North Korea deal, but rather, to push Pyongyang to finally come clean on its alleged proliferation activities as a way to accelerate a peace settlement. And what's more, the briefing came as Israel and Syria had both spent weeks signaling their interest in pursuing possible engagement and their anxiety to avoid an escalation of hostilities.

“Based on my own ‘uninformed’ perspective, the big question is not whether the Syrians were building a nuclear reactor, but whether it was actually close to becoming operational (which raises questions

about the timing of the strike) and the almost total absence of any evidence of what kind of plans the Syrians may have had for any plutonium that might have been produced at the plant if and when it went into operation,” said former US National Security Council official Gary Sick. “Although some will fix on the anomalies to cast doubt on the very existence of such a project, the real debate in policy circles (including the Congress) is likely to focus on whether it was really as far along as claimed and whether the same thing could have been accomplished by publicizing the photographic evidence and insisting that the IAEA be permitted to inspect the site.”

"The other big question is why the Syrians decided to do this," Sick added. "It is easy to explain North Korean motives -- money, money, money. But did the Syrians intend to follow their covert reactor project with a covert plutonium reprocessing facility and then a covert bomb design and testing program? And they didn't expect to get caught?"

In the wake of the US briefing on the Syria strike, Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak has postponed a trip to Washington, Israeli media report. "The postponement is aimed at avoiding the impression that his meetings were in any way connected to the U.S. decision to disclosure information on the Syrian facility," Ha'aretz reported, noting that Barak had been slated to meet with his counterpart Defense Secretary Robert Gates as well as Vice President Dick Cheney.

The Syrian Nuclear Puzzle

May 1, 2008

Author:

Greg Bruno

On matters of nonproliferation, policymakers and weapons inspectors share a disdain for secrets. So perhaps it was inevitable that a seven-month delay (NYT) in disclosing details of an Israeli air raid on a Syrian nuclear reactor—built, allegedly, with North Korean assistance—would spark outrage from Capitol Hill and the UN’s nuclear agency. Members of the House and Senate intelligence committees scolded (AFP) the Bush administration for its delay in briefing Congress on the September 2007 strike. Mohamed ElBaradei, chief of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, said he “deplores the fact” information was not provided to his agency in a timely fashion, as required under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. President Bush, meanwhile, defended the late disclosure as necessary to avoid sparking a larger regional conflict.

Beyond the dispute over timing is the broader question of motivation. At a news conference on April 29, Bush said the release was aimed as a warning to nations pondering the spread of nuclear weapons; he singled out Syria, North Korea, and Iran. A senior administration official, detailing the sequence of events in a background briefing for reporters on April 24, went further. The official said the disclosure was intended “to advance a number of policy objectives,” from serving as a potential trump card in negotiations with Pyongyang over its own nuclear program (AP), to compelling the international community to take action against Iran for its suspected nuclear-weapons development.

But some observers see other motives in pulling back Syria’s nuclear curtain. Andrew Semmel, the former top State Department official for nonproliferation, tells Voice of America the release may have been aimed at “putting a positive spin” on intelligence that was bound to leak. Dar Al-Hayat columnist Elias Harfoush sees the disclosure as an attempt by Washington to interrupt talks between Syria and Israel over the disputed Golan Heights. The intelligence briefing came amid reports of a potential breakthrough (Reuters) between the two sides. Still others question the veracity of the nuclear plant claim. The allegations were equated in some quarters (al-Jazeera) to intelligence presented to the UN Security Council by then Secretary of State Colin Powell in the run-up to the Iraq war. Nuclear weapons experts David Albright and Paul Brannan don’t doubt the photos’ veracity but question whether the plant was part of an “active nuclear weapons program” (PDF).

The situation puts a new spotlight on the troubled U.S.-Syria relationship. In recent years Damascus and Washington have sparred over the Arab-Israeli conflict; Syria’s support for Hezbollah in Lebanon; and claims that foreign fighters in Iraq have entered the war zone via Syria. The Bush administration has raised concern about Syrian weapons development in the recent past. Damascus has rejected such charges before and denies (AFP) the targeted complex in the most recent case was nuclear in nature.

But U.S. claims of Syrian support for terrorists are decades old; the U.S. government first listed Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1979. The State Department’s most recent annual report on global terrorism accuses Syria of providing material and political support to Palestinian terrorist groups, and suggests official involvement in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recalled the U.S. ambassador to Syria following the

murder, although Syria maintains a diplomatic mission in Washington. The United States has also sought to use economic leverage to compel Syria to cut ties with terrorist groups.

It is uncertain how stepped up U.S. pressure will influence Syrian behavior. The American Enterprise Institute's David Frum says reckless regimes can't always be reasoned with (National Post). Jeremy M. Sharp, a Middle East analyst for the Congressional Research Service, estimates economic sanctions would be futile. Trade with Syria is already minimal, Sharp writes (PDF). And the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), which has published a series of reports on Syrian politics and regional relations, has found that sanctions could embolden the ruling party. The most direct route to change, two USIP scholars say, lies with Syria's oppositionists.

North Korea and the Incident in the Syrian Desert

Daryl G. Kimball
Arms Control Today
May 2008

Seven months after Israeli Air Force jets bombed a remote facility near al-Kibar in Syria, the United States released intelligence information April 24 suggesting that the site housed a nuclear reactor for a military program being built with assistance from North Korea. The assessment comes as Pyongyang and Washington have reached a tentative agreement on a declaration of North Korea's nuclear program, an issue which has stalled talks aimed at verifiably denuclearizing North Korea.

The charges of a Syrian-North Korean nuclear connection raise new and troubling questions about Pyongyang's past proliferation behavior and Damascus' intentions, which must be fully investigated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Yet, it would be a grave mistake to allow it to derail the ongoing diplomatic process that has led to the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and still provides important, if limited, leverage to halt further North Korean proliferation activities.

In the past year, the six-party negotiations have finally yielded significant results. In July 2007, the IAEA confirmed that North Korea shut down its Yongbyon reactor and plutonium-separation plant. Since October, U.S. officials have been on the ground with North Korean scientists to disable those facilities.

Now, under a tentative deal, North Korea has agreed to produce a declaration on its weapons program and acknowledge U.S. concerns about its proliferation activities and alleged uranium-enrichment program. Within weeks, U.S. experts may begin the process of verifying North Korea's declaration. In exchange, the Bush administration has pledged to seek to remove Pyongyang from the state sponsors of terrorism list and lift certain sanctions.

Some fear the Syria revelations make it appear as if Washington is rewarding bad behavior. Instead, the United States should remain focused on the priority task of taking out of circulation whatever nuclear bombs, bomb material, and uranium-enrichment items North Korea has and redirecting its scientists to nonlethal pursuits.

When confronted with a similar situation in 2002, the Bush team miscalculated. On the basis of preliminary intelligence, Washington accused North Korea of pursuing a uranium-enrichment program in violation of previous denuclearization commitments. To show his displeasure, President George W. Bush cut off delivery of heavy fuel oil shipments to North Korea, even though it was clear this might lead Pyongyang to kick out IAEA inspectors and restart plutonium production, which had been frozen eight years earlier.

Pyongyang's plutonium supply grew from one to two bombs worth to about 10. Then, after delays in the six-party talks and U.S. financial sanctions in 2006, Pyongyang engaged in a fit of missile tests and set off a nuclear test explosion. Only after a February 2007 agreement outlining an "action-for-action" series of steps to achieve denuclearization and the normalization of relations has the situation somewhat eased.

The six-party process is imperfect but invaluable because it also provides much needed leverage to snuff out North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities. In the wake of the Sept. 6, 2007, Israeli strike on Syria's facility, the United States demanded and got North Korea to reaffirm "its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how" in an October 2007 six-party statement.

As Bush said Sept. 20 when he was asked a question about reports of North Korean-Syrian ties, "[T]o the extent that they are proliferating, we expect them to stop that proliferation if they want the six-party talks to be successful." Now, U.S. leaders and allies need to back up this demand with tough diplomacy.

Indeed, any North Korean-Syrian nuclear or missile cooperation would be a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1718 of October 2006, which requires states to cease trade of these items with North Korea. If Syria was in fact building a reactor, it would also have been a clear violation of its safeguards obligations because it failed to inform the IAEA of the project.

Following Israel's September raid, any such assistance would appear to have ended, along with the facility. Israel's action, however, will make it far more difficult for the IAEA to find any hard physical evidence of the existence of a reactor, which Syria denies. It also increases the risk of a possible future attack on Israel's secret military reactor at Dimona.

Israeli concern about Syrian nuclear activities is understandable. But rather than launching a risky and illegal airstrike, Israel or the United States should have used their information about the al-Kibar reactor to call on the IAEA or the Security Council to demand an inspection and the dismantlement of the facility, as well as other potential secret nuclear sites in Syria.

Policymakers should use the release of the intelligence on the Syrian facility to increase pressure on North Korea to accept measures that help verify it has ceased its proliferation activities, rather than use it as a pretext to delay or derail the process of verifiably denuclearizing North Korea.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-op-cohen4-2008may04,0,4335891.story>

Cloak and stagger

After overestimating the Iraq threat, U.S. intelligence agencies are now dangerously underestimating Syria and Iran.

By Leonard S. Spector and Avner Cohen

May 4, 2008

Last month's unclassified congressional briefing on Syria's clandestine nuclear reactor, which was destroyed by Israel on Sept. 6, 2007, was yet another reminder of the challenges confronting the U.S. intelligence community. Still smarting from its gross overestimation of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, the community bent over backward to avoid overstating its case against Syria -- and in doing so, it stumbled badly.

In the Syrian case (as with the release last year of part of the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program) the intelligence community was unnecessarily cautious, and thereby underestimated the threats posed by Syria and Iran. Its efforts to improve precision have only created new confusion and uncertainty.

The key problem has been the intelligence community's astonishing awkwardness in making clear what's a fact and what's an inference. In the case of Iraq, there were few facts on which to build a convincing case that Saddam Hussein was arming himself with weapons of mass destruction. But Hussein's past pursuit of them, coupled with the anxieties unleashed by 9/11, led U.S. intelligence analysts and many policymakers to infer the worst and leap to conclusions unsupported by the facts.

The intelligence community has now jumped to the opposite extreme with respect to Iran's and Syria's nuclear ambitions, where there are more than a few facts. Yet it has virtually refused to draw any conclusions, no matter how obvious, about the two countries' nuclear programs. The effect has been to seriously understate the dangers Iran and Syria pose and to distort the policy options available to the U.S. to manage them.

When the unclassified summary of the NIE on Iran's nuclear program was released Dec. 3, many observers were shocked by its most prominent "key finding" -- that the intelligence community believed with "high confidence" that Iran had halted its "nuclear weapon program" in late 2003. A footnote defined "nuclear weapon program" as Iran's efforts to design a nuclear weapon and to enrich uranium in secret. That definition is extremely narrow because most proliferation experts view designing the bomb as relatively easy compared with producing the necessary fissile materials for its core and developing a delivery system.

As a result, the summary paid scant attention to those two nuclear-weapon-related -- and extremely dangerous -- activities in Iran. In fact, the summary doesn't even mention the missiles, and Iran's uranium enrichment activities, the focal point of U.S. and U.N. Security Council diplomacy and pressure, are described in the blandest of terms.

Why? Based on comments at a recent roundtable of U.S. officials and outside proliferation experts that we co-chaired, those responsible for the NIE on Iran knew that the heads of the 16 U.S. intelligence agencies had agreed that its key findings would not be declassified. But the White House, fearful that the findings might leak to the media without any official explanation of their significance, overruled the agencies.

By the time the White House decided to release an unclassified summary, the classified version had been produced and was about to be handed over to the congressional intelligence committees. That created a problem. Even though the estimate's "key findings" were originally intended to be understood in the context of the whole classified report, the intelligence community and the White House felt that they needed to repeat them almost verbatim in the unclassified summary. They worried that any rephrasing of the findings would open them up to accusations of playing politics with the estimate.

That still leaves the question of why the intelligence community spotlighted the finding on Iran's nuclear weapons program. We know that important new evidence on Iran's nuclear activities in 2003 had been obtained and that it had required changing a 2005 estimate that the country was pursuing a nuclear weapon. In highlighting the new data, the authors of the 2007 unclassified summary unfortunately left out the context of the previous estimate -- that a rogue Iran remained well on course to developing a nuclear capability.

Ever since Dec. 3, the intelligence community has been trying to restore context to its key finding. On Feb. 27, Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell said the release of the unclassified version was rushed and that it was "an error of judgment on my part." Days later, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples said that "although Iran claims its program is focused on producing commercial electric power, [we assess] with high confidence Iran remains determined to develop nuclear weapons." Then in March, CIA chief Michael Hayden, asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" whether he thought Iran was trying to develop a nuclear weapon, replied "Yes," adding this was not based on "court-of-law stuff. ... This is Mike Hayden looking at the body of evidence."

These statements were a move in the right direction, but the CIA's linguistic fumbling during last month's congressional briefing on Syria's reactor indicates that the snafu over the Iran estimate is not a one-time blunder.

After going to considerable lengths to show that Syria's reactor was built with North Korea's help, that it was modeled on the reactor that the North Koreans used to produce plutonium for their nuclear weapons and that it had been carefully disguised by the Syrians to avoid detection, senior intelligence officials declared they had only "low confidence" that Syria has a nuclear weapons program.

The justification for this bizarre conclusion? Although it has "a rich level of information" about the destroyed reactor and North Korea's involvement in building it, the intelligence community said it has no specific information on Syrian facilities for the manufacture of fuel for the reactor or for processing the fuel after it is irradiated to extract plutonium. Nor has it any information showing that Syria is working on a design for a nuclear warhead.

While well-intentioned, the intelligence community's efforts at clarity have now twice gone astray. If it wants to right the balance between facts and inference, a starting point might be to stop redefining commonly used phrases -- such as "nuclear weapon program" -- in order to give them new, counterintuitive meanings that obscure a more simple and dangerous reality.

When the intelligence community has real evidence, it should not be afraid to draw the obvious inference and call a spade a spade.

[Leonard S. Spector directs the Washington office of the Monterey Institute's James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. Avner Cohen is a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington and the author of "Israel and the Bomb."](#)

The Elusive Smoking Gun

Assessing Nuclear Activity in Syria and Iran

By INSS: Emily Landau

Sunday, May 4, 2008

Posted 05/4 at 09:54 AM

On April 24, US officials briefed lawmakers on Syria's covert nuclear reactor. They explained their "high confidence" that what was destroyed last September in Syria was in fact a nuclear reactor for the production of plutonium, and that it was built with the long-term and sustained assistance of North Korea. In contrast to this certainty, a central aspect of their estimate regarding Syria's nuclear plans adopted a vaguer tone: when asked whether the material to be produced by the reactor would be used in a nuclear weapons program, the Intelligence officials accorded this only a "low confidence" level.

Interestingly and rather surprisingly, the officials acknowledged that a low confidence estimate did not concur with what they actually believed to be the case. In fact, on the basis of their overall analysis of the situation, it was their belief that the reactor was intended to produce nuclear weapons. Indeed, they found no other reasonable explanation for the reactor: it was clearly not for producing electricity, and it was ill-suited to be a research reactor. Moreover, Syria had acted suspiciously in other regards, such as rushing to destroy the remains of the reactor after the attack. But due to the lack of "additional clinical evidence of other activities" – most importantly, the absence of a reprocessing facility – they could not accord this assessment the level of confidence that they actually believed to be the case. As one of the Intelligence officials at the briefing tried to explain: "there's a difference between evidence and an assessment."

This episode underscores the problematics involved when decisions regarding nuclear proliferation activities are expected to be grounded in clear-cut evidence of a "smoking gun" – namely, in some physical or clinical evidence that proves beyond a doubt the illegal and dangerous nature of the nuclear activity in question.

Generally speaking, smoking guns – although packaged by those who seek them as the epitome of proof based on hard evidence – are actually subject to interpretation, and can prove to be quite elusive. In reality, there are no clear-cut criteria for smoking guns. Short of producing evidence of a nuclear bomb, is any piece of evidence truly iron-clad? If someone is not interested in finding a state guilty of illegal nuclear activity, then with regard to most evidence – again, short of a nuclear bomb – a more benign interpretation can generally be manufactured. In the final analysis, much depends on the ability of the presenter to convince others that the facts exposed do or do not constitute incriminating evidence.

Moreover, the history of the past five and a half years of dealing with Iran's nuclear activities demonstrates that the ongoing search for a smoking gun can result in the loss of valuable time in confronting a determined proliferator. Throughout 2003 the search was on for a smoking gun in Iran, which was never found. But in late 2007, the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) concluded that for most of that same year – as well as for close to 20 years before that time – Iran had actually been engaged in an active nuclear weapons program. If in 2003 states had acted upon what they sensed and

believed to be the case in light of Iran's long history of deception in the nuclear realm – rather than focusing on finding a smoking gun – things might have evolved differently.

This leads to another problem with smoking guns: determined proliferators are well aware of the fact that states are looking for this kind of evidence, and they put tremendous efforts into hiding it. Therefore, the difficulties that are encountered in finding a smoking gun should come as no surprise, and the inability to find one due to states' concealment efforts should be factored into assessments. According to the NIE, Iran stopped one aspect of its nuclear program in the fall of 2003: weaponization. It continued with the other two activities that are essential for nuclear weapons: production of fissile material (uranium enrichment), and development of long-range ballistic missiles. The decision to stop the weaponization program had a double logic for Iran: first, this was the part of its program that could be achieved in the least amount of time, and thus it was the easiest to suspend temporarily while Iran continued to work on the other two prongs. Second, this was the only part of the program that Iran believed it would be hard pressed to account for, if discovered. Uranium enrichment in Iran has been conducted openly for the past several years and Iran steadfastly continues to insist that it is for civilian purposes, and long-range missiles can be explained as intended for conventional warheads. But designs for a nuclear warhead suggest a different narrative that would be more difficult to explain.

All of this leads to the conclusion that connecting the dots of weapons-related nuclear activity should be carried out in the realm of strategic analysis, where hard evidence of so-called smoking guns is but one important component (but not a sine qua non) in an overall, intricate picture. Something is amiss when Intelligence officials have to bend over backwards to explain an estimate that doesn't concur with what they believe to be the actual nature of a state's nuclear activity based on their overall analysis and powers of deduction. Moreover, there is the real risk that media articles will pick up the line that there is "low confidence" that nuclear activity is intended for weapons, and forget the broader, more complex message that was presented. The sound bytes that appeared in the media following publication of the NIE – and the damage that they caused to efforts to confront Iran – are a case in point.

Comprehensive and logical assessments with regard to nuclear proliferation obviously need to include as much hard evidence as possible, but in the interest of non-proliferation, they should not be held hostage to the absence of a smoking gun.

EDITORIAL

N Korea's long nuclear reach

Tuesday May 06, 2008

The disclosure that Syria has been caught in the secret construction of a high-class nuclear facility bears special attention for our part of the world.

That is because the fingerprints of North Korea appear at each stage of the largely mysterious Syrian facility destroyed last year by Israel. The facts of the Syrian facility are murky at best. Damascus appears determined to try to deny the whole problem away by claiming there was nothing there.

The United Nations nuclear watchdog has spent far more energy and urgency denouncing the Israeli airstrike and withholding of evidence by the United States, than in investigating the secret Syrian project and _ most ominous of all actors in the story _ the Pyongyang link.

The first time most of the world heard of the possible Syrian nuclear project was last September, when the Israeli air force and commandos destroyed the facility. Damascus, in a most unusual reaction to the act of war, waffled over what had been hit and what reaction it planned. After months of pressure and vacillation, the United States finally coughed up the information it had gathered on the site in northern Syria.

The evidence appears overwhelming that Syria had secretly and thus illegally almost finished constructing a nuclear facility, virtually identical to that of the North Korean nuclear programme headquartered at Yongbyon, which has made nuclear bombs. It credibly indicates a continuing, strong effort by North Korea to proliferate nuclear sites, quite possibly for its own purposes.

And that is the rub. Recent photographs show the head of the North Korean nuclear project in Syria. Pyongyang is known to have peddled missiles and weapons technology to Syria. The evidence is almost entirely circumstantial but thus far it points to a single conclusion: North Korea has tried to build a nuclear plant in Syria capable of supplying plutonium and related material which would fit perfectly in the North Korean weapons programme.

There may be another explanation, but the initial claim by Syria that Israel had bombed an abandoned building was clearly a lie, since dated satellite photos from several sources prove the site was active.

Shortly after Israel destroyed the Syrian facility, North Korea renewed diplomatic relations with Burma. The Burmese junta kicked out the North Koreans in 1983, after Pyongyang staged a terrorist attack in Rangoon which killed many South Koreans and almost assassinated then-president Chun Doo-Hwan during a state visit.

The timing of the renewal of diplomatic relations between the two Asian hermits raised eyebrows because they have so little in common. Their biggest common interest is that Rangoon wants a nuclear facility and Pyongyang has the technology and, perhaps, a burning ambition to help the generals get one.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has already proved too lackadaisical in taking up evidence in the Syrian case. Indeed, it appears Syria is in serious violation of its responsibility under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to report all nuclear construction. Not only is the IAEA qualified to investigate, it must do so. More troubling is the North Korean link. If Pyongyang really was attempting to set up a back-up source of plutonium in Syria, it probably is doing the same elsewhere.

The IAEA also must delve urgently into all aspects of the inscrutable nuclear projects by Burma. If Rangoon is trying to construct a medical-type nuclear reactor, fine. But the world, and more importantly this region, deserves to know if North Korea is playing any role.

Review & Outlook

Vetoing the Verifiers

May 8, 2008; Page A14

The State Department is justifying its decision to let North Korea renege on its pledge to give a "complete declaration of its nuclear programs" by promising a strict verification regime. So why is Foggy Bottom cutting its own verification experts out of the loop?

The State Department's systematic exclusion of its own Bureau of Verification, Compliance and Implementation has gone unreported as the North Korean diplomacy proceeds. But it is causing concern on Capitol Hill and has already led to a proposal to require State to submit a report to Congress describing how the U.S. will verify any nuclear deal. Sponsored by Florida Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the legislation passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week with the support of Democratic Chairman Howard Berman.

The mandate of the verification bureau, as described on the State Department's Web site, is to provide oversight "on all matters relating to verification or compliance with international arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament agreements and commitments." It "supports the Secretary" in "developing and implementing robust and rigorous verification and compliance policies."

The verification bureau was created by a Republican Congress in 1999 over the objections of the Clinton Administration and State Department careerists who didn't want agreements subject to additional oversight. The bureau's biggest success to date is Libya, where it played a central role in dismantling the country's WMD programs in 2003. There the bureau worked closely with experts from the Departments of Defense and Energy as well as with Britain and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

North Korea is a different story. The verifiers "have no voice so far," one person close to the process told us. They aren't part of the negotiating teams talking to the North Koreans and they've been excluded from key internal meetings. No one from the verification bureau participated in a recent State Department trip to Pyongyang intended to work out verification issues.

Nor is the verification bureau in charge of monitoring the disabling of the North's nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. One bureau professional took part, but he was invited for his technical expertise; he was not there as a verifier. Paula DeSutter, the assistant secretary who heads the bureau, declined to comment.

Incredibly, the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs is calling the shots – talking to the North Koreans, hand picking experts to work at Yongbyon, and overseeing disablement. Call it the Chris Hill Show. Mr. Hill – the assistant secretary for East Asia – has also made a mockery of the interagency process. The verification bureau's Pentagon counterparts, who were closely involved in the six-party Korean diplomacy until mid-2005, have also been kept in exile.

Now there's talk that the East Asia bureau – not the verification bureau – will also end up monitoring any final six-party agreement. Not only does East Asia lack the technical expertise to verify a nuclear

agreement, its staffers would hardly be eager to find violations in an accord negotiated by their superiors. There's even talk State may outsource some of the inspection work to China, which will be chairing a verification group within the six-party group. But China would have no incentive to blow the whistle on its client state.

The fact that Mr. Hill and his boss, Secretary Condoleezza Rice, are marginalizing their own verifiers is further reason to doubt their North Korea deal. The diplomats want to deliver a "success" and are afraid that if the verifiers get a close look, they will expose it as a fraud. Among the uncomfortable questions: Where is all of the plutonium North Korea has produced over the years? What happened to the uranium program that Pyongyang once boasted about but now says does not exist? What exactly did the North proliferate to Syria?

No verification can deliver 100% certainty, and North Korea, with its history of cheating and lying, would be a difficult case under even the most stringent inspection regimes. The disarmament of Libya succeeded because Moammar Gadhafi decided to cooperate. There's zero indication that Kim Jong Il shares that frame of mind.

North Korea's geography offers special challenges too. It's a mountainous country, with caves hiding mobile missile launchers aimed at Seoul. The military has vast underground facilities built with the help of its former Soviet patrons. Will these be open to inspectors? Even assuming that Kim will allow unimpeded and unannounced access – a leap of diplomatic faith – special expertise is needed to decide where to inspect and what to look for.

The State Department's verification bureau was created in the spirit of Ronald Reagan's slogan, "trust but verify." The Gipper was referring to the disarmament of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, but his principle applies equally to North Korea today. If Foggy Bottom won't trust its own verifiers enough to make them part of any disarmament deal, then the rest of us shouldn't trust any deal struck by the Bush State Department.

OPINION

Bush's North Korea Nuclear Abdication

By JOHN R. BOLTON

May 8, 2008; Page A15

Despite rising Capitol Hill opposition to its North Korea policy, the Bush administration continues to find new and imaginative ways to accommodate Pyongyang's sensitivities. Meanwhile, the administration's Democratic congressional allies are urgently pushing to waive the Glenn Amendment, which bars essentially all U.S. economic and military aid to the North.

The strategic folly here is rooted in the administration's decision to focus on North Korea's plutonium supplies and stop caring what Pyongyang once did or is doing on the enriched-uranium route to nuclear weapons. That could be a fatal mistake.

In 2002, our intelligence community definitively judged that the regime was working on an industrial-scale enrichment program. Since then we have little new information, reducing the confidence level, but not changing the substantive conclusion, that the North Koreans "have and continue to operate a uranium enrichment program" – as Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell testified in February.

For the Bush administration, however, the lack of new data is an excuse to ignore the entire issue of uranium.

On plutonium, the administration seems content to seek vague statements from the North that "account" for the amount of this fissile material we think it has extracted from its Yongbyon reactor's spent fuel rods over the years. Administration briefings reveal little or no interest in how many plutonium weapons exist; whether there are other plutonium-related facilities hidden in North Korea's vast complex of underground facilities; and what the North's weapons-manufacturing capabilities are.

Proliferation? Perhaps the Bush administration's most wondrous act of magic is to make that problem disappear. The State Department argues that North Korea may have proliferated in the past, but that's all behind us. How do we know? The North Koreans have told us.

Since the reactor it helped Syria build on the Euphrates River was pulverized by the Israeli Air Force last September 6, Pyongyang's efforts at and interest in nuclear proliferation may have ceased. Even if true, that should not give us comfort: It took an act of brute military force to bring this about. One need hardly point out that this tactic is not congruent with the administration's current approach to North Korea's nuclear behavior.

More troubling is the administration's apparent treatment of the Syrian reactor as if it were the only proliferation threat in the Middle East. It is not. Iran should be top of mind as well.

It is inconceivable that Syria could work for five years or more building the clone of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor on the Euphrates without, at a minimum, Iranian acquiescence. Quite likely, Iran

was involved. Tehran could well be financing Syria's purchase of reactor technology from North Korea. It could also have expected to benefit from the reactor's production of plutonium.

Indeed, Iran had much the same incentive as North Korea to hide its nuclear activities from international scrutiny. What better way to conceal proscribed work from inspectors in North Korea or Iran than to build facilities in Syria?

Iran and North Korea already have a history of cooperation in ballistic missiles – the delivery system which, if perfected, could give their weapons global reach. After the North declared a moratorium on launch testing from the Korean Peninsula in 1999, it simply ramped up cooperation with Iran's aggressive missile research and development program.

The North thus continued to benefit from launch-testing data, prior to breaking its moratorium on July 4, 2006, while also scoring a propaganda victory among the clueless for its apparent renunciation of provocative behavior in Northeast Asia. Outsourcing weapons programs is nothing new for Pyongyang.

Although our intelligence community stated publicly that the Syrian reactor was a cash transaction, its congressional briefings contained little or no supporting evidence that this was so. This is unsurprising. The Israeli raid was based on the hard physical evidence seen on the banks of the Euphrates River, not on scrutiny of documents embodying the deal.

Some friendly advice to our intelligence services: Think joint venture. Think asset diversification.

Hypothetically, what if the deal had North Korea getting a third of the plutonium produced by the Euphrates reactor, Iran a third, and Syria a third? The North benefits by maintaining open access to a plutonium supply even if Yongbyon remains frozen. Iran gets experience in reactor technologies immune from IAEA scrutiny. And Syria takes a major step toward undisclosed nuclear capabilities. Win-win-win, as that entrepreneurial proliferator A.Q. Khan might have said.

Here is the real problem. North Korean nuclear proliferation is quite likely more than a series of one-time transactions that create problems elsewhere in the world. It may very well be integral to its own nuclear weapons program.

The Bush administration can wish away these possibilities and still achieve its deal. But it cannot wish away the underlying reality, the full scope of which we simply do not know. That reality, whatever its reach, will still be there to haunt President Bush's successor and threaten international peace.

Commentary

CIA credibility suffers

By HAVILAND SMITH

May 8, 2008

Credibility is the lifeblood of any intelligence organization serving a democracy. If the public, or any given administration, doesn't believe it is getting told the truth, then the organization has lost its purpose and effectiveness. It is the public perception of credibility that matters most, and thanks to current White House tasking of the agency, the CIA appears to be losing that battle today.

The role of any intelligence organization is to provide intelligence information and estimates to policymakers in support of security and foreign policy issues, based on known facts.

During the Cold War, the CIA did its best to do just that. It was not always as effective as it might have been, but it was a principled organization staffed by motivated, reputable people who did their best to do their job and do it right. The Cold War CIA did not lie or fabricate intelligence for policymakers or for public consumption.

CIA management occasionally suffered from poor judgment and did some really stupid things, like providing disguises to a former employee who was a member of the Watergate break-in team. However, with the possible exception of Iran/Contra — who knows if Reagan knew and approved? — the CIA never undertook covert activities without White House direction. It was never the "rogue elephant" that its fiercest critics persistently alleged it to have been.

Unfortunately, concerns about CIA credibility have grown since 9/11. The role of the CIA in enabling the Iraq invasion is probably still not fully understood, muddled as it is by the machinations of the Bush administration. The persistent, unprecedented visits by Vice President Cheney to CIA headquarters during the run-up to the invasion, reportedly to seek changes in CIA estimates on Iraq that would support such an invasion, have never been fully explained.

The "slam dunk" moment on Iraqi WMD; allegations of CIA waterboarding, renditions, a gulag of prisons around the world and, most recently, the question of why the waterboarding tapes were destroyed have all added fuel to the credibility fire.

Structural changes have weakened CIA credibility, as well. The post-9/11 creation of a new Office of the Director of National Intelligence at the expense of the CIA was senseless and bureaucratic. The persistent efforts of the Pentagon under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to usurp CIA functions and to denigrate the CIA, its processes and its products have added further to an atmosphere in which CIA credibility is routinely publicly questioned.

In early September 2007, Israeli jets flattened a structure in the Syrian desert. Israel, Syria and America all acknowledged the act, but none gave any explanation for it, that is, until recently. Now we see pre-raid photos of the inside of the Syrian structure with virtually identical companion pictures of North Korean nuclear sites. The Syria photos presumably were obtained from the Israelis.

In the meantime, the Syrian ambassador in Washington, who can hardly be viewed as impartial, claims the photos are CIA fabrications. This claim has then become the object of speculation in the American media.

What's going on here? Why was this information held so tightly and only released now, seven months later? Is the CIA lying about this issue? Has the CIA fabricated these photos? Have the Israelis done the fabrications and passed them on to us? All of these questions and more are now under examination.

Ultimately what is true and what is false about this Syria incident is of secondary importance to what the effect of a media examination of the subject has already brought and will continue to bring. What will matter is that further doubt will arise in Americans' minds about CIA credibility.

The U.S. involvement in the "war on terror" and in Iraq has put tremendous pressure from the White House on the CIA to undertake activities which, even if not illegal, create in the public mind an aura of mistrust. In today's world, no one is quite sure if the CIA is on the "right" side of anything.

That may suit the needs of today's White House, but it creates a legacy of mistrust in and lack of credibility for the CIA that will continue for years after they are gone. This legacy may serve this White House well, but it will disastrously serve its successors. The U.S. can ill afford to have an intelligence service whose credibility is publicly questioned.

Haviland Smith is a retired CIA station chief who served abroad in Europe and the Middle East, as executive assistant in the director's office and as chief of the counterterrorism staff. He lives in Williston.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/12/AR2008051202330.html>

The Right Path With N. Korea

By Siegfried S. Hecker and William J. Perry

Tuesday, May 13, 2008; A15

The Bush administration's North Korea strategy is being criticized from the right and the left for letting Pyongyang off the hook. Some advocate scuttling the six-party talks. Others suggest slowing our own compliance with the agreement to get North Korea to make a full declaration of its nuclear program first. We disagree with both positions. Our mantra should be: It's the plutonium, stupid.

North Korea does have the bomb -- but a limited nuclear arsenal and supply of plutonium to fuel its weapons. The Yongbyon plutonium production facilities are closed and partially disabled.

In separate visits to North Korea in February, we concluded that the disablement was extensive and thorough. We also learned that Pyongyang is prepared to move to the next crucial step of dismantling Yongbyon, eliminating plutonium production. This would mean no more bombs, no better bombs and less likelihood of export. After this success, we can concentrate on getting full declarations and on rolling back Pyongyang's supply of weapons and plutonium.

We must not miss this opportunity, because we have the chance to contain the risk posed by North Korea's arsenal while we work to eliminate it. As dismantlement proceeds, negotiations should focus concurrently on the plutonium declaration, the extent of the uranium enrichment effort and Pyongyang's nuclear exports.

Pyongyang's declaration of 30 kilograms of plutonium (sufficient for roughly four to five bombs) falls short of the estimate of 40 to 50 kilograms, based on our past visits. We believe that North Korea is prepared to produce operating records and permit access to facilities, equipment and waste sites for verification. Obtaining and verifying its declaration of plutonium production and inventories is imperative. Let's proceed.

Pyongyang continues to claim that it has made no efforts to enrich uranium, despite strong evidence to the contrary. Although it appears unlikely that these efforts reached a scale that constitutes a weapons threat, a complete accounting is required. Dismantlement of the Yongbyon facilities should not, however, be postponed to resolve this issue. In October 2002, the Bush administration accused North Korea of covert uranium enrichment, only to have Pyongyang withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and produce plutonium to fuel the arsenal that we are now attempting to eliminate.

Nuclear exports are of greater concern. As recently revealed evidence demonstrates, North Korea sold nuclear technology to Syria, much as it sold missile technology. North Korea must cooperate if we are to get to the bottom of the Syrian incident and ensure that it is not repeated elsewhere. Israel eliminated the Syrian threat, for now, by bombing the reactor at Al Kibar. But it is imperative that Pyongyang reveal the nature and extent of its export operations and, most important, whether it has similar deals underway with Iran.

We do not advocate letting Pyongyang off the hook, but a "confession" regarding Syria is not the critical issue. We have good knowledge of what the North Koreans supplied to Syria. What we really

need is information from North Korea that will help us deal with potential threats. For example, was North Korea acting alone, or was it part of a more sophisticated proliferation ring involving Pyongyang's trading partners and suppliers? North Korea's leadership must resolve all three declaration issues fully, and these will take time to verify.

To ultimately succeed in the peaceful elimination of nuclear weapons, we must understand why North Korea devoted its limited resources to going nuclear. The September 2005 six-party joint statement addresses many of these concerns, promising mutual respect for national sovereignty, peaceful coexistence, and a commitment to stability and lasting peace in Northeast Asia, as well as normalization of relations. Given the acrimonious history of our relations, such steps require a transformation in the relationship between North Korea and the United States, a change that will first require building trust -- step by step.

The six-party negotiations have put us on that path, and there is much evidence of winds of change blowing in North Korea that will make navigating that path easier (the recent New York Philharmonic concert in Pyongyang is one such symbol of change; the joint industrial facility at Kaesong is another). But North Korea's reluctance to provide full declarations and the Syria revelations have moved us in the wrong direction.

Nevertheless, walking away from the talks or slowing them at this point would be counterproductive. Instead, in its remaining months, the Bush administration should focus on limiting North Korea's nuclear capabilities by concluding the elimination of plutonium production. If it can also get answers on the Syrian operation and resolve the question of uranium enrichment, it will put the next administration in a stronger position to finally end the nuclear threat from North Korea.

[Siegfried S. Hecker and William J. Perry](#) are with the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. Hecker was director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory from 1986 through 1997. Perry was secretary of defense from 1994 through 1997.

The failed theology of arms control

So-called experts are frequently certain about what they know about nuclear material -- and they're frequently wrong.

By Gabriel Schoenfeld

May 24, 2008

ONE OF THE least noticed and most peculiar campaign promises made by Barack Obama is his pledge, if elected president, to "secure all loose nuclear materials in the world within four years." Without doubt that is a laudable goal, but one is left wondering how exactly he expects to accomplish it in four years, or even, for that matter, in 40.

One of many obstacles is that our intelligence agencies seldom know where loose nuclear materials are, especially when they are hidden on the territory of hostile states. An even bigger problem is that when we they do locate them, there always will be some expert or another telling us that, despite all the evidence, they are not really there. Obama, of all people, should know this.

He has one such expert advising his campaign.

On Sept. 6, 2007, Israeli jets destroyed a large box-shaped structure built in Syria at Al Kibar, not far from the Euphrates River. Although Israel maintained a discreet silence about the raid, and Syria confined itself to denouncing Israel for violating its airspace, suspicion immediately began to mount that the target was a nuclear reactor. In the weeks that followed, satellite photos and other data buttressing that suspicion rapidly began to emerge.

But not everyone was convinced. Among the skeptics was Joseph Cirincione, formerly a staff member for Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) on the House Armed Services Committee and more recently a denizen of the Washington think-tank world, who has been an informal advisor on nuclear affairs for Obama and has written a series of memos for the campaign.

Interviewed by Seymour Hersh of the New Yorker after the Israeli raid, Cirincione was emphatic: "Syria does not have the technical, industrial or financial ability to support a nuclear weapons program. I've been following this issue for 15 years, and every once in awhile a suspicion arises and we investigate and there's nothing. There was and is no nuclear weapons threat from Syria."

Thanks to materials made public by the U.S. on April 24, we now know that the facility at Al Kibar was a nuclear reactor and that it had been built with North Korean assistance. Indeed, it was a close copy of the North Korean plutonium producing reactor at Yongbyon that the U.S. has been trying, via negotiations, to shut down. Cirincione has admitted that he got it wrong, explaining that the evidence "seems strong" that Syria was building a reactor and that no one can bat 1,000.

Cirincione is correct about the difficulty of attaining a perfect batting average. But still, why did he miss this particular ball?

One obvious explanation is that he fell victim to Syrian deception. As a report by the Institute for Science and International Security makes plain, Syrian engineers and architects went to "astonishing

lengths" to erase the "signature" of the reactor at Al Kibar and to camouflage and/or bury "commonly expected attributes and conceal the building's true purpose." So successful was the Syrian concealment effort that even after 2005, when U.S. intelligence officials first became aware of the structure and a North Korean presence at it, they labeled it an "enigma facility."

Yet secrecy and camouflage are par for the course. No country with a covert nuclear program has failed to use such means to keep its effort hidden from the world. And no nuclear nonproliferation expert worth his boron would be unaware of this. What else must have been at work here?

Experts, like generals, have a tendency to fight the last war. In this instance, the last war was the Iraq war, in which the U.S. invaded in no small part to dismantle a nuclear weapons program that turned out not to exist. A good many nuclear specialists within and outside the intelligence world appear to have become so fearful of repeating that sorry experience that they are afraid even to acknowledge things that do exist. Last year's National Intelligence Estimate on Iran that declared, misleadingly, that Iran's nuclear weapons program ended in 2003 is a prominent case in point.

Cirincione seems to have been snared by precisely the same trap. Reports of a Syrian nuclear reactor, he wrote a week after the Israeli strike, were "nonsense," the handiwork "of a small group of officials leaking cherry-picked, unvetted 'intelligence' to key reporters in order to promote a preexisting political agenda. If this sounds like the run-up to the war in Iraq, it should."

It "is all political," he insisted to Hersh. Those peddling the story of the nonexistent reactor appear to have been aiming "at derailing the U.S.-North Korean agreement that administration hard-liners think is appeasement."

In his solicitude for the U.S.-North Korean agreement -- itself a deeply flawed document and one repeatedly violated by Pyongyang -- the solution to the riddle becomes clear. Cirincione is now the president of an outfit called the Ploughshares Fund, a foundation dedicated to funding advocates of arms control negotiations around the world. To him and his fellow members of the arms control creed, the admission that North Korea was illicitly shipping nuclear technology abroad -- and that a country such as Syria, a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, had been caught in a brazen violation of its commitments -- might be taken as an acknowledgment that the arms control regime on which they have staked their reputations and dedicated their lives has failed utterly.

But it is as irrational to suggest that weapons never exist as it would be to suggest that they always exist. As the Syrian episode demonstrates, there may not be weapons of mass destruction under every dictator's bed, but sometimes there will be, and it is not something about which we -- or, in this instance, the Israelis -- can afford to be wrong.

In short, when the Israelis obliterated the reactor at Al Kibar, the reverberations of the blast also shattered a theology. If Obama is to make any headway at all on his quixotic pledge to secure all loose nuclear materials in the world in four years, he might begin by securing some more realistic nuclear advisors.

[Gabriel Schoenfeld is senior editor of Commentary magazine.](#)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/30/AR2008053002517.html>

Going Their Own Way in The Mideast

By David Ignatius

Sunday, June 1, 2008; Page B07 [Accessed 2008-05-31T11:55Z]

[EXCERPTS]

What happens when a superpower becomes preoccupied by a costly war and loses some of its ability to coerce friends and enemies toward the outcomes it favors? We're seeing a demonstration of that change now in the Middle East, as Arabs and even Israel reckon with the limits of American power -- and begin to cut their own deals.

[deletia]

The American-Israeli split on Syria has been widening for the past several years. One point of difference was what to do about the nuclear reactor the Syrians were secretly building at Al Kibar, in the northeastern desert, with help from North Korea. The Bush administration wanted to confront the Syrians last year with the intelligence and use the issue to pressure them to dismantle the facility. The Israelis decided they couldn't wait -- and bombed the suspected reactor site on Sept. 6.

The United States feared the Israeli attack might trigger a wider war and insisted on American-Israeli silence to avoid humiliating Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In the end, the Israelis were right in their prediction that Syria wouldn't retaliate. Instead, according to U.S. intelligence, the Syrians scrambled to hide traces of the reactor they had secretly been building.

http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_semper_tyranis/2008/06/a-visit-to-the.html#more

A visit to the Levant - Kieran

03 June 2008

Kieran sent me this letter account of his travels in the Levant some days ago and has today allowed me to post it. pl

Johnharvardstatue7_4

"Recently I had the opportunity to travel as part of a student-organized delegation of 30 Harvard graduate students (mostly from the Kennedy School, though I'm at the Center for Middle East Studies) to Lebanon and Syria. We met with most of the major players, with whom we engaged in generally quite freewheeling debate. I imagine that the kind of discussions we had were quite rare simply because students have a certain freedom (and allow a certain freedom to the other party) that politicians, diplomats, journalists, and certainly citizens of the countries concerned do not. We were also there at a very historic time for Lebanon (May 19 - June 1), just after the Doha agreement. I thought you might be interested in hearing a few of my impressions.

[deletia]

A couple of days later we travelled to Damascus to meet Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma in the visitors' palace on a mountain overlooking Damascus. Bashar spoke with us for three hours, all Q&A. He impressed the whole group with his willingness to actually answer the questions asked, his ability to provide logical defenses of his positions, his command of English, and his forward-looking mindset. A number of anti-Syrian Lebanese in the group walked away shaken by the experience. We were furthermore surprised that, in contrast to almost every other politician we met, we were not searched or put through any kind of physical screening. Only one (massive) bodyguard attended him and he seemed to be present more to pass the microphone around.

I asked him why he had not allowed the IAEA in to inspect the 'nuclear facility' in order to disprove US-Israeli allegations. He responded that there was no use - Saddam opened his sites up to inspectors but the US attacked anyway. He indicated that he does not believe in dignifying these kinds of allegations, or in setting the precedent of allowing weapons inspectors to run around his country. I told him I thought he underestimated the value of public relations - he was standing on a point of principle, but this would have real costs in terms of Syria's image in the media. He replied that he did not think so: the Western media would paint him as a bad guy in any case, and moreover in his view the key strategic decisions are taken without regard to public opinion (he again used the invasion of Iraq as an example).

Someone else asked him about his worst and best case scenarios for the region during the next 5 years. He said that the worst case scenario was a US or Israeli attack on Iran, which would have repercussions everywhere. The best case scenario was a US president committed to seeking peace accords with Syria and the Palestinians ("a genuine commitment, not like Annapolis"). I got the impression from this (and later from a sly 'yes we can' from his wife) that they saw a significant difference between Obama and McCain. Nonetheless, when explicitly asked about this, he replied that his country had learned to be skeptical of US campaign rhetoric.

As to the Syria-Israeli talks Assad said that the intention was genuine but that he doubted Olmert's ability to actually reach an agreement.

On Lebanon he was reluctant to discuss the details of Lebanese politics, though he was clearly pleased by the Doha agreement. He was ready to establish normal ties in principle (embassies and border demarcation) but sounded reluctant to do so with the government of Fuad al-Siniora. We (especially the Lebanese among us) pushed him hard on this issue, but it was not clear whether or not he appreciated the importance of Syria making a symbolic gesture of reconciliation. He considers Walid Jumblatt an enemy of the state.

The only point at which he became emotional was in discussing the regime's fight against Islamists during the early 80s, responding to a question about Hama. He talked about the various atrocities committed by the Islamists, then saying "what would you do with these people?"

When asked about Alawi dominance of key levers of power and the impact of that on political reform, he responded obliquely, talking about the new party law designed to end the Ba'ath Party's dominance of political life. When we pointed out that the problem was not just in the Party but in the military-security apparatus, his response became vaguer still. It was clear we were not getting anywhere on this issue.

Overall, Assad performed extremely well. Still, he could get off easy as the darker side of Syrian involvement in Lebanon is (somewhat) plausibly deniable. It struck me that one reason he may have consented to such an extended discussion in such a freewheeling format is practice for him in the hope of eventually making the transition to a more conventional or at least Western-style politician, giving press conferences and such.

After three hours his wife Asma showed up. If they were not in love it was a hell of a good act. After chatting informally for a bit and taking photos he left, and she sat in his place. She is beautiful, charming, and thoroughly English. She is also extremely intelligent and had a remarkable grasp of the minutiae of domestic social and economic policy that he himself did not exhibit. It occurred to me that a woman in her position may be in effect a second president. She discussed the importance of education as the key strategic domestic issue. She also mentioned that she was personally key in shaping the new companies law, which aims to shift the emphasis from the development of existing large enterprises to small and medium businesses, including startups.

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=syr&s=f&o=345148&apc_state=henh

Syria News Briefing

Syria home

“Nothing to Hide” From Nuclear Inspectors

(12-Jun-08)

Analysts in Syria insist the reason Damascus is allowing the United Nation’s atomic watchdog in for an inspection is that it has nothing to hide.

After several months’ delay, a delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, is to inspect a site at al-Kibar in northeastern Syria on June 22-24.

The Israeli air force bombed the al-Kibar site last September. In April, the United States said it believed al-Kibar was the site of a reactor plant that North Korea was helping to build for Syria.

Damascus insisted that the facility was an abandoned military building.

Most Syrians appear to believe their government’s assertion that it has no ambition to develop nuclear weapons, with analysts noting that Damascus is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has worked with the IAEA in the past.

The Syrian government argues that the US lacks credibility on nuclear issues since the claim that former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction proved untrue.

Many Syrians agree, and support their government’s argument that the international community should view Israel rather than Syria with suspicion.

“Syrians are not afraid of the IAEA’s inspections,” said an assistant professor at Damascus University.

“Israel hasn’t signed any non-proliferation international agreement or protocol for nuclear weapons. It has never allowed inspection of its nuclear institutions. Where is the logic in that? Syria is inspected on the basis of suspicions, whereas Israel has nuclear weapons but isn’t subject to inspection.”

Radwan Ziyadeh, an opposition member and a scholar at the US Institute of Peace, said while America may views Syria’s nuclear intentions with suspicion, this is not a matter of concern for the opposition.

“I don’t think any Syrian believe that Syria has a nuclear programme,” he said. “And secondly, I don’t believe that Syria has the capacity to build a nuclear programme.”

Some interviewees expressed fears that the United States was raising a red flag about Syria’s nuclear activities as a pretext for launching an attack.

A local activist who works on anti-globalisation issues claimed the US was “creating problems” in an effort to gain greater leverage over Damascus – perhaps to make it more cooperative on Iraq, or to compromise in the ongoing negotiations with Israel.

“If Syria was secretly hiding something from the IAEA, it wouldn’t have agreed to allow its sites to be inspected,” said the activist.

“I am afraid that the Iraqi scenario will be repeated and this [nuclear issue] will be used as a pretext to launch a war against the country. Yesterday, it was Iraq. Now it’s Syria and Iran. The US is trying to fabricate pretexts for controlling Middle Eastern countries. It won’t stop at inspecting suspected nuclear facilities; it goes much farther than that.”

Syria initially ignored IAEA requests to visit the site, raising suspicions that it was concealing illegal nuclear activities.

According to Ziyadeh, “It’s better for the Syrian government to deal with this issue with more transparency, because it builds its credibility domestically and externally.”

A western diplomat in Damascus, who did not want to be named, said, “Syria has to fully cooperate with the IAEA in order to refute international accusations that it has non-peaceful nuclear programmes, otherwise it will face problems with the international community.”

“Syria has the right to have peaceful nuclear programmes,” added the diplomat. “But they must be observed by the IAEA permanently and continually.”

IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei told the German magazine Der Spiegel that he expected "absolute transparency" from Syria, and that the IAEA delegation would demand visits to several other sites that might have supplied to al-Kibar. However, the Associated Press last week cited Arab diplomats as saying Damascus planned to give the inspectors access only to the destroyed facility.

In the interview, ElBaradei was critical of the Israeli attack on al-Kibar, saying,

"With unilateral military actions, countries are undermining international agreements, and we are at a historic turning point."

(Syria News Briefing, a weekly news analysis service, draws on information and opinion from a network of IWPR-trained Syrian journalists based in the country.)

FAIR - 21 hours ago [*Accessed 2008-06-18T14:00Z*]

Extra! December 2007

Coverage of Syria Airstrike

By Peter Hart

When an apparent airstrike by Israel against Syria on September 6 was eventually linked to accusations of a secret Syrian nuclear program, the striking thing about the often muddled reporting was how much the credulous reaction to unsubstantiated claims resembled the similarly uncritical reporting about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

When the airstrike was first disclosed, the New York Times (9/12/07) quoted an unnamed U.S. military official saying "it was still unclear exactly what the jets hit." The best guess from other unnamed officials was that the building housed "weapons caches" of arms from Iran, ultimately destined for Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon. Yet another U.S. official--who, like others, "spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing a military action by another government"--drew North Korea into the plot, suggesting it "might be unloading some of its nuclear material on Syria."

The following day's Washington Post (9/13/07) had a piece that further attempted to connect the alleged Syrian nuclear program to North Korea. Details on the air raid were still hard to come by; the Post could only point to one source who had heard the site was "capable of making unconventional weapons."

On September 15, the Post reported that "a prominent U.S. expert on the Middle East" had heard from Israeli officials "that the attack appears to have been linked to the arrival three days earlier of a ship carrying material from North Korea labeled as cement." The Post noted that the "emerging consensus in Israel was that it delivered nuclear equipment"--which was the emerging consensus in the media as well.

Soon these sketchy accounts began to take on a more definitive tone. The Post's editorial page noted (9/20/07) that "it's not clear whether U.S. intelligence agencies concur with Israel's conclusion, and independent experts have said that Syria lacks the resources for a credible nuclear weapons program." But the paper went on to conclude, "It nevertheless is beginning to look as if Israel may have carried out the boldest act of nuclear preemption since its own 1981 raid against Iraq's Osirak nuclear complex."

The next day the Post (9/21/07) was still more confident, leading a news piece with the declaration that Israel had attacked "a suspected nuclear site set up in apparent collaboration with North Korea." The main basis for the paper's increasing certainty seemed to be the growing assurance being expressed by anonymous U.S. officials.

An October 14 New York Times account that led with the conclusions of "American and foreign officials with access to the intelligence reports" gave readers a vital cue much further down: Dick

Cheney's office, we were told, was lobbying to use the Israeli strike as a pretext to abandon negotiating with North Korea. Indeed, many reports noted the push from hardliners inside and outside the Bush administration, but failed to connect the dots between their anonymous leaks and their pre-Iraq War strategy of hyping intelligence to bolster their political goals.

The New York Times (9/21/07) quoted an (of course) anonymous U.S. official saying that "the enormous secrecy around the findings, both here and in Israel, suggests that the activity that prompted the Israeli attack involved 'more than a run-of-the-mill missile transaction'"--as if not providing a rationale for your actions was somehow itself a rationale. NBC correspondent Martin Fletcher seemed to agree (9/21/07), saying that "Israel's keeping completely mum on the subject. Another example showing that it actually must be a much more serious issue this time than in the past."

Then came dramatic new visual evidence. On the October 19 broadcast of ABC World News, anchor Charles Gibson dubbed it "a story that could come right out of a Tom Clancy novel," with correspondent Martha Raddatz relying on an unnamed "senior U.S. official" who said that "based on the photographs and additional intelligence...the facility was a North Korean design because of its construction and the technology used." Raddatz relayed her source's supreme confidence: "The official I spoke to said, quote, 'It was unmistakable what it was going to be. There is no doubt in my mind.'" Seconds later, however, when Gibson asked why the administration has been so reluctant to speak on the record "if the intelligence was so clear," Raddatz responded: "Well, I think some in the administration felt it wasn't absolutely clear." The same could be said for such reporting.

More evidence came on October 24, when the Washington Post reported on satellite photos of the Syrian site analyzed by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS). The Post declared that "satellite imagery of the area shows buildings under construction roughly similar in design to a North Korean reactor capable of producing nuclear material for one bomb a year," and quoted ISIS analyst David Albright as saying he was "pretty convinced that Syria was trying to build a nuclear reactor."

The Post article did include some skeptics, but the situation was reminiscent of a similar attempt to prove via satellite photos that Iraq had an unconventional weapons program. Most media outlets took Colin Powell's February 2003 case against Iraq at face value; indeed, the very same David Albright declared on CNN (2/9/03) that Powell's presentation of satellite photos and the like was "compelling.... Based on looking at other things Iraq has done, you get the sense that Iraq never intended to comply." The fact that Albright had been so wrong about Iraq's weapons programs hardly seemed to factor into whether reporters should trust his analysis of Syria. (Albright would later say of the White House's chemical and biological weapons claims, "I just figured they were telling the truth"-- L.A. Times, 4/20/03)

Other parallels to the run-up to the Iraq War were still to come. On October 26, the New York Times noted that Syria had suspiciously cleaned up after the airstrike: "New commercial satellite photos show that a Syrian site that Israel bombed last month no longer bears any obvious traces of what analysts said appeared to have been a partly built nuclear reactor." While it's not hard to imagine various reasons why a country would clear away the debris left by a humiliating foreign airstrike, the clean-up was taken by some (including Albright) as an attempt by Syria to cover its tracks. The same reasoning was used by Powell to argue that any discernible activity near suspect buildings was evidence that Iraq was concealing its weapons programs.

The consensus was then more or less well-established: Syria was up to something suspicious, and thus Israel was wise to act. The legality of attacking another country on the basis of a hunch without even offering an explanation hardly factored into any of the media discussion of the attack.

But the next day's New York Times (10/27/07) would raise some doubts: Other satellite images showed the Syrian facility in question had been clearly visible as of September 2003, seemingly undercutting the notion that this was a new project of any sort. At this point, the story seemed to curiously fall off the media radar. A more aggressive and skeptical press--one that would want to show it had learned lessons from being burned by faulty intelligence before the Iraq invasion--would take this new evidence and run with it. Instead, they ran from it.

<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080624/FOREIGN/913247596/1002&profile=1002>

Nuclear or not, the damage has been done

Phil Sands, Foreign Correspondent

Last Updated: June 24. 2008 11:28PM UAE / June 24. 2008 7:28PM GMT

DAMASCUS // UN nuclear experts are due to leave Syria this evening after a three-day search for proof that Damascus has been running a secret nuclear programme. Did the International Atomic Energy Agency team find that evidence?

A cloak of silence has surrounded the matter in official circles. The IAEA made no comment while on the ground in Syria – in fact it has not even confirmed its presence in the country. Those details have come from other sources.

For their part, the Syrians have imposed a heavy media blackout. SANA, the state news agency, has not so much as hinted that UN inspections are under way, nor have any other government-run media organisations. Only one Syria-based newspaper has referred to the inspections at all – the privately owned al Watan, an Arabic daily.

The issue is so sensitive here that the authorities are taking no chances; best to publicly ignore it and hope it all quietly fades away.

Whether that actually happens depends on what the inspectors actually saw and what they will conclude in their September report.

There are three scenarios: the UN inspectors found conclusive evidence of a hidden nuclear programme; they found some inconclusive suggestions of a programme; or they found no evidence at all.

Syria insists vehemently it has no nuclear ambitions, no nuclear project and therefore that no legitimate evidence can possibly be found. If the IAEA agrees, Damascus will have renewed justification for believing it is unfairly persecuted by the United States, Israel and the international community.

Israeli bombers attacked the site of the alleged nuclear reactor last September, a unilateral pre-emptive strike on its neighbour. If Syria had launched a similar assault on Israel's up-and-running nuclear facilities – something that is politically unthinkable and probably physically impossible – the international uproar would have been huge, and the Middle East thrown into another, hotter-than-ever firestorm.

But Israel attacked Syria and so nothing much was said. If cleared by the UN team, Damascus will be able to claim the moral high ground and will doubtless mention – accurately – that it allowed the IAEA inspectors in, something that Israel, which neither denies nor admits it is armed with nuclear weapons, has never done.

The intelligence services and governments of the United States and Israel, both of which claim to have photographic evidence of a Syrian nuclear programme, would be unlikely to accept a finding of

innocence. The UN team was only given a few days on the ground, under tight Syrian supervision, and was refused access to some of the sites it wanted to inspect. Syria's enemies will say that is proof of a cover-up, that the failure to find fresh evidence is not the same as saying the evidence does not exist – just that the UN team was obstructed and unable to find it.

Those against Syria will also note that the UN atomic agency was not able to stop North Korea from developing and testing a nuclear bomb.

If the UN inspectors do say they have uncovered hard evidence of a nuclear programme, it will be devastating for Syria and its friends, and a gift to its enemies. It would in all likelihood trigger intense international pressure and harsh economic sanctions, as well as a wider probe into possible links between Syria, Iran and North Korea, the latter two having declared nuclear programmes.

The United States and Israel would claim conclusive justification that Syria was part of an “axis of evil” and Damascus would become further isolated from the West, moving into an ever-tighter alliance with Tehran. Prospects for peace with Israel would wither, as would prospects for gradual political reforms in Syria.

In the event of the IAEA saying it did find proof, Syria would continue to deny it had a nuclear programme and had fallen victim to set-up, would be able to say the Israeli bombers had dropped nuclear material during the attack – a smoking gun pushed into an innocent's hands. Or that the UN team was in the hands of foreign agents and was itself guilty of planting evidence.

Perhaps the most likely scenario is that the IAEA's September report will offer no conclusive, final proof of guilt or innocence. Inspectors may find things that do not add up to a nuclear reactor but which may imply one; perhaps traces of graphite of the type that is used in a nuclear plant. They would say they want to return to Syria to visit other sites to carry out more tests, that they need more time on the ground.

That will ensure the Syrian nuclear affair drags on. There will be more media discussion and speculation, more unnamed intelligence officials having their say, more late-night meetings in Vienna, Damascus, Washington, Jerusalem and Brussels about what to do and how to do it.

Syria can well do without this kind of drawn-out wrangle. Damascus already has a death-by-a-thousand cuts legal probe on its plate, the UN inquiry into the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister. Syria has been implicated in the murder – allegations hotly denied by the Syrian authorities.

A basic principle of justice is the presumption of innocence. The burden of proof is on the prosecution to prove its allegations, not on the defendant to prove those allegations are unfounded.

On that basis Syria must be considered innocent until such time as the IAEA says that, beyond all reasonable doubt, it did have an undeclared nuclear programme. The head of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, has already said it is unlikely such evidence can be found.

But under the US “war on terrorism”, such a legal principle has been eroded, even in legal systems such as those of the United States and United Kingdom, which supposedly pride themselves on being

dispassionate and scrupulously fair. If the presumption of innocence scarcely applies these days in the western judicial establishment, it certainly does not in the ugly world of geopolitics, intelligence agencies and trial by media.

The nuclear claims have put Syria in a difficult position and it is hard to see Damascus coming out of this matter in better shape than it went in. The Syrian authorities are canny political operators and they might come out on top. It will be a difficult struggle.

Nuclear mud has been thrown at Syria and some will have stuck. Rightly or wrongly, the innuendo will linger. Whatever the IAEA inspectors' findings, this week's inspection will not be the end of the affair.

psands@thenational.ae

A Surprise From Syria And Israel?

By David Ignatius

Wednesday, June 25, 2008; A13

[EXCERPTS]

What's going on between Syria and Israel? Are the indirect peace negotiations through Turkish mediators that were announced last month for real? I've been talking with sources on all sides, and they present an upbeat view of a peace process that has taken many people (including top Bush administration officials) by surprise.

As with any secret diplomatic initiative, this one is surrounded by mysteries and riddles. So I'll examine the Syria-Israel dialogue as a series of puzzles and offer my best guesses about what's happening:

[deletia]

(5) What about Syria's secret nuclear reactor, which was destroyed by the Israelis on Sept. 6, 2007?

Oddly enough, that attack on what CIA analysts called the "Enigma Building" may have helped the peace talks. The Israelis felt that their decisive action helped restore the credibility of their deterrence policy. The Syrians appreciated that Israeli and American silence allowed them time to cover their tracks. Finally, the fact that Assad kept the nuclear effort a secret, and that he managed the post-attack pressures, showed Israelis that he was truly master of his own house, and thus a plausible negotiating partner.

[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:H.R.6420:](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:H.R.6420)

110th CONGRESS
2d Session

H. R. 6420

To toll the congressional notification period for removing North Korea from the state sponsors of terrorism list.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 26, 2008

Mr. SHERMAN (for himself and Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Rules, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To toll the congressional notification period for removing North Korea from the state sponsors of terrorism list.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. REQUIREMENT TO TOLL CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION PERIOD FOR REMOVING NORTH KOREA FROM THE STATE SPONSORS OF TERRORISM LIST.

(a) Requirement-

(1) **IN GENERAL-** Beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the 45-day period referred to in the provisions of law described in paragraph (2) shall be tolled with respect to any rescission of the determination of the Secretary of State that the Government of North Korea has repeatedly provision support for acts of international terrorism pursuant to such provisions of law until the President certifies to Congress that North Korea meets the conditions described in subsection (b).

(2) **PROVISIONS OF LAW DESCRIBED-** The provisions of law referred to in paragraph (1) are section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2371), section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2780), and section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979 (50 U.S.C. App. 2405(j)).

(b) **Conditions Described-** The conditions referred to in subsection (a) are the following:

(1) The Government of North Korea has made a complete and verifiable declaration regarding the existence, number, and disposition of any assembled or partially assembled nuclear explosive devices.

(2) The Government of North Korea has made a complete and verifiable declaration regarding attempts to enrich uranium or develop the capability to do so.

(3) The Government of North Korea has made a complete and verifiable declaration regarding nuclear assistance provided to any other countries.

Cooling Tower Crumbles

That doesn't mean North Korea has decided to give up nuclear weapons.

Saturday, June 28, 2008; A14

THE 60-FOOT-HIGH cooling tower at North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor came tumbling down in a cloud of dust yesterday, producing a television picture that U.S. officials have been seeking for more than two years. The dramatic image was meant to convey the tangible results of a protracted and torturous diplomatic campaign to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons program and signal its irreversibility. In that sense there is less than met the eye. Yongbyon's shutdown is indisputably a positive development, and one that a U.S.-led coalition achieved at relatively modest cost. No longer will the facility add to a North Korean plutonium stockpile that already contained the raw material for at least eight bombs -- though the plant has not yet been dismantled beyond repair. Still, the goal of disarming North Korea, far from becoming inevitable, remains distant -- and the regime's repeated evasions, lies and failures to fulfill its promises strongly suggest that it has no intention of giving up its arms.

By the terms of the agreements it signed, North Korea should have supplied a full declaration of all its nuclear programs by the end of last year. Instead, the disclosure it handed over Thursday, six months late, does not acknowledge the uranium enrichment work it is known to have done -- the latest evidence for which turned up, in the form of radioactive traces, on some of the documents it handed over. It does not explain its export of a nuclear reactor to Syria, a clandestine crime that continued after President Bush declared proliferation activity by the North to be a "red line." It does not say how many bombs have been fabricated from the available plutonium, though the Bush administration originally demanded that that be part of the disclosure.

In exchange for its partial compliance, Kim Jong Il's regime will get everything promised it by the international coalition, including the equivalent of 1 million tons of fuel oil and removal from the U.S. list of terrorism sponsors. Though U.S. officials said the effect is largely symbolic, it is, at least, galling to public opinion in Japan, which is still seeking answers from Pyongyang about citizens who were kidnapped and forced to live in North Korea.

With only months left in office, Bush administration officials now intend to press ahead with a new phase of negotiations that would seek to establish a plan for North Korea to turn over its weapons and plutonium in exchange for far larger U.S. concessions. The talks will go forward despite the still-outstanding questions about the uranium program and proliferation to Syria. U.S. officials say they will seek answers as part of the verification of the recent declaration. But it's safe to predict that North Korea's refusal to cooperate will continue, since there has been no consequence for it so far. Rather than lunge for a last-minute deal, the Bush administration should focus on laying a foundation for the next administration. That means establishing a principle: North Korea will receive no further concessions until it discloses its nuclear activities -- including uranium enrichment, proliferation and bomb fabrication -- and those disclosures are verified.



Remarks With South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan
Secretary Condoleezza Rice
Seoul, Korea
June 28, 2008

[EXCERPT]

First of all, Mr. Lee Woo-tak, please go ahead with your question.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) Yes, I am from Yonhap News. My name is Lee

Woo-tak. Welcome for your – this – the current visit to Korea. I have some questions for you, Secretary of State Rice.

North Korea has made the submission of declaration and within this declaration, we have a list of the plutonium extraction-related information. However, we don't have any information concerning the nuclear weapons and materials. There are also some suspicions about the spread of nuclear proliferation to Syria as well, as well as the UEP issue. So for those issues and verifying those issues, how do you plan to proceed with that? That's my first question.

And when we go into the third phase, then the nuclear weapons or materials that are possessed by North Korea, how it is going to be sent out of the country will be an issue. So from that perspective, does the U.S. have any plans to, for example, purchase those materials and weapons and take them out of North Korea?

And lastly, I think there are many people who are expecting you to visit North Korea. You have already mentioned that this is not the time yet. However, what do you believe will be the appropriate conditions for you to visit North Korea?

My last question is for Foreign Minister Yu. Currently, concerning the submission of declaration by North Korea as well as the destruction of the cooling tower, I think that there are some who criticize about how the verification process may lack the participation of Korea. So how will Korea be able to activate a participation in that verification process? There are some cost issues involved as well as the need to acquire the specialists and experts. And is the Korean Government willing to pay for that?

SECRETARY RICE: Let me begin by saying that we consider the verification process that is about to begin to be one that is a six-party verification process and in which all parties need to be actively engaged. And in fact, the Foreign Minister and I had an extensive discussion about moving forward on verification. We are looking forward to the discussions about how the verification protocol will be carried out.

In fact, on the weapons and other related nuclear programs and materials, it is fully understood that in order to have abandonment of weapons and materials, one also has to have an accounting of them. Now the phase that we've just gone through in which the North Koreans have made a declaration about the amount of plutonium produced and in which they have given representations of a willingness to have that number verified through access to the reactor, through documents that we do have in hand, it is a natural step to know how much plutonium was made as one moves to understanding what has happened with weaponization. But I want to assure everyone that in this next phase, we do have to move on abandonment. That is the purpose of the six-party talks and that is what was agreed in the September 2005 statement.

As to the other elements, the proliferation and the HEU program, it is – there are documents that are referred to in the declaration concerning those two issues, HEU and proliferation. I have said before and I will say again that thus far, we don't have the answers that we need about either. But I expect that the North will live up to the obligation that it's undertaken to take those concerns seriously and to address them. And so at the end of this – let me just emphasize, again, at the end of this, we have to have the abandonment of all programs, weapons, and materials.

Dick Cheney 'tried to block North Korea nuclear deal'

By Philip Sherwell in New York

Last updated: 6:51 PM BST 28/06/2008

[EXCERPT]

Vice President Dick Cheney fought furiously to block efforts by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to strike a controversial US compromise deal with North Korea over the communist state's nuclear programme, the Telegraph has learned.

"The exchanges between Cheney's office and Rice's people at State got very testy. But ultimately Condi had the President's ear and persuaded him that his legacy would be stronger if they reached a deal with Pyongyang," said a Pentagon adviser who was briefed on the battle.

Mr Cheney's office is believed to have played a key role in the release two months ago of documents and photographs linking North Korea to a suspected nuclear site in Syria that was bombed by Israeli jets last year.

Six months later than promised, Pyongyang last week handed over details to China of its plutonium stocks and invited US officials to witness the symbolic destruction of an already disabled cooling tower at its Yongbyon plutonium plant.

But the declaration gave no information about its programme to enrich uranium or its sharing of nuclear technology with other rogue states - two demands that Washington had previously insisted were non-negotiable if a deal was to be reached.

[deletia]

North Korea nuclear deal with US 'like police truce with Mafia'

By John Bolton

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For most Europeans, President Bush's second-term North Korea policy is a welcome relief from his earlier unilateralist cowboy-ism. Recent photos of the Yongbyon reactor's cooling tower collapsing are soothing evidence that Washington's foreign-policy establishment has reasserted itself. Can direct US negotiations with Iran be far behind? In fact, what is collapsing is not the North's nuclear program but President Bush's foreign policy. North Korea has violated every significant agreement ever reached with the United States, and all indications are that the North is again following its traditional game plan. It is quite adept at pledging to give up its nuclear programme, having done so several times in the past fifteen years. Not once, however, has it actually taken decisive steps to do so. Indeed, quite the opposite.

Almost from the moment the North signed the 1994 Agreed Framework, it set about violating it, seeking to offset the loss of plutonium produced in Yongbyon's spent fuel by pursuing uranium enrichment, the alternate route to nuclear weapons. Only when America uncovered decisive proof that North Korea had embarked on a production-scope procurement effort for an enrichment program was that ruse broken. The North initially admitted to the enrichment program, but now firmly denies it. In fact, the evidence suggests the enrichment programme is still underway.

Much fanfare heralded the North's handover of 18,000 pages of documents on Yongbyon's operation, but those very documents are contaminated by particles of highly enriched uranium, probably from that enrichment program the North never had. Equally telling is that these records are incomplete and, given the North's economy in the truthfulness department, quite possibly fraudulent. Gaps in the records preclude determining how much plutonium Yongbyon has produced during its lifetime, a critical issue in estimating how many nuclear weapons the North has.

The only real progress in de-nuclearising North Korea came via Israel's air force last September 6, when it pulverized a nearly-completed clone of Yongbyon on the banks of the Euphrates River in Syria. While the reactor is history, we still lack its vital details, most notably its likely customers. Was this a straight sale to Syria from the North, or was it in fact a North Korean reactor sitting on leased Syrian territory? Or was it a joint venture, perhaps with Iranian cooperation and financing? Iran has the same incentive as North Korea to hide its nuclear activities from prying international eyes, and what better place to hide than a place no one was looking? Or so they thought, until Israeli strike aircraft flattened the Yongbyon twin.

The world's nuclear proliferators are nothing if not determined. For them, diplomacy is not intended to solve common problems, but a very effective way to string along guileless Westerners, thus buying more valuable time to achieve their proliferation objectives. Iran has most graphically demonstrated this by using over five years of negotiations with Britain, France and Germany to perfect the critical nuclear technologies of uranium conversion and enrichment. As one keen observer put it, negotiating with Iran or North Korea is like the police sitting down with the Mafia to discuss their common interest in law-enforcement. President Bush's North Korea deal reflects the Administration's lame-duck status. Europeans appear overwhelmingly to favour the election this November of Senator Obama, in many

respects because his foreign policy is so congenial to their tastes. It may be comforting now to think that the unilateralist cowboys are about to retire to their ranches. It will be less so when we are all confronted, as we will be inevitably, with the continuing reality of Iranian, North Korean -- and other -- nuclear weapons programs.

John Bolton is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. He is most recently the author of *Surrender Is Not an Option* (Simon & Schuster/Threshold Editions).

Israel's Airstrike on Syria's Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime

Leonard S. Spector and Avner Cohen

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On September 6, 2007, in a surprise dawn attack, seven Israeli warplanes destroyed an industrial facility near al-Kibar, Syria, later identified by the CIA as a nearly completed nuclear reactor secretly under construction since 2001.[1]

According to the CIA, the unit was built with North Korean assistance and was modeled on one used by North Korea to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

The CIA declared that it had only "low confidence" that Syria was pursuing a nuclear weapons program, however, because the agency had not unearthed evidence of other key facilities that would be needed for such an effort, in particular a plant to fabricate fuel for the reactor and one to extract weapons-usable plutonium from its spent nuclear fuel. Nonetheless, the CIA acknowledged that the reactor was not suited for the production of electricity or for nuclear research, leaving little room for doubt that the unit was intended to produce plutonium for nuclear arms. Although the location of the plant would strongly indicate that it was part of a secret Syrian nuclear weapons program, a recent story in the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, suggests another possibility: the article cites "intelligence documents" as indicating that the unit was in fact part of a multinational nuclear weapons effort led by Iran, in which Syria and North Korea were collaborating.[2] Both Syria and Iran are non-nuclear-weapon states-parties to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which prohibits such parties from developing and producing nuclear weapons.

What was particularly notable about this attack was what occurred afterward: the near total lack of international comment or criticism of Israel's action. The lack of reaction contrasted starkly to the international outcry that followed Israel's preventive strike in 1981 that destroyed Iraq's Osiraq reactor. To be sure, foreign governments may have reserved comment because of the lack of information after the attack. The Israeli and U.S. governments imposed virtually total news blackouts immediately after the raid that held for seven months, and Syria was initially silent on the matter and then subsequently denied that the bombed target was a nuclear facility. Yet, the international silence continued even after the CIA on April 24, 2008, provided a 12-minute video and an extensive briefing that made a strong case that the target was a North Korean-built reactor designed for producing weapons-usable plutonium.

Was the international community tacitly condoning the 2007 Israeli raid even though it appeared that the Syrian reactor did not pose an imminent threat to Israel, the sole justification under international law for the anticipatory use of military force?[3] Were foreign governments, cognizant that the UN Security Council had been unable to halt Iran's continuing development of previously undeclared sensitive nuclear facilities, tacitly endorsing Israel's decision not to invoke the diplomatic tools at its disposal, such as demanding an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigation of the site, another traditional prerequisite to the anticipatory use of force?

With the case still unfolding, it is premature to draw firm conclusions about its meaning for the future of global nonproliferation efforts, but two issues will bear close watching. Has confidence in the enforcement of nonproliferation norms eroded to the point that the international community is prepared to accept more readily than in the past the preventive use of force to suppress suspected nuclear weapons programs in certain narrowly defined cases? If so, what does this augur for the future use of military force to arrest Iran's weapons-relevant nuclear activities?

Contrasting Reactions: Osiraq versus al-Kibar

On June 7, 1981, minutes before sunset, eight Israeli F-16 jet fighters in a surprise raid dropped 16 tons of high explosives on the French-supplied, nearly completed Osiraq research nuclear reactor in Tuwaitha, Iraq's main nuclear center, some 26 kilometers southeast of Baghdad. Two days later, in a dramatic press conference in Tel Aviv, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin took full responsibility for the operation, praised its execution as extraordinary, and justified it both on moral and legal grounds. Begin referred to the strike as an act of "anticipatory self-defense at its best." [4]

The message that Begin conveyed was that the raid on Osiraq was not a one-time operation but rather a long-term national commitment. He ended his press conference with these dramatic words:

We chose this moment: now, not later, because later may be too late, perhaps forever. And if we stood by idly, two, three years, at the most four years, and Saddam Hussein would have produced his three, four, five bombs.... Then, this country and this people would have been lost, after the Holocaust. Another Holocaust would have happened in the history of the Jewish people. Never again, never again! Tell so your friends, tell anyone you meet, we shall defend our people with all the means at our disposal. We shall not allow any enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction turned against us. [5]

A few days later, in a CBS News television interview, Begin reiterated this doctrinal point: "This attack will be a precedent for every future government in Israel.... [E]very future Israeli prime minister will act, in similar circumstances, in the same way." [6]

The international community did not share Begin's view. On the contrary, the Israeli raid against a declared nuclear facility belonging to an NPT signatory state in good standing met with near-universal condemnation. Within two days, the surprised Reagan White House suspended the delivery of F-16 warplanes to Israel (the suspension was cancelled two months later). [7]

If the U.S. reaction, especially in Congress, was somewhat ambivalent, the worldwide reaction from Moscow to Paris was blunt and strongly disapproving. In the UN Security Council, after a week marked by some 40 speeches all fiercely critical of Israel's action, a tough seven-point resolution, which "strongly condemned" Israel for the strike against Osiraq, was unanimously approved. [8] The resolution characterized the Israeli action as a "clear violation of the UN charter and the norms of international conduct" and admonished Israel to refrain in the future from similar actions. Defending the right of Iraq to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, the resolution urged Israel to accept IAEA inspections on all its nuclear facilities (a step that would force Israel to eliminate its widely assumed nuclear arsenal) and concluded by recognizing Iraq's right to "appropriate redress."

The IAEA Board of Governors was equally condemnatory, repeating the Security Council demand that Israel place its nuclear facilities under agency safeguards and warning that Israel might be expelled from the agency if it declined to do so. Finally, on November 10, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution harshly critical of the Israeli attack on Osiraq, with 109 states voting in favor, 34 states abstaining, and only Israel and the United States voting against the measure.

More than a quarter century later, however, after Israel's similar raid on the al-Kibar reactor, the international repercussions were strikingly different. This time, Israel said nothing after the attack and imposed a tight and unprecedented news blackout on the Israeli press regarding the episode. The Bush administration, which apparently consulted with Israel on its concerns about the site before the attack, was also mute and ordered U.S. officials not to discuss the matter. Although several articles in the U.S. media reported that the Syrian installation was a nuclear facility of some kind, there was no official confirmation of such speculation in Jerusalem or Washington until the CIA release of information in April 2008.[9]

Syria said very little as well. Initially, Syria complained only that Israeli aircraft had violated its airspace and dropped some explosive charges in a remote, desolate area, but Damascus went no further. [10] Two weeks later, Syrian President Bashar Assad confirmed in an interview with the BBC that a Syrian military facility under construction was attacked by Israel but provided no details.[11] At the time, Syria (with North Korean help, according to the CIA) was razing the remnants of the al-Kibar facility, in an apparent effort to remove any remaining evidence of the nature of the installation. Within weeks, a new facility was erected, covering the location of the former reactor.

In subsequent statements, Syrian officials categorically denied that the country was building a covert nuclear facility at the site of the Israeli attack.[12] In early June 2008, Syria agreed to an inspection of the site by an IAEA team, to be dispatched later in the month. With Syria having razed the remnants of the facility and built a new structure in its place, it was not clear whether IAEA inspectors would be able to confirm that the site originally housed a reactor. Nor was it clear whether Damascus would grant IAEA monitors access to other undeclared sites that might house the still unidentified fuel fabrication and reprocessing plants that would be needed for a nuclear weapons program.

In a stunning contrast with developments in 1981, no Arab government commented on the Israeli raid, much less pressed for retaliation against Israel, diplomatic or otherwise. The Egyptian Al-Ahram Weekly characterized the state of affairs as the "synchronized silence of the Arab world." [13] The restraint may have reflected the fact that many Arab governments were not displeased that a possible clandestine Syrian nuclear weapons effort had been dealt a serious setback. Iran, Syria's closest ally, also remained largely silent on the issue (possibly to avoid calling attention to itself, if it was, indeed, helping to build the facility). Surprisingly, given that virtually nothing was known publicly about al-Kibar at the time, North Korea strongly condemned the Israeli attack, the only state to do so.[14] Some in the Western press took this as evidence that North Korean nationals were involved in the project and may have been injured in the Israeli attack.[15]

Similarly, the matter was not brought up for debate at the UN Security Council. Nor did the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, which deals with disarmament and international security, address the attack and Syria's possible violation of its NPT pledges at its meetings, held from October 8 to November 2, 2007.

Perhaps more importantly, this pattern of silence continued after the CIA video and briefings were published on April 24, 2008, which disclosed that Israel had attacked what the U.S. intelligence agency alleged was a Syrian nuclear reactor in a preventive strike. To be sure, IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei issued a disapproving statement on April 25. The statement deplored the fact that the United States and Israel had not provided information to the IAEA “in a timely manner, in accordance with the agency’s responsibilities under the [NPT] to enable it to verify its veracity and establish the facts.” It went on to declare that “the director general views the unilateral use of force by Israel as undermining the due process of verification that is at the heart of the nonproliferation regime.”[16] Although expressing concern about the impact of the Israeli strike on the NPT and the IAEA, ElBaradei’s statement did not directly challenge Israel’s exercise of a right to anticipatory self-defense in this case, in sharp contrast to the findings in 1981 of the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, and the IAEA Board of Governors regarding the Osiraq raid.

Indeed, the Security Council, the body that in 1981 had unanimously condemned Israel’s raid as contrary to the UN Charter and “to norms of international conduct,” had an obvious opportunity to debate the matter at its meeting on April 25. At that session, it addressed a major nonproliferation issue, whether to extend the mandate of the council’s committee to oversee implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540. The resolution calls on all UN member states to establish domestic controls and adopt legislation to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Yet, according to the official summary of the debate on the matter, neither the Israeli attack nor Syria’s secret nuclear activities was mentioned.[17]

The Israeli attack also was not criticized at recent international meetings held in Geneva from April 28 to May 9 to prepare for the 2010 NPT Review Conference.[18] Presumably to avoid calling attention to its own alleged misconduct, even Syria did not raise a complaint about Israel’s airstrike in its official statement to the forum but focused instead on the traditional Arab state criticism of Israel for blocking the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East and of the nuclear-weapon states for not making better progress toward disarmament.[19] A number of other Arab states also called for universal adherence to the NPT, the indirect language commonly used to press Israel to renounce its nuclear weapons and join the pact, but again these familiar calls were made without reference to the September 6 airstrike.[20] The United States and Canada complained openly about North Korea assistance to Syria and to Syria’s noncompliance with its obligations under the NPT and under its safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Both states not only declined to criticize Israel, but they did not even mention that Israel had attacked the site.[21]

At the recent meeting of IAEA Board of Governors in early June, ElBaradei declared in his opening remarks, “It is deeply regrettable that information concerning this installation was not provided to the Agency in a timely manner and that force was resorted to unilaterally before the Agency was given an opportunity to establish the facts, in accordance with its responsibilities under the NPT and Syria’s Safeguards Agreement.” He went on to stress, however, that “Syria, like all States with comprehensive safeguards agreements, has an obligation to report the planning and construction of any nuclear facility to the Agency. We are therefore treating this information with the seriousness it deserves,” noting that an IAEA inspection team would visit Syria June 22-24, 2008.[22] Nonetheless, the IAEA’s official summary of the meeting does not indicate that the matter was further debated, a silence on the matter that at least one official present confirmed.[23]

Bush Doctrine

Adding to the difficulties of understanding the implications of this case is the Bush doctrine, articulated in the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy.[24] The traditionally accepted justification for the use of force in the absence of actual aggression was established in 1837 in a U.S.-British controversy known as the Caroline case, which permitted a state to use appropriate military force when not under attack only in case of necessity, “where the attack was imminent and only forcible action could forestall such attack.”[25]

The Bush doctrine sought to expand this definition to justify pre-emptive military action. Highlighting the catastrophic destructive potential of weapons of mass destruction, the readiness of international terrorist groups and isolated leaders of anti-status quo states to use them, and the ease of concealing such weapons, the doctrine declared that “[t]he greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”[26]

Then-national security adviser Condoleezza Rice expanded on the new doctrine in an address shortly after the release of the National Security Strategy.

The National Security Strategy does not overturn five decades of doctrine and jettison either containment or deterrence. These strategic concepts can and will continue to be employed where appropriate. But some threats are so potentially catastrophic—and can arrive with so little warning, by means that are untraceable—that they cannot be contained. Extremists who seem to view suicide as a sacrament are unlikely to ever be deterred. And new technology requires new thinking about when a threat actually becomes “imminent.” So as a matter of common sense, the United States must be prepared to take action, when necessary, before threats have fully materialized.

But this approach must be treated with great caution. The number of cases in which it might be justified will always be small. It does not give a green light—to the United States or any other nation—to act first without exhausting other means, including diplomacy. Preemptive action does not come at the beginning of a long chain of effort. The threat must be very grave. And the risks of waiting must far outweigh the risks of action.[27]

The National Security Strategy sparked immediate controversy, in part because it was articulated by the world’s sole superpower and by an administration with a reputation for acting unilaterally and seemingly eager to advance U.S. interests through the use of military force, particularly in the then-looming confrontation with Iraq.[28] The Bush doctrine misfired badly in Iraq, where the U.S.-led intervention was justified as essential to destroy Saddam Hussein’s WMD programs, which were later found not to exist. Nonetheless, the underlying rationale for modifying the norms governing anticipatory self-defense to confront nascent nuclear weapons programs has gained a degree of recognition within the U.S. policy community, even among some who have criticized the Bush administration for its assertive projection of U.S. military might.[29] Internationally, however, the doctrine has remained the target of strong criticism.[30]

Israel’s strike on al-Kibar in September 2007 was, in effect, a clear application of this internationally disfavored doctrine. Given that the al-Kibar reactor had not started to operate and, according to the

CIA, Syria's fuel fabrication and reprocessing facilities had not been discovered and might not yet have been completed, Syria was unquestionably some time away from producing fissile material for nuclear weapons and still further from producing the weapons themselves. Thus, few could argue that Israel met the traditional necessity/imminence standard in the case of the al-Kibar reactor strike. (The same would be true if the reactor was, in fact, part of an Iranian nuclear weapon program.) Moreover, Israel bypassed a key restraint enumerated by Rice, in that Israel did not exhaust or apparently ever initiate other diplomatic means for dealing with this threat. Yet, even then, the international community refrained from condemning the Israeli attack.

Explaining the Silence

What can account for this reaction, now that the major details of the episode have begun to emerge? One senior Middle Eastern diplomat, Egyptian Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, said at a June 2008 forum in Washington that governments in the region had refrained from commenting because so little authoritative information was originally provided officially by the governments involved. He added that the episode had also been overshadowed by other events in the region and that governments would be more likely to speak to the issue once the IAEA had completed its initial investigation of the incident. Yet, the reasons behind the international silence appear to be considerably more complex and could indicate a broader concern about the underlying weakness of the NPT regime.

Regional politics have certainly played a role. An isolated state with close ties to Iran, Syria is perceived as a disruptive influence in the region, even within the Arab community, making it a decidedly less sympathetic victim of Israeli pre-emption than Iraq in 1981. Also, the specific details of the al-Kibar case itself, coupled with the as yet ineffective efforts to enforce the NPT in the case of Iran, have undoubtedly influenced thinking in foreign capitals.

In contrast to the Osiraq reactor, which was openly purchased from France, declared, and subject to IAEA monitoring, the Syrian reactor was secretly built with North Korean aid, undeclared, deliberately concealed, and not subject to IAEA safeguards. These differences in themselves made the Syrian reactor, once revealed, immediately suspect and lent an element of credibility to Israel's underlying concerns about the installation. The physical characteristics of the al-Kibar reactor reinforce these points. The Osiraq reactor was appropriately sized and designed for nuclear research; only by a complex scheme of emplacing and removing uranium targets around its core between IAEA inspections could it have been used to secretly produce plutonium for weapons. Al-Kibar, in contrast, was modeled on a reactor specifically designed to produce plutonium for nuclear arms, immediately creating an additional cause for suspicion and concern.

At the same time, Israel's principal diplomatic option for eliminating the risk posed by the facility—seeking an IAEA investigation, possibly leading to UN Security Council action—hardly appeared promising. Israel has never placed trust in international organizations to guarantee its security, particularly in cases where its very existence may be at stake. Indeed, this is the philosophy behind the 1981 Begin doctrine. In recent years, as international nonproliferation enforcement efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program have escalated from IAEA demands to UN Security Council sanctions, Israel has grappled with the profound dilemma of deciding how long it can rely on these efforts before reverting to the Begin doctrine.

By the time of the al-Kibar raid, the Security Council had adopted two resolutions demanding that Iran cease its uranium-enrichment and plutonium-production-related activities and had imposed sanctions against Iran until it did so. Iran has defied these measures, however, as well as demands from the IAEA that it provide a full explanation of evidence that it conducted work on nuclear weapons at least through early 2004.[31] Meanwhile, Tehran significantly expanded its uranium-enrichment capabilities and indicated its intent to continue doing so, in effect bringing it ever closer to the ability to produce material for nuclear weapons. (On April 25, 2008, the council adopted a third sanctions resolution seeking to halt the sensitive elements of the Iranian nuclear program, Resolution 1803.)

Given this history, had Israel brought the matter to the IAEA, Israel would have had reason to fear that Syria would have followed the Iranian example: stalling for time, delaying inspections, removing evidence, asserting (however falsely) that the site was peaceful in nature, and claiming that it had disguised the unit in order to protect it from possible attack. Moreover, for Israel to have approached the agency might have required it to compromise intelligence about the al-Kibar site and would certainly have led Syria to heavily protect the facility, potentially constraining Israel's option to destroy the reactor if IAEA inspections and other diplomatic measures failed to prevent its operation. Once it was operating, Israel would have been further constrained because destroying the facility could have created significant radiological fallout.

It probably would be an overstatement to interpret the international silence on the al-Kibar attack as constituting tacit endorsement that diplomatic mechanisms for enforcing the nonproliferation regime have proven ineffective and that threatened states have a right to preventively attack clandestine foreign nuclear facilities. Silence is a convenient, noncommittal reaction that avoids the need for a government to openly take sides in a potentially incendiary international controversy. Nonetheless, the persistence of the silence suggests that states are becoming increasingly concerned about the weakness of the nonproliferation regime in enforcing its norms and, therefore, cautiously more tolerant of an affected state using force preventively, beyond the classic rule limiting anticipatory self-defense to cases where a threat is imminent.[32]

Impact on Nonproliferation

If the international response was indeed an unspoken expression of anxiety about current regime enforcement mechanisms, the most important means to begin to restore confidence in the regime is for the IAEA and the Security Council to act decisively to address the Iranian nuclear program. In its most recent report, the IAEA appears to be intensifying its pressure on Tehran, but the Security Council seems incapable of decisive action because of Chinese and Russian reluctance to impose strong sanctions against Iran. The international response to the Israeli attack should be taken as a clear rebuke for their hesitancy.

After all, Iran pursued a clandestine uranium-enrichment program for some 18 years, with secret support from the Abdul Qadeer Khan nuclear smuggling network, behavior not unlike Syria's pursuit of the al-Kibar project. Even after placing all of its known nuclear facilities under IAEA inspection, Tehran continues to bring new suspicions on the program. Since 2005, for example, Tehran has rescinded expanded authority it had previously granted the IAEA to conduct inspections on its territory. Moreover, according to U.S. intelligence estimates and documents now in the hands of the IAEA, Iran pursued work specifically on nuclear weapons at least through early 2004, including development of a nuclear warhead for its intermediate-range Shahab-3 missile. As recently reported by the IAEA, Iran

has refused to acknowledge or explain this earlier work and has denied the agency the access necessary to confirm that Iran is not currently engaging in any nuclear weapons research or clandestine fissile material production activities.[33]

These are the principal underlying reasons the UN Security Council has demanded, inter alia, that Iran cease all enrichment activities. At the same time, the response to the Syria attack is far from a clear precedent implicitly endorsing the use of military force against the Iranian nuclear program. The cases are not identical. The council has imposed sanctions against Iran under Article 41 of the UN Charter, which excludes the use of military force to implement Security Council mandates. Thus, the al-Kibar strike, even if seen as tacitly expanding the right of preventive attacks against clandestine nuclear programs, can hardly be said to provide Israel or any other state with a green light for attacking threatening nuclear installations in Iran.

Moreover, from an operational military perspective, there is a huge difference between the ability (especially for Israel) to conduct a successful strike against a single, ground-level reactor in nearby Syria and the ability to destroy the dozen or so major nuclear weapons-relevant components of a much larger nuclear program in distant Iran, including Iran's underground, heavily shielded enrichment facility at Natanz. These are two radically different military missions. Moreover, with allies in Iraq, southern Lebanon, and Gaza, as well as missiles able to reach Israel, Iran would have a wide range of retaliatory measures at its disposal. Thus even if international quiescence regarding the al-Kibar attack might provide a political opening for striking Iran, military realities would make this a very dangerous and daunting effort. Nonetheless, with the recent war of words between Iranian officials, threatening to "erase" Israel and declaring that it will soon disappear, and one potential Israeli candidate for prime minister, Shaul Mofaz, declaring that military strikes to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons looked "unavoidable," this option cannot be ruled out.[34]

Although other senior Israeli officials criticized Mofaz's declaration as reckless and driven by domestic considerations, only days before he spoke Israel carried out a major military exercise involving over 100 jet fighters and refueling tankers, apparently intended to rehearse the execution of long-range strikes. Some U.S. officials characterized the maneuvers as a warning to Iran.[35] Moreover, if the Der Spiegel report is accurate and Iran was the hidden hand behind al-Kibar, Israel's attack against Iran's nuclear weapon program may have already begun.

Finally, as analysts consider the lasting impact of the al-Kibar attack, some may criticize it as a challenge to the treaty- and inspection-based nonproliferation regime. Although it is still too early to predict the lasting normative legacy of the Israeli action on al-Kibar, the difference in international attitudes between 1981 (Osiraq) and 2007-2008 (al-Kibar and subsequent release of information about the attack) is unmistakable. One explanation may be that in the intervening years, the gross violations of nonproliferation regime compliance rules by Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—all NPT non-nuclear weapon state parties—have altered thinking regarding the legitimacy of unilateral preventive action, at least in cases of undeclared nuclear facilities that are apparently oriented towards the production of weapons.

There may also be a growing appreciation in the international community that military action can sometimes complement and reinforce the regime. Military modalities, such as alliances and security assurances, have traditionally played a supporting role in reducing the motivations of states to go nuclear, but it appears that since the first Gulf War there may be an increased recognition that, in some

cases, military action or the threat of such action may also play a more direct role in halting violations of the regime compliance rules. This was the case in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, which, with the subsequent work of the UN Special Commission, eliminated Saddam Hussein's WMD programs; with the threat of military intervention against North Korea in the early 1990s, which facilitated the freeze of Pyongyang's plutonium program under the 1994 Agreed Framework; and with the enforcement of the inspection requirements in UN Security Council Resolution 687 in Iraq through the threat of invasion in 2002-2003.

Conclusion

Although many details about this incident are yet to be revealed, it is already evident that its reverberations challenging the efficacy of the classic nonproliferation regime and potentially expanding the rights of states to intervene against clandestine nuclear programs in their early stages appear inevitable. Effective investigations by the IAEA in Syria, perhaps unearthing still undiscovered clandestine facilities, and significantly intensified efforts by the agency and the Security Council in addressing the Iranian threat could do much to help restore the regime's integrity and need to be urgently pursued. [Click here to comment on this article.](#)

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19. In a sentence that undoubtedly raised diplomats' eyebrows but did not elicit comment, the Syrian delegate also declared that "Syria reaffirms its continual commitment to its international obligations under the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons." "Statement of Dr. Faysal Hamoui, Second Preparatory Committee of the 2010 Review Conference of States Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons," April 29, 2008.
20. See "General Statement of Egypt to the Second Preparatory Committee of the 2010 NPT Review Conference," April 28, 2008.
21. Christopher A. Ford, "Cluster Two – Nonproliferation: Facing Up to the Most Fundamental Challenge to the NPT," Remarks at the 2nd Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, May 5, 2008. Statement by Colleen Swords Assistant Deputy Minister, International Security Branch and Political Director Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2008 NPT Preparatory Committee, April 28, 2008, http://www.international.gc.ca/canada_un/geneva/2008-04-28-en.asp Under Syria's safeguards agreement, Damascus was obligated to declare any new facility to the agency "as soon as the decision to construct" or "authorize construction" of a new facility were taken. "Strengthening

Bush's North Korea Decision Twists the Partisan Divide

By Matt Korade, CQ Staff

CQ HOMELAND SECURITY

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What some are hailing as a largely symbolic gesture by the Bush administration toward North Korea has a political mix of lawmakers in Congress plotting opposition.

In a partisan twist, Democrats on key committees are cautiously supportive of the administration's decision to ease trade sanctions on North Korea and remove it from the terrorism blacklist in return for information on its nuclear programs.

Republicans, on the other hand, have been joined by hawkish counterparts across the aisle in publicly and privately expressing outrage.

In a statement, California Democrat Howard L. Berman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called the agreement "encouraging."

The Bush administration, he said, "has wisely chosen to assess Pyongyang's sincerity" in moving forward with verifying North Korea's nuclear program disclosures."

"You can be sure Congress will also closely monitor North Korea's actions. For now, the ball is squarely in Pyongyang's court," he said.

Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement it was not clear to him why the administration would choose to lift sanctions on Kim Jong Il's regime just weeks after publicly confirming North Korea's assistance in developing a covert nuclear reactor in Syria — and while the press was reporting the regime may also have a covert uranium enrichment program.

Information compromising North Korea's credibility reached his committee just hours after the president's announcement, he said. "I intend to work with my colleagues over the next 45 days to examine whether the Congress should intercede and block the president from removing North Korea from the state sponsors of terror list."

The ranking Republican on Reyes' panel, Peter Hoekstra of Michigan, had even harsher words for Bush.

"A decision seemingly has been made that it is more important for the White House to reach a legacy agreement than to get to the bottom of North Korea's nuclear efforts," he said in a statement. "The administration has repeatedly delayed briefing Congress on North Korean proliferation because it knows any deal reached would not likely survive the scrutiny of Congress. It has never sought to hold North Korea accountable for its nuclear weapons test, its known nuclear proliferation activities or its willingness to sell arms to any nation or group that can pay."

The most vocal opponents may be Reps. Brad Sherman , D-Calif., and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen , R-Fla.

Sherman, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights, has introduced — with Ros-Lehtinen as a cosponsor — legislation (HR 6420) that would effectively halt the deal until Pyongyang releases the complete details of its nuclear programs. The two were sharply critical of the deal announced June 26.

“The president has caved, he’s desperate to tell voters that the Republicans have accomplished something, and even more desperate to get something good in the history books, and he just took whatever they could get out of North Korea, which is pitiful, as far as a declaration,” Sherman said. Bush’s North Korea Decision Twists the Partisan Divide

The declaration, he added, is the diplomatic equivalent of a chocolate-chip cookie — deceptively tasty, but possibly lethal if swallowed whole.

“So the State Department Web site says they’re going to verify the hell out of the chocolate-chip recipe,” he said. “How about starting with a declaration that covers the issues?”

Rather than reflect concerns over nonproliferation, the White House’s actions showed a subservience to multinational corporations, which also is reflected in the administration’s refusal to make China’s currency manipulation a leverage point for cooperation in the six-party talks, Sherman said.

“I would think that the folks in Tehran are just giggling right now,” Sherman said. “I think they may be a little worried about what Jerusalem does, but it’s real clear that the multinational corporations have won big-time, year after year, action after action, and any statement by this administration that they care about proliferation — yes, but only at a distant second to letting these multinationals do whatever they want, and not just U.S.-based multinationals, but international multinationals. This president is very ecumenical when it comes to multinational corporations.

“That combined with fooling the American public that something has been accomplished, and maybe fooling the historians as well, is the only explanation for why a president who is world famous for his bellicose rhetoric has, when the rubber meets the road, put us on the road to capitulation.”

Ros-Lehtinen, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a release that the decision was cause for “profound concern.” In rewarding North Korea for providing a limited nuclear-program declaration that left out much of what it was asked, the administration risked abandoning allies such as Japan while sending a message to Syria and Iran that the United States is willing to betray its own interests.

“Serious verification questions linger,” Ros-Lehtinen said, “and I would have hoped that the administration would have shown more caution, and less haste, on a matter of this gravity.”

Meanwhile, the United States is giving up valuable leverage without any certainty North Korea will offer a complete, verifiable accounting of its nuclear activities, said Ros-Lehtinen, who introduced earlier legislation (HR 3650) containing a slew of additional conditions North Korea would have to meet before removal from the terrorism blacklist.

From the administration's perspective, the decision was premised on North Korea's agreeing to dismantle its plutonium reactor at Yongbyon and provide details about its nuclear programs, which entitled it to removal from the "Trading with the Enemy Act" (PL 65-91) and the state sponsors of terrorism list, said national security adviser Stephen Hadley after Bush's announcement.

The bilateral trade sanctions to be lifted, Hadley said, were "relatively minor," including some licensing requirements for goods imported from North Korea, U.S. citizens' involvement in third-party shipments to the communist nation, and some prohibitions on financial transfers by its government.

Meanwhile, removal from the terrorism blacklist would entitle North Korea to international aid, such as loans from the World Bank. But easing these restrictions was minimal in the scheme of things, because North Korea remained one of the most sanctioned countries in the world, both from the United States and the international community, Hadley said.

Although the United States had some concerns over how much plutonium North Korea has produced, the existence of its uranium-enrichment program, and its building of a nuclear reactor in Syria, the six-party talks with the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia, over time will allow both verification of this information and preventive monitoring, Hadley said.

Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow for foreign policy at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution, supported the administration's view. One of the main benefits of the administration's decision was that it would allay criticisms from China and Russia that the United States has been stubbornly inflexible in its dealings with North Korea while setting up an ironclad rationale for further punishment if North Korea fails to follow through on its promises, O'Hanlon said.

Bush's North Korea Decision Twists the Partisan Divide

China and, to a lesser degree, South Korea, have kept North Korea afloat and have been unimpressed with blunt U.S. demands to squeeze the country over nonproliferation issues, he said, while Russia sits on the U.N. Security Council and problematically sides with China in the six-party talks.

The general goal, O'Hanlon said, should be to move North Korea in the direction of Vietnam, making aid and diplomacy contingent on such things as denuclearization and improved human rights. But while the current deal opens the door to aid, it doesn't provide that aid.

"I think it's a smart step, but it's not a huge accomplishment in and of itself," O'Hanlon said.

By law, Bush must give Congress 45 days' notice before removing a country from the terrorism blacklist. The Sherman-Ros-Lehtinen bill would freeze the 45-day notification period, preventing removal from the list, until Pyongyang supplies the declaration it originally promised. This includes a full accounting of its uranium enrichment programs, existing nuclear weapons, and proliferation to countries such as Syria and Iran.

If floor votes were counted by zeal, the legislation would sail to passage. Right now, however, Sherman isn't so sure.

"I would think that the president will veto any bill that does pass, that he will be able to stymie in the Senate any bill that he does veto," Sherman said. "The president does not have the capacity to get a

declaration out of North Korea that means anything, but he does have enough support in a very partisan year to disenfranchise Congress on this issue.”

One Senate aide who has followed the issue closely said legislative action might be a possibility.

“Supporters of this policy have been attempting to marginalize the opposition in Congress by saying it’s only conservative Republicans, but that’s just not true,” the aide said. On the controversial issue of waiving sanction restrictions to spend money on dismantling North Korean nuclear reactors, as well as on other, related legislation, the administration was dealt setbacks from both sides of the aisle, the aide said.

“The most vocal opponents have been Republicans for sure, but you’ll see that there’s skepticism and push-back from Democrats as well.”

Matt Korade can be reached at mkorade@cq.com

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22. “Introductory Statement to the Board of Governors by IAEA Director General Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei,” June 2008.

23. Western government official, conversation with authors, Washington, DC, June 2008.

24. “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” September 17, 2002, chap. 5.

25. Arend, “International Law and the Preemptive Use of Military Force.” See Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter, “A Duty to Prevent,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004; Daalder and Steinberg, “The Future of Preemption.”

26. “National Security Strategy,” p. 15.

27. Condoleezza Rice, “A Balance of Power That Favors Freedom,” Wriston Lecture, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, October 1, 2002.

28. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, “The Sources of American Legitimacy,” *Foreign Affairs* November/December 2004; Richard Falk, “The New Bush Doctrine,” *The Nation*, June 27, 2002; Roger Speed and Michael May, “Dangerous Doctrine,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2005.

29. See Daalder and Steinberg, “The Future of Preemption.”

30. In Israel, where the Bush doctrine was perceived as an official vindication of the thinking that led Israel to destroy Osiraq in 1981, there was a sense that the United States adopted the Begin doctrine to address new WMD threats. This assertion is based on numerous conversations with Israeli officials and former officials at the senior level. Israelis, of course, are aware of the practical and political differences in the respective application of this doctrine by Israel and the United States. For Israel, virtually any emergence of a nuclear threat in the region is viewed in existential terms. This is not necessarily the case for the United States.

31. IAEA, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007) in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” GOV/2008/4, February 22, 2008.

32. Israel apparently paved the way for this acquiescent response by sharing crucial evidence with a number of key states, in addition to the United States. Ronen Bergman and Ronen Solomon’s “Dangerous IAEA,” *Ye’diot Achronot*, June 20, 2008.

33. IAEA 2008 Iran implementation report. Like al-Kibar, it may be added, Iran’s uranium-enrichment program is difficult to justify as a peaceful effort, given the fact that the country has no reactors that use enriched uranium other than the Russian-supplied Bushehr nuclear power plant, for which Russia is also providing all the necessary fuel. See also National Intelligence Council, “National Intelligence Estimate - Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,” November 2007, 9 pp.

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The Madness of Chris Hill

Backstory on a bad deal.

By James Rosen

July 03, 2008, 4:00 a.m.

‘You will be better advised,’ John Mitchell once famously said, “to watch what we do instead of what we say.” This maxim, uttered by Richard Nixon’s pipe-smoking attorney general, has echoed through the ages, applauded and denounced for its frankness in acknowledging the occasional need for duplicity, or at least the odd sleight of hand, in the practice of government.

Now, with the arrival of North Korea’s declaration of its nuclear programs — long overdue and woefully inadequate in its disclosure of key data — and with the enthusiastic reception afforded the document by the current White House and State Department, the Bush administration seems to have taken Mitchell’s maxim to heart.

The 60-page declaration is a product of the so-called February 13 agreement, the road map for North Korean denuclearization signed in 2007 by all members of the Six-Party talks. The accord, entitled “Initial Actions To Implement Six-Party Joint Statement,” obligated Pyongyang to submit, by the end of 2007 and in exchange for certain benefits it has already received, such as large shipments of heavy fuel oil and infrastructural upgrades, “a complete declaration of all nuclear programs.”

Time and again, the top State Department official on the North Korean account, Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill, insisted the United States and its allies in the Six-Party talks would accept nothing less. “We can’t go with something that’s 80 percent or 90 percent,” Hill told reporters at the Okura Hotel in Tokyo this past January, when the deadline for the declaration’s submission had already passed. “We really need to go with something that’s complete.” “Frankly speaking,” Hill added at the Japanese Foreign Ministry, “a partial declaration is really no declaration at all.” Asked about the lapsed deadline, Hill exalted comprehensiveness over timeliness: “We felt it was better for them to give us a complete one and correct one even if it’s going to be a late one.” The following month, Hill reiterated, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that “we cannot accept a declaration that is incomplete or incorrect.”

Half a year later, the declaration we have accepted is by all accounts far from “complete” or “correct.” First, it omits the number of plutonium-based bombs produced at the massive and aging reactor at Yongbyon, which the North Koreans, having tested a nuclear device in October 2006, have now begun to disable. Equally concerning, the declaration also fails to provide any data on two other key issues: the regime’s secret highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, which the U.S. intelligence community judges with “high confidence” to have existed, and with “moderate confidence” to be ongoing; and the North’s proliferation of nuclear technology to other state sponsors of terrorism. This latter issue came to the fore last September, after Israeli fighter jets destroyed a nuclear facility North Korean workers were building in the deserts of northeastern Syria.

These were, we heard repeatedly, the issues of gravest concern to Ambassador Hill. Eight days after the ink dried on the February 13 agreement, he told a Washington think tank audience that the North Koreans had “attempted to purchase some aluminum tubes from Germany” and that there were

“indications that they were successful in getting some of these tubes elsewhere.” Six days later, he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee: “We know from the Pakistanis that [the North Koreans] bought these centrifuges. There’s no other purpose for a centrifuge of that kind than to produce highly enriched uranium.” Last November, senior Bush administration officials gathered at the headquarters of the Air Force Technical Applications Center, located on Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, for a special briefing on the traces of HEU discovered on some of the aluminum tubes Pyongyang, inexplicably, provided for our inspection. “It is my professional judgment,” Hill had confidently told a House subcommittee the previous month, “that by the end of this year, we will have a clarity on [the North’s] uranium enrichment such that we can be assured that a highly enriched uranium program is no longer a threat to our country.”

Yet in welcoming the North’s declaration last week, eight months after Hill offered his “professional judgment,” White House National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley admitted the Six-Party allies still need to “get to the bottom of this issue of the uranium enrichment... Our intelligence community has some concerns about their past activities and has some concerns about potentially ongoing activities.” And the proliferation activity? “We want to get to the bottom of that” as well, Hadley said, “to make sure there is not continuing activity going on between North Korea and Syria, or activity with respect to other locations as well.”

So it would appear that, after long delay, the Bush administration has chosen to accept — and to hail as “a good step forward,” in the words of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice — a “partial declaration” of the very sort her point man on the issue, Ambassador Hill, dismissed earlier this year as “no declaration at all.” Indeed, given the nature of the document’s omissions, and the administration’s own stated suspicions about ongoing activities, it is fair to wonder whether the declaration even rises to the level of the “80 percent or 90 percent” Hill also declared unacceptable in January. All the North Koreans were willing to say in their declaration about HEU and Syria, according to Hadley, was that “they’re not engaged in these activities now and won’t [be] in the future.” “They also have acknowledged in writing that we have raised concerns,” Hadley added, as if that were a victory for American diplomacy.

Pressed to explain the administration’s apparent relaxation of standards for accepting the North’s declaration, Hill defended the progress made to date in the Six-Party talks, even as he acknowledged “you’re looking at a partially finished product here and we’ve got to finish the job.” “Obviously, we would like to deal with things in one fell swoop, but sometimes,” Hill told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington on July 1, “you have to kind of do things on an incremental basis... I would draw your attention to the fact that a year ago they were producing plutonium and not only are they not producing plutonium, but they can’t produce plutonium because the thing is disabled.”

To close observers of the Six-Party process, however, the Bush administration’s capitulation on the contents of the declaration came as no surprise. On January 25 of this year, citing foreign diplomats involved in the Six-Party talks and American analysts familiar with the negotiations, Fox News reported that Hill “is now considering accepting a declaration that would be less than complete, carving out the two most contentious issues for later resolution... Hill has floated the idea of allowing the North Koreans to exclude from their declaration both their highly enriched uranium (HEU) program and their nuclear collaboration with Syria, with the understanding that these issues would be revisited later.”

In a series of angry e-mails, all on the record but unpublished until now, Hill vehemently denied the story. “Completely inaccurate,” he wrote. “This idea that we would ignore the most contentious items and take them up later is ridiculous. I don’t believe in ‘carve outs’ and even if I did (which I don’t) how in the world would this work in practical terms? Do you really think we could make concessions on the basis of an incomplete declaration, then somehow we would be able to return to the contentious issues AFTER – AFTER!!!??? — giving away all our leverage? Why? I can tell you this stupidity has never been under consideration by anyone who is part of the process or truly close to the process.

“I suspect,” Hill continued, “that you have sources who are a little out of it, a little frustrated either because they want the process to go forward or are afraid it might, and who are much more interested in manipulating you rather than enlightening you because I can assure you that nobody involved in this process has ever suggested this foolishness or floated such ideas because they don’t make any sense.” Finally, Hill addressed, without invitation or foundation, what he assumed to be the reporter’s political leanings. “And, btw, I am a conservative, meaning I take this messy world as I see it and try to deal with painful reality, stay in channels, respect institutions, observe service discipline and follow instructions. You are not talking to conservatives. Believe me.”

When the reporter politely thanked Hill and promised to distill his rant down to a quotable reaction, suitable for use in reporting, Hill shot back: “Just to be clear. I am calling your piece completely inaccurate. And since you are unable to provide a single named source — not a one, I have to wonder what you have been drinking (or smoking since you are obviously not a conservative).”

The reporter still hasn’t disclosed what he is smoking, but the plumes from John Mitchell’s pipe hang heavy today over the Bush White House and Rice’s State.

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Mending fences

France and now Germany have decided if they can't beat 'em, they will let them join, notes Bassel Oudat from Damascus

Slowly but surely, Europe is edging closer to Syria. European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pottering, who is planning a visit to Damascus next month, told reporters that Syria "is a key country in the Middle East and a major partner in the peace process". He is not the only one to think so. Last week, Syria played host to Iceland's Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Gisladdottir and German Foreign Ministry Middle East coordinator Andreas Michaelis. For the moment, Europe's overtures to Syria are still of an exploratory nature. And Western sources say that Damascus has some way to go to prove its willingness to cooperate on various regional issues.

It's a message that the Syrians are taking to heart. Syrian Vice-President Farouk Al-Sharaa recently told Hizbullah-run Al-Manar television that Syrian-European relations were "going into a new phase".

In mid-2004, Syrian-French relations took a turn for the worst after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri. But French attempts to ostracise Syria did not stop Damascus from trying to stay in Europe's good books. Syrian officials, civil society representatives and businessmen continued to exchange visits with their German, Italian, and Spanish counterparts.

Syria also managed to keep its economic relations with European countries going. And many Europeans preferred to contain rather than to isolate Syria, a country they know has considerable influence in Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine.

Economic and commercial exchanges between Syria and Europe remained intact (Syria exports oil, cotton, phosphates, and textiles to EU countries). At one point, Damascus started looking around for alternative trade partners in case Europe turns completely against it.

"Europe is not our only option. We have strategic connections with various economic blocks around the world. Syria is determined to upgrade its relations with countries in the East, such as Iran, Russia, China, and Malaysia, as well as countries in Latin America and Africa, including South Africa," Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Al-Dardari said recently.

Making good on Syrian promises, President Al-Assad visited China, Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem held talks in South Africa, and various Syrian officials have been in Tehran. Syria is attracting many investors from Malaysia, China, and Iran. The Syrians say that they can survive without Europe, but they have done all they can to keep their economic ties with Europe intact, even when the political scene looked discouraging.

Finally, France has begun to change its tune. Following the Doha talks about Lebanon, French officials expressed satisfaction with the Syrian position. Then President Nicolas Sarkozy telephoned President Bashar Al-Assad and invited him to attend the Union for the Mediterranean conference, scheduled to be held in Paris on 13 July, one day before the French National Day celebrations. This was big news for the Syrians, opening other doors for them in Europe. According to a German source, Germany plans to "take immediate measures to improve ties with Syria in a similar fashion to what France has done."

Damascus is thrilled with any gesture coming from European countries. During a conference in Tripoli last month, Syrian officials discouraged any statements hostile to the Union for the Mediterranean. In talks with visiting European officials, the Syrians are said to have expressed their desire to promote regional peace and stability.

In exchanges with European officials, the Syrians defend their policies in Iraq and Palestine. They admit to having vital interests in Lebanon, but deny interfering in Lebanese affairs. As for the accusations concerning an alleged nuclear reactor in Al-Kibar, one that Israel bombed recently, Syrian officials maintain that it was an old military site. Last week, they allowed officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect the site.

According to Saber Falhout, media advisor to the Syrian president, the US allegations about a Syrian covert nuclear programme were designed to "dampen the peace process in the Middle East and drive a wedge between Syria and Europe." He told Al-Ahram Weekly that the US has been trying to put pressure on Syria for years.

"The US has satellites that can trace the movement of ants in the desert, and therefore knows better than anyone else that Syria doesn't have nuclear reactors that can be used for military purposes," Falhout said, noting that Syria has signed all international agreements banning nuclear weapons and agrees to opening its facilities to investigation.

According to well-informed sources, the site in question did not contain a nuclear reactor. But it may have been used as a warehouse for missiles from suspicious sources or to produce non-nuclear weapons. Syria is not cooperating with neither Iran nor Korea in nuclear matters and doesn't have the technical, financial, and human resources needed to build a nuclear weapon, the sources note.

In an interview with the Weekly, a Damascus-based French diplomat said that Europe's rapprochement with Syria was not exactly taking place "without US endorsement". He added that both Europe and the US failed to contain Syria through sanctions and pressure and couldn't get it to distance itself from Iran, Hizbullah, and Palestinian groups. "Therefore, the West decided that improving ties would be a better option."

The French diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity, noted that the West encouraged Turkey to improve its ties with Syria and act as mediator between Syria and Israel. The West is hoping that Turkey may prove so useful to the Syrians that the latter would feel no need for their special ties with Tehran. This may not be as far-fetched as it seems. Damascus is less than pleased with Iranian policy in Iraq, and the Iranians are not exactly thrilled with the prospect of Syrian-Israeli talks.

The Syrians are pleased with recent developments, but they cannot take Europe for granted. Damascus still has a lot of explaining to do with regard to its policies in Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine. Unless what it says is acceptable to its European interlocutors, hopes for improved Syrian-European relations may be dashed.

<http://verificationthoughts.blogspot.com/2008/07/three-other-syrian-sites.html>

The three other Syrian sites

Wednesday, 9 July 2008

Syria's destroyed nuclear reactor at Al-Kibar has been the focus of considerable attention throughout July. Few would have missed the International Atomic Energy Agency's visit to Syria in late June. James blogged about it at the work. He expressed skepticism over the alleged link with Iran, which I think is a healthy reaction.

Having observed the interaction between Syrian and Iranian diplomats at the Agency GC for some years now, I would personally be surprised if they're not talking. Close personal interactions in Vienna does not mean, however, close cooperation on undeclared nuclear facilities.

Anyway. A three man team, headed in person by the DDG-S Olli Heinonen, arrived at Damascus International Airport on Sunday, 22 June. No details of the trip has been released by anyone, and officials on both sides of the Atlantic are very tight-lipped about what, if anything, might have been uncovered.

Most press reports claim that Heinonen and his crew met Syrian officials on Sunday evening, and then headed out on a 400 kilometer trek to Al-Kibar first thing Monday morning. According to Mark Heinrich, the Syrians had restricted inspections to that site, at which Heinonen and his entourage were allowed to take "extensive environmental samples".

It is not clear where samples were taken. Understandably, Heinonen himself did not give much detail. In his quite Finnish way he simply said that samples had been taken of "quite a lot of things". Obviously, that can mean anything.

It can also yield surprising results. Consider that the Iranians thought that they were home-free at Kalaye Electric before Chris Charlier's team swiped at a place where the Iranians forgot to sanitize.

Ephraim Asculai, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Science and International Security, have argued that, "Inspectors will [...] attempt to sample for particles of uranium, particles of the cladding, and particles of graphite", but does not seem very optimistic that tell-tale signs will be picked up. Moreover, he argues that it "is highly unlikely that inspectors will find any above-ground major components of the reactor and affiliated equipment" but that remnants of the reactor foundation might still be present at the site.

So, we'll see what the sampling will reveal. I am pessimistic, but you never know.

The three other sites

The Syrians did not allow Heinonen and his limited team to get access to three other sites fingered by US intelligence as being associated with the country's nuclear programme. Reportedly, one of the sites may have some reprocessing capability. Two sites are operational and one is under construction.

I have tried to find out what these sites are and where they might be located, but no-one honestly have a clue. Even people that usually are in the know. I've noticed, though, that someone has been buying coverage of two areas in Syria. First in January then again in May. The dates indicate that it is the same client - although that might also be a coincidence.

One location is the chemical weapons facility near Al Safir and the adjacent SCUD site (36° 3'31.23"N 37°20'9.57"E). The other location might be a triple fenced compound in the Syrian desert (34°37'35.72"N 37°14'2.10"E). Of course, this is not evidence of anything. It is simply an observation. But there is SAM coverage of both areas.

The Agency team flew back on Tuesday, 24 June. If I have to guess, they probably took Austrian Airline's daily 3.55 pm shuttle to Vienna.

Posted by Andreas Persbo

Nukes under concrete?

Aug. 16, 2008

EPHRAIM ASCULAI , THE JERUSALEM POST

In some old gangster films, as well as probably in real life, there is the scene where the victim is thrown into a building construction mold and drowned in a thick layer of cement. A tell-tale shoe that fell off in the old movies - and more recently the hidden security camera - provides the clues that bring the culprit to justice, even though the body has not been found. The case of Syria's bombed Al-Kibar site holds many similarities to these gangster movie scenarios.

The photographic evidence of the existence of a nuclear reactor under construction at the site was overwhelming: pictures of the reactor under construction, with great similarities to a North Korean plutonium production reactor, and its later camouflage by the construction of a surrounding building that completely enclosed the structure; the intake of water from the Euphrates River and the outlet of returning water from the building back into the downstream of the river, which indicated the existence of a strong energy source at the site. The most damning piece of evidence probably is the way the Syrians razed the site, poured concrete over it and claimed that it was some sort of a military site and not a nuclear reactor.

THIS SHOULD have been enough for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to indict Syria for its violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, the IAEA requested an inspection of the bombed site in the hope that it would be able to collect evidence that would clinch the matter. A four-day inspection trip was made in June 2008, months after the Syrians finished their clean-up of the site, but was probably limited by the Syrians to "classical" IAEA inspection methods of visual observations and collection of samples. It is doubtful whether these would uncover much, given the Syrian efforts at a cleanup. The "corpse" still lies buried in the huge amount of poured concrete. It is possible, however, that the IAEA inspectors were getting too close for comfort, since Syria recently announced that it would not permit the inspectors to return to the site.

In addition, the Syrians made an important diplomatic move, seeking a seat on the IAEA Board of Governors, a 35-member forum that could decide that Syria violated its obligations. Since most of the decisions in this body are made by consensus, Syria would thus insure itself against condemnation. Thus, by refusing inspections and gaining the seat of governor, which it has a good chance of doing, Syria is taking out double insurance.

THE TIME has come for the IAEA to take a strong stance on the Syrian issue and state that the burden is now upon Syria to prove that there was no reactor under construction at the site. Syria would have to permit the most intrusive inspections, using advanced technologies, such as thus called for in on-site inspections of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. If Syria is unwilling to do this, it should be censured and, at the very least, banned from becoming a member of the IAEA Board of Governors. Given the attitude of the present Director General of the IAEA, it is doubtful that this will happen.

The United States is also an important actor in the Syrian affair, since it provided the evidence on Syria's misdeeds, and the connection to North Korea. The US is acting against the proposal to let Syria become a member of the Board. If it can persuade North Korea to disclose its connection to the Syrian nuclear reactor, it will put an end to Syria's lies and denials.

[The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies \(INSS\).](#)

<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/national/news/20080830p2a00m0na001000c.html>

Editorial: North Korea must not suspend work to disable nuclear facilities

(Mainichi Japan) August 30, 2008

As the Bush administration nears the end of its term, it will have to deal with another thorny issue. North Korea has declared that it will immediately suspend the disabling of its Yongbyon nuclear facilities, and that it would also consider restoring nuclear facilities that have already been disabled.

This is not a temperate declaration. North Korea claims that even though it fulfilled its own obligations by submitting a report on its nuclear program in June, the U.S. has not removed it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. North Korea asserts that the U.S. has clearly reneged on its agreement.

But there is something wrong with this line of argument. North Korea timed the convening of working level talks with Japan to coincide with the passing of the Aug. 11 deadline for removing it from the terrorism blacklist. In doing so, North Korea probably intended to communicate its own willingness to be flexible to Japan and the U.S.

However, North Korea has failed to meet its own obligations. The six nations that are included in the six-party consultations have offered various enticements in exchange for actions by North Korea in order to remove Pyongyang's nuclear threat. These enticements include removal from the terrorism blacklist. However, North Korea's submission of a report is not sufficient to fulfill its own obligations. It would be impossible to ensure that the nuclear threat has been eliminated without conducting strict inspections. The U.S. State Department has every right to point out that inspections are one of the items agreed to in the six-nation talks, and that North Korea is in violation of the agreement.

However, if the standoff between the U.S. and North Korea drags out, major progress toward nuclear disarmament cannot be expected before the Bush administration leaves office in January. And it is uncertain what kind of North Korea policy the next U.S. administration will adopt. If the current stalemate persists, and North Korea's nuclear weapons and related facilities remain largely untouched, it goes without saying that this would constitute a major setback for Japan.

It is crucial that steps toward disarmament not be impeded, and that the U.S. and North Korea conduct a dialogue for this purpose. But we should also place our hopes on efforts by China, as the host of the six-party talks, to bring North Korea around. As the so-called "New Cold War" between the U.S. and Russia erupts in various regions of the world, and attempts are made to preserve the unity of the six-party talks, Japan's diplomatic efforts will certainly be tested.

However, subtle differences in emphasis within the U.S. administration are also a concern. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the American delegate to the six-nation talks, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice appeared to be comparatively amenable to removing North Korea from the terrorism blacklist. On the other hand, President George Bush seemed to adopt a harsher line toward North Korea in his summit meeting with his South Korean counterpart earlier this month.

Compared to previous U.S. presidents, President Bush has been one of the most ardent supporters of Israel. The threat that North Korea poses to Israel through its nuclear technology ties with Syria is a

concern to President Bush and conservatives in the U.S. Congress, and has certainly put the brakes on efforts to remove North Korea from the terrorism blacklist prior to the U.S. presidential election.

North Korea is alert to the subtle differences within the U.S. government, and is probably using them as fodder to stir things up, but it must not forget its obligation to fully disclose information related to its nuclear weapons, relations with Syria, and uranium enrichment program, and comply with inspections. It is North Korea that has still not delivered on its promises.

We May Miss Kim Jong-il (and Maybe Musharraf)

By DAVID E. SANGER

September 14, 2008

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON — Last week, when the news filtered out of the black hole of North Korea that Kim Jong-il likely suffered a stroke in August, no one in the Bush administration rushed out to buy a get-well-soon card. This is, after all, a man President Bush has described as a “tyrant,” a dictator who starves his own people, and, according to some Senators, a “pygmy” — the biggest insult for a guy who keeps a lot of elevator shoes in the presidential closet in Pyongyang.

But whatever names he is called, there was a surprising ambivalence in official Washington about the news — more than a whiff of reluctance, in fact, to lose Mr. Kim at the helm just now.

This was true especially among intelligence officials, who wake up every day worried about what happens when states implode, and whether there will be a free-for-all for their weapons.

[deletia]

That is why the American bomb-watching community has a grudging fondness for Mr. Kim, the “pygmy dictator.” The Americans’ biggest fear about North Korea is a collapse of the state, in which a starving, broke nation simply implodes. That could send everyone on a mad scramble for the country’s arsenal — the Chinese, the South Koreans, the Russians, the Americans. “The bad news about North Korea,” said Jonathan Pollack, a North Korea expert at the Naval War College, “is that we don’t know much about their nuclear control system. Or even if they have much of one.”

The good news is that the arsenal is small. In recent negotiations with the United States, before Mr. Kim fell ill, the country said it possessed about 82 pounds of bomb-grade plutonium. If they are not lying (a significant “if”) that’s about enough to make six weapons. Some in the C.I.A. think the North Koreans could have 12 or more weapons. It’s nothing to sneeze at, but compared to Pakistan’s arsenal, it’s a manageable number.

[deletia]

Recent history is not especially reassuring about either Pakistan or North Korea, considering how much technology has already leaked from them to other states. Pakistan’s laboratories were where Abdul Qadeer Khan started his nuclear proliferation ring and flourished during political upheaval in the 1990s. Dr. Khan has been under house arrest, but in recent months he has been allowed to move around much more freely.

And when the Israelis bombed a nuclear reactor in Syria a year ago, it soon came out that they had a lot of design and building help — from the North Koreans. That was when Mr. Kim had his full faculties. The nightmare is how much worse the leakage could get if it is unclear who is in charge.

http://news.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/editorials/view/2008_09_14_Time_to_close_deal_with_India

Time to close deal with India

By Boston Herald Editorial Staff

Sunday, September 14, 2008 - Added 22h ago [*as of 2008-09-14T14:05Z*]

The end of the international ban on nuclear trade with India is being greeted by groans from the arms-control crowd. But President Bush is right to try to bring India's civilian nuclear program under international regulation and bring the world's largest democracy closer to the United States.

The 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group agreed on Sept. 6 to permit civilian nuclear trade despite the fact that India, which has nuclear weapons, never signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Test Ban Treaty. Last month, the International Atomic Energy Agency reached agreement with India to inspect its 14 civilian power reactors.

Congress now has 30 days to pass implementing legislation. It isn't clear whether the administration can win the necessary waiver of the waiting period or whether the matter must be left for next year, but it is going to try and it has a chance. The Democrats' nominee for vice president, Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and supports the changes.

Electricity-short India found it hard to expand production from its reactors because it lacks uranium and could not legally buy any abroad. Critics of the new arrangement say it permits the eight military reactors to concentrate on material for bombs. This is true, but the bomb material train left the New Delhi station in 1974.

Critics also claim that the deal makes it harder to persuade North Korea and Iran to give up their nuclear projects, but that train also has departed. The Non-Proliferation Treaty binds Syria, but that didn't stop Syria from trying to build a nuclear reactor with help from North Korea, another treaty signer that disregarded it (before withdrawing) on the way to its own nuclear weapon. It didn't stop Libya from trying, before it was scared out of the attempt, or discourage Iran. Treaty or no treaty, nations will pursue or shun nuclear weapons according to calculations of their own interests. Several started such pursuits only to stop once concluding that they were not advancing their security one whit.

The closer technological, scientific, commercial and military relations between India and the United States that are bound to follow nuclear trade should also induce prudence in China if it should ever be tempted to adventurism.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JParticle/ShowFull&cid=1221745575435>

Note to European Union: Say NO to Syria

By ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

Sep 20, 2008 21:53 | Updated Sep 20, 2008 22:30

[EXCERPTS]

Even as the civilized world condemned Russia's invasion of Georgia, other countries have rushed to praise it. Among these is Syria, whose strongman Bashar Assad - on a recent visit to Moscow - proclaimed his support for Russia's actions while eagerly shopping for advanced conventional weapons and announcing his willingness to deploy Russian missile systems in Syrian territory.

Yet, European allies appear ready to reward Syria's belligerent regime with an "Association Agreement" that would provide Assad's regime with eagerly sought political legitimacy and material assistance.

These developments are worrisome indeed.

[deletia]

EVEN MORE troubling is Syria's record on nuclear proliferation. As a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Syria has pledged to never acquire nuclear weapons and to do all in its power to prevent the technology and materials necessary for these weapons to reach other countries.

However, despite vehement denials from Damascus, the evidence clearly shows that Syria was nearing completion of a nuclear reactor built with assistance from North Korea when Israel conducted its strike in September 2007. US intelligence officials have publicly stated that this reactor, had it become operational, would have been capable of producing enough plutonium to build at least two nuclear weapons within a year. Damascus continues to bar inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency from further examining the site to determine the extent of Syria's nuclear activities.

Sound familiar? It is. Syria is following Iran's approach to nuclear weapons. The world has done far too little to stop Iran's nuclear ambitions. We must learn from those mistakes. The U.S. has called on France and other EU member-states to force Damascus to grant IAEA inspectors full access to all Syrian nuclear facilities. Our European allies must increase the pressure on Syria if we are to thwart the regime's nuclear ambitions.

European leaders should cease all further action toward an Association Agreement with Damascus. They must require that Syria verifiably end its interference in Lebanon, its support for Islamist terrorist organizations, and its pursuit of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them. They must also clarify that this must be accomplished before Syria is treated as a responsible partner and included in the councils of the West. If Europe ignores the lessons of inaction and accommodation as it has with Iran and Russian aggression in Georgia, and chooses a similar path toward Syria, we may all soon regret it.

The writer, a congresswoman from Florida, serves as the senior Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

[Sourcebook note: See the 2007-10-20 Wall Street Journal op-ed article What Happened in Syria? by Peter Hoekstra and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in this sourcebook.]

http://www.forbes.com/opinions/2008/09/24/nuclear-north-korea-oped-cx_cr_0925rosett.html

Freedom's Edge

A Clear And Present Nuclear Danger

Claudia Rosett **09.25.08**, 12:00 AM ET

Wall Street's meltdown has almost swept it from the news, but right now Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has on her hands a diplomatic debacle in North Korea that may ultimately prove even more dangerous than the mess in the markets.

The problem is not just that Pyongyang is now trumpeting its plan to re-start the same Yongbyon nuclear reactor that it has twice shut down since 1994--each time in exchange for massive aid and concessions from America and friends. Nor does the problem stop with signs that North Korea is planning another long-range missile test (hello, Los Angeles) or with worries that, along with peddling missiles and nuclear technology to the Middle East, North Korea might just sell a nuclear weapon or two to terrorists who have a grudge against America.

The jumbo, overarching problem is that North Korea's regime, with its knack for making Washington's star diplomats dance like marionettes, has become a world showcase for the payola of running a nuclear extortion racket. Especially for the past year and a half, Pyongyang has been demonstrating to thug governments everywhere the amazing leverage that a nuclear arms program can provide to even a small rogue regime willing to play chicken with the U.S.

Since agreeing in February 2007 to the latest denuclearization deal, North Korea has unilaterally revised the terms as it pleases, demanded hard cash upfront, shrugged off deadlines and refused to disclose anything about the clandestine uranium-enrichment program that it appears to have. Oh, and while promising last year to give up its nukes, North Korea went on for months secretly collaborating with Syria in completing a copy-Yongbyon reactor on the Euphrates, with no clear purpose but to produce plutonium for weapons, smack in the heart of the Middle East. That was shut down not by the North Koreans or the Syrians, but by an Israeli air strike last September.

Were U.S. diplomats daunted by any of this? Hardly. Like the Clinton administration, when Kim cheated on a previous nuclear freeze deal, the Bush administration in recent years has winked, shrugged and even abetted Pyongyang's games. Last year, to comply with North Korean demands, Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill, top wheedler to North Korea, enlisted the help of the U.S. Federal Reserve, no less, to transfer \$25 million in crime-tainted frozen funds from Macau's Banco Delta Asia back to Pyongyang. Since then, North Korea has been receiving free fuel shipments and America has been pouring in aid via the United Nations World Food Program, which now proposes to send more than half a billion dollars worth of food to North Korea over the next 15 months--despite Pyongyang's long record of diverting such help to the military.

The list of American concessions and gifts goes on. But most appalling has been the U.S. surrender of principle on matters of human rights for North Korea's 22 million people, who during Kim's 14-year reign have been imprisoned by the hundreds of thousands and starved to death by the millions. Having

appointed a special envoy, Jay Lefkowitz, to address these horrors, Bush and Rice then sidelined him as irrelevant to wheeling-and-dealing with North Korea--especially after Lefkowitz gave a speech this past January noting, correctly, that the Six-Party talks had failed.

What has the U.S. received from North Korea in return? No real access, that's for sure. Along with the continuing mystery about the full scope of North Korea's nuclear programs, networks and weapons stockpiles, U.S. officials aren't even sure right now whether North Korean ruler, Kim Jong Il, is alive or dead. And despite the diplomatic and financial bonanza for Pyongyang, not one ounce of plutonium has been handed over. Not one bomb or missile has been destroyed. Apparently nothing has been demolished that can't be rebuilt in a hurry.

When the State Department, to its credit, finally balked recently at removing North Korea from the list of terrorist-sponsoring states, pending some way to verify its nuclear activities, North Korea told the U.S. to take a hike. But even now, the State Department can't tear itself away from the bargaining table. "We're going to remain engaged with the North Koreans," was how a spokesman put it last week, adding that the next president--whoever that might be--is unlikely to do anything different.

One can only hope the next president will take a different tack. The way it's going now, should anyone be surprised that Iran is speeding along the wayward nuclear trail blazed by North Korea? Is it any wonder that Syria thought it worth a shot to collaborate with North Korea in building a secret nuclear plant? Can others be far behind?

[Claudia Rosett, a journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, writes a weekly column on foreign affairs for Forbes.com.](#)



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Thérèse Delpech

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- Pourquoi la première réaction est-elle venue de Pyongyang ?
- Pourquoi la Syrie a-t-elle protesté aussi mollement ?
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- Quand ce projet a-t-il commencé ?
- D'autres pays ont-ils bénéficié des largesses de la Corée du Nord ?

Syria's Nuclear Revival

by Robert Maginnis

10/07/2008

Hohenfels, Germany -- Last year's Israeli air force strike on an alleged Syrian plutonium reactor appears to have had two unintended consequences. It spurred Damascus to redouble its efforts to continue its atomic program, and it has drawn attention away from the Iranian and North Korean atomic weapons programs -- thus making the world more dangerous.

The London-based Asharq Alawsat newspaper reported on October 2nd that Syrian President Bashar Assad has redoubled his efforts to develop a nuclear program. The paper reports that, following the Israeli airstrike, Syria changed course and began a nuclear program based on the Iranian model of simultaneously building multiple facilities in various sites throughout the country to make any effort to destroy its atomic facilities more difficult.

Further, the addition of Syria to the list of rogue nations seeking atomic weapons demonstrates the failure of ongoing efforts by the international community to denuclearize North Korea and Iran. Rather than cooperating in those efforts, Pyongyang and Tehran are each involved heavily (either on their own or in partnership) in developing Damascus' atomic program.

Syria's nuclear ambitions are an open secret. In 1986, then Syrian chief of staff, Gen. Hihmet al-Siabi, said his country seeks nuclear parity with arch rival Israel. Israel is believed to have at least 180 nuclear warheads.

But Syria denies that it has a covert nuclear weapons program. It says that its atomic ambitions are focused exclusively on energy production, which is supported by official statements. In August, President Assad visited Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in Tehran, where the Syrian gave his support for the Iranian nuclear program, claiming that every state has the right to acquire atomic technology.

Of course, that is the same façade used by North Korea and Iran to give their atomic weapons program deniability. The Central Intelligence Agency director Michael Hayden warned Congress against naivete when he said Syria will act like its rogue partners "to delay and deceive" outsiders regarding its true nuclear intentions. Remember, North Korea successfully used these tactics for many years before testing a plutonium device in 2006. Iran is perhaps less than two years from a similar milestone.

There is plenty of evidence that Syria has gone well beyond rhetoric in its bid to secure a nuclear arsenal. This spring, Hayden told Congress "Do not assume that al Kibar [the Syrian reactor destroyed by Israel] exhausted our knowledge of Syrian efforts with regard to nuclear weapons." Hayden said the agency had the "highest confidence level" that al Kibar housed a plutonium reactor designed to produce weapon grade fissile material.

What's shrouded in uncertainty is the accuracy of America's information regarding other aspects of Syria's nuclear program. However, the information in the public domain is very compelling.

Apparently, the U.S. has information about a number of suspected Syrian nuclear sites. American officials have been pressing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nation's nuclear watchdog group, to demand access to three Syrian sites to look for evidence of nuclear activity, but Damascus has denied admittance, citing concerns over its "security."

Certainly the U.S. is aware that Syria has accumulated nuclear technology which aids its secret weapons efforts. Syria likely received assistance from the nuclear trafficking network run by Pakistani nuclear official Abdul Qadeer Khan, the same man who proliferated atomic technologies to Iran and North Korea. Even the IAEA has helped Syria with numerous atomic projects, including uranium extraction from phosphoric acid, isotope production and the construction of a cyclotron facility.

A 2004 CIA report to Congress on weapons proliferation is revealing. The report observes that Syria "... continued to develop civilian nuclear capabilities, including uranium extraction technology and hot cell facilities." These are critical technologies potentially applicable to a weapons program.

Syria has also solicited nuclear assistance from a variety of countries, including Russia. That country, which has provided Iran and North Korea with nuclear assistance, is now seeking to renew its influence in the Mideast through the sale of sophisticated weapons, defense agreements and perhaps atomic energy knowhow. Broader access by Syria to Russian atomic expertise could provide opportunities for Syria to expand its indigenous weapons development capabilities.

Syria's nuclear program has also been helped by the Iraq war. There is evidence that Iraqi nuclear scientists escaped to Syria and are working for Assad's regime. A group of about 12 Iraqi nuclear technicians fled to Syria before the fall of Saddam's regime. These experts allegedly brought considerable nuclear technology with them.

The second consequence of Israel's destruction of the al Kibar site is the attention it takes away from the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs. This is exacerbated by Tehran and Pyongyang, which are doing their best to accelerate Syria's nuclear program.

Specifically, Syria has developed a very close relationship with North Korea. Moshe Arens, Israel's three time minister of defense, told this writer that North Korea has been "peddling technology" in the Mideast for "20 to 30 years." Recently, North Korean nuclear officials have been very busy in Syria helping to "Iranize" that atomic program.

The Syria-North Korea nuclear cooperation began "probably as early as 1997," said a US intelligence official. The Syrian reactor destroyed by Israel was a North Korean designed reactor being built with assistance from Pyongyang. It was configured similarly to North Korea's five megawatt reactor at Yongbyon, which was used to produce the plutonium for North Korea's 2006 nuclear weapon test.

The Asharq Alawsat report which broke the Syrian nuclear story indicated that the new Iranian model is being built with experts from Pyongyang and that just last month Iranian experts arrived in Syria to join the project.

The al Kabir incident which spawned these consequences recently became even darker. The "point man" for Syria's nuclear weapons program, Brig. Gen. Muhammad Suleiman, was assassinated at a beach resort near Tartus, Syria. The immediate impact of his death is that the IAEA's investigation of

the al Kibar site will be slowed. But the likely long-term implication is that Syria will use the incident to stiff-arm the IAEA, as Iran and North Korea have done for the past couple decades.

It's clear that Syria has joined a growing club of atomic weapons rogues that threaten their neighbors and could lead to the proliferation of nuclear technologies to terrorist groups and other dangerous regimes.

It's unfortunate that Israel's strike on the al Kibar reactor created undesirable geopolitical consequences. But lack of action by the West will have vastly more undesirable consequences if inaction results in Syria and Iran achieving their nuclear weapons ambitions.

There is no need for evidence, buddy

[Author believed to be Andreas Persbo]

Thursday, 9 October 2008

Over the last month, discussions on verification activities in Syria has increased. Mohamed ElBaradei gave a short statement on the matter to the Board of Governors on 22 September 2008. He informed the assembled governors that:

In April this year, the Agency received information claiming that an installation destroyed by Israel in September 2007 at Al Kibar in Syria was a nuclear reactor. The Syrian authorities have repeatedly stated that the alleged site was not involved in any nuclear activities.

With Syria's cooperation, the Agency was able to visit Al Kibar in June 2008. Samples taken from the site are still being analyzed and evaluated by the Agency, but so far we have found no indication of any nuclear material.

In order to assess the veracity of information available to the Agency, we asked the Syrian authorities in July to provide access to additional information and locations. Syria has not yet responded to this request but has indicated that any further developments would depend on the results of the samples taken during the first visit.

I trust that Syria will show maximum cooperation and transparency and provide all the information needed by the Agency to complete its assessment.

Yesterday, I highlighted that samples taken at the site may indicate the presence of reactor-grade graphite. However, there seem to be no trace of nuclear material at the site. This is not entirely surprising given that the facility was not operating when it was struck by the Israeli air-raid.

The majority view within the Department of Safeguards is reportedly that the site very likely housed a graphite moderated reactor. The departmental firewalls are strongly upheld and information flows within the Agency itself is constricted. This is how it should be. Nevertheless, there is a minority within the Department that isn't convinced by the data collected thus far, and that is reluctant to accept the conclusions of the U.S. intelligence community. Indeed, it would seem like the U.S. intelligence agencies enjoys a not insignificant confidence-deficit with large parts of the wider analytic community.

Now, there is an emerging debate about the utility of special inspections in Syria. Unfortunately, there has been a significant meshing of legal, political and tactical arguments. I think that some clarity is needed.

At heart is the assertion that the IAEA needs some sort of evidence to call for a special inspection. Those who advocate this view often equate evidence with documents or objects that establishes facts about the Syrian programme. This argument may be correct from a tactical or political point of view, but certainly not from a legal one.

Safeguards in Syria is implemented through the country's comprehensive safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/407). This agreement entered into force on 18 May 1992. I'm going to refer to this agreement in this post, and not the model CSA (which is contained in INFCIRC/153),

Article 72 of Syria's safeguards agreement reads, in applicable parts,

...the Agency may make special inspections ... if the Agency considers that information made available by Syria, including explanations from Syria and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the Agency to fulfill its responsibilities under this Agreement.

Note that a special inspection is made at the Agency's discretion. It may engage in this activity, but may also choose not to if it can find other ways to fulfill its obligations. The IAEA's main responsibility under the agreement is defined in article 2, which reads:

The Agency shall have the right and the obligation to ensure that safeguards will be applied, in accordance with the terms of this Agreement, on all source or special fissionable material in all peaceful nuclear activities within the territory of Syria, under its jurisdiction or carried out under its control anywhere, for the exclusive purpose of verifying that such material is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

In other words, the Agency cannot choose not to follow up on leads that may involve the diversion of nuclear materials. While a reactor under construction doesn't prima facie fall under article 2, associated activities such as the manufacturing and handling of nuclear fuel most certainly will.

If a country constructs a reactor, but does not have any associated safeguarded fuel cycle activities, all kinds of alarm bells should go off in Vienna. The fuel has to come from somewhere. Is it in the country? Do they intend to import it from somewhere? If so, import and exports may need to be declared. These questions alone raise doubt whether all source or special fissionable material is safeguarded.

And indeed, if there is nothing in the routine declarations, it is not far fetched to conclude that the information given by the state isn't adequate for the organization to fulfill its obligation.

Technically, no evidence is needed for the Agency to start consider the special inspection procedure. Theoretically, a similar procedure could be initiated if, say, a country decides not to submit routine declarations on known sites (or submit incomplete information). The attentive reader may observe that this scenario is foreseen in article 76 (a) of the safeguards agreement.

Tactically, however, it may not be prudent to use the special inspection tool. According to Article 76 of the agreement, the Agency and Syria shall consult over the circumstances leading up to the inspection. This is a mandatory requirement. There is no time limit for consultations. Talking may take a long time.

As a result of the consultations the Agency may obtain access, in agreement with Syria, to information. It may also get access to any location under Syrian jurisdiction or control. If Syria refuses to cooperate at this point the matter could get referred to the Agency Board of Governors. The Board may call on Syria to take the required action without delay. However, broadly speaking that's the limit of the Board's enforcement capabilities (see article 18, but see also article 19).

It has been said that this procedure would take months, which would allow a country to relocate potentially incriminating evidence from locations, and to shred any documentation that may be harmful.

The Agency may therefore decide that a special inspection is not the best way to enable it to fulfill its own obligations. This call, however, is political and tactical and has nothing to do with the Agency's rights and obligations.

I thought that distinction had to be made.

The Curse of American Reasonableness by Victor Cha

Updated Oct.20,2008 09:11 KST

The hardest thing to accept about President Bush's October 11 decision to take North Korea off of the terrorism blacklist is not that he was rewarding bad behavior after Pyongyang fired missiles and kicked out IAEA inspectors. Nor was it that Bush as a beleaguered lame duck president might have made bad decisions not unlike Bill Clinton at the end of his term of office. Instead it is that Pyongyang appears capable of forever exploiting the curse of American reasonableness. As a former negotiator, I find this to be the most maddening aspect of Six Party talks.

The curse of American reasonableness means that every agreement in the Six Party process is negotiated with painstaking care in which parties hammer out specific quid pro quos, the synchronization of steps, timelines, with concomitant rewards and penalties. Yet sooner or later, Pyongyang plays brinkmanship and demands more than it was promised or does less than it should. While everyone accepts that the DPRK is being completely unreasonable, they also realize that a failure of the agreement could mean the failure of the Six Party talks and the precipitation of another crisis. To avoid this, the parties end up pressing the U.S., knowing full well that the DPRK is at fault and traversing the bounds of fairness and good faith, but at the same time, certain that the only chance of progress can be had from American reasonableness rather than DPRK unreasonableness. The result is that any additional American flexibility is widely perceived in the region as evidence of American leadership, but is viewed in Washington as some combination of desperation and weakness.

An element of this dynamic was almost certainly at play in the current agreement. The ostensible reason for North Korea's unraveling of the Six Party denuclearization agreement was that the United States once again was "moving the goal posts" in demanding Pyongyang's agreement on a verification protocol for its nuclear declaration as a pre-condition for the North's removal from the U.S. blacklist of terrorist states.

It has become the reflexive analysis of respected media outlets like the New York Times and CNN to blame this negotiation stalemate in Six Party talks on so-called "hardliners" in the Bush administration trying to submarine Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill's negotiation process.

This is the wrong focus. Sure, the nonproliferation and arms control functional bureaus in State and the NSC pushed for a tough verification protocol. That is their job, particularly with a target state as untrustworthy as the DPRK. The focus instead should be on DPRK unreasonableness. The requirement of a verification protocol for the North's nuclear declaration has always been the clear understanding of all the parties at the talks. The principle of verifiability was first enunciated in 2002 as part of the CVID concept ("complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement") during the first Bush administration. The concept was included in the Six Party September 2005 Joint Statement, and it was reaffirmed in the February 2007 agreement. I was involved in negotiations for both of these and the DPRK fully understood our need for verification of any declaration.

And lest people forget, President Bush's official statement on June 26 of his intention to delist North Korea was equally clear in its conditioning delisting on verification: "I am notifying Congress of my intent to rescind North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terror in 45 days. The next 45 days will

be an important period for North Korea to show its seriousness of its cooperation. We will work through the six-party talks to develop a comprehensive and rigorous verification protocol. And during this period, the United States will carefully observe North Korea's actions -- and act accordingly.” Thirteen days later, Secretary of State Rice met with North Korean foreign minister Pak Eui-chun on the sidelines of the ASEAN regional forum meetings in Singapore, the first such meeting at the cabinet level in years and continued to insist on a verification protocol.

Yet when the North starts to rollback disablement, claiming verification was not part of the deal, all parties while angered with Pyongyang’s unreasonableness understand that their best chance at avoiding a collapse of the negotiations and full-blown crisis lies with asking for a little more US flexibility. And so the U.S. takes steps which are praised in the region as signs of American political commitment, but roundly criticized in Washington as rewarding bad behavior.

The verification agreement will soon be codified at the next Six Party meeting in Beijing. While it is weak in its specificity on the North’s uranium-based nuclear activities, proliferation, and undeclared nuclear sites, the agreement will be useful in terms of closing down Yongbyon, hopefully, permanently. In this regard, while the Clinton administration achieved a freeze of Yongbyon, the Bush administration will have achieved a shutdown of it, which constitutes progress. A McCain or Obama administration will have to contend with the problems of dismantlement, uranium, and Syria, and other nuclear issues which undeniably will come up during the verification of Yongbyon.

Conservatives are skeptical that the North will live up to the agreement. But they should be heartened by the fact that if Pyongyang again prevaricates, the United States can always put the North back on the list of terrorist states, particularly if there is unsatisfactory information on the North’s proliferation connections.

The author is director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University and senior fellow at the Pacific Council. He was the U.S. deputy head of delegation for the six-party talks and director of Asian affairs on the NSC 2004-2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/27/AR2008102702437.html>

EDITORIAL

Mr. Assad's Medicine

After sponsoring terrorism against three of its neighbors, Syria plays the victim when its own border is breached.

Tuesday, October 28, 2008; A16

IT WAS interesting to observe the wails of outrage from Syrian officials yesterday following a raid on a target near the country's border with Iraq, carried out by helicopter-borne U.S. commandos. "Criminal and terrorist aggression," charged Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem. "The law of the jungle," bemoaned spokesman Jihad Makdissi at the Syrian Embassy in London. This from a regime whose most notable activities of the past few years have been the serial assassination of senior Lebanese politicians, including former prime minister Rafik Hariri; the continuous and illegal supplying of weapons to the Hezbollah militia for use against Israel and Lebanon's democratic government; the harboring in Damascus of senior leaders of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups; and -- most relevant -- the sheltering of an al-Qaeda network that dispatches 90 percent of the foreign fighters who wage war against U.S. troops and the Iraqi government.

The logic of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad seems to be that his regime can sponsor murders, arms trafficking, infiltrations and suicide bombings in neighboring countries while expecting to be shielded from any retaliation in kind by the diplomatic scruples of democracies. For most of this decade that has been lamentably true: U.S. commanders and Iraqi officials have over and over again pointed to the infiltration of al-Qaeda militants through the Damascus airport and the land border with Iraq, and Syria's refusal to curtail it, without taking direct action. Yet in the past year Israel has intervened in Syria several times to defend its vital interests, including bombing a secret nuclear reactor. If Sunday's raid, which targeted a senior al-Qaeda operative, serves only to put Mr. Assad on notice that the United States, too, is no longer prepared to respect the sovereignty of a criminal regime, it will have been worthwhile.

Mr. Assad's government has lately taken a few cautious steps toward breaking out of its isolation, participating in indirect peace talks with Israel and granting formal diplomatic recognition to Lebanon for the first time. European governments have been quick with rewards, and the next U.S. president -- if it is Barack Obama -- may also hasten to upgrade contacts. If the Syrian regime is genuinely interested in making peace with Israel, distancing itself from Iran and the terrorist movements it sponsors, and rebuilding ties with the West, that is to be welcomed. What Damascus should not be allowed to do is reap the diplomatic and economic rewards of a rapprochement while continuing to plant car bombs, transport illegal weapons and harbor terrorists. Israel has let Mr. Assad know that it is prepared to respond to his terrorism with strikes against legitimate military targets. Now that the United States has sent the same message, maybe the dictator at last will rethink his strategy.

Editorial
The Guardian,
Tuesday October 28 2008

Shooting first, talking later

About the only US comment on a special forces raid that killed at least seven people in a Syrian village close to the Iraqi border on Sunday came yesterday from an unnamed military official in Washington. He said that since Syria had been unable to shut down the so-called rat lines, the network of foreign fighters moving into Iraq, US forces would take matters into their own hands. But that is precisely the problem.

Syria's sovereignty is a weak enough concept from whichever border it is viewed - from Israel, whose fighters bombed a nuclear reactor under construction in the desert, or from Iran, whose missiles transit the country bound for Hizbullah in Lebanon. A withdrawal of US combat troops from Iraq will depend on securing Iraq's borders, with the assistance of its neighbours. Hence the policy pursued in both France and Britain of encouraging Damascus back into the diplomatic fold, of which yesterday's talks in London between David Miliband and his Syrian counterpart were a part. It has also been the policy of the caretaker Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert to pursue Turkish-mediated talks with Syria on the return of the Golan Heights. Unless Washington believed that a raid inside Syria would spur Damascus into taking action against foreign jihadis, or they thought the target was too important to miss, then the attack was another sign of a US administration which shoots first and thinks later.

Not only long-term goals such as withdrawal are damaged. Short-term objectives - among them the need to strike a deal with Baghdad over the legal status of US forces in Iraq by the end of the year - are also affected. For Shia politicians sensitive to the degree of sovereignty their government will exercise as it enters an election year, the US raid into Syria bears a striking resemblance to an operation they carried out recently in Anbar province. A senior member of the main Sunni party was killed in a province which the US had ostensibly handed over to the Iraqi authorities. If America ignores Syria's borders, to what extent will they honour Iraq's sovereignty?

A government seeking to encourage a regional solution should also bear in mind what could happen in Israel. The Likud leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, said yesterday in the Knesset that if he became prime minister, Israel would keep the Golan Heights, large parts of the West Bank and all of Jerusalem - each of which would be enough to sink a deal with the Palestinians. Although his rival Tzipi Livni gained in the polls by refusing to cut a deal with the ultra-orthodox party, the Shas, the election will be close. The hardline Likud leader has gained in popularity since Hamas seized power in Gaza and could well be returned to power.

The Leaks by El-Baradei's Agency

Elias Harfoush

Al-Hayat

13/11/08/ [2008-11-13]

Regardless of the identity of the IAEA diplomats who leaked the information about uranium traces found at the Syrian al-Kibar site, it is evident that those leaks were intended to cast doubts on the Syrian story which has from the very beginning denied the construction of a nuclear reactor in that location bombed by Israeli planes last September.

The leaks are also likely to prevent any possible future cooperation between Syria and the Vienna-based IAEA. Such cooperation is necessary for two reasons: first because it helps the IAEA reach conclusive results with its experts active on the ground - instead of reaching conclusions from a distance - and secondly because it would assert the impression the Syrians are trying to create about the site as an incomplete facility that was still under construction. If the facility was indeed under construction as Minister Walid Moallem reiterated in his press conference with the Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, then where did the traces of uranium in question come from?

The Syrian foreign minister answered that the Israeli planes might have dropped some of those nuclear materials at the site, which is what American and Israeli planes do when they drop uranium-bearing bombs on Iraq, Afghanistan and South Lebanon. Moallem confirmed that the objective of the leaks to the media was political with the aim of pressuring Syria rather than technical with the aim of obtaining information on an alleged nuclear program.

It is well-known that the site hit by the Israeli planes was eventually leveled to the ground. The IAEA experts who visited the site were only able to get soil samples for testing with their request to visit other sites denied. All this fueled the suspicions that were further reinforced by IAEA director Mohamed El-Baradei when he said two days ago that the agency was taking the allegations about the Syrian nuclear program seriously and was asking Damascus to fully cooperate with the investigation. El-Baradei had complained about the Israeli raid on al-Kibar site, arguing that the raid prevented his agency from conducting a full technical investigation at this site to verify the purpose of its construction. He also urged states that possess information about assumed nuclear programs in the Middle East and other areas to present that information to the agency rather than taking unilateral initiatives as Israel did through its raid in September last year.

Until the IAEA holds its meeting in the last week of this month (27 and 28 November), the story of the Syrian uranium will remain hanging between political exploitation and technical leaks. Damascus says it will not respond to the accusations until a complete report is issued by the meeting; the IAEA spokeswoman prefers waiting for the results to come out instead of jumping to conclusions. Jumping to conclusions and leaking information, however, had come from the agency itself this time although the watchdog's performance is supposed to be objective and free of any political exploitation. Perhaps this may be an opportunity to control the agency's modus operandi to avoid contradicting remarks on the objectives of the Syrian nuclear program, ones similar to those surrounding the Iranian nuclear program. This would result in a new diplomatic crisis at the beginning of the new American term at a time when big efforts are made to defuse the Iranian problem.

Syria and the Iranian path

By Yossi Melman

Last update - 02:57 16/11/2008

The discovery of enriched uranium at the Syrian military site that Israel bombed last year may be the first step toward revealing Syria's smoking gun. This week, International Atomic Energy Agency Director Mohamed ElBaradei will submit a report to the organization's Board of Governors on Syria's nuclear program. The report will state that IAEA inspectors discovered traces of enriched uranium at the site on the bank of the Euphrates River.

This will be ElBaradei's first written report on the Syrian issue, and the first time since the bombing that a non-American, non-Israeli official has expressed suspicions that the bombed site was a nuclear reactor. Until now, only the CIA claimed the structure was a nuclear reactor in the final stages of construction, but even it spoke cautiously, noting that radioactive material had yet to be introduced to the site.

The IAEA report not only strengthens claims by the American and Israeli intelligence community, it even goes beyond them. Since the bombing, the Syrians have made every effort to deny, confuse and conceal the nature of the site. At first they claimed Israeli planes entered their airspace but were repelled. Then they said the planes dropped a few bombs, but caused no damage.

Later, Syrian President Bashar Assad confirmed that the planes had bombed a military building, but denied vehemently that the location contained a nuclear reactor. North Korea, which built the facility, echoed Assad's sentiments.

Photographs released by U.S. intelligence show clearly that the structures that survived the bombing were quickly cleared away, and vast amounts of soil were removed from the area, most likely to remove traces of radioactivity.

Furthermore, Syria found various ways to block IAEA inspectors from the site. In June, nine months after the bombing, Damascus finally allowed inspectors to enter. They took samples of earth, rocks, air, water and plants, and transferred them to IAEA laboratories in Austria.

The results that emerged were complicated and ambiguous, and experts struggled to come to definitive conclusions. For a while it seemed as if Syria's efforts to hide the circumstances of the bombing were succeeding. Lately, however, experts have drawn clear results - traces of man-made uranium were identified at the site.

The experts were unable to determine the precise source of the radioactive material, but have cited three options. The first is that small amounts of radioactive material entered the site during its construction, which conflicts with U.S. intelligence's preliminary findings. The second option is that Syrian or foreign nuclear experts came into contact with radioactive material at their workplace and unintentionally left it behind at the facility. A final option is that equipment previously used to enrich uranium was installed at the site.

The discovery of uranium now reinforces the onus on the Assad regime, which will be forced to provide comprehensive explanations. The strange pronouncements made last week by Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem - that the Israeli planes dropped bombs bearing radioactive material - can hardly be considered such an explanation.

The IAEA will demand that Syria allow its officials to speak with the experts who discovered the radioactive material or equipment at the site. For several weeks Damascus has refused to allow additional visits from IAEA inspectors, and if it persists, suspicions will heighten that it has something to hide.

Pushing Syria into the corner is reminiscent of what happened to Iran. Tehran also denied at first that it had built hidden nuclear facilities (such as the uranium enrichment facility in Natanz, the centrifuge factory in Tehran and the reactor in Arak.)

When the truth finally emerged, Iran was forced to admit the existence of the sites, but continued to deny that they were being used for nuclear activity. As it was confronted with ever more facts, it continued weaving its web of lies, until the IAEA finally labeled it a non-compliant country that had violated its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on it.

Syria is still far from that point, but the discovery of uranium at the bombed site could be a turning point. It could be the first step toward finding the smoking gun that incriminates Damascus in the international community, and strengthens Israel's claim that its own operation was necessary and justified to prevent Syria from developing a nuclear weapon.

PolicyWatch #1432

Syria's Reactor: Can the IAEA Act Effectively?

By Patrick Clawson and David Schenker

November 21, 2008

High on the agenda of the November 27-28 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors (BOG) will be the November 19 report from Director General Mohammed ElBaradei about Syria. How the IAEA responds to the Syrian challenge may determine whether future urgent proliferation concerns are taken to the IAEA and UN Security Council or resolved through military force, such as Israel's airstrike last year on Syria's Dayr Az Zor site.

Background

On September 6, 2007, Israeli warplanes bombed a site at al Kibar near Dayr Az Zor (referred to as Dair Alzour in the IAEA report) in northeastern Syria. Days later, Syria demolished the remaining portions of the damaged facility, bulldozed the site, and erected a new building atop the buried rubble. On April 24, 2008, senior U.S. intelligence officials briefed Congress and the press about the Dayr Az Zor site, saying that the United States had "detailed information showing that the al Kibar facility was a nuclear reactor."

Following the briefing, Syria granted IAEA inspectors access to Dayr Az Zor (but denied them access to three other sites), where they took environmental samples on June 23, 2008. After the visit, Syria suspended cooperation with the IAEA, saying it was awaiting the results of the samples. Despite all that Damascus had done to scrub the site, IAEA soil samples revealed "a significant number of natural uranium particles" that were "anthropogenic," that is, produced by human action rather than being already present in the environment.

Since then, Syria has refused to respond to IAEA requests for additional information. In its defense, Syria told the IAEA that particles found at the site "were contained in the missiles that were dropped from the Israeli planes onto the buildings." These claims have been widely dismissed, however, as no country is known to have ever used natural uranium in a bomb or a missile.

The IAEA and Syria

Syria's safeguards agreement with the IAEA requires notification to the agency in advance of construction of any nuclear facility, regardless of the presence of nuclear material. So, if indeed Syria was building a reactor, it would have violated its IAEA obligations. Not surprisingly, Syria has claimed that the site was not a reactor, but Damascus has not made much of a case on its own behalf. As the IAEA report notes, "Syria has not yet acceded to the Agency's request to provide any documentation relevant to the destroyed building, or any of the other buildings, to support its statements." Damascus also said that the site could not have been a reactor because of "the unreliable and insufficient electricity supplies [and] the unavailability of large quantities of treated water." Yet, according to the IAEA report, the water "pumping capacity is adequate for a reactor of the size referred to" and the site had "sufficient electrical capacity to operate the pumping system."

While the very construction of a reactor without notification violates Syria's international treaty obligations, evidence of nuclear material at the site significantly raises the level of concern. The natural uranium found by the IAEA is the type of fuel that would be fed into a reactor to produce plutonium, which after extraction in a reprocessing facility, could fuel a nuclear bomb. At a minimum, the presence of the natural uranium particles suggests that fuel for the reactor may have been on site when the facility was bombed.

Violations of International Commitments

The Bashar Asad regime's apparent violations of Syria's nuclear nonproliferation treaty commitments are only the latest in a series of broken agreements. In his eight years as president, Asad has established an impressive history of broken pledges to Washington. Two examples provide illustration:

In June 2001, then Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Damascus with the express goal of securing a Syrian commitment to end the smuggling of oil from Saddam Hussein's Iraq in contravention of the UN Oil for Food program. Powell hoped to close the Kirkuk-Banyas pipeline that supplied Damascus with 150,000 barrels per day of Iraqi crude and Saddam with hundreds of millions of dollars. According to Powell, Asad agreed to close the pipeline but reneged on this promise, and the pipeline remained open until 2003, when U.S. forces in Iraq closed the spigot. Secretary Powell again traveled to Damascus, in April 2003, this time to gain a Syrian commitment on terrorism. In an interview following his return, Powell relayed that "Asad said that he was taking action to close down these [Damascus-based Palestinian terrorist] offices, and that he would restrict their ability to communicate." Nevertheless, these offices continued to operate; five months later, in August 2003, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad suicide bomber killed 23 in Jerusalem.

The Asad regime's pattern of broken bilateral agreements with Washington -- and now, of international treaty obligations to the IAEA—raises doubts about whether Syria can be trusted to implement the terms of a peace treaty with Israel. At a minimum, these experiences should inform Washington's policy should the next administration decide to actively mediate in Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Based on the Asad regime's record of keeping commitments, Washington cannot effectively guarantee Syrian treaty obligations to Israel. As such, within the context of any U.S.-brokered deal, Washington should ensure that tangible and irreversible Syrian concessions coincide with -- if not precede -- Israeli territorial withdrawals.

Judging the IAEA Meeting

The November 19 IAEA report is the latest evidence of the superb technical capabilities of the IAEA staff. Regrettably, however, this work has at times been undercut by IAEA director general ElBaradei, who has a tendency to emphasize benign interpretations of ambiguous findings while ignoring mechanisms available for suspected proliferators to provide evidence to the contrary. The real shortcoming with the international law approach, however, has been the failure of will by the governments that sit on the IAEA BOG and the Security Council.

Next week's meeting will answer longstanding questions regarding the utility of the IAEA for resolving nuclear problems. If Syrian stonewalling continues, how will the IAEA proceed? Will the BOG recommend sanctions if the investigation yields derogatory conclusions or if Syria continues to put forth implausible explanations unsupported by evidence?

A serious response by the IAEA BOG would be to warn Syria that failure to resolve the outstanding issues on a timely basis would constitute a violation of Syria's obligations, which the IAEA would have to report to the Security Council for action by that body. At a minimum, the BOG should demand documentation of Syria's claims about the destroyed building and follow-up inspections of Dayr Az Zor and access to the three facilities to which Syria denied the IAEA. The unfortunate reality is that the IAEA/Security Council approach has, to date, not dealt effectively with several proliferation threats. In contrast, Israeli military action resulted in the complete destruction of the reactor site and evidently to an indefinite postponement if not abandonment of Syria's nuclear ambitions. Moreover, the Israeli action was tacitly accepted by the international community: no Arab country (other than Syria) and no European government complained about the Israeli raid. Even the Arab League statement was mild.

International reaction to Israel's Al Kibar strike stands in stark contrast to its 1981 raid on the Iraqi Osiraq reactor, which was nearly universally condemned. One way to understand the difference between 1981 and 2007 is that the world today is less optimistic that reliance on the IAEA can stop proliferation. The IAEA can change this perception by acting decisively on Syria during its next meeting. And in the process, it just might generate enough credibility regarding IAEA effectiveness to forestall an airstrike -- Israeli or American -- against Tehran's nuclear facilities.

Hovering in the background is Syria's tentative reopening of peace talks with Israel. The November 20 Financial Times nicely summed up the situation, describing these talks as "a get-out-of-jail-free card [when] Syria has not changed its regional behavior. [French president] Sarkozy, nonetheless, invited [Assad] to a summit in Paris. . . . The message this sends to the Middle East is disastrous."

Israeli hawks ready to fly on Iran

Paul Sheehan

November 24, 2008 [Accessed 2008-11-23T14:40Z]

[EXCERPT]

In effect, Israel has already conducted a test run into an enemy country and been encouraged by the results. In September last year, Israeli Air Force jets destroyed a nuclear facility under construction in Syria. Israel never said a word. Syria never said a word. No government in the Middle East ever said a word.

"Israel's raid on Syria was greeted by a thunderous silence from the rest of the region," Eran Lerman [a former senior member of Israel's Directorate of Military Intelligence] said. "What that silence told us was that the rest of the region regard Syria as part of the Iranian problem. If Iran obtains the bomb, even if they don't use it or threaten to use it, they will have positioned themselves in a way that will transform this region into a much more dangerous place. Iran has influence on the Shiia communities, not just in Iraq and through Hezbollah in Lebanon but in Syria and the Gulf states. The position of the moderate states in the Gulf will have been rendered more fragile."

<http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=2352>

So it Really was a Reactor in Syria

Asculai, Ephraim

INSS Insight No. 81

November 23, 2008

[EXCERPT]

There are two outstanding issues on the table for the forthcoming IAEA Board of Governors meeting: the nuclear programs of Syria and Iran.

Syria

The IAEA report on the Syrian issue that finally came out on November 19, 2008 gave a detailed summary of its findings but omitted two important items: the technical details of the sampled uranium particles found in the vicinity of the Syrian reactor site at Dair Alzour (or al-Kibar, as called by US reports) and the unequivocal statement that the site housed a nuclear reactor under construction when it was destroyed on the night of September 6, 2007. By leaving out these two elements, the report gave everyone what it wanted: Syria and its supporters could happily claim that there was no reactor at the site, while others could vary in their conclusions from uncertainty to firm belief that the destruction of the construction prevented or at least delayed Syria from acquiring a military nuclear capability. This ambiguity on the part of the IAEA should have been expected, since it is in line with its organizational culture – try to have something nice to say about member states.

Not all the technical facts detailed in the report are needed to reach the conclusion that the installation housed a nuclear reactor that was nearing operation, much as the US claimed. It is sufficient to note that the report confirmed that the water pumping capacity was sufficient for removing 25 megawatts of energy. An energy source of this magnitude would need to burn either fossil or nuclear fuel, or it would have to consume electrical energy imported to the site. Since the Syrians confirmed "the unreliable and insufficient electricity supplies in the area," the last option is not viable. Since it is obvious that this was not a fossil fuel electricity producing station (and no one claimed that it was) the conclusion is unequivocal. In addition, a fossil fuel plant would have been constructed near the Euphrates River for efficiency reasons and not hidden inland, out of sight. The IAEA chose to state that "While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building, as described above, along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water, are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site." One cannot but wonder, what could have possibly been the "non-nuclear use"?

Although not essential for the evaluation, the visit to the site and the results of the samples taken showed the presence of a few natural uranium particles that had undergone chemical processing. Natural uranium is used in the North-Korean-type reactor, assessed by the US to have been constructed in Syria. The IAEA chose not to divulge the composition and other characteristics of the uranium particles (information it certainly has, since it assessed the chemical processes), yet thereby confirmed the relationship between the particles and nuclear fuel. Otherwise, it would have certainly noted it. Although the Syrians did their best to clean the area around the site, they evidently did not do a good enough job and a few particles remained on the surface, some of which were detected by the very sensitive analytical methods of the IAEA laboratories.

It is possible that the fact that no graphite particles were found indicates that the bombs did not penetrate the reactor's core, and the source of the uranium particles were the fuel rods waiting to be loaded into the core. If true, this could indicate that the reactor was a short time away from its startup, when hitting it could already cause environmental damage.

The IAEA Director General reiterates his accusation that "the Agency was severely hampered in discharging its responsibilities under the NPT and under Syria's Safeguards Agreement by the unilateral use of force and by the late provision of information concerning the building at the Dair Alzour site." One can only speculate what would have been the international consequences of such a visit to an operating reactor, or much worse, whether Syria's nuclear program would have been confirmed by a Syrian nuclear explosion.

[deletia]

http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Outside_View_A_litmus_test_for_the_IAEA_999.html

Outside View: A litmus test for the IAEA

by Patrick Clawson | David Schenker
Washington (UPI) Nov 25, 2008

High on the agenda of this week's meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors will be the recent report from Director General Mohammed ElBaradei about Syria.

How the agency responds to the Syrian challenge may determine whether future urgent proliferation concerns are brought before it and the U.N. Security Council or resolved through military force, as Israel did with its airstrike last year on Syria's al-Kibar site.

On Sept. 6, 2007, Israeli warplanes bombed the site in northeastern Syria. Days later Syria demolished the remaining portions of the damaged facility, bulldozed the site and erected a new building atop the buried rubble. In April 2008 senior U.S. intelligence officials briefed Congress and the press, saying they had detailed information showing that the al-Kibar facility was a nuclear reactor.

In June Syria granted IAEA inspectors access to the site (while denying them access to three other sites), where they took environmental samples. After the visit Syria suspended cooperation with the agency, saying it was awaiting the results of the samples. Despite all that Damascus had done to scrub the site, IAEA soil samples revealed "a significant number of natural uranium particles" that were "anthropogenic," that is, produced by human action rather than being already present in the environment.

Since then Syria has refused to respond to IAEA requests for additional information. In its defense Syria told the IAEA that particles found at the site "were contained in the missiles that were dropped from the Israeli planes onto the buildings." These claims have been widely dismissed, however, as no country is known to have ever used natural uranium in a bomb or a missile.

Syria's safeguards agreement with the IAEA requires notification to the agency in advance of construction of any nuclear facility, regardless of the presence of nuclear material. So, if indeed Syria was building a reactor, it would have violated its IAEA obligations. Not surprisingly, Syria has claimed the site was not a reactor, but Damascus has not made much of a case on its own behalf. As the IAEA report notes, "Syria has not yet acceded to the Agency's request to provide any documentation relevant to the destroyed building, or any of the other buildings, to support its statements."

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The IAEA report is the latest evidence of the superb technical capabilities of the IAEA staff. Regrettably, however, this work at times has been undercut by ElBaradei, who has a tendency to emphasize benign interpretations of ambiguous findings while ignoring mechanisms available for

suspected proliferators to provide evidence to the contrary. The real shortcoming with the international law approach, however, has been the failure of will by the governments that sit on the agency's board of governors and the U.N. Security Council.

Next week's meeting will answer longstanding questions regarding the utility of the agency for resolving nuclear problems. If Syrian stonewalling continues, how will the IAEA proceed? Will the governors recommend sanctions if the investigation yields derogatory conclusions or if Syria continues to put forth implausible explanations unsupported by evidence?

A serious response by the governors would be to warn Syria that failure to resolve the outstanding issues on a timely basis would constitute a violation of Syria's obligations, which the IAEA would have to report to the Security Council for action by that body. At a minimum, the governors should demand documentation of Syria's claims about the destroyed building and follow-up inspections of the site and access to the three facilities to which Syria denied the IAEA.

The unfortunate reality is that the IAEA/Security Council approach, to date, has not dealt effectively with several proliferation threats. In contrast, Israeli military action resulted in the complete destruction of the reactor site and evidently to an indefinite postponement if not abandonment of Syria's nuclear ambitions. Moreover, the Israeli action was tacitly accepted by the international community: No Arab country (other than Syria) and no European government complained about the Israeli raid. Even the Arab League statement was mild.

International reaction to Israel's al-Kibar strike stands in stark contrast to its 1981 raid on the Iraqi Osiraq reactor, which was nearly universally condemned. One way to understand the difference between 1981 and 2007 is that the world today is less optimistic that reliance on the IAEA can stop proliferation. The agency can change this perception by acting decisively on Syria during its next meeting. And in the process, it just might generate enough credibility regarding its effectiveness to forestall an airstrike -- Israeli or American -- against Tehran's nuclear facilities.

(Patrick Clawson is deputy director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; David Schenker is a senior fellow and director of the Program on Arab Politics at the institute, which first published a version of this article.)

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Particles of doubt

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Damascus won't allow further inspections of Al-Kibar, the site that Israel bombed last September and that the US claims was a nuclear facility, Bassel Oudat reports from Damascus

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that it will ask Syria for topsoil and equipment removed from Al-Kibar site, in northeast Syria. The IAEA says that it is still trying to determine the nature of the site, which was bombed by Israel in September 2007, but thinks that it bears "the characteristics of a nuclear reactor".

"While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building... are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site," the report says.

According to the report, IAEA inspectors found a "significant number" of uranium particles in the site, even though the Syrian authorities hastened to bury the facility completely after the Israeli raid. Still, the IAEA report notes that the IAEA cannot determine the source of the uranium unless Damascus allows international experts to uncover the debris of the building.

The IAEA expressed the hope that Syria would allow it to visit the site, inspect the debris, and examine any equipment that has been removed from the venue. IAEA officials have asked Israel to provide information concerning the Syrian allegation that the uranium particles found in the scene come from the depleted uranium (DU) coating of Israeli shells.

"Syria has not yet provided the requested documentation" to back up its assertion that the bombed building was a non-nuclear military facility, IAEA officials said. They added that Israel's "unilateral use of force" interfered with the efficacy of the investigation, but despite this, that the Syrian dossier will be treated just like the Iranian dossier should Syria refuse to cooperate.

IAEA chief Mohamed El-Baradei said that IAEA intends to discuss with Syrian officials pictures of the Al-Kibar site, which the agency obtained from Israel, France and the US in an attempt to spur Damascus to release more information about the case.

Syrian Nuclear Energy Agency chief Ibrahim Othman, speaking to reporters in Geneva, dismissed the IAEA report as "proving nothing" and called for an end to the investigation. Othman said that Syria allowed international investigators one visit in June, and will not allow another.

Asked if Syria was rejecting further communication with the IAEA, the Syrian official said, "No, no. If the requested information is related to the accusation, we will provide it." But he said that further on-site inspection was "difficult".

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem commented on the report by saying that it aims to "pressure Syria". He said that any traces of uranium in the site were due to the shells Israel used in the attack. He pointed out that both Israel and the US have a history of using shells coated with DU in Iraq and Afghanistan. Israeli use of DU bombs and its own nuclear weapons programme were not mentioned in the IAEA report.

The US suspects that the site contained a nuclear reactor based on a North Korean design. US officials claim that the facility was capable of producing bomb-grade plutonium if allowed to operate. The White House maintains that North Korea helped Syria in secret nuclear activities, something that Damascus denies.

With the US calling for investigation in Syria's nuclear activities, the IAEA sent a team of experts to Syria last April to investigate Al-Kibar site. Syria didn't announce the visit at the time and discouraged any reporting on the IAEA investigation. Syrian officials declined to comment on the activities of the inspectors. Well-informed Syrian sources said that Damascus cooperated with the experts, but didn't allow them to move beyond 500 metres from the site.

Ri Tau Hai, a North Korean diplomat based in Damascus, denied that there is any nuclear cooperation between his country and Syria. He told Al-Ahram Weekly that, "Syria is a friendly country and we have strong economic and military cooperation with it. There are Korean experts working in more than one field in Syria, including military experts, but there is no cooperation of any kind in the nuclear field... There are no North Korean reactors or nuclear substances in Syria," he said.

Saber Fahout, media advisor to the Syrian president, denied that Syria has a military nuclear programme, saying that the current interest in Syrian nuclear activities is designed to "undermine the potential for the peace process." He added that the "US, through its highly accurate satellite monitoring, knows better than anyone that Syria doesn't have nuclear reactors of a military nature."

Ghassan Abdel-Aziz, a member of the Syrian ruling National Front Command, told the Weekly that, "Syria has never sought to acquire nuclear weapons... and is utterly committed to international resolutions in this regard."

Well-informed Syrian sources say that Damascus has no desire to build a military nuclear programme, adding that Syria lacks the technical, human, and financial capabilities to guarantee the safety of such installations.

Syria is still in a state of war with Israel, despite the recent indirect talks they held with Turkish mediation. In the event of any nuclear confrontation between the two countries, the Syrians claim, nuclear weapons would be of no value. Syria also has long-range missiles that can reach any point in Israel. Therefore, nuclear weapons would not be of any use in war, according to the same sources.

Syria doesn't have the human resources needed to build a big nuclear programme. Also, the security of nuclear facilities is a very complex matter, involving for example the choice of a seismically stable site

and precautions for preventing radioactive leaks. Such precautions would be hard to conceal and would require a very high technical, scientific and industrial level.

The IAEA report on Syria's nuclear activities coincided with an offer by the same agency to help Syria build a nuclear power station costing \$200 million. The offer, which would require ratification of the IAEA Board of Governors, involves assistance in small nuclear projects related to medical and agricultural use. Several Western countries, including the US and the UK are reluctant to endorse the offer. But other members of the IAEA Board of Governors approved the proposal, saying that such agreements must not be politicised without clear and good reasons.

Syrian sources say that claims that traces of uranium have been found in Syria aim to undermine future agreements between Damascus and the IAEA.

It is worth noting that the Syrian Nuclear Energy Agency is a small establishment with little more than laboratory-level nuclear reactors. The agency is mainly active in examining medical, agricultural, and industrial substances and assessing their radioactive level.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Syria and the Nuclear Cops

IAEA Chief Mohamed ElBaradei believes Syria deserves a new reactor.

NOVEMBER 28, 2008

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed last week that it had discovered a "significant number" of chemically processed uranium particles at a suspected Syrian nuclear site destroyed last year by Israel. The IAEA also reported that satellite images of the site taken prior to its destruction had the markings of a nuclear reactor.

So what did IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei do with this information? Why, urge the approval of a Syrian request for a \$350,000 feasibility study for a new reactor.

"People and countries are innocent until proven guilty," the Egyptian told an IAEA committee studying the request, according to a transcript of his comments obtained by Agence-France Presse. "Technical cooperation programs to any member states should not be blocked, delayed or otherwise hindered for mere suspicion or unproven allegations."

Mr. ElBaradei has an interesting idea of what "mere suspicion" amounts to. Syria bulldozed the wreckage of the destroyed reactor -- the existence of which it has always denied -- shortly after the Israeli raid. It later limited IAEA inspectors to a single visit to the area, and has ruled out an IAEA request to inspect three other sites suspected of being part of a covert nuclear program. Those three sites were also landscaped by the Syrians after the IAEA requested visits, according to the agency's chief investigator.

By its own admission, the IAEA knew nothing about the Syrian reactor, much less of North Korea's involvement in it, until it was destroyed. For an agency charged with enforcing the nonproliferation regime, that's bad enough, if not altogether surprising. That Mr. ElBaradei should now abet Syria's nuclear ambitions -- even as it obstructs his own inspectors -- is astonishing. Remind us again why Condoleezza Rice agreed to give this man a second term?

LETTERS

Probing Syria's Nuclear Project

DECEMBER 2, 2008, 9:38 P.M. ET

In regard to your Nov. 28 editorial "Syria and the Nuclear Cops":

The way the international nonproliferation system is meant to work is as follows: If states, many of which have surveillance capabilities, have any suspicions of clandestine nuclear activity, they should report them to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Armed with this information, the IAEA investigates its veracity. In the case of Syria, instead of providing the IAEA with images of a building alleged to be a reactor, Israel unilaterally bombed the installation. Meanwhile, information was withheld from the IAEA for more than six months, by which time Syria had cleaned away the rubble and built a new facility. This made the agency's verification work difficult and complex.

The results, so far, are inconclusive and the verification process continues. To aid his inspectors, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei is calling on Syria to provide maximum transparency. He is also calling on other states, including Israel, that have inexplicably withheld critical information on the site, particularly the images from the immediate aftermath, to provide that information to the IAEA.

The 35 member countries of the IAEA Board of Governors have agreed to approve a nuclear power feasibility project requested by Syria. Similar IAEA-mandated studies on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes are being conducted in 20 other countries. The Syria project is at an early stage, and the board may revisit it during its different phases.

Unlike in the cases of Iraq, Israel, Iran and North Korea, where the agency found these countries to be in violation of its rules and restricted their IAEA technical cooperation projects, the agency has not made any such judgment of Syria. In accordance with principles of fairness and equity, a state has full rights of membership until decided otherwise, based on established facts.

Melissa Fleming
International Atomic Energy Agency
Vienna

[See Israel Atomic Energy Commission spokeswoman response of 2008-12-12 below.]

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/2112/can-the-iaea-suspend-technical-cooperation-with-syria#comment>

[ARTICLE AND SELECTED COMMENTS]

Can the IAEA Suspend Assistance to Syria?

posted Tuesday **November 25, 2008** under Syria by james_acton

There is a storm brewing over in Vienna about whether the IAEA should cease technical cooperation with Syria on account of the latter's suspected nuclear programme.

The IAEA Director General weighed in on Monday. According to Reuters

IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei urged governors to approve the aid project, saying there was no legal basis for curbing Syria's IAEA membership rights based on unverified accusations.

"There are claims against Syria, which we're looking at. There were claims against Iraq, which were proven bonkers (mad), and after, the result was a terrible war," he said in remarks to the closed gathering relayed to Reuters.

...

"So we have to be very careful when we talk about an investigation," ElBaradei said. "Even people who are not a lawyer would know that people and countries are innocent until proven guilty. And we continue to act on that basis."

Let me say first off that, on a personal level, I entirely agree with suspending technical cooperation with Syria. Ceasing to assist Syria to develop a nuclear power programme is an entirely appropriate and proportionate step given the very strong evidence that Syria built a clandestine reactor—in fact, in my opinion, it would be "bonkers" not to take this step.

But, putting my personal feelings aside, is ElBaradei right about the lack of a legal basis for stopping technical cooperation?

Article 19 of Syria's Comprehensive Safeguards agreement states that

If the Board, upon examination of relevant information reported to it by the Director General, finds that the Agency is not able to verify that there has been no diversion of nuclear material required to be safeguarded under this Agreement to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, it may make the reports provided for in paragraph C of Article XII of the Statute of the Agency (hereinafter referred to as "the Statute") and may also take, where applicable, the other measures provided for in that paragraph. In taking such action the Board shall take account of the degree of assurance provided by the safeguards measures that have been applied and shall afford Syria every reasonable opportunity to furnish the Board with any necessary reassurance.

Note the way this article is phrased. The IAEA is required to make a finding of non-compliance if it is unable to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material. It does not have to prove there has been a

diversion; it only needs to be unable to prove that there hasn't been one. So, ElBaradei is quite wrong when he says that states are innocent until proven guilty. Fair or not, Syria signed up to a system that works the other way around.

Given the evidence in GOV/2008/60, there seems little doubt that the IAEA cannot verify the non-diversion of nuclear material in Syria. Moreover, it has given Syria "every reasonable opportunity to furnish the Board with any necessary reassurance". Syria has recently said it will allow no more inspections.

So, there seems to me little doubt that the Board already has legal right (if not the obligation) to find Syria in non-compliance. If that is done, article XII.C of the Statute comes into play:

The Board shall call upon the recipient State or States to remedy forthwith any non-compliance which it finds to have occurred. The Board shall report the non-compliance to all members and to the Security Council and General Assembly of the United Nations. In the event of failure of the recipient State or States to take fully corrective action within a reasonable time, the Board may take one or both of the following measures: direct curtailment or suspension of assistance being provided by the Agency...

The article manifestly gives the IAEA the right to suspend technical cooperation. I would argue that it could do this right away since it has already given Syria "reasonable time" to take "fully corrective actions" but I am sure that others would argue this article means that Syria must be given some more time after it is found in non-compliance. In any event, even if the IAEA can't suspend technical cooperation right now, it should be able to do so in the near future, if it finds Syria in non-compliance now.

There, however, is the rub. My reading of the law is that the IAEA can only suspend technical cooperation after finding Syria in non-compliance. As much as I think such a finding would be legally justified (and entirely deserved), it seems like a non-starter right now. And because of that it also seems to me that the legal basis for denying Syria technical cooperation is shaky—even if the reasons are totally different from those implied by the Director General.

[Selected Comments]

James,

While I agree with your post in principle, I think it is important to look at the big picture and think tactically. Specifically, what is the goal and what is the best way to get there? If the goal is a full accounting of the BOE then I don't think a finding of noncompliance is going to get you there (or anywhere useful) unless it's part of a bigger political strategy.

So while the IAEA may have the legal right to declare Syria in noncompliance, it probably is not wise to do so, at least at this time.

— Andy · Nov 25, 11:17 PM ·

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For a long time, there was a dangerous disconnect between the IAEA's technical assistance and standards put forward by the Departments of Nuclear Safety and Safeguards. This was particularly true in the case of radioactive source material. Some shocking lapses were discovered by the Agency, and, over time, ElBaradei and Blix largely corrected this problem.

What is often overlooked by some is the political bargain that creates such support for the Agency: although the technical cooperation (TC) budget is voluntary, if there were no technical assistance, support for safeguards from less-developed countries would evaporate. The big nuclear power countries are there for safeguards, the less-developed are there for the TC program[me].

Because of this interdependence, it seems to me that the objectives of TC and safeguards/safety should seamlessly complement each other. But ElBaradei and other politicians clearly understand the attendant political risks of a point-of-no-return referral to the UNSC for non-compliance. I expect the Agency will defer or slow-roll the Syria TC project until things become more clear.

— AWR · Nov 26, 12:49

#

I agree with Andy that we should think of the larger goal. First, what would ending technical cooperation with Syria do? Here, one should consider both Syria's reaction and that of other states. Syria is not likely to provide more or better information on the BoE. As for other states, seems to me that a few might be deterred from following what appears to be the Syrian path, but many would believe this is yet another case of the "haves" preemptively taking out the "have-nots" without evidence.

Secondly, take a look at the cooperation the IAEA has with Syria: conversion of the MNSR reactor from HEU to LEU fuel, starting up medical isotope production (Mo-99) with LEU targets, as well as potential nuclear power cooperation.

So let's see — nuclear power is not likely to be constructed quickly, but we can quickly torpedo conversion of the MNSR to LEU fuel, part of a multinational nonproliferation and anti-terrorism initiative (GTRI). And ending hopes for medical isotope production both looks horrible from a humanitarian standpoint, and certainly does not help bring Western security culture, improved understanding, etc. etc. to Syria (and could force them into the better-known process of using HEU targets, maybe?)

There certainly are cases where ending cooperation should be an automatic penalty, but I think we have to be very careful about accusations, and consider both the short- and long-term consequences. If IAEA is to reject Syrian cooperation, it has to have an iron-clad legal basis, and should be designed to ensure other nations do not think that the IAEA is picking on a "have-not" nation.

— Cristina Hansell · Dec 1, 04:01 PM ·

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@ Cristina Hansell:

IMHO, you can't have it both ways – you can't blow off IAEA safeguards requests for info and benefit from technical cooperation at the same time. The Agency needs to think this out carefully, and the Board, like it or not, will be reluctant, to say the least, in approving projects for Syria that are not clearly related to a development or public health need, like cancer stuff. Despite the flaws in the NPT bargain, there should be no cooperation on TC with Syria until they cooperate on safeguards. The IAEA rarely, if ever, asks for things that are unreasonable.

— AWR · Dec 1, 04:56 PM ·

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AWR:

I agree the NPT is meant to be a bargain. The difficulty is in what we mean by “benefiting from technical cooperation.” If we mean sales of a nuclear reactor, I'm with you. But if the IAEA TC is in reactor safety... and the reactor is question is one Syria will build itself or with partners whom the IAEA isn't influencing...

While an unsafe reactor could put Syria at risk, doesn't it put the neighbors at risk, too? So my question is what TC should be allowed (continue IAEA cooperation with Syria on medicine? fresh water? not reactor safety?) and how can this be legally sustained so that the incentives for other actors are as positive as we can make them.

— Cristina Hansell · Dec 2, 03:23 PM ·

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AWR: on the subject of Syria and TC, see my letter to the editor of the Wall Street Journal, published today:

In regard to your Nov. 28 editorial “Syria and the Nuclear Cops”:

The way the international nonproliferation system is meant to work is as follows: If states, many of which have surveillance capabilities, have any suspicions of clandestine nuclear activity, they should report them to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Armed with this information, the IAEA investigates its veracity. In the case of Syria, instead of providing the IAEA with images of a building alleged to be a reactor, Israel unilaterally bombed the installation. Meanwhile, information was withheld from the IAEA for more than six months, by which time Syria had cleaned away the rubble and built a new facility. This made the agency's verification work difficult and complex.

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Melissa Fleming
International Atomic Energy Agency
Vienna
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122826791151574655.html>

— Melissa Fleming, IAEA Spokesperson · Dec 3, 04:43 AM ·

Ayoon wa Azan (Their Causes Are Entrusted to Others)

Jihad el-Khazen

Al-Hayat

10/12/08/

[EXCERPT]

I called Dr Mohamed ElBaradei and his wife Aida to wish them a happy Adha *[7-8 December 2008]*, but I ended up having a long discussion with the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Iran and Syria and on the degree of truth or fiction in the talk about the two countries' nuclear programs.

The agency, as its Director General said, is still waiting for many clarifications from Syria and still wants its inspectors to check different sites. But, ElBaradei cannot deprive Syria of the right to join the nuclear club. Such a decision is taken once Syria is proven to have violated concluded agreements and existing conditions.

I understood from Dr ElBaradei that the agency is weighing many projects with Syria within the framework of a technical feasibility study. The appropriate project, if any, will be implemented under the agency supervision. But so far no project is worth an official request.

Dr ElBaradei insisted on Syria's need to prove its innocence amidst the charges that have been circulating following the Israeli air raid. He complained that the Israeli strike was mounted on mere suspicions; Israel and the US should have provided the nuclear watchdog with all available information so that it would verify its validity.

[deletia]

<http://www.j-khazen.blogspot.com/>

<http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=6424308>

**Fmr. Weapons Inspector On Nuclear Iran, Syria, And Barack Obama
Hans Blix Says Demanding Iran Suspend Enrichment Before Negotiations Is 'Silly'**

By LARA SETRAKIAN

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates, Dec. 10, 2008

[EXCERPT]

ABC: What do you think of what happened in Syria, the strike on an alleged nuclear facility?

Blix : I think it's mystifying ... Mohammed Al Baradei had a point, saying why didn't they come to us, ask for an inspection? Instead, they bombed. A bit more transparency, by those who often ask for transparency, would be desirable. What puzzles me now are reports from the IAEA that they've found some traces of uranium. That puzzles me because if it was a reactor, uranium is about the last thing you would introduce. If it were a reactor, that would mean it was practically ready.

LETTERS

DECEMBER 12, 2008, 10:16 P.M. ET

Israel Responds to IAEA's Letter on Syria's Site

The International Atomic Energy Agency's letter of Dec. 3 ("Probing Syria's Nuclear Project") [*See above*] defending the agency's record in investigating Syria is astonishing, but not surprising. Each time the agency comes under political criticism for handling of a Middle Eastern country's flagrant breaches of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or its safeguards agreement, the agency immediately resorts to publicly invoking Israel's name.

It is the government of Israel's firm position that compliance with legally binding nonproliferation commitments is the cornerstone of an effective global regime. Israel has always been guided by this principle and has strictly adhered to it.

Past and present practices by four Middle Eastern countries which exploit their NPT membership to disguise the true nature of their nuclear programs have been a source of grave concern to the international community. The IAEA should take responsibility for the manner in which it has been dealing with these four countries, none of which is Israel.

The IAEA, as specified in its recent report, is examining uranium particles found at the Syrian site where some features are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site. Syria is also requested to allow visits to locations containing the debris and any equipment removed from the site for the purpose of taking samples.

If the agency needs relevant commercial satellite images to ascertain its findings on the Syrian site currently under investigation, it should obtain them. Nothing should stand in the way of the agency's search for evidence. The claim that Israel is withholding critical information on the site is nothing but a smoke screen.

Targeting Israel is a poor excuse. It will not absolve IAEA of its prime duty to get to the bottom of Syria's nuclear activities. Only a different approach by the agency, one which focuses on its professional mission, will reinstate its reputation and credibility in the mission to uncover clandestine nuclear programs and effectively handle dangerous proliferation activity by rogue regimes.

Nili Lifshitz
Spokeswoman
Israel Atomic Energy Commission
Tel Aviv

ANALYSIS / How did Assad manage to gain international respect?

By Aluf Benn,
Haaretz
26/12/2008

[EXCERPTS]

After eight and a half years at Syria's helm, President Bashar Assad is gaining the respect and admiration that had been reserved for his father Hafez. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has been courting him enthusiastically with the help of a Turkish matchmaker, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. European leaders are standing in line to meet with him. Close associates of U.S. president-elect Barack Obama see Syria as the basis for a new balance of power in the region.

[deletia]

According to Olmert, he began the peace probes with Syria in February 2007 during a visit to Erdogan in Turkey. If this is so, the Hezbollah victory had shaken Israel's nonchalance and prompted him to put the Golan up for sale, for fear of a further strengthening of the "axis of evil."

But the plot thickened with the discovery of the Syrian nuclear reactor. Olmert cut off contact and prepared to attack the reactor, recruiting international support. He was worried about how Assad would react. Would he launch a missile attack on Tel Aviv and deploy in the Golan, or show restraint and continue the quiet in the north? Olmert ordered a psychological profile of Assad from MI, which analyzed his complex relationship with his father and elder brother - the heir-apparent before his death in a car accident in 1994.

Olmert's gamble paid off. The reactor was destroyed, Syria remained outside the nuclear club and the world supported Israel. The cold war in the north continued with assassinations of high-ranking Hezbollah leader Imad Mughniyeh in Damascus and Syrian general Mohammed Suleiman, an Assad adviser who had been in charge of the nuclear project. Syrian sovereignty was once again harmed and Bashar decided to sit by quietly.

[deletia]

EDITORIAL: Obama's North Korean challenge

Tuesday, January 6, 2009

In the wake of last month's collapse of U.S.-North Korean nuclear disarmament talks, the incoming Obama administration will have some difficult decisions to make about dealing with Pyongyang.

In his second term, President Bush adopted a conciliatory approach toward the Stalinist regime, often choosing to overlook North Korean cheating. In June, Pyongyang asserted that by providing a declaration of its nuclear activities to U.S. officials, it had earned its removal from the U.S. list of terror-supporting states - without Washington having to worry whether its assertions could be verified. The claim was false. For more than three years, American officials had repeatedly told the North Koreans that verification was a critical component of any agreement. But when push came to shove, North Korea sought to renege and Washington acquiesced.

The report agreed to by the Bush administration fell short in three major ways: It didn't account for nuclear weapons already produced; it failed to address North Korean proliferation activities involving Iran and Syria; and it did not provide details of North Korea's covert uranium enrichment activities. But these concessions to North Korea were not enough to salvage the Washington-Pyongyang nuclear arms talks, which fell apart last month after North Korea refused to agree to a system of verifying that it had ended all nuclear activities - as it had pledged to do.

While Mr. Obama has said relatively little about his approach to North Korea, his on-the-record statements suggest that the new administration's policy will not differ very much from the soft approach taken by the Bush administration during the president's second term. During a September debate with Sen. John McCain, Mr. Obama suggested that the Bush administration's tougher first-term approach toward North Korea was to blame for its decisions to abandon the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 2003 and to test a nuclear weapon in 2006. He asserted that because the Bush administration had softened its approach toward North Korea, "we have at least made some progress." The facts suggest otherwise.

There is one issue on which Mr. Obama would do well to clarify his policy: ballistic missile defense - an essential component of any policy aimed at deterring Pyongyang from staging a nuclear and/or ballistic missile attack. "Blueprint for Change," the Obama campaign doctrine, declares that Mr. Obama will support missile defense that is "pragmatic and cost-effective" and "does not divert resources from other national security priorities until we are positive the technology will protect the American public from nuclear attack." These statements imply incorrectly that missile defense technology is unproven and that it is not a national security priority. As a recent Heritage Foundation study on missile defense points out, successful intercepts were achieved on 34 of 42 tests from 2001 to 2007. If the new president clings to old myths about missile defense, he can probably say goodbye to any chance, however remote, of persuading North Korea to change its behavior.

Now Is No Time to Downplay North Korea

By JOHN R. BOLTON

JANUARY 31, 2009

[EXCERPT]

The belief that North Korea is not an imminent danger is closely related to the fallacy that it is "merely" a threat to peace and security in Northeast Asia, a longstanding State Department fixation. In fact, North Korea is an urgent threat in the Middle East, both because of its nuclear program and its strenuous efforts to proliferate ballistic missile technology there.

The clone of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor -- under construction in Syria until it was destroyed by Israel in September 2007 -- demonstrates beyond debate how the North's nuclear program contributes directly and palpably to Middle East tensions. Trying to ignore or downplay the relationship guarantees that we will resolve neither Pyongyang's, nor Tehran's, nuclear ambitions.

One on One: 'With no likelihood of US use of force, that leaves Israel'

By RUTHIE BLUM LEIBOWITZ

Feb 5, 2009 20:51 | Updated Feb 7, 2009 22:08

[EXCERPTS]

John Bolton makes no bones about his bleak forecasts. Rather than leaving his listener in a state of despair, however, his straight talk is surprisingly comforting, especially under the circumstances.

[deletia]

[Leibowitz:] But doesn't Israel rely on the US? Can Israel "go it alone," without American approval?

[Bolton:] Well, it has done so in the past. For example, it undertook the very important operation, in September 2007, to destroy the North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. That was done, if not over US opposition, certainly without US approval. Personally, I think that US policy was wrong. I think Israel's destroying of that nuclear facility was beneficial to international peace and security.

[Leibowitz:] You're saying the US was actually against that operation?

[Bolton:] Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice wanted very much to avoid that strike. In fact, when Israel came to the US and first proposed it in the spring of 2007, she urged that it be postponed indefinitely. The Israeli response was, "We'll postpone it, but not past the end of the summer."

And that's exactly what happened.

PolicyWatch #1483

Urge Damascus to Come Clean on Nuclear Activity

By Michael Singh

February 26, 2009

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) recent progress report on its investigation into Syria's nuclear activities reinforces concerns, voiced most prominently by the United States, that the al-Asad regime was secretly building a nuclear reactor until it was destroyed in late 2007. With the March 2 meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors (BOG) just around the corner, the world is watching carefully to see what stance the Obama administration takes on this issue. The extent to which the United States can persuade Syria to change its attitude toward the IAEA investigation from one of recalcitrance to one of voluntary cooperation will serve as a concrete test of Damascus's willingness to change its ways and mend fences with the international community.

Background

On February 19, the IAEA released its second report concerning Syria's alleged nuclear activities, centering on the facility near Dair al-Zour that was destroyed on September 6, 2007. This latest report is as remarkable for its brevity as it is for its substance. It conveys three vital pieces of information: first, continued exploitation of environmental samples obtained in the IAEA's one and only visit to the site revealed additional anthropogenic (man-made) uranium particles, of a type not included in Syria's declared nuclear inventory; second, there exists only a "low probability" that these particles could have been introduced at the site by Israeli munitions, as Syria has asserted; and finally, Syria has not cooperated with the investigation, providing only partial responses to IAEA requests and not permitting further IAEA visits to Dair al-Zour or other potentially related sites. The report reaches no conclusions about the Dair al-Zour site, and IAEA director General Mohamed ElBaradei asserted recently that the agency will not "jump the gun" in doing so. The report's findings, however, appear to discredit Syria's official explanation of the site's purpose and thus lend credence to suspicions that Syria was covertly building a nuclear reactor in contravention of its Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Agreement obligation to notify the IAEA in advance of such work.

Implications for U.S. Policy

One month into its tenure, the Obama administration has already signaled that it intends to take a different approach toward Damascus than that pursued during President Bush's second term. Both President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have indicated their preference for direct engagement with the al-Asad regime and have signaled their intent to ease sanctions on Syria by granting a license for the export of spare parts for a Syrian government-owned airline. In doing so, they have adopted a policy similar to that pursued during the first term of the Bush administration, where high-level envoys and the U.S. ambassador in Damascus conveyed concerns about Syrian policies directly to Syrian officials, to little avail.

As the United States pursues this outreach, the IAEA investigation could prove be double-edged. On the one hand, the IAEA BOG could eventually refer Syria's apparent flagrant violation of its NPT obligations to the UN Security Council. The Security Council could then impose sanctions on Syria, as it has in the cases of Iran and others. In this sense, the IAEA investigation might prove a powerful point

of leverage in persuading Syrian president Bashar al-Asad to finally revise policies long decried by Washington, such as Syria's support for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. If al-Asad refuses to do so, the IAEA's findings could serve to rally international support for sanctions, which has not been forthcoming in the past.

On the other hand, even as it provides the United States with leverage, the IAEA investigation also limits U.S. flexibility in pursuing a rapprochement with Damascus and constrains the Obama administration's policy options. Like the Hariri Tribunal (the UN investigation of the 2005 killing of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri), the international inquiry into Syria's nuclear activities is not a bilateral matter between the United States and Syria. As a result, the administration could face a dilemma arising from the mounting evidence of Syria's deception of the IAEA. The United States may conclude, if it believes its outreach to Damascus is making progress, that there is no benefit to pursuing the matter further: the Dair al-Zour reactor, after all, is no more. In this case, the United States could likely prevent further international action on the matter simply by doing nothing: an IAEA BOG referral to the UN Security Council is unlikely to take place without active U.S. advocacy, judging from the tenor of the November 28, 2008, BOG meeting on the issue.

Such an approach, however, would incur significant costs. First and foremost, it would further tarnish the credibility of an already shaky global nonproliferation regime. The Syrian nuclear episode suggests that this regime must be strengthened -- for example, by seeking broader observance of the IAEA's Additional Protocol and by developing tighter and more innovative export controls. Failure to take action in response to Syria's apparent violations of its NPT requirements would have the opposite effect, pushing would-be proliferators to increase their risk taking and responsible countries to rely less on the international regime and more on ad hoc efforts to stymie those proliferators.

Failing to pursue the case against Syria could also send a negative signal to Iran and North Korea. At a time when both of these regimes are taking the new U.S. administration's measure and gauging its toughness, laxity on Syria could be misinterpreted as a lack of commitment to countering Tehran and Pyongyang's own nuclear programs. At the last meeting of the IAEA BOG, U.S. representative Greg Schulte suggested that Syria, in seeking to "sanitize" the Dair al-Zour site, was adopting tactics honed by Iran. It is unlikely that this learning flows in just one direction -- if the Iranian regime sees that al-Asad was excused his nuclear improprieties, it may be emboldened to seek the same dispensation.

Finally, giving Syria a pass at the IAEA could paradoxically damage efforts by the Obama administration to improve relations with Damascus. Al-Asad has a reputation in the region for overreaching in response to a perceived advantage. A typical example is his August 2006 speech in which, likely emboldened by what he saw as a favorable outcome to the Israel-Hizballah conflict earlier that summer, he unwisely lambasted his fellow Arab rulers as "half-men." Following this pattern, it is highly possible that al-Asad would see a U.S. decision not to pursue Syria's case at the BOG as a sign of weakness and correspondingly harden his positions in talks.

The Way Forward

The Obama administration will face an uphill climb in its apparent drive to improve U.S.-Syria relations. According to the U.S. intelligence community's publicly released 2009 threat assessment, the al-Asad regime, despite its professed desire for better relations with Washington, has maintained its interference in Lebanon, support for Palestinian terrorist groups, and close ties with Iran; further, it has "increased substantially" its military support for Hizballah. It is in this inauspicious environment that the new administration must formulate its position on the IAEA's investigation into Syria, with the

knowledge that aggressively pursuing the case could derail any outreach to Damascus, while deemphasizing the investigation could impair the administration's national security agenda on multiple fronts.

If the administration wishes to avoid these negative outcomes, a potential solution is for the United States to stress in any talks with Syrian officials -- who continue to deny any nuclear wrongdoing despite mounting evidence -- the need for Damascus to voluntarily cooperate with the IAEA. Doing so would mean sharing with investigators the information and documentation noted in the February 19 report and allowing them to visit the additional sites to which they have requested access (eventually dismantling those sites should they prove to be nuclear related).

Voluntary disclosure and cooperation by Syria has a nearby precedent in Libya and could actually serve to strengthen, rather than weaken, the global nonproliferation regime. This approach would support a broader effort to rehabilitate Damascus as a responsible member of the international community without compromising other vital [whose?] national security goals; additionally, it would provide a more concrete measure of Syria's sincerity than would vague pledges by Damascus to be more constructive on other regional issues. In a recent interview, al-Asad said that he would "wait for the reality and the results" in dealing with the United States. Washington would be wise to do the same in its dealings with Syria.

[Michael Singh is a Boston-based associate fellow of The Washington Institute and former senior director for Middle East affairs on the National Security Council.](#)

The Attack on Syria's al-Kibar Nuclear Facility

by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Joshua D. Goodman

inFocus

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Israel's September 6, 2007, attack on Syria's al-Kibar nuclear facility surprised the world—Syria most of all. The operation, executed by the Israeli Air Force (IAF), was reminiscent of Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor, but with two noticeable differences. First, Israel remained silent following the al-Kibar bombing, while in 1981 it boasted publicly about the Iraq strike even before the pilots had returned. Second, whereas the international community knew of Saddam Hussein's nuclear plans in 1981, few were aware of the extent of Syria's nuclear program in 2007.

The IAF's attack raises two important questions: What was Syria hiding? Why did Israel feel compelled to launch a military strike? Subsequent investigations have painted a clearer picture of what took place at al-Kibar.

Early Indicators

In hindsight, there were several warnings in recent years that Syria might be pursuing nuclear weapons. The December 2001 National Intelligence Estimate, focusing on foreign missile development, noted the U.S. intelligence community's concerns about "Syria's intentions regarding nuclear weapons." An unclassified 2004 report by the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis stated that Pakistani investigators had confirmed that Abdul Qadeer Khan—the Pakistani nuclear scientist who ran a clandestine black market network—offered "nuclear technology and hardware to Syria." The report expressed concern "that expertise or technology could have been transferred."

Press reports also began to circulate in 2004 that Khan had visited Syria on several occasions, and had met with senior Syrian officials in Iran. While Syria denied this, Bashar al-Assad acknowledged in a 2007 interview with an Austrian newspaper that he had received a letter from Khan in 2001. He claimed that he rebuffed the overture, unsure "if it was an Israeli trap."

Still, a generalized assessment of Syria's nuclear intentions could not be gleaned from these early warnings. Indeed, Western intelligence agencies were unaware of the purpose of the al-Kibar facility until the summer of 2007. According to an ABC News report, Israel's Mossad learned that Syria was building a covert nuclear facility that summer, and proceeded to either place a mole inside the plant or convince a worker to provide Israel with intelligence. Through this source, Israel obtained important video footage, as well as photographs, providing evidence that al-Kibar was indeed a nuclear facility (with a large cylindrical structure, a pumping station, etc).

Israel approached the Central Intelligence Agency with this evidence, and, according to the Jerusalem Post, the U.S. "looked up satellite coordinates for the site" and "helped Israel pinpoint possible 'drop sites'." The two countries discussed the possibility of the U.S. carrying out the strike; American officials even examined options for doing so. Eventually, the White House conveyed the message "that the U.S. preferred not to attack." In fact, "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates attempted to convince Israel 'to confront, not attack!'"

What Was Syria Hiding?

Syria's response in the wake of Israel's bombing was curious. The regime sought no retaliatory measures. It did not even ask the U.N. Security Council to discuss or condemn the incident. Rather, satellite photos show Syria's efforts to scrub the site of any traces of the nuclear reactor that Syria denied having. Reuters reported that Syria

bulldozed the area, "removed debris and erected a new building in a possible cover-up." Former U.N. weapons inspector David Albright, president of the prestigious Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), told the New York Times, "It looks like Syria is trying to hide something and destroy the evidence of some activity. But it won't work. Syria has got to answer questions about what it was doing."

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director Mohammed ElBaradei condemned the U.S. and Israel for their "shoot first and ask questions later" approach. Nonetheless, the IAEA began probing Syrian nuclear activity, and Syria gave its inspectors access to the al-Kibar site in June 2008. (Syria later refused IAEA requests to revisit al-Kibar and examine three other related sites.)

The IAEA released a report on November 19, 2008, containing a number of relevant data points. The report establishes that construction of the al-Kibar facility began between April 26 and August 4, 2001. Based on analysis of satellite imagery, the IAEA also notes:

Imagery taken prior to and immediately after the bombing indicates that the destroyed box-shaped building may have had underground levels. Its containment structure appears to have been similar in dimension and layout to that required for a biological shield for nuclear reactors, and the overall size of the building was sufficient to house the equipment needed for a nuclear reactor of the type alleged.

The IAEA's on-the-ground evaluation also found a water pump and other adequate infrastructure to support a reactor. Environmental samples from the site also yielded a "significant number of natural uranium particles" that were of anthropogenic origin. (Syria claimed that the particles came from the missiles Israel used to destroy the facility.)

Consistent with the caution for which the IAEA is known, its report did not conclusively state that the Syrian site was a nuclear reactor—but the implication was strong.

North Korea's Connection

Post-attack analysis also highlighted North Korea's connection to al-Kibar. Shortly after Israel's strike, press reports suggested that the characteristics of the Syrian facility were similar to North Korea's reactor in Yongbyon. David Albright and Paul Brannan of ISIS confirmed this in April 2008. Specifically, they "measured the footprint of the Yongbyon reactor building and compared it to that of the suspected reactor building in Syria and found the two footprints were approximately the same." Prior to Syria's construction of al-Kibar, the Yongbyon model had been the only one of its type built in 35 years.

Video from inside the Syrian facility has also been described as "very, very damning" by a nuclear weapons specialist who spoke to the Washington Post. The video demonstrates that al-Kibar's core design was the same as the Yongbyon reactor, "including a virtually identical configuration and number of holes for fuel rods." The video also shows North Korean personnel inside the site.

Subsequent investigations have revealed that key materials for al-Kibar were smuggled from China and possibly Europe into Syria by Namchongang Trading, a North Korean firm.

Why Did Israel Attack?

There are several explanations for why Israel elected to launch a strike against the Syrian facility. The most obvious is that Israel feared the prospect of having a nuclear neighbor—particularly one with which Israel has been in a constant state of war since the Jewish state's independence in 1948. The two countries have clashed several times since the 1973 Yom Kippur war, including a major engagement in the 1982 Lebanon war and occasional skirmishes at their shared border. Moreover, Syria threatens Israel by proxy—through its support of such terrorist groups as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

A second possible motivation is Israel's desire to re-establish deterrence in the Arab world. Israel's failures in its 2006 war with Hezbollah weakened the perceived deterrent that it held over its neighbors. The al-Kibar strike may have been an attempt to reestablish the supremacy of Israel's military apparatus in its enemies' eyes. Christopher Pang, head of the Middle East and North Africa program at the Royal United Services Institute in London, told the Associated Press, "In terms of deterrence, the effect was clear by invading Syrian airspace, by showing that Israel is not only able, but willing, to still launch strikes against Syrian targets."

The IAF's strike may also have been intended as a warning to Iran—or even a practice run on an eventual bombing raid on Iranian nuclear facilities. Obviously, al-Kibar differed greatly from the primary nuclear targets in Iran. Indeed, al-Kibar was at least partially located above ground, and was within Israeli warplanes' striking range. Nonetheless, al-Kibar was protected by the same Russian-built Tor-M1 air defense system used to protect Iranian facilities. Thus, Israel's strike may have been a test run to find flaws in Iran's air defenses.

If indeed Israel's strategy was to diagnose Iran's air defense weaknesses, the strategy appeared to backfire. The apparent failure of these systems prompted Iran in December 2007 to purchase the more advanced S-300 system from Russia. (Both Russia and Iran insist the deal had been in the works well before then.)

In the end, however, the Israeli operation seems to have been motivated by necessity; the pictures collected by Israel's mole depicted a nearly complete facility. Albright and Brannan argue that the late detection of the reactor, coupled with the perception of a nearly operational facility, compelled Israel to choose the military option as a measure of first resort. They write that Israel's "analysis, which in hindsight must be viewed as a worst-case assessment, was that Syria could soon load uranium fuel and start the reactor." Israel did not want to attack after the reactor was fully operational, because doing so would run the risk of spreading radioactive material.

A Warning For The Future

As primary energy grows more expensive, many countries are turning to nuclear power. The expansion of "civilian nuclear programs" highlights the need for a more robust non-proliferation regime; the Middle East alone has about a dozen states with at least nascent nuclear programs. The existence of al-Kibar, however fleeting, should serve as a serious warning about the current non-proliferation regime, as well as U.S. engagement of Syria.

If Washington does attempt to engage Syria, it cannot simply ignore al-Kibar. Syria's apparent nuclear development and subsequent deception reinforce pre-existing concerns about the country's interest in regional peace and stability. Pretending that the al-Kibar incident did not occur would send the wrong signal to Syria and other potentially dangerous proliferators in the Middle East.

[Daveed Gartenstein-Ross is director and Joshua D. Goodman is deputy director of the Center for Terrorism Research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.](#)

Syrian nuclear mystery remains unsolved

20:28 | 11/ 03/ 2009

Print version

MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Andrei Murtazin) - Last week, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) met in Vienna to discuss the Iranian nuclear file and the Syrian nuclear mystery.

The IAEA has some misgivings about Syria's al-Kibar nuclear facility, reportedly bombed by the Israeli Air Force (IAF) on September 6, 2007. After IAEA experts found uranium particles at the scene of the attack, Damascus said that Israel had bombed a vacant plot belonging to an inter-Arab agricultural cooperative in the Deir ez-Zor Governorate, 450 km from the Syrian capital, and that uranium particles belong to missiles that had been used during the air strike.

Top IAEA officials remained unconvinced; what's more, Syria refused to admit another expert group to the suspicious facility.

Israel claims that the al-Kibar facility was, in fact, a nuclear reactor, built by Syria with assistance from North Korea. There is still no evidence to refute or to confirm this claim. However, immediately after the bombing Damascus did not raise an uproar and did not demand that the aggressor be punished.

Instead, construction machines demolished all the buildings at the al-Kibar facility. Damascus issued an official statement about the Israeli air strike only several weeks later.

One more fact that does not speak in favor of Syria: On August 1, 2008, Brigadier General Mohammad Suleiman, a close associate of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, was gunned down at a beach resort near the Syrian port city of Tartous. This happened ten months after the Israeli air strike when the IAEA wanted to ask Damascus some more questions. U.S. intelligence reports say that General Suleiman was responsible for the Syrian nuclear program.

The Syrian response to various suspicions and accusations is the central issue so far. Damascus is behaving very much like Iran does in a similar situation.

The IAEA Board of Governors said nothing new about the Iranian nuclear program. On March 3, the so-called Iran Six of international mediators, namely, Russia, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, addressed the Board of Governors and called on Tehran to fully cooperate on all contentious aspects of its nuclear program.

As usual, Tehran replied that the actions of the Iran Six trying to solve the Iranian nuclear-file problem could only harm the country's cooperation with the international community on this issue.

Nor did the first official meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Geneva produce any new results. Lavrov reiterated the need for turning the Middle East into a nuclear-free zone and for eliminating all other weapons of mass destruction in the region.

Both sides once again expressed their concern about the Iranian nuclear program's military component and once again demonstrated their differences on the issue. It is common knowledge that Washington opposes this program in any form, while Moscow only opposes its military aspects.

Two weeks ago, Gholamreza Agazadeh, the Iranian Vice-President and Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, said Tehran planned to install 50,000 operational centrifuges at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in the next five years.

Russia, the United States, Europe and Israel deserve to know why Iran needs so much enriched uranium at a time when Moscow undertakes the delivery of nuclear fuel for the Bushehr nuclear power plant built by Russian power engineers and the disposal of used fuel.

Iran says enriched uranium is needed to guarantee the future of its nuclear program and to prevent dependence on the West and probably Russia. Thus a mystery surrounding Iranian centrifuges is not far off from a Syrian nuclear mystery.

But for Tehran's militant rhetoric, constant threats and verbal attacks against Israel, the United States and some Arab nations, the Iranian nuclear program would not cause so many questions on the part of the international community.

At the same time, Tehran is trying to turn Moscow into a guarantor of its nuclear and political security. Iran expands its contacts with Russia each time the situation becomes aggravated.

It is hardly surprising that the current visit of Sergei Kiriyenko, Head of Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear energy corporation, to Bushehr has coincided with the visit of Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar to Moscow.

Although diplomats tried hard to hush up the main purpose of Najjar's visit, namely, the sale of S-300 surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems to Tehran, the Iranian media actively discussed the issue. Iran wants to use these SAM systems for shielding its nuclear facilities from Israeli missiles and warplanes.

Although the S-300 contract was initiated two years ago, Moscow is still in no hurry to implement it because of insistent U.S. and Israeli requests, therefore retaining leverage with Tehran. Owing to Russian efforts, the UN Security Council has not yet passed any tough sanctions against Iran, while Israeli warplanes have so far avoided hitting the incomplete Bushehr NPP and reducing it to heaps of twisted concrete and smoking rubble.

Although Russia does not build any NPPs in Syria, it sells weapons to Damascus. The administration of U.S. President Barack Obama has resumed negotiations with Syria for the first time since 2005. Two senior U.S. officials, namely, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Asian Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and Daniel Shapiro, the head of the Middle East desk at the National Security Council, have just visited Damascus.

At a meeting with Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem, both sides agreed on the importance of resumed Syrian-U.S. dialogue for mutual interests and regional peace and security, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said.

Although no details of the talks were disclosed, it is obvious that Washington is trying to gradually reduce Iranian influence on Damascus. If it succeeds, then the IAEA would have no more questions for Syria.

Incidentally, claims to Tehran may disappear in exactly the same way.

[The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.](#)

PolicyWatch #1493: Special Forum Report

The Washington-Beirut-Damascus Triangle (Part I)

Featuring John Hannah

March 17, 2009

On March 13, 2009, Andrew Tabler, Magnus Norell, and John Hannah addressed a special Policy Forum luncheon at The Washington Institute to discuss the Washington-Beirut-Damascus triangle. Mr. Hannah, senior fellow at The Washington Institute and national security advisor to former vice president Dick Cheney, focused his remarks on U.S. policy toward Lebanon and Syria. The following summary draws from his presentation. A summary of the presentations by Andrew Tabler and Magnus Norell was published as PolicyWatch #1494.

The Stakes in Lebanon

Lebanon's fate has become part of a larger struggle for power and influence that is playing out across the Middle East, a struggle pitting the United States and its friends against Iran and its proxies. The outcome of that struggle will have strategic implications for the United States that extend well beyond Lebanon.

Whether or not the U.S. government sees events in Lebanon this way, the rest of the Middle East will have their scorecards out in the days and weeks following Lebanon's June elections to determine which side won. Based on that tally, the region will proceed to draw broader conclusions about the correlation of forces in the region that will have real consequences for U.S. interests.

A clear-cut electoral victory for Hizballah would greatly undermine U.S. prestige and credibility in the region, while providing a major boost to the perceived power of America's adversaries. The strategic dilemma that Hizballah's strength already poses would escalate dangerously should the terrorist group -- with Iran and Syria behind it -- come to dominate virtually all the institutions of the Lebanese state. The result could well be the consolidation of a permanent Iranian military outpost on the eastern Mediterranean and a major presence of Iran's Qods (Jerusalem) Force -- a special unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps -- directly on Israel's northern border, with all its deadly capabilities and intentions.

A total collapse of Lebanon's Cedar Revolution would complicate the Obama administration's overarching strategy of engagement. Not only would it make the already difficult task of trying to convince Iran to discontinue its nuclear program much harder, it would also make sustaining engagement over time more difficult if the American public concludes that such diplomacy requires sacrificing the interests of America's friends on the altar of some hoped-for rapprochement with its enemies. In this sense, Lebanon's elections will most likely become the first real test case of engagement's viability as a strategy for protecting U.S. interests more broadly.

Risks of Engagement

The Obama administration needs to remain acutely sensitive to how U.S.-Syrian engagement impacts Lebanon's elections. Lebanon is poised on a razor's edge, with a significant bloc of voters on the fence,

not wanting to be caught on the losing side. In a close election, a perception that the United States is once again ready to sacrifice Lebanon's independence for a deal with Damascus could tip the balance in the wrong direction.

Syria will almost certainly try to exploit U.S. engagement for exactly that purpose. Just after President Obama's inauguration, a Syrian commentator close to the al-Asad regime declared that "The new Obama administration knows that the plans of the previous U.S. administration have been defeated and that Syria played the primary role in ensuring that defeat. Syria is not in a hurry to pick the fruits of its policies. It is up to the defeated to present his menu and up to the victor to present his demands." Especially in the context of what is seen to be a dramatic U-turn in U.S. policy from isolation to engagement, this narrative of Syrian strength and U.S. defeat, with Washington coming to Damascus on bended knee, could resonate in the region -- unless it is aggressively countered by the United States.

To its credit, the Obama administration has done an admirable job so far of balancing its outreach to Syria with a strong effort to reassure the Lebanese government. Both the president and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made strong statements in February supporting Lebanon's independence and reaffirming U.S. support for the Hariri tribunal (the international tribunal created to investigate the 2005 assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister). Congressional delegations rushing to Damascus have been encouraged to include Beirut on their itineraries as well. The first high-level U.S. envoys to Syria in four years included Jeff Feltman, who more than any other person in the U.S. government has been identified with the struggle for Lebanon's independence, and Dan Shapiro, who helped draft the Syria Accountability Act. The administration should also consider whether its messages of reassurance to the Lebanese public need to be coupled with a warning about the potential consequences for U.S. and international support of a Hizballah electoral victory.

Washington should aggressively use its engagement with Syria to deter Damascus from resorting to violence in Lebanon, either in the run-up to elections or in their aftermath. In mid-March, President Bashar al-Asad gave an interview in which he issued veiled threats against Lebanon should the Hariri tribunal reach the wrong conclusions or should the March 14 coalition win the elections and actually attempt to govern as a democratic majority. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that violence remains an integral part of Syria's strategy. The Obama administration should act now to put the Syrian regime on notice that the relatively smooth passing of Lebanon's elections will be a critical metric by which the United States assesses the value of engagement going forward.

Challenges of Engagement

Pursuing engagement in a way that meets U.S. objectives, rather than simply addressing Syria's narrow agenda, will not be easy. The thinking today is that dealing with Syria must no longer just be about "land for peace" with respect to the Golan Heights, but rather "land for strategic realignment" with respect to Syria's alliance with Iran. But ensuring that the wide range of U.S. concerns vis-a-vis Syria are dealt with in a meaningful and systematic way will be much easier said than done. Syria will likely do everything it can to limit its engagement to resuming U.S.-sponsored peace talks with Israel to recover the Golan, with strategic realignment to follow at some point in the distant future.

What will happen if Syria insists on pursuing its version of engagement rather than ours? Will the Obama administration be able to stop and declare the process a failure after having made engagement its signature initiative -- especially with the allure of an ongoing Israeli-Syrian peace process, if not peace itself, to claim as a major diplomatic achievement?

If Engagement Fails

It will be important for the administration to have -- and for Syria to know that it has -- a contingency plan should engagement be given a fair trial and shown not to address key American concerns. At a minimum, such a contingency should include the option of significantly ramping up multilateral pressure and sanctions against the al-Asad regime. In this regard, the administration should do everything in its power to ensure that the two most important levers available -- the Hariri tribunal and the International Atomic Energy Agency investigation of Syria's secret plutonium reactor -- remain robust and hanging over the head of the al-Asad regime. Syria will no doubt seek to use engagement to neutralize those threats, and the Obama team must resist. History suggests that only pressure that threatens the al-Asad regime's survival is likely to trigger the kinds of strategic Syrian shifts that advance U.S. interests.

While Washington is focused on the potential merits and promise of engagement, it bears remembering that the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon four years ago -- arguably, the high point of American policy vis-a-vis Syria in the past several decades -- was itself the product of a policy of intensely focused confrontation, multilateral pressure, and veiled threats against the al-Asad regime. Such an approach may indeed be out of fashion. Although the Bush administration proved unable to sustain this policy over the long term, it was undoubtedly effective at that particular moment in history. For this reason alone, it may be a model worth keeping in reserve.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123759986806901655.html>

Iran's Axis of Nuclear Evil

By JOHN BOLTON

MARCH 21, 2009

While President Obama's unanticipated Nowruz holiday greeting to Iran generated considerable press attention, his video wasn't really this week's big news related to the Islamic Republic. Far more important was that a senior defector -- Iran's former Deputy Minister of Defense Ali Reza Asghari -- disclosed Tehran's financing of Syria's nuclear weapons program. That program's centerpiece was a North Korean nuclear reactor in Syria. Israel destroyed it in September 2007.

At this point, it is impossible to ignore Iran's active efforts to expand, improve and conceal its nuclear weapons program in Syria while it pretends to "negotiate" with Britain, France and Germany (the "EU-3"). No amount of video messages will change this reality. The question is whether this new information about Iran will sink in, or if Washington will continue to turn a blind eye toward Iran's nuclear deceptions.

That the Pyongyang-Damascus-Tehran nuclear axis went undetected and unacknowledged for so long is an intelligence failure of the highest magnitude. It represents a plain unwillingness to allow hard truths to overcome well-entrenched policy views disguised as intelligence findings.

Key elements of our intelligence community (IC) fought against the idea of a Syrian nuclear program for years. In mid-2003, I had a bitter struggle with several IC agencies -- news of which was leaked to the press -- concerning my testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee about the Syrian program. Then Sen. Joe Biden made the Syria testimony an issue in my 2005 confirmation battle to become ambassador to the United Nations, alleging that I had tried to hype concern about Syria's nuclear intentions. (In fact, my testimony, in both its classified and unclassified versions, was far more anodyne than the facts warranted.)

Key IC agencies made two arguments in 2003 against the possibility of a clandestine Syrian nuclear weapons program. First, they argued that Syria lacked the scientific and technological capabilities to sustain such a program. Second, they said that Syria did not have the necessary economic resources to fund a program.

These assertions were not based on highly classified intelligence. Instead, they were personal views that some IC members developed based on public information. The intelligence that did exist -- which I thought warranted close observation of Syria, at a minimum -- the IC discounted as inconsistent with its fixed opinions. In short, theirs was not an intelligence conclusion, but a policy view presented under the guise of intelligence.

How wrong they were.

As for Syria's technical expertise, North Korea obviously had the scientific and technological ability to construct the reactor, which was essentially a clone of the North's own at Yongbyon. Moreover, it is entirely possible that Syria's nuclear program -- undertaken with Pyongyang's assistance -- is even more extensive. We will certainly never know from Syria directly, since Damascus continues to deny it

has any nuclear program whatever. It's also stonewalling investigation efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

As for Syria's ability to finance a nuclear program, Iran could easily supply whatever Syria might need -- even in a time of fluctuating oil prices. Moreover, given Iran's hegemony over Syria, it is impossible to believe Syria would ever undertake extensive nuclear cooperation with North Korea without Iran's acquiescence. Iran was likely an active partner in a three-way joint venture on the reactor, supplying key financial support and its own share of scientific knowledge. Cooperation on ballistic missile programs between Pyongyang and Tehran is longstanding and well-advanced, and thereby forms a basis of trust for nuclear cooperation. Moreover, both Iran and North Korea share a common incentive: to conceal illicit nuclear weapons programs from international scrutiny. What better way to hide such programs than to conduct them in a third country where no one is looking?

Uncovering the North Korean reactor in Syria was a grave inconvenience for the Bush administration. It enormously complicated both the failing six-party talks on North Korea and the EU-3's diplomatic efforts with Iran, which Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice so actively supported.

Mr. Asghari's revelations about Iranian financing of Syria's nuclear program -- if borne out -- will have precisely the same negative impact on Obama administration policies, since they track Mr. Bush's so closely. In fact, the two administrations' approaches differ only to the extent that Mr. Obama is poised to pursue policies, like face-to-face negotiations with Iran, that the second term Bush State Department wanted to do, but faced too much internal dissonance to implement.

The Nowruz video reflects the dominant view within the Obama administration that its "open hand" will be reciprocated. It's likely Iran will respond affirmatively to the near-plaintive administration request to "engage."

And why not? Such dialogue allows Iran to conceal its true intentions and activities under the camouflage of negotiations, just as it has done for the past six years with the EU-3. What's more, Iran will see it as confirmation of U.S. weakness and evidence that its policies are succeeding.

There is very little time for Mr. Obama to change course before he is committed to negotiations. He could start by following Iran's money trail.

<http://www.antiwar.com/prather/?articleid=14437>

Certifying Syria's Nuclear Program

by Gordon Prather

March 21, 2009

The Likudniks, here and abroad, are running scared. Why? Well, it may turn out that President Obama genuinely intends to solve Middle East conflicts peacefully, diplomatically.

For example, Obama just had Secretary of State Clinton send, Jeffrey Feltman, her Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, in company with Dan Shapiro, head of the Middle East Division of the National Security Council Staff, to meet last week with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallim and presidential advisor Bothainia Shaaban in Damascus.

According to Feltman, the talks covered "Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Hamas, Iraq" and "Syria's attempts to develop a nuclear program."

Feltman was the Bush-Cheney Ambassador to Israel in 2006 during the Israel-Hezbollah-Hamas war and the associated Israeli unrestricted bombing of Lebanon.

Shapiro was Obama's "emissary" to "Jewish groups" during the presidential campaign and reportedly drafted the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 [.pdf], which contained, among many onerous findings and determinations, the following;

"[T]he United States will not provide any assistance to Syria and will oppose multilateral assistance for Syria until Syria ends all support for terrorism, withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon, and halts the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction and medium- and long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles."

According to Shapiro's Act, if Obama now wishes to normalize relations with Syria, he will have to certify to Congress that

"[T]he Government of Syria has ceased the development and deployment of medium- and long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, is not pursuing or engaged in the research, development, acquisition, production, transfer, or deployment of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons, has provided credible assurances that such behavior will not be undertaken in the future, and has agreed to allow United Nations and other international observers to verify such actions and assurances."

Which brings us to the otherwise inexplicable publication this week of a seemingly authoritative "report" by Hans Ruhle in the Swiss daily, Neue Zuercher Zeitung. Ruhle alleges – in the course of "revealing" what retired Iranian general Ali Reza Asghari allegedly told the CIA when he defected back in February, 2007 – that the immediate imperative for the Israeli aerial attack on a site near Al Kabir on September 6, 2007 was that a "North Korean" ship had been "checked" and determined to be carrying "nuclear fuel" to Syria.

Checked? By whom?

Determined? By whom?

Ruhle doesn't say.

But surely, not by the United States or any "concerned state" associated with the Proliferation Security Initiative of Bonkers Bolton, established by President Bush the Younger back in 2003. According to Bolton;

"Our [PSI] goal is to work with other concerned states to develop new means to disrupt the proliferation trade at sea, in the air, and on land. The initiative reflects the need for a more dynamic, proactive approach to the global proliferation problem. It [PSI] envisions partnerships of states working in concert, employing their national capabilities to develop a broad range of legal, diplomatic, economic, military and other tools to interdict threatening shipments of WMD- and missile-related equipment and technologies. To jumpstart this initiative, we have begun working with several close friends and allies to expand our ability to stop and seize suspected WMD transfers."

Surely, therefore, if any of our PSI "partners" had "checked" this ship and "determined" that it was carrying North Korean "nuclear fuel," bound for Syria, along the "axis of evil," it would have seized this shipment.

What then?

Well, at a minimum Bush-Cheney would have informed the International Atomic Energy that their suspicions about North Korea's and Syria's nuclear programs had been vindicated. More likely, with a nuclear "smoking gun" implicating both North Korea and Syria in their possession, Bush-Cheney would have launched wars against both.

But, reportedly, Bush-Cheney refused to even participate in the Israeli raid on the Al Kabir site. A raid for which the Israelis reportedly insisted there could be no delay.

Yet, in April, 2008, the CIA released a detailed computer-simulation based video depicting what they were "convinced" the Syrians – assisted by the North Koreans – had been doing at the Al Kabir site since 2001.

To wit:

"Syria was building a gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons, was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research."

Now, while the CIA claimed that the alleged reactor was "nearing operational capability" at the time of the Israeli raid, it is important to note that there was no mention whatsoever in their report of the "smoking gun" just now "reported" in the Neue Zuercher Zeitung – the shipment of what was "checked" and "determined" to be North Korean startup "nuclear fuel" for a clone of the North Korean weapons-grade plutonium-producing reactor at Yongbyon.

The most likely explanation is that neither the CIA – nor any of our PSI partners – had any reason to believe that such a shipment had taken place.

So, why the seemingly inexplicable publication this week of what now seems anything but an authoritative report on nuke weapon collaboration between North Korea and Syria (and funded by Iran)?

Perhaps to make it virtually impossible for President Obama to ever certify to Congress that the Government of Syria "is not pursuing or engaged in the research, development, acquisition, production, transfer, or deployment of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons" and "has agreed to allow United Nations and other international observers to verify" that they are not?

Perhaps, but maybe Hans Rühle, allegedly a former Chief of the Planning Staff in the German Ministry of Defense, is also an alarmed Likudnik.

Syria Unlikely to Resume Nuclear-Weapon Program, Expert Says

By Chris Schneidmiller

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Global Security Newswire

WASHINGTON -- The Syrian facility destroyed in a 2007 Israeli air strike almost certainly housed a reactor being readied to produce nuclear-weapon material, an effort that the Middle Eastern state is not likely to resume, one expert said yesterday (see GSN, March 20).

"I think for the moment this program is really quite dead, not likely to be restarted," said Leonard Spector, head of the Washington office for the Monterey Institute's James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

Spector spoke here on the first day of a nonproliferation conference organized by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, on a panel that addressed several "nuclear crisis points" -- also including Iran, North Korea and Pakistan.

Syria, which joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1969 as a non-nuclear-weapon state, is perhaps the most recent addition to that list.

Israel has not commented publicly on its reasons for eliminating the structure at al-Kibar in September 2007, but U.S. intelligence officials would later allege it was the core of Syria's attempts to establish itself as a nuclear-weapon state (see GSN, April 25, 2008).

Damascus denied that claim, and in the wake of the attack razed the site and built a new structure in the same location. It has allowed only one inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which found some evidence to support the assertion that the facility was a nearly finished reactor designed with help from North Korea to produce weapon-ready plutonium (see GSN, Nov. 19, 2008).

"From my point of view, there really wasn't too much doubt, based on the information provided by the CIA, and some of the information ... obtained by the IAEA, that this was indeed a nuclear-weapon program that Syria was embarked on," Spector said, citing "the style of the reactor, the secrecy with which it was built, the efforts to disguise its presence, [and] now we're hearing of some type of uranium on site."

Some audience members said the matter remained unresolved. The U.N. nuclear watchdog's investigation has been hampered by the attack, which eliminated the key piece of evidence, said Ambassador Taous Feroukhi of Algeria, current chairwoman of the IAEA Board of Governors.

"The board is still divided regarding Syria because there is no evidence that there is undeclared activity in that installation that has been destroyed," she said.

Her complaints echoed those of IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei, who has said that Jerusalem and Washington should have shared their suspicions with his organization before the strike.

Even the CIA appears to have doubts, Spector said. The agency says the absence of a reactor fuel fabrication facility and a reprocessing plant at al-Kibar leaves it only "low confidence" that Syria sought a weapons capability. He argued, though, that the presence of processed uranium at the location indicates that Syria might have obtained reactor fuel from North Korea or another source, while Pyongyang has showed that a reactor can begin operations before a reprocessor comes online.

"The sequence here does not really push you away from the view that this was in fact a nuclear-weapon program," Spector said.

Panelist Ariel Levite, a nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, noted that Damascus has blocked IAEA access to several other facilities: "They may be part of the mystery."

Syria had several reasons for wanting a nuclear-weapon program, according to Spector. By 1997, when discussions are believed to have begun with North Korea, Syria no longer enjoyed the patronage of the former Soviet Union and the political backing and access to weaponry that came with it, he said.

"The entire role of Syria in the Middle East was diminished, in part, because of this," Spector said. "There was also increasing fear of possible encirclement because of growing Israeli capabilities and the increasing presence of the United States in the region."

The "critical factor" was North Korea's willingness to assist then-Syrian leader Hafez Assad realize his ambitions for his nation, Spector said: "I think without that there could not have been a program."

Video taken inside the facility shows North Korean personnel and indicates that the plant itself appears to be modeled after the Stalinist state's plutonium-producing reactor at Yongbyon, U.S. officials have said. Washington has claimed that Pyongyang is no longer providing nuclear assistance to Damascus.

Lack of access to that expertise and the seeming elimination of the black market nuclear network once led by former top Pakistani atomic scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan is likely to prevent Syria from trying to build another reactor, Spector said.

Spector asked why the international community has not pressed the case on Syria as hard as it has other nations suspected of operating illicit nuclear programs. He then offered several possible answers to his own question.

Observers might be waiting for additional evidence, though little could be expected from the current level of access allowed by Syria, he said. Nations might also be reluctant to pressure Damascus as they try to diplomatically try to "woo" it back into the global community, Spector added.

"With the Israeli attack, the actual urgency, the danger that might have been posed by the evolution of the Syrian nuclear-weapon capability is no longer before us," he said.

Syria's nuclear program was the fourth to go undetected -- at least for some period of time -- in recent decades, Spector said, naming Iraq in the 1980s, Iran in the 1980s to 1990s and Libya early this decade as the others.

"These were failings of detection by the NPT-IAEA system," he said. "We know there are limits on what the IAEA can do, but certainly this is a very unhappy development."

The U.N. Security Council's inability to enforce nuclear rules, as shown in the cases of Iran and North Korea, "undoubtedly" played a role in Israel's decision to destroy the al-Kibar facility, according to Spector. He labeled the strike a "pure case" of the Bush administration's doctrine of preventive war to eliminate possible threats at an early stage.

"The fact that the international community has responded so cautiously to this event suggests that there may be increased tolerance for these kinds of activities in very, very specific circumstances involving a clandestine facility that appears to be oriented toward the production of nuclear weapons," Spector said.

Israel's Diplomatic Isolation

By John R. Bolton

Posted: Friday, May 1, 2009

ARTICLES

Commentary magazine (May 2009)

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[EXCERPT]

An Iran with nuclear weapons is a palpable risk not only for Israel, and the Arab states know it. That is what accounts for the mysterious silence on the part of the Arab world in September 2007, when Israel bombed the nearly completed North Korean nuclear reactor on the Euphrates River in Syria. Israel exposed and degraded yet another Middle Eastern clandestine nuclear program, **one that could not have come into being without some measure of Iranian support**, and the lack of Arab protest was deafening.

The Wall Street Journal

OPINION

MAY 18, 2009

Netanyahu and Obama Have a Shared Interest in Iran

By REUEL MARC GERECHT

[EXCERPT]

We shouldn't be surprised if the Israelis reach a conclusion at odds with Washington's near-consensus against pre-emptive strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. In 1981, Jerusalem certainly surmised that a raid against Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor could make Saddam Hussein furious and that he possessed conventional and unconventional means of getting even. But they went ahead and destroyed the reactor.

The consensus in Israel is just as widespread about the correctness of last year's strike against the secret North Korean-designed reactor at Dir A-Zur in Syria -- a project that may well have had Iranian backing. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered the attack although the Bush administration opposed it. And in 1967, Israelis believed that pre-emptive action saved their nation from an Arab-initiated, multifront offensive that could have proved lethal.

[Mr. Gerecht, a former Central Intelligence Agency officer, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.](#)

Damascus Gets What it Needs

Jonathan Spyer, Ph.D.

5/25/2009

In his letter to Congress announcing the renewal of US sanctions on Syria, President Barack Obama was specific regarding the reasons for his decision.

Syria, the President said, was "supporting terrorism, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, and undermining US and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq."

These three accusations are related to verifiable activity currently being undertaken by the Damascus regime. Syria's activity in turn reflects the firmness of the regime's strategic choice to align itself with the regional alliance led by Iran.

Syria's actions should be observed well by all those currently promoting the feasibility of a "grand bargain" between Israel and the Arab world. They are evidence of the reality of a Middle East Cold War, in which the fault lines are growing ever clearer.

First, let's recall the details. With regard to supporting terrorism, it is well known that the leaderships of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are domiciled in Damascus. Syria has over the last decade built a close, mutually beneficial strategic relationship with Hizbullah. Damascus also serves as a large care home for various superannuated leftist Palestinian groups.

On weapons of mass destruction, reports have surfaced in recent days suggesting that the Syrians have constructed a biological weapons facility, on the site of the al-Kibar plutonium reactor destroyed by Israel in 2007. Certainly, Damascus's interest in both biological and chemical weapons is long-standing.

Syria possesses one of the largest and most advanced chemical warfare programs in the Arab world - including chemical warheads for all its major missile systems. It is known to possess a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin, and is in the process of attempting to develop the more powerful VX nerve agent, according to the CIA's bi-annual report on WMD proliferation. Damascus is also thought by western governments to possess a biological warfare development program.

On the "stabilization and reconstruction" of Iraq - the latest news is that after a short pause, Damascus has in the last month recommenced its practice of facilitating the entry of Sunni jihadi fighters into Iraq by way of Syria's eastern border. At the height of the Sunni insurgency, Damascus airport became a transit point for fighters from across the Arab world and beyond it seeking to make their way to Iraq. In mid 2007, 80-100 fighters per month were crossing into Iraq from Syria. Having fallen to close to zero earlier this year, the numbers are now up to 20 per month.

The charge sheet is both substantial, and formidable. It isn't hard to see why the US administration found it necessary to renew the sanctions. But the interesting question remains that of Syria's motive.

Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, and NSC senior official Daniel Shapiro have visited Damascus twice in the last two months. Feltman noted that the two sides found "lots of common ground" between them. Syrian Ambassador to the US Imad Moustapha happily described the "new spirit of serious discussion" that he found in his meetings with Obama administration officials.

So why, four months into Washington's courting of the Assad regime, has there been no improvement of any kind in Syria's stances regarding issues of concern to the US? Rather, where there has been change, it has been for the worse - as in the situation on the Iraqi border, and perhaps with regard to al-Kibar.

The regime has evidently done its calculations, and concluded that it has nothing to gain by loosening its relationship with the Iranians at the present time. US sanctions are not toothless. Oil and gas production in Syria has been hit because of lack of access to US technology. The aviation and banking sectors have also been affected. Damascus would substantively gain from seeing the sanctions lifted.

But Syria is also aware that with the region polarized between US and Iranian blocs, moving toward the former entails moving away from the latter. And it is not at all clear that the US could, or would, wish to provide Syria with the very tangible strategic benefits it currently gains from its close relations with Iran.

Washington wants a free Lebanon, a stable, strong Iraq, and progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Syria opposes all of these. Damascus seeks to rebuild its own power in Lebanon, to keep Iraq weak and strife-torn, and to benefit from its own self-proclaimed stance as the expression of pride and defiance in the Arab dispute with Israel.

Allies of Iran and Syria may be about to win elections in Lebanon, and are growing daily more powerful among the Palestinians. The alliance with Iran also makes Syrian meddling in Iraq a possibility, and may well prevent the reemergence of a strong and independent Baghdad.

The firmness of the Syrian stance suggests that Damascus expects US attempts at engagement with Iran to fail - making the issue a zero-sum game. On that basis, the reasons for the Syrian choice become clear. While rapprochement with the US might give the Assad regime something of what it wants, its alliance with Iran gives it most of what it needs.

[Jonathan Spyer is a senior research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center in Herzliya, Israel.](#)

North Korea Advertises Its Nukes

Syria has already been a customer.

By GORDON G. CHANG

MAY 26, 2009

North Korea yesterday tested a second nuclear weapon at its underground site near the northeastern city of Kilju. This follows the launch of a long-range missile early last month.

What does Kim Jong Il want? First and foremost, he wants the international community to recognize his nation as a nuclear weapons state. Second, the regime seeks to destabilize the South Korean government of President Lee Myung-bak, who has taken a much tougher approach to Pyongyang than his two predecessors. Third, Kim undoubtedly wants additional assistance from international donors to alleviate the hardship caused by a downturn in the North Korean economy. And as always, Pyongyang's ruler hopes to bolster the popularity of his regime among hungry North Koreans -- and the senior generals whose backing he needs.

All these objectives have been known -- or should have been known -- for some time in American foreign policy circles. Yet both the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have put North Korea on the back burner.

Kim had one more frightening objective in mind when he set off the nuclear device yesterday. And that reason alone should be sufficient to put North Korea at the top of the foreign-policy inbox for the next several years. The official Korean Central News Agency said this immediately after the detonation: "The results of the test helped satisfactorily settle the scientific and technological problems arising in further increasing the power of nuclear weapons and steadily developing nuclear technology." This is sales talk. North Korea appears set to go into high gear and merchandise its nuclear arsenal.

North Korea's last nuclear test, in October 2006, was by all accounts a dud. The North Koreans were too ambitious in their designs, used unsuitable plutonium, or had not mastered the intricacies of the triggering device. In any event, the yield was less than a kiloton, well below the four kilotons they had predicted when they gave the Chinese a warning of the test. To get over the embarrassment of the "fizzle," Kim's technicians had to detonate another device to validate their designs and demonstrate the power of their weapon.

The Iranians who witnessed the event three years ago could not have been overly impressed with the low yield. And Tehran is an important customer to the North Koreans because the Islamic Republic has, in all probability, funded at least one acquirer of Kim's nuclear technology.

That acquirer would be Syria, which was building what looked like a reactor of North Korean design. The Israelis destroyed that secret facility in September 2007 in a daring air raid. We do not know at this moment if Damascus has abandoned its nuclear ambitions, but it is clear the Iranians have not. They are somewhere between one to three years to a working nuclear device of their own. Undoubtedly, we will hear in the next few months reports that Tehran's technicians were again witnesses to yesterday's test.

There is no greater threat to the U.S. than the proliferation of nuclear weapons to dangerous and hostile regimes. The Bush administration, however, never made North Korea pay any price for crossing the red line of selling nuclear technology. In fact, Bush policy in later years centered on providing benefits to Pyongyang for its continued participation in denuclearization talks.

The critical question is what Washington will do in the coming days. After the early-April test of a long-range missile, Stephen Bosworth, President Obama's part-time envoy for North Korea, said he was "relaxed" and even

suggested direct talks with Pyongyang, which is what the North always wanted from Washington. The feckless American response was a big green light for Kim to continue his destabilizing behavior.

The North does not need to possess sophisticated weapons to make itself a real threat. It soon will be able to deliver a nuclear device to the American homeland by either a short-range missile launched from a rusting merchant ship or, as some fear, a pickup truck. Another danger is the dissemination of nuclear technology to hostile states and their terrorist allies.

This is a consequential moment. North Korea is taking on the world, and we have no choice but to respond.

[Mr. Chang is the author of "Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World" \(Random House, 2006\).](#)

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,522162,00.html>

Bolton: We Need to Apply More Pressure to North Korea's Regime

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

This is a rush transcript from "On the Record," **May 26, 2009**. This copy may not be in its final form and may be updated.

GRETA VAN SUSTEREN, FOX NEWS HOST: There is breaking news out of the Korean peninsula. There are reports tonight that North Korea has test fired another short range missile from an east coast launch pad.

If true, that means North Korea has launched six short range missiles in two days.

And yesterday, the rogue regime tested a nuclear device underground.

So what should the United States do? Moments ago, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton when on the "On the Record."

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

VAN SUSTEREN: Ambassador Bolton, nice to see you, sir.

JOHN BOLTON, FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE U.N.: Glad to be here.

VAN SUSTEREN: Yesterday, the world was surprised by the detonation of nuclear device by the North Koreans -- today two short range missiles shot off. So now what?

BOLTON: I think it shows the North Koreans are not very impressed by statements of world leaders about their test or about the launches. I think it shows they want a deliverable nuclear weapons capability, and they're continuing to take steps to that end.

I think the response by the U.S. ought to be to get rid of the six- party talks. I think they have failed. There is no way the North Koreans are going to be talked out of their nuclear weapons.

We need to apply more pressure to this regime, and we need China to do the same.

VAN SUSTEREN: Currently there are no talks. I guess we could just officially say we are not talking either. North Korea says they're not talking, but we could say, OK, we're not either.

But France, for instance, has called for greater sanctions. What more sanctions are available out there? They have virtually nothing.

BOLTON: There are a number of things the U.S. can do. We can put them back on our list of state sponsors of terrorism, once again eliminate their access to international financial markets, both things the Bush administration did.

We could certainly do more on the proliferation security initiative, another Bush administration effort, that today South Korea announced it was joining for the first time. That is a significant step forward. But the real key here is China. China supplies 80 to 90 percent of North Korea's energy, a substantial amount of food. China could change that regime. And, in fact, if they want a more secure, peaceful northeast Asia, it is really in their interest to do that.

VAN SUSTEREN: Are we a little bit closer to that being a realistic possibility, because China was dismayed, to put it gently, after the April 5th launch of the longer-range missile they were just made? And now the detonation of the nuclear device, it looks like they have really been snubbed by North Korea, and that is their biggest trading partner, North Korea is.

Is China now more vulnerable to being persuaded they need to lowering the hammer on North Korea and put some force on them?

BOLTON: I think there's a possibility. In the old days, they used to say that the North Korean and Chinese communist party's were as close as lips and teeth. I do not think that is as true anymore.

I think that China does understand that if North Korea keeps its nuclear weapons, Japan, possibly South Korea, possibly Taiwan will go nuclear too. That can't be in China's interests.

Where we disagree is that they kind of like having the Korean peninsula divided. They like having a buffer between them and the South Korean/American forces.

But the fact is North Korea is a very artificial creation. The regime is fragile. One day the Korean peninsula will reunite, and China could get on the right side of history.

This will not be easy by any stretch of imagination. But the comparison between the difficulties of eliminating the Kim Jong Il regime and that regime with nuclear weapons are night and day.

VAN SUSTEREN: When you talk about the reunification of the peninsula, when we went to North Korea last summer, they have a monument showing the reunification of Korea. But they see it as North Korea being the re-unifier and not South Korea.

Japan is deeply disturbed by the latest developments, and so is South Korea. And they have got China worried that if North Korea does come apart, then you have all these North Koreans fleeing into China.

So how does this realistically play out?

BOLTON: Again, the risk of a refugee flow is simply not anything in the same league with the risk of North Korea with nuclear weapons.

And I think if the regime collapsed, you would have the interest of both South Korea and the U.S. on one hand and China on the other to try to reestablish stability in the north, to get the refugees back into North Korea and feed them there.

So I think that we could say, in all candor, that we would be willing to work with China in a post Kim Jong-II North Korea to have stability and to have a situation where neither China nor South Korea are overburdened by refugee flows.

VAN SUSTEREN: How do we know they have enough money? If they get \$10, it does not go to feeding their people. It goes to their weapons program. But if their weapons program ends up costing \$30, \$40, or \$50, they still do not have enough money for their weapons program.

Is it possible that they will be strangled economically so they can't even build their weapons program?

BOLTON: Well, there is some reason to believe that there may be an Iranian financial connection here, as well. Certainly Iran and North Korea trade information on ballistic missiles. We know that. That is been going on for over 10 years.

They may be trading information on the nuclear programs too. It has not gone unnoticed that North Korea was building a nuclear reactor in Syria, very unlikely that Syria could pay for that.

So the Iranian connection is quite significant. And it's a major reason why I do not think you can look at North Korea's nuclear program only as an east Asia problem. It is a Middle East problem, too.

VAN SUSTEREN: What about Japan? How long is Japan going to be patient, because they are very worried with the events that have occurred in the last couple of days, last couple of months? How long will Japan be patient?

BOLTON: I don't think that it's infinite. That's for sure. They are also quite concerned about North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens. You can imagine how Americans would feel if North Korea were kidnapping our people. The North Koreans have never given full disclosure.

And the fact that North Korea has now exploded two nuclear devices in a country where, after all, Hiroshima and Nagasaki took place during World War II, is of enormous political consequence.

I think Japan also worries about the solidity of the American nuclear umbrella. And if they do not think we are there to protect their interests, it's a powerful argument for them to go nuclear, as well.

VAN SUSTEREN: What is so bizarre to me is that what I've been reading in the last two days is that the reason that they are launching these short-range missiles is, in part, so it is been reported, is that when on April 5, when they launched that rocket, and the United States and the U.N. Security Council, basically everyone said it was a flop, it was a failure, they got mad. And they want an apology for calling their launch anything but a peaceful launch of a satellite.

And because nobody is apologizing, they are now doing these nuclear tests and the short-range missiles.

BOLTON: I think the North Koreans are taking advantage of what they see as an opening. They have not seen a strong reaction to the Taepodong-2 launch in April or the nuclear test. They are doing other testing, clearly in violation of Resolution 1718.

Everything they do gives them more information and a greater capability to marry that nuclear device with a long-range missile. And that really would be the point at which we all need to worry a lot more.

Column One: Israel and the Axis of Evil

Caroline Glick , THE JERUSALEM POST

May. 27, 2009

[EXCERPT]

North Korea is half a world away from Israel. Yet the nuclear test it conducted on Monday has the Israeli defense establishment up in arms and its Iranian nemesis smiling like the Cheshire Cat. Understanding why this is the case is key to understanding the danger posed by what someone once impolitely referred to as the Axis of Evil.

Less than two years ago, on September 6, 2007, the IAF destroyed a North Korean-built plutonium production facility at Kibar, Syria. The destroyed installation was a virtual clone of North Korea's Yongbyon plutonium production facility.

This past March the Swiss daily Neue Zuercher Zeitung reported that Iranian defector Ali Reza Asghari, who before his March 2007 defection to the US served as a general in Iran's Revolutionary Guards and as deputy defense minister, divulged that Iran paid for the North Korean facility. Teheran viewed the installation in Syria as an extension of its own nuclear program. According to Israeli estimates, Teheran spent between \$1 billion and \$2b. for the project.

World Passivity in the Face of Advanced Nuclear Challenges

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

World Passivity in the Face of Advanced Nuclear Challenges

INSS Insight No. 112, June 8, 2009

Asculai, Ephraim

With the countries of the world looking on, Iran reached its next serious milestone: the accumulation of enough low enriched uranium (LEU) to enable it to further enrich it and produce one Significant Quantity (S.Q.), or 25 kilograms, of high enriched uranium (HEU). This is considered the quantity that is sufficient for the production of one core for an HEU-based nuclear explosive device. The Iranians reached this milestone some months earlier than expected, due mainly to their efficiency in installing and operating a large number of gas centrifuges, the machines that perform the enrichment operation.

This assessment is based on the information contained in the latest (June 5, 2009) report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). At the present time Iran has no reason to produce HEU, since it would be more reasonable for it to accumulate a much larger quantity of LEU, and then enrich it in one batch to a quantity of HEU, sufficient for building a small arsenal of nuclear weapons. Should Iran decide that it wants to further enrich LEU to HEU, it could transform some of the operating LEU cascades (agglomerations of centrifuges), and complete the HEU enrichment in much less than a year. It would probably reason that it needs two explosive devices for underground nuclear tests (the second comes in case of the failure of the first) and then an additional one or two, as a deterrent or for actual use.

The information contained in the IAEA report suggests that four S.Q.s could be produced by the end of 2011 or even somewhat earlier. This could certainly happen if the world continues with the mild and ineffective actions ostensibly intended to prevent Iran from reaching further milestones. In the short term, the world is waiting for Iran's upcoming presidential elections, yet the fact is that no real change can be expected since more than the president, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is the de-facto ruler of Iran, and it is his decisions that matter. In addition, the Supreme Leader controls the Revolutionary Guards, who control the weapons of mass destruction production and deployment, including the missiles of Iran. The change that could come out of the elections is a change of tone to one more conciliatory towards the West that could further lull it into thinking that there is a chance for a complete halt, if not a rollback of the nuclear weapons development program. Although many have agreed that Iran is succeeding in its play for time, the Obama administration is still taking its time, pinning hope on elusive "talks" that may or may not succeed. Yet Iran is now so close to its target that the chances of halting if not dismantling its nuclear program are almost gone. Only very strong action, such as sanctions of the type imposed on Iraq in 1991, with "catch-all" prohibitions on commerce and diplomatic relations, could perhaps force Iran into obeying the Security Council's demands concerning the suspension of activities.

The same day that the IAEA sent its report on Iran to its Member States, it also issued a report on Syria. Although less elaborate than the report on Iran, it has one very interesting point and an

unfortunate omission. Paragraph 17 of the IAEA report, mentions that samples taken by the IAEA at a declared nuclear facility contained anthropogenic natural uranium particles, of an unnoted type. These were found inside hot-cells and associated equipment. This is quite interesting, since the natural uranium particles found at the Dir Alzour bombed reactor site were also denoted as "anthropogenic," i.e., the uranium was processed by human hands and not transformed by processes in nature. Inexplicably the IAEA report does not give any details of the composition of the particles, and more importantly, does not answer the question whether the particles found at both sites were similar. If similar, could they be indicative of reactor-fuel origin? If the particles are similar, why then does the IAEA continue to hamper on the issue of the possible Israeli bomb origin of the particles found at Dir Alzour? Whoever bombed the Dir Alzour site certainly did not bomb the declared laboratories and introduce the particles into them. This would refute any Syrian claim that the particles at the bombed site are of Israeli bomb origin. Moreover, what were these particles doing in and around the hot-cells?

The second issue and the significant omission from the report on Syria is that the IAEA desists from declaring the Syrian activities indicative of illicit nuclear activities and in non-compliance with Syria's obligations as a member of the NPT. This, unfortunately, is consistent with IAEA behavior, where the Director General is not willing to point a finger at a Member State and declare it as possibly being in non-compliance. He should have done that, and then given the state in question some time to disprove the allegations against it. Once the grace period elapses, the verdict against that state should become absolute. In the present system, however, no state can do wrong. As long as the state has stories to tell, and as long as it vaguely promises access, no indictment will come out of the IAEA. That is the case with Syria.

The issue of the IAEA and Iran is much worse, since the IAEA first became aware of and then noted in its reports Iran's lies, its concealed and undeclared activities, and its refusal, even now, to give the IAEA information to which it is legally entitled. As Dr. ElBaradei's term as IAEA director general draws to a close, one can only hope that the next director general, to be elected soon, will take a more realistic and less forgiving attitude towards those NPT members that are not willing to cooperate fully with the IAEA.

The Institute for National Security Studies . 40 Haim Levanon St. . Tel Aviv 61398 . Israel . 03-640-0400 . e-mail: info@inss.org.il

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<http://www.pddnet.com/news-ap-interview-with-john-bolton-061309/>

Interview With John Bolton

By Jamie Colby Associated Press

Saturday, June 13, 2009

<Show: FOX ON THE RECORD WITH GRETA VAN SUSTEREN>

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[EXCERPTS]

COLBY: The U.N. Security Council voting unanimously for new sanctions against the communist state. But is this more talk from the U.N. that will not change a thing? Earlier, we spoke to former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton about the ongoing threat from North Korea, the elections happening right now in Iran come, and how threats from the two rogue nations may tie together. Take a look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

COLBY: Ambassador Bolton, thank you so much for joining us.

JOHN BOLTON, FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE U.N.: Glad to be here.

[deletia]

COLBY: Before we talk about the news being made in Iran and the outpouring of people want to participate in the elections there, can you explain to the viewers, because I find it very interesting, the role that Iran plays in North Korea's nuclear program?

BOLTON: Well, there is very little doubt there has been extensive cooperation between Iran and North Korea over a long time on their ballistic missile program.

And I think there is pretty solid reason to believe that cooperation exists in the nuclear field as well.

If you look at the North Korean reactor being built in Syria that the Israelis destroyed in 2007, I think it is almost impossible to believe that Syria could have financed and supported that reactor unless Iran were heavily involved.

So the idea that there really is an axis of the evil between North Korea and Iran, I think, has a solid evidentiary foundation. And that is one reason why the treatment of North Korea is so important for how Iran perceives its ability to continue its nuclear weapons program.

The Syria Syndrome

By Cyrus G. Robati

June 15, 2009

Two years after Israeli jets knocked out what was alleged to be a controversial plutonium-producing plant placed in the rural site on the Euphrates River near the village of al-Kibar, close to the Turkish border, there are now revelations surfacing that the Syrians have started re-structuring the plant after having it flattened and then built another building on top of it.

Syrians have also been involved in a string of military nuclear-bio-chemical research not too far from Deir el-Hajjar -- a titanic tourist magnet. Deir el-Hajjar is also known for agricultural research, which is intended to hide the real purpose of nuclear research. Experts believe some of the satellite early detection technology will be dismissed because of the agricultural component of the location. There are also three other sites, geographically speaking in the shape of something like the Bermuda Triangle, currently engaged in highly suspicious activities - and curiously all close to rivers too: as-Safirah and Deir-az- Zwar and Hamah -- like al-Kibar - located on the Euphrates and the Orontes Rivers.

With attempts to acquire dual-use technologies that could be applied to a nuclear weapons programme, three top Syrian scientists working closely with the regime of Dr Bashar al-Assad are back in business. The most prominent is Dr Ibrahim Othman who heads the Atomic Energy Commission (AECS) -- an organisation established in 1979 by Hafez al-Assad for peaceful use of nuclear technology for power plants. Dr Othman is a habitual visitor to all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) annual meetings in Vienna. It is believed he was the contact man with his Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Qadeer Khan, known to have passed classified secrets onto rogue nations.

The other two scientists are Dr Mustapha Hamolella, a Kurdish nuclear physicist and Dr Faris Al-Asfari. Both work closely on the nuclear programme and are closely associated with the regime. It is also believed some of Iraqi nuclear scientists who had escaped to Damascus days after the invasion are working closely with the regime to build a bomb. This is plausible since a galaxy of about 12 middle-ranking Iraqi nuclear technicians and their families were transported to Syria before Saddam Hussein's regime fell. The transfer was arranged under a combined operation by Saddam's now defunct Special Security Organisation and Syrian Military Security, headed until recently by Assef Shawqat, Mr Assad's brother-in-law, who was at the centre of a failed February 2008 coup attempt.

The Iraqis, who brought with them CDs crammed with research data on Saddam's nuclear programme, were given new-born identities, including Syrian citizenship papers and faked birth, education and health certificates. Since then they have been hidden away at a secret military installation where they have been conducting research on behalf of their hosts.

Later the nuclear watchdog's investigators revealed that the still-under-watch Dr Khan, who was finally freed in February this year -- because of suffering from cancer -- after being put under house arrest, had sold nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea, and that he was also behind the proliferation of sensitive nuclear technologies to Damascus. "The leadership of Pakistan was well aware of the export of Pakistani nuclear technologies," an unnamed IAEA official was quoted as saying. "It is not ruled out that besides Iran, Libya and North Korea, such supplies could have been made to Syria."

Prior to Dr Khan's arrest and quizzing, several Western diplomats had been saying for months that Damascus was a customary customer of Dr Khan's "black market business network in the Middle East and Asia Pacific".

“Syria certainly had contact with [Dr] Khan,” said a non-American Western diplomat, adding that suspicions of Syrian research in atomic weapons have existed for decades.

But the Khan connection goes much deeper than that. On August 25, 2004 the American intelligence community had obtained evidence that the Khan network sold and delivered components for an unspecified number of Pakistani-designed P1 centrifuges to Syrians. On April 29 Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton said Dr Khan had “several other” customers who might want the bomb. Western diplomats in Vienna said Mr Bolton was clearly referring to Damascus' future dirty bomb. And on June 9, a North Korean expert disclosed to Future Korea that Syrians had visited capital Pyongyang to acquire equipment.

According to his testimony,

Syria ordered a series of Scuds tipped with bio-chem warheads.

Syria ordered rocket engines that were made at “January 8th Factory” in Kaechon.

Syria ordered missile bodies that were made at “No. 26 Factory” in Namchon-dong, Kanggye city.

The missiles were assembled at “Shin-eum-ri Factory” in capital Pyongyang.

And bio-chem warheads, the most sensitive parts, were finished at “Namheung Chemical Factory” and transported via train.

On March 5, substantial sums of uranium had gone missing from a nuclear technology company in Sweden. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official later told the Swedish newspaper, Expressen, “The company [Ranstad Mineral] is a security risk and we have taken the matter to top level to get the Swedes to stop them.”

The CIA operative claims to know that the small Swedish company has educated Syrian nuclear physicists in the treatment of uranium. The Syrian scientists left the company right after the uranium vanished. He also has information that a Swedish consultancy has sold nuclear equipment to the Syrians that can be used in the treatment of radioactive material. “If it transpires that radioactive or nuclear material has been sent on from Sweden to Syria then this is a very serious matter for Sweden,” the CIA official said.

After a meeting with the CIA operative, the Swedish authorities raided Ranstad Mineral several times and shut the company down on the grounds of security lax. Apart from that earlier nuclear saga, the Syrians were the conduit for the purchase of SAM (surface-to-air missile) engines for the Saddam government from Belarus (via arms sale firm “Beltechexport”) and Ukraine (via “Motor Sich”, the state's mega manufacturer of aircraft and rocket engines) that would have enabled Iraq to use them to deliver any weapon up to 180 kilometres in radius. These same engines can be mounted two-to-a-rocket, which would have enabled Iraq to deliver any missile up to 600 kilometres. Of the 352 engines that were purchased by Syria from Belarus, only a handful were delivered to Iraq and accounted for, the rest are still in Syria's possession.

On May 14, 2004 the Western diplomatic sources said Beijing has sent several delegations and technicians to accelerate Damascus' programme for extended-range Scuds. The sources said the increased aid was first detected in late 2003 in what they termed a major development. “The Chinese effort is meant to provide Syrians with technical assistance that they have not been able to receive from other countries,” a diplomatic source said. “The focus is to extend the Scud from short-range to medium- and even intermediate-range.”

The Chinese assistance appears to be replacing that of North Koreans -- the prime supplier to and developer of Syrians' missile programmes. Pyongyang supplied and helped develop the Scud C and D programmes.

On February 29 this year, during a press conference in Lebanese capital Beirut, Iranian Defence Minister Shamkhani said his country had signed a memorandum of understanding with Syria and another with Lebanon to bolster the military apparatuses of both countries. The Syrian deal in fact was intended to send a clear signal that cooperation between Iran and Syria are an integral part of their foreign policy on a parallel nuclear programme that too includes Venezuela supplying Iran with uranium and Bolivia supplying the nuclear material -- courtesy of a leaked Israeli foreign ministry report.

But perhaps a more crucial factor to remember about Damascus's alliance with Tehran is that it gives the former access to Iranian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian, North Korean, and Chinese military and economic aid. There is of course another aspect of that alliance too: Dr Assad's "Mukhbarrat" (Syria's Intelligence Agency) and Mr Ahmadinejad's "VEVAK" (is the Farsi acronym for Vezerat-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, or MOIS), both have gained quite some notoriety for espionage and counter-espionage, using local agents to infiltrate nuclear-powered nations, such as Pakistan, India, Jordan and Algeria.

Tehran is calculating that Damascus' involvement may distract attention away from its own nuclear programme (which never ever transpired, anyway) but also the intended purpose is to present Washington with another challenge that Tehran knows well Washington will be unable to face simultaneously and because of a multiple fronts opened to confront terror tremor.

Israel's September 6, 2007 attack on the Yongbyon-copycat al-Kibar nuclear facility was reminiscent of that of 1981 on Iraq's Osirak reactor, but with two noticeable differences. First, Israel remained silent following the al-Kibar bombing, while in 1981 it boasted publicly about the Iraq strike even before the pilots had returned. Second, whereas the international community knew of Saddam's nuclear plans -- in addition to his so-called 40-metre "supergun" project designed by Canadian-born astrophysicist Gerald Bull -- few were aware of the extent of Syria's nuclear programme back in 2007.

The reactor would have produced enough plutonium for one or two bombs within a year of becoming operational. It appears that the Syrians were trying to add tubes in rings from centre and the outer ring was not yet in place. Counting fuel tubes and it appears that the reactor was considerably smaller than its North Korean counterpart, Yongbyon, which has considerably more fuel channels. If you model the core of a reactor as a sphere, the volume (and hence capacity) of al-Kibar would be about one-fifth that of Yongbyon -- sixty percent cubed. The implication of a smaller reactor is smaller plutonium production -- roughly, while Yongbyon could produce 5-7 kilogrammes of plutonium per year, al-Kibar could have only produced about 1 kilogramme of plutonium per year. That is still not good, but it also invites comparison's to the fuss over Algerian Es Salam reactor, near the town of Ain Oussera, which was resolved with safeguards not airstrikes.

Yet, a smaller reactor would also require less natural uranium fuel -- something that might matter if one planned to extract uranium from phosphates. Finally, a smaller reactor would also, presumably, reduce the design throughput for whatever reprocessing facility the Syrians intended to build or have squirreled away. Curiously, a video from inside the Syrian facility also later described as "very, very damning" by a nuclear weapons specialist who spoke to The Washington Post. The video demonstrated that al-Kibar's core design was the same as that of the Yongbyon reactor, "including a virtually identical configuration and number of holes for fuel rods". The video also showed North Korean personnel inside the site.

Subsequent investigations then revealed that key materials for al-Kibar were smuggled from China and possibly Europe into Syria by Namchongang Trading, a North Korean firm. In February 2009, the Syrians let it be known that the al-Kibar facility was being used as a missile base. They never said what kind of missile base. But apparently the missiles being developed there will carry biological and chemical weapons.

Between 2007 and 2009 the Syrians have rebuilt the al-Kibar structure and three other sites into facilities for the production of chemical and biological weapons. Two American envoys who recently visited Syria were aware of the report and presented satellite photos to the Syrians, who denied it.

But then if photos can't talk loud enough, tests certainly can.

And as suspicions have gained momentum with the discovery of uranium at a second site, experts say they indicate attempts to isolate plutonium from spent reactor fuel. The IAEA's random test at a small research reactor in Damascus turned up processed uranium particles of a "type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material". Independent experts believe the uranium appeared to indicate Syria could have been experimenting with a technology that, used under more sophisticated conditions, could be used to isolate plutonium from spent nuclear power plant fuel.

Something real fishy is going on at al-Kibar and the other three suspicious sites, as Reform Party of Syria, a Washington-based group seeking regime change in Syria, has closely monitored and verified suspicious Syrian behaviour since the 1990s. The most dangerous of the four sites is, of course, the capital's Scientific Studies and Research Centre -- the nucleus of the regime's chemical, biological, and missile WMD programme. The centre's scientists regularly travel to Tehran to coordinate with their counterparts in Amir Kabir University of Technology for critical support in the fields of chemical weapons and ballistic missile research. The centre is also behind the super-secret Syrian Air Force chemical weapons arm, Unit 417, which has held test launches of short-range ballistic missiles equipped with chemical warheads.

One such test occurred in the summer of 2006, when fighting between Israel and Hezbollah had reached a peak, followed by another one in October 2007. Furthermore, the centre runs high-tech covert chemical and bio labs in a barren rural strip of land in the northwest known as the Dubaya Centre. Jane's Intelligence Review, using satellite images from commercial sources gathered between 2005 and 2008 to examine activity at the chemical weapons facility, has identified as-Safir in northwest Syria. The Jane Review report says it has observed in the imagery "significant levels of construction have taken place at the facility's production plant and adjacent missile base", noting that the site is hardly "a civilian industrial complex".

As primary energy grows more expensive, many countries are turning to nuclear power. The expansion of civilian nuclear programmes highlights the need for a more robust non-proliferation regime; the Middle East alone has about a dozen states with at least nascent nuclear programmes. The existence of al-Kibar, however fleeting, should serve as a serious warning about the current non-proliferation regime, as well as American engagement of the Syrians.

If Washington does attempt to engage Damascus, it cannot simply ignore al-Kibar and those three sites. Damascus' apparent nuclear and missile development and subsequent deception reinforce pre-existing concerns about the country's interest in regional peace and stability. Pretending that the al-Kibar incident never occurred would send the wrong signal to Damascus and other potentially dangerous proliferators in the Middle East.

And all indications are that Damascus - which has already doubled its Scud arsenal -- is building a potent nuclear programme with Iran's assistance and help. With Barrak Obama's zeal to "engage" with both the Assad and Ahmadinejad regimes, one would think that for the May sanctions to be re-imposed there would have to be an awfully good reason - no matter even if George Mitchell is trying to mark a further thaw of relations between Washington and Damascus.

This is Google's cache of <http://www.armscontrol.org/print/3466>.
It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on Jun 18, 2009 04:00:47 GMT

IAEA Report Raises Suspicions on Syrian Site

Peter Crail

A Syrian facility destroyed by Israel last year could have been a nuclear reactor, a Nov. 19 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report determined. Although the IAEA has not completed its investigation, its early findings appear to support U.S. claims made in April that Syria was constructing a nuclear reactor in secret with North Korean assistance at a site called Dair al Zour. (See ACT, May 2008.)

According to the report, the investigation faces serious challenges due to the bombing of the facility by Israel in September 2007 and the subsequent bulldozing and construction over the site by Syria. (See ACT, November 2007.) Moreover, due to the lack of information provided to the agency regarding the facility, IAEA inspectors did not arrive until nearly 10 months after the facility was destroyed.

In spite of these challenges, the IAEA has uncovered evidence that potentially points to undeclared Syrian nuclear activities, including the presence of uranium particles found at the site and Syrian procurement activities consistent with the construction of a reactor.

IAEA Discovers Traces of Uranium

One of the key pieces of evidence uncovered during the IAEA inspection of Dair al Zour was the presence of a "significant number of natural uranium particles" in some of the samples taken from the site. The agency noted that this uranium was produced through chemical processing and was therefore man-made. Speaking in regard to the uranium particles, a senior UN official said during a Nov. 19 background briefing, "[T]hat kind of material should not be there." The official further noted that the size of the particles was "extremely small," making it more difficult to tell its exact composition and therefore its potential purpose.

The possible origin of any man-made uranium particles is far from clear. Syria pursued a small-scale effort to extract yellowcake uranium from phosphates in technical cooperation programs with the IAEA during the 1980s and 1990s. Yellowcake uranium is chemically processed uranium ore and is the result in one of the first steps in manufacturing nuclear fuel.

According to the agency, financial difficulties prevented these uranium-extraction projects from moving beyond the experimental stage. It is unclear whether Syria has pursued any undeclared efforts to fuel a nuclear reactor. An unclassified 2005 CIA report to Congress judged that, "in 2004 Syria continued to develop civilian nuclear capabilities which may also be potentially applicable to a weapons program," including uranium-extraction technology. This judgment did not appear in subsequent annual unclassified reports to Congress in 2006 and 2007.

If the U.S. intelligence assessment of the design of the alleged Syrian reactor is correct, such a plant would be able to operate on natural uranium fuel, which requires only limited steps beyond yellowcake uranium to purify it into uranium dioxide and fashion it into metal fuel rods. During an April 24 briefing, U.S. intelligence agencies claimed that the facility was a reactor based on the design of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear plant. The senior UN official surmised that the uranium particles could have been reactor fuel but that further analysis was needed to come to any conclusion.

Damascus claims that the uranium came from Israel. In a Nov. 11 response to the agency's findings, Syria alleged that "the only explanation" for the presence of the uranium particles "is that they were contained in the missiles that were dropped from the Israeli planes onto the building."

Although some types of munitions contain depleted uranium, the senior UN official stated that "not one single depleted uranium particle has been found so far."

Activities Consistent With a Reactor

A number of other verification activities undertaken by the agency have also suggested that the Dair al Zour facility was a nuclear reactor. Making use of available satellite imagery of the facility prior to its destruction, the agency assessed that its size and layout were similar to those of a reactor. The IAEA also noted that a pumping facility on the Euphrates River that still remains after the facility's destruction provides a pumping capacity "adequate for a reactor [of] the size referred to" by U.S. intelligence.

The agency has also sought clarification regarding Syrian procurement activities that the IAEA judged "could support the construction and operation of a nuclear reactor." The report cautioned that it was possible that such equipment was intended for a non-nuclear use.

Lastly, the report stated that the agency has requested visits to three additional sites in Syria that may have installations "of relevance to the activities" at Dair al Zour. The IAEA determined from satellite imagery that Syria landscaped these sites and removed large containers shortly after the agency's request. The senior UN official noted Nov. 19 that the agency did not have any information suggesting that any of these locations were involved in producing fuel for a reactor or reprocessing spent nuclear fuel from a reactor.

A reprocessing capability is necessary to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel to use in nuclear weapons. The U.S. intelligence community judged that the Dair al Zour facility was intended to produce this spent fuel. The 2005 CIA report assessed that Syria was developing hot cell facilities, which can be used to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel.

Investigation Hampered by Bombing, Syria

The agency report stressed that its investigation was "severely hampered" by Israel's bombing of the facility and "the late provision of information" regarding the site. Following the destruction of the facility and media speculation that it was a nuclear reactor, IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei called on any state with information regarding the facility to share it with the agency. Nearly eight months had passed between the time that Israel destroyed the facility and when the United States provided information to the IAEA in April.

In the months following the bombing, Syria plowed over the site and erected new buildings whose purpose is unclear. The agency stated that both the bombing and the removal of the remains has made the investigation "more difficult and complex."

The IAEA has also been hampered by Syria's failure to fully cooperate with its requests. Although Damascus provided full access to the Dair al Zour site, it has not fulfilled the agency's requests to turn over documentation regarding the purpose of the destroyed facility to back up claims that the building was a military installation of a non-nuclear function. Moreover, Syria has rebuffed agency requests for additional visits to Syria and inspections of the three additional sites.

Despite the current difficulties faced by the agency in carrying out its investigation, the senior UN official said Nov. 19 that the agency is unlikely to carry out a special inspection in the near future. Special inspections invoke a rarely used legal authority mandating that a state provide the agency with additional access to information and locations beyond those covered in routine inspections. This authority may be invoked either in cases in which there is the possibility of a loss or removal of nuclear material or in which the IAEA cannot ensure that safeguards are applied to all nuclear activities and material in a state based on the information that state has provided. The IAEA Board of Governors determined in 1992 that special inspections should only occur on "rare occasions."

The board has invoked its special inspections authority twice in its history. The first was carried out in 1992 at the invitation of Romania to clarify nuclear activities carried out under the ousted regime of Nicolai Ceausescu. In the second case, it mandated a special inspection in North Korea in 1993 following a discrepancy in North Korea's nuclear accounting. Pyongyang refused to comply with the inspection, resulting in the board referring the issue to the UN Security Council and a tense standoff.

In addition to the agency's investigation, the United States has stated that it will pursue answers regarding any North Korean involvement in a Syrian nuclear program within six-way talks on Pyongyang's nuclear program. (See ACT, October 2007.) North Korea has been reluctant to discuss this topic but has committed to Washington that no such assistance is ongoing and that none will occur in the future. (See ACT, July/August 2008.)

Will Syria Fold?

Why U.S. efforts to get Syria to give up its bad behavior might come to naught.

BY MARA E. KARLIN

AUGUST 13, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

This week, a U.S. military delegation is in Damascus, Syria, to discuss how the two countries can collaborate to stabilize Iraq. Having served in the Pentagon for four years, including as the Levant director responsible for U.S. policy on Syria, among other countries, I wish them luck. During the last eight years, U.S. engagement with Syria fluctuated considerably as the Bush administration initially tried to convince the Syrian government to play a positive role in the Middle East and then, once Syrian actions to the contrary became quite clear, implemented a robust slate of sanctions against the regime. Interactions between the two governments were substantially curtailed and consisted entirely of rare discussions on Iraqi refugees and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

I cannot help but be impressed by the Obama administration's deft efforts in dealing with this difficult regime. But, difficult -- indeed intractable -- issues remain that could stymie its best efforts. Getting Syria to change its bad behavior in Iraq and Lebanon, to cease its partnership with terrorists and terror-sponsoring states, and to come clean about its nuclear program will not be easy.

[deletia]

There is also that persnickety problem of Syria's nuclear reactor, which was quietly destroyed by Israel in September 2007 before it could become operational. Putting this issue on the table for discussion is inconvenient, to say the least, for those dealing with Syria or North Korea (just imagine the dilemma that U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill faces; in his previous job he worked with North Korea on nuclear issues and now he needs to gain Syria's cooperation on Iraq).

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090830/OPINION/708299933>

Ship seizure

Last Updated: August 29. 2009 7:51PM UAE / August 29. 2009 3:51PM GMT

North Korea has long been a pivotal figure in the illicit arms trade, its reclusive leadership persistently flaunting international sanctions to buy and sell sensitive technologies. As we report today in The National, the UAE has seized a cargo ship carrying North Korean weapons destined for Iran. Preliminary reports indicate the contraband was rocket-propelled grenades hidden as “machine parts”, but the incident sheds light on the greater issue of proliferation and regional security.

Pyongyang’s second atomic test earlier this year demonstrated a nuclear weapons programme that is steadily gaining ground. With substantial evidence linking the country in the past to the Pakistani scientist AQ Khan, the Syrian reactor that was destroyed by Israel in 2007 and the suspected programme in Myanmar, there is little doubt that North Korea is a key supporter of illicit nuclear programmes.

In one way, the seizure of the ship holding North Korean contraband is a reminder of the vigilance needed to keep the Gulf free of illicitly trafficked arms. Unfortunately in the globalised world, the problems of East Asia now concern us all.

Cheney depicts Clinton's North Korea trip as mistake

By Hwang Doo-hyong

2009/08/31 05:09 KST

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30 (Yonhap) -- Former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney Sunday said that ex-President Bill Clinton made a mistake when he visited Pyongyang to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to win the release of two American journalists.

"Well, obviously, you're concerned for the reporters and their circumstances. But I think if we look at it from a policy standpoint, it's a big reward for bad behavior on the part of the North Korean leadership," Cheney told "Fox News Sunday."

Clinton met with Kim for more than three hours before coming back home with the journalists from Current TV, founded by former Vice President Al Gore, who were held in Pyongyang for several months for illegal entry into the North on a reporting tour.

"I think when a former president of the United States goes and meets with the leader and so forth, that we're rewarding their bad behavior," Cheney said. "And I think it's a mistake."

Cheney, a neo-conservative who took a hardline policy toward the North during Bush's tenure, insisted North be punished for its development and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

"They've been major proliferators of nuclear weapons technology," he said. "They've built a reactor in the Syrian desert very much like their own reactor for producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. They probably are the worst proliferators of nuclear technology any place in the world today. And there ought to be a price for that."

Israel air raided the purported reactor in Syria last year, although Damascus denied the allegations the air bombed facility is a nuclear reactor for production of weapons-grade plutonium.

Damascus Deception

Two years after their reactor was destroyed, the Syrians still haven't come clean about their covert nuclear program and the world's nuclear watchdog is powerless to make them.

BY GREGORY L. SCHULTE

SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

Last Friday, Mohammed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), issued a fourth report on the agency's investigation into Syria's attempts to construct a covert nuclear program with the help of North Korea. The report shows that two years after their suspected reactor was destroyed, Damascus continues to stonewall the IAEA. It also illustrates the agency's limitations in detecting and investigating clandestine activities. The reactor may no longer exist, but Syria's past pursuits and North Korea's dangerous role are still causes for concern -- as is the IAEA's inability to do anything about them.

Syria's rogue nuclear program was shrouded in secrecy from the beginning. The reactor was constructed in a remote desert canyon, its resemblance to a North Korean reactor disguised with false walls and a false ceiling, and its cooling pipes buried underground. Syria did not notify the IAEA of the reactor's construction, thereby violating its Safeguards Agreement, a standard agreement meant to allow the IAEA to verify the peaceful use of nuclear material.

After an Israeli airstrike in September 2007 destroyed the reactor, Syria went to great lengths to cover up its violation. President Bashar al-Assad denied that the destroyed facility housed a reactor, and North Korea refused to acknowledge its involvement. Incriminating components were hauled away, the facility remains were further destroyed, much of a surrounding hill was bulldozed over the site, and a new building was quickly erected on top.

When IAEA inspectors arrived at the site in June 2008, what was left of the reactor had already been removed or buried. But the inspectors still did their job: They took environmental samples, which when analyzed showed traces of man-made uranium. They asked detailed questions about the destroyed facility and suspicious Syrian procurement activities, which Syrian authorities refused to answer. Syria soon announced that IAEA inspectors were no longer welcome except at sites they had already declared.

It is now well over a year since that one and only visit to the destroyed reactor site. Syria has refused IAEA requests to visit other suspect sites. And as the director general reports, Syria "did not cooperate with the agency to confirm Syria's statements regarding the non-nuclear nature of the destroyed building." Earlier in the investigation, ElBaradei sought to highlight cooperation. Now, he reports that the agency's "ability to confirm Syria's explanation regarding the past nature of the destroyed building ... is severely impeded because Syria has not provided sufficient access to information, locations, equipment or materials." "Severely impeded" is about as strong as language gets in Vienna.

Assad obviously wants to bury the investigation in the same way that Syrian bulldozers buried the reactor remains. But the IAEA cannot let this happen, both for the credibility of its safeguards regime and to ensure that leaders in Damascus, Pyongyang, and other capitals are not tempted to try again. The IAEA must keep the spotlight on Syria, insist on Syria's full cooperation, and be prepared to exercise the IAEA's full authority. Ultimately the IAEA Board must be ready to find that Syria's noncooperation constitutes noncompliance and report that noncompliance to the U.N. Security Council.

Syria is trying to limit the IAEA investigation by strictly interpreting its safeguards agreement, which focuses on accounting for nuclear material at sites that, unlike that of the destroyed reactor, were formally declared to the IAEA. However, the agreement also includes a provision for “special inspections” of any site if the agency concludes that the access and information being provided by Syria is insufficient. The director general’s report suggests that this time has come.

Part of the problem in Syria is the inherent weakness of today’s safeguards system. An additional protocol to the standard safeguards agreement was meant to help IAEA inspectors uncover illicit nuclear activities at undeclared sites. However, Syria is one of a group of countries -- including Egypt, Brazil, and Argentina -- that have refused to sign the additional protocol. Iran has signed a protocol but refuses to implement it. The Syrian case shows why the this protocol needs to become a universal standard.

Yet even with the additional protocol, there is no assurance that the IAEA would have detected Syria’s elaborately concealed reactor. To detect and investigate clandestine activities, the IAEA must assemble a mosaic of information acquired from many sources. The IAEA is accordingly moving to a more information-driven investigative approach.

But this frequently involves member states providing sensitive information, often acquired by intelligence agencies -- not always an easy task. The sharing of information from other member states requires confidence -- confidence that the information provided will be protected as necessary and confidence that it will be used with good effect to further safeguards investigations. Removing the politics from these investigations and returning the IAEA to its technical verification role will go a long way to ensuring this confidence and strengthening the agency in face of future violations.

Strangely, the report only mentions North Korea’s role briefly, but the IAEA must not let the country’s role stay buried in the rubble. It was North Korea’s willingness to sell its nuclear expertise that gave Syria the opportunity to build the reactor. Even if Syria is dissuaded from trying again, North Korea’s leaders might find another willing customer, particularly if that customer thinks that cooperation with North Korea carries no international penalty.

The IAEA Board must also take its verification role far more seriously. It is striking how many board members are always eager to criticize Israel or the United States but remained silent on Syria’s violation and failure to cooperate. Yet it is many of these same countries -- such as Egypt or Malaysia -- that could suffer most from a nuclear arms race in the Middle East or from North Korea exporting nuclear technology to an irresponsible country or terrorist group in their region. Moreover, President Obama’s vision of a world without nuclear weapons, a vision widely supported by IAEA member states, is unthinkable without a robust verification system.

The case of Syria’s reactor underscores the importance of strengthening the IAEA -- removing the politics from IAEA investigations, refocusing the agency on its technical verification role, and ensuring that it has the authority, resources, and will to have the bark required of the world’s nuclear watchdog.

[Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte was the U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency from July 2005 to June 2009. He is now a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Defense University. This contribution reflects his personal views and not those of NDU or the U.S. Government.](#)

<http://thebulletin.org/files/065005002.pdf>

The ElBaradei Legacy

Andreas Persbo & Mark Hibbs,

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

September/October 2009, vol. 65, no. 5, pp. 10–23.

[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

Concerns that an IAEA referral of Tehran to the Security Council could trigger U.S.-led military action gradually abated as Washington became bogged down in Iraq after 2003. By 2007, some IAEA officials were concerned that Israel—supported by the United States—might attack Iranian nuclear fuel-cycle installations that Tehran refused to idle in disregard of a 2006 Security Council order. Instead, in September 2007, Israel attacked a site in Syria called Al Kibar where Israel and the United States had concluded a secret plutonium production reactor was nearly completed.

A secret reactor in Syria? After Israel bombed the site at Al Kibar, ElBaradei upbraided the United States and Israel for failing to provide the IAEA with intelligence they had obtained on Syria's nuclear program. (U.S. lawmakers were the first to be briefed in March 2008.) As he had done previously in Iraq and Iran, ElBaradei assigned the Department of Safeguards to probe allegations of Syria's undeclared nuclear activity.

Some sources at the IAEA suggest that ElBaradei's approach to Syria was informed by his support for an ongoing diplomatic initiative, involving Israel, Turkey, and the EU, to urge Damascus to abandon its support for Iran and for Islamic fundamentalists in the region. The IAEA successfully negotiated access to the site to take environmental samples. But for nearly a year after the attack, sources suggest, the IAEA secretariat discreetly urged board members to keep the matter off the agenda to buy time. During this period, they say, ElBaradei conferred with senior government officials whose countries were involved in protracted talks aimed at securing Syria's political realignment.

By September 2008, according to Western officials, the United States and its allies on the IAEA board made sure the Syrian issue would be formally discussed. But in late 2008, ElBaradei and the Bush administration clashed yet again over a Syrian request for technical assistance from the agency to pursue a nuclear power program. While the IAEA's Department of Technical Cooperation was prepared to provide the assistance, according to agency officials, Washington fiercely objected on the grounds that the country was suspected of having a clandestine nuclear weapons program. One U.S. official involved in preparations for a November board meeting in Vienna privately complained to us at the time that ElBaradei was meddling in opposition to U.S. interests over yet another nuclear program in the Middle East. At the meeting, ElBaradei angrily defended Syria's right to technical assistance on the grounds that neither the IAEA secretariat nor the Board of Governors had determined that Syria had violated its safeguard obligations.

As the Department of Safeguards analyzed its Syrian samples during the second half of 2008, it became clear that if the IAEA's analysts were going to achieve a breakthrough, they would have to return to

sites in Syria. A senior ElBaradei aide tells us that in September 2008 the IAEA decided against requesting a special inspection—permitted under Syria’s safeguards agreement with the IAEA—because the agency had yet to find suspicious nuclear material in its probe of the site. But even when tiny particles of processed oxidized uranium were found in the samples shortly thereafter, no special inspection was openly requested. A senior U.S. official tells us that Washington plans to raise this issue with the IAEA again this fall.

[deletia]

Andreas Persbo is the acting executive director of the Verification Research, Training, and Information Centre, or VERTIC. He holds a law degree from Stockholm University and has studied political science, economics, sociology, and anthropogeography at Orebro University. In the 1990s, he served with the Swedish contingent of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon and the U.N. Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia. Mark Hibbs is an editor for Nucleonics Week and Nuclear Fuel, covering the Asia-Pacific and European regions. He has an undergraduate and master’s degree in international economics from Columbia University and Cornell University, respectively. He has written for the Bulletin for almost 20 years on nuclear proliferation and nuclear security issues as they relate to India, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan, and Russia.

http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14428655

Iran, North Korea and the bomb
Spinning dark new tales

From The Economist print edition
Something new to worry about
Sep 10th 2009

HONESTY is a rare commodity in the nuclear underworld, where Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Syria and possibly others—as well as Argentina, Brazil, Libya and South Africa in times past—have long done deals for the equipment, technology and materials needed for their illicit nuclear programmes. Yet North Korea and Pakistan's notorious blackmarket-maker, Abdul Qadeer Khan, have both proudly and separately decided to tell the world more about their nuclear exploits. **By contrast there is a worrying silence from Iran and Syria, two countries in the spotlight this week at the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear guardian, for their suspect nuclear activities.**

[deletia]

Either way, even with Mr Khan out of the picture and some of his network rolled up, there is scope for mutual help between his customers. **North Korea is known to have secretly built a nuclear reactor for Syria, of the sort it used to make the plutonium for its own bomb; that structure was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in 2007.**

North Korea's claim (assuming it is true) that it can now enrich uranium opens up a another dark possibility. Centrifuge machines are hard to operate. North Korea will have needed help in getting them up and running. North Korea and Iran are already known to co-operate intensively in developing nuclear-capable missiles. So what is to stop them helping each other with their nuclear programmes? North Korea has plutonium and warhead-building skills. A master tunneller, it could also help any country wanting to hide its nuclear efforts from satellites. Iran, meanwhile, has the uranium-enrichment skills that North Korea previously lacked. Small wonder Iran thinks it can enrich on happily.

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/09/10/iran-north-korea-nuclear-weapons-opinions-columnists-gordon-chang.html>

For Tehran, Talk Is Cheap

Gordon G. Chang

09.11.09, 12:01 AM EDT

[EXCERPT]

So far, Kim's abhorrent state has paid no price for first hiding its nuclear weapons program and now negotiating in bad faith with the international community--the same things Iran is now doing. This should come as no surprise--there have been reports that the North Koreans have been schooling the Iranians on how to deceive ElBaradei's IAEA. And when it comes to nuclear matters, the two nations are as thick as thieves. Iranian observers were on hand for both of North Korea's nuclear detonations, and North Korea has sold the Iranians at least one nuclear reactor, the one Israeli planes destroyed in the Syrian desert in September 2007.

Gordon G. Chang is the author of *The Coming Collapse of China*. He writes a weekly column for Forbes.

Syria Defence and Security Report Q4 2009 **(Business Monitor International)**

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* Published Date: 16/09/2009

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* Report Type: Market Report

* Country: Syria

* Number of Pages: 44

[EXTRACT from summary]

Despite the overwhelming sense that relations between Syria and the West are moving forward, ongoing investigations into the country's alleged nuclear programme will raise some concerns. Without greater cooperation from Syria, we believe that the nuclear issue could become a stumbling block in its negotiations with the US. The reported discovery of traces of uranium at a second Syrian site by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) provides an illustration of the numerous obstacles that still remain to the resumption of full and friendly relations between Syria, the US and the wider international community.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/10/08/how_to_manage_a_nuclear_iran?page=0,0

How to Manage a Nuclear Iran

Obama's diplomacy is the first step. Here are steps 2 through 5.

BY GREGORY L. SCHULTE

OCTOBER 8, 2009

[EXCERPT]

Another requirement is total transparency. In his Oct. 1 statement, Obama insisted that Iran demonstrate its commitment to transparency. In particular, he called on Tehran to grant the IAEA unfettered access to the enrichment site near Qom. Iran's leaders have agreed, and the IAEA is preparing to send inspectors to the site later this month.

But the transparency shouldn't end there. First, Iran must commit to notifying the IAEA of the construction of any other nuclear sites, and Iran's leaders cannot be allowed to hide behind the argument that they "suspended" this requirement. Worryingly, Syria also violated this requirement by secretly constructing a nuclear reactor with North Korea's help. Clandestine construction of nuclear facilities cannot become a new norm in the Middle East, or anywhere else.

Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte, the U.S. permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency from July 2005 to June 2009, is a senior visiting fellow at the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Defense University (NDU). This contribution reflects his personal views and not those of NDU or the U.S. government.

VIEW: Iran and US options

Leonard S Spector

Friday, October 09, 2009

[EXCERPT]

If the threat of intensified “diplomatic pressure” seems insufficient to spur Tehran’s revelation of the facility, what might have been an added unspoken incentive for taking this step? Perhaps, fears of a military strike on the facility.

Iranian leaders knew the history: In September 2007, Syria suffered just such an attack, when Israeli warplanes destroyed an installation near the town of Dair Alzour. The CIA later revealed the site housed a nuclear reactor, modelled on the one used by North Korea to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons. Syria had taken great pains, the CIA stated, to disguise the facility, whose configuration made it unsuited to the production of nuclear power or for traditional nuclear research.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Israeli attack, however, was the virtual total absence of international criticism: no condemnation by the IAEA Board of Governors, no condemnation by the UN Security Council, and, indeed, no coordinated condemnation by the traditionally antagonistic Arab states. This contrasts starkly with the international hue and cry that followed Israel’s 1981 attack on Iraq’s Osiraq nuclear reactor, a facility that was openly purchased from France, modelled on another legitimate French research reactor, and under IAEA inspection.

Although the Qom facility is a different type of nuclear plant from that at Dair Alzour, like the latter, it is apparently configured to produce fuel for nuclear weapons, built in secret, not disclosed to the IAEA, and carefully disguised and dug deep underground — all implying that it was intended for a nuclear weapon programme. And, if the Syrian case is a legitimate precedent, an attack on the facility might not have been met with an international outcry. Iran, after all, is no more popular internationally than Syria.

In effect, Iran might have had little or no diplomatic recourse after such a strike, while the attacking state – presumably Israel, with behind-the-scenes support from the United States – might have dealt the Iranian nuclear program a serious blow and given an implicit warning of things to come if Iran failed to close down its sensitive nuclear sites, as the UN Security Council has demanded.

Leonard S Spector is Director of the Washington DC Office of the James Martin Centre for Non-proliferation Studies

Commentary

Don't underestimate nuclear terror threat

Graham Allison

Friday, October 9, 2009

[EXCERPT]

• Where could terrorists acquire a nuclear bomb? Russia is the most likely source of materials used for a nuclear attack. North Korea is a close second. Kim Jong Il's regime already has displayed recklessness in risk-taking by selling to Syria a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor a thousand times larger than a nuclear weapon. Further, research reactors in 40 developing and transitional countries still hold the essential ingredient for nuclear bombs.

Graham Allison, director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, is a former assistant secretary of defense and author of "Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe."

In the fight against nuclear proliferation, don't forget about Syria

Bennett Ramberg

THE JERUSALEM POST

Oct. 20, 2009

Renewed international efforts to reign in Iran's atomic program have shrouded another unresolved Middle East nuclear challenger, Syria. The International Atomic Energy Agency's failure to get Damascus to reveal the history of its secret nuclear reactor and related elements raise troubling questions not simply about the Assad regime's nuclear intentions but, more fundamentally, about the ability of the IAEA to act as an effective watchdog. Unless Syria provides a full accounting, its successful stonewalling will only serve further to undermine international efforts to curb proliferation.

International awareness that Syria poses a nuclear threat emerged only in September 2007 when it is believed that Israeli aircraft destroyed the nuclear plant under construction in the country's remote northeast desert.

The attack generated a surprisingly muted response from Damascus and Jerusalem, but in Vienna, the IAEA condemned the strike arguing that Israel should have informed the agency about Syria's installation. Israel's unwillingness reflected a common and growing uneasiness that the IAEA has become a hollow instrument to ferret out nuclear cheaters or reverse them once revealed. The result - Jerusalem, unwilling to risk international dithering, allegedly took matters into its own hands.

THE SEPTEMBER 2009 meetings of the agency's 35 nation Board of Governors and the General Conference - the annual conclave of the IAEA's entire membership - sustained growing apprehensions about Middle East nuclear proliferation but focused on Israel to abandon its program. The General Conference only gently rapped the knuckles of Syria and Iran, calling on both "to cooperate fully with the IAEA within the framework of their respective obligations."

The statement reflected a "coaxing" strategy - repeated requests that nuclear transgressors provide transparency and eliminate contraband - that has become the agency's trademark to constrain violators. The approach builds on the hope that calibrated calls for openness can prompt transgressors to feel more comfortable with revelation. However, too often the response is otherwise. Violators throw a few bones followed by agency demands for more. The dance repeats but never comes to a satisfactory non-proliferation conclusion.

The Iran case illustrates. Coaxing discouraged the revolutionary regime from bolting the non-proliferation treaty while tethering it to safeguards on declared nuclear sites. Coaxing also generated IAEA inspector access to sites otherwise unavailable for review, but not "comprehensive" nuclear transparency. But the policy also allowed Teheran to buy time to build a nuclear weapons breakout capacity.

Evidently, Syria has learned much from the Iranian experience as it denies agency requests for a full explanation of its nuclear enterprise. The behavior reveals why coaxing that buys time wastes time to promote accountability.

Syria, which became an NPT party in 1968, applied safeguards to a small research reactor in Damascus in 1992. The agreement required Syria to inform the IAEA about any planned nuclear installations. The alleged Israeli strike clearly spoke to the Assad regime's failure to do so.

In a time line provided by Washington eight months later, officials traced the origins of the Dair Alzour reactor to a collaborative North Korean undertaking that broke ground in 2001. Israeli operatives confirmed the facility's weapons potential prior to the assault, although there remains the mystery of how Damascus intended to extract weapons usable plutonium absent a chemical extraction plant.

Following the attack, the IAEA attempted to get Syria to clarify the plant's purpose. Ten months would pass before Damascus allowed inspectors access to the site. Syria used the interim to demolish the installation's skeleton. It then buried its foundation, plowed over the ground and built a structure over the remains. It removed debris to an undisclosed location. Despite the cover-up, inspectors found uranium particles in soil samples. Syria unsatisfactorily explained that the residue came from Israeli munitions that destroyed the plant.

IN FOUR reports published by the agency since 2007, Director-General Mohammed ElBaradei repeatedly called upon an "uncooperative" Damascus to reveal the facility's function, the uranium residue and the location of debris carted away. He also requested access to three additional suspect sites. Syria stonewalled.

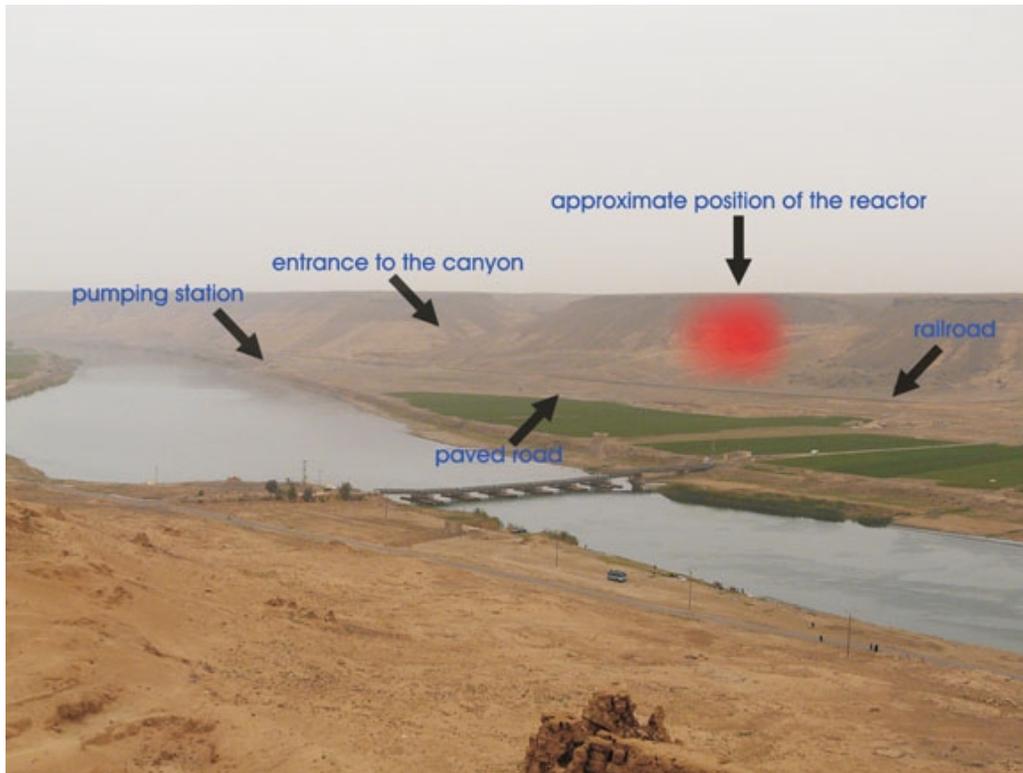
Damascus' repeated resistance to transparency naturally raises questions about what the Assad regime is hiding. But Syria's behavior also begs a response to an equally fundamental matter: How ought the international community deal with current and future violators? Evidently coaxing does not work. Transgressors see coaxing as IAEA impotence. Change requires the agency and the Security Council to replace the practice with meaningful "benchmarks" enforced by with "time certain" sanctions that nuclear violators cannot ignore.

In the months to come the IAEA will have an opportunity to strengthen its policing function, with a new director-general in December followed in May 2010 with the important NPT Review Conference that convenes every five years. The meeting offers an opportunity for attendees to press the Security Council to authorize the IAEA to be more assertive with nuclear violators. The practice is long overdue.

The writer served as a State Department policy analyst during the George H. W. Bush administration and as a consultant to the US Senate, Rand, Nuclear Control Institute, Henry Stimson Center, Global Green and Committee to Bridge the Gap.

Tourist Trip To Halabiye

posted Wednesday **October 28, 2009** under Syria by jeffrey



One of the unique features of the AlKibar (Dair Alzour) site is that it is located near a (somewhat offbeat) tourist attraction. I even joked that a visit “seems like a good use of my grant money.”

I didn’t expect one of you to actually do it. A reader, on a visit to Syria, took a day trip to Halabiye. He has decided to share his observations and photographs:

As you might know, close to the reactor there is an old Byzantine fortress called Halabiye (Frank Pabian mentioned it in his presentation). Tourists only seldom visit Halabiye, but still some travel-guides mention it, so a visit to the fortress was not too obvious. I tried to see how close I could get to the reactor, in the end I was 1.5 km away. This whole area is really, really far off and lies about 60-70 km away from Deir ez-Zour, which also is seldom visited by tourists. Every Syrian I told I was going to Deir ez-Zour immediately asked why I would want to visit such an ugly “\$#&%hole”. After all it is a six hours drive from Damascus and a three hours drive from Palmyra. On holidays lot of Syrians villagers picnic near the fortress. As they apparently had never seen a foreigner before, I quickly became the attraction of the day.

So here my impressions and thoughts on the Al Kibar site:

First let me state, that I think it indeed was a nuclear reactor. I know many people question this and their main argument is that the site is not defended in any way.

This notion is wrong. There are simply no visible defenses. Actually the area is so far off that little defenses are necessary, climbing up the cliffs there is extremely exhausting, difficult and takes a long time. I almost fell twice when climbing up the hill of the castle. Security forces would have plenty of time to thwart any “misguided” hikers. Ten soldiers or so garrisoned inside the canyon and some light barriers would be more than enough to keep away any any intruders. Additionally I can confirm that the site is defended even if a bit differently than people would expect. There were three men simply hanging around next to the bridge. Our very nice taxi driver offered us to go over the bridge to take some photographs of the castle from the other side (where the reactor is located). Then suddenly those guys approached our driver who told us: “Wait I will do this for you”

They started questioning him with one of them taking out a small book to take notes. When we were going further down the bridge to the other side of the river our always amiable driver asked us aggressively “What do you want there? There is nothing there”. That was the only time he talked to us in such way. My friend and I took three pictures on which those suspicious guys are visible — the one tying his shoes was the guy who took out his notebook. They monitored us very closely until we went back to Deir Ez Zour.

In my opinion all of that really makes sense, the Syrians would never be able to stop a concentrated Israeli attack on a pin point target. Hiding it was the only way to go. Of course that was a big gamble, which they lost.



Putting an old Russian SAM next to it, which would have been eliminated in a matter of minutes anyway would have been the most stupid thing to do. Constructing a SAM station

anywhere is like painting “here is an important installation” in big red letters into the desert for all satellites to see, especially in such a remote region.



The pumping station (above) seems to be somewhat hidden, too. A big earthen wall makes it impossible to see it from the ground. The fortress is situated on a big hill and you can inescapably view the pumping station from the top of it, even if from a distance of two kilometers. I did photograph it, unfortunately the weather was rather misty making the picture a little blurred. I was lucky enough to capture a man standing behind the pumping station, he gives a clear indication of the size of the building. When considering the earthen wall hides the lower part, it also gets clear how tall the building actually is.



Another point is the position of the building itself. I photographed a different canyon (above) behind the castle. The canyon where the reactor was located probably looked similar before construction started. Flattening the ground and laying the foundations for such a giant building like an reactor is a major task which simply would not make sense for a normal construction. There is more than enough free, even space right next to the Euphrates only two kilometers down the river (where the cement factory, pictured below, is located)



This is also why the “water treatment” plant is suspicious to me. Why build such a plant kilometers away when there is enough space right next to the river and right next to the main road? Laying kilometers of water pipes in Syria’s hottest region is no fun either. But who knows perhaps the Syrian’s converted this facility into a real water treatment plant later on.

There are some ruins on the other side of the Euphrates (the reactor side) but our driver stated he could not pass the river over that very pontoon bridge. The bridge, despite being partially made of wood, can carry cars, however. I photographed a van crossing it, interestingly with a “Danger” sign on it (below). Apparently it was forbidden only for us.



There seems to be a frequent truck traffic to the cement factory, so steady supply of the reactor using trucks would not be noticeable. In fact, I recall that Frederick Forsyth, in *The Fist of God* (his novel about Saddam getting the bomb), describes an asphalted road and a steady flow of trucks as the most pressing problem when concealing a nuclear factory (in *The Fist of God*, the Iraqis disguise the plant as a car dump).

A lot of people claim the photos from the briefing could have been taken anywhere but the whole atmosphere and colors were just spot on. OK, I know this argument is anything but objective, but the photos of the presentation and my travel pictures correspond rather well (see the screenshot).



Another major claim of skeptics is the lack of support structures. Syria has an history of underground sites. And more important, why should such structures have to be 10m away from the reactor? In the age of fibre optics control stations could be placed kilometers away. Even storage sites could be placed far away, due to the many lorries there transports to the reactor would hardly be noticeable. It again reminded me of Forsythe. In *The Fist of God*, analysts don't recognize a nuclear factory as such because its facilities are placed so far apart.

I photographed a vast building which looked a little out of place, because of its tower-like structures and sheer size. The inscriptions says "workshop for gypsum and decor". Of course, it could be just that but still one should not discard the idea the Syrians may have "outsourced" some of the necessary structures to buildings like this one or the alleged water treatment plant. There seems to be a lot of cooperation with the DPRK in general. In Damascus I once saw a North Korean delegation (above), which I unfortunately could only photograph from behind. I tried to ask my Arabic teacher, from Syria's main port of Tartous, about it, but he said the subject was not appropriate to discuss.



[Note: I asked “Why did you conclude the Asian men were from the DPRK?” Our reader responded: “The guy in the uniform walked past me very closely. I could see he wore the Kim Il Sung pin North Koreans are obliged to wear on his chest.”]

I hasten to add that I take the photographer at his word; the pictures certainly look accurate.

I edited a couple of the images to block out anything that I thought might make trouble for certain people. Which brings me to a very important point:

I want to discourage, in the strongest possible terms, readers from doing anything illegal or that might otherwise endanger yourself, your host or people around you. Many governments have no sense of proportion when it comes to the line between what is innocent behavior in a free society — taking pictures of public events; using your intellect to draw conclusions — and espionage. Recent events in Iran and North Korea demonstrate this too clearly for my taste.

So, please don't go taking silly risks. We can leave that to the professionals.

Mysterious Air Strike How Operation Orchard proceeded in the night of Sept. 5-6, 2007

AROUND 11 P.M.

Ten Israeli F-15I fighters from the Israeli Air Force's 69th Squadron take off from Ramat David air base southeast of Haifa for a supposed emergency exercise and fly out into the Mediterranean. ①

Satellite images of the complex before and after its destruction



Satellite image: Google Earth

HALF AN HOUR LATER

Three aircraft are ordered back. ② The remaining seven change course and head for the Syrian border. There they deactivate a Syrian radar station near Tall al-Abuad using laser-guided precision weapons and electronic jamming signals. ③

AFTER A FURTHER 18 FLIGHT MINUTES

The aircraft reach the area near the town of Deir el-Zor on the Euphrates River and destroy the Al Kibar complex using Maverick missiles and 500-kilogram bombs. ④



The suspicious Al Kibar complex

①

Euphrates

DEIR EL-ZOR

The Story of 'Operation Orchard' How Israel Destroyed Syria's Al Kibar Nuclear Reactor

By Erich Follath and Holger Stark

11/02/2009 04:53 PM

In September 2007, Israeli fighter jets destroyed a mysterious complex in the Syrian desert. The incident could have led to war, but it was hushed up by all sides. Was it a nuclear plant and who gave the orders for the strike?

The mighty Euphrates river is the subject of the prophecies in the Bible's Book of Revelation, where it is written that the river will be the scene of the battle of Armageddon: "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East."

Today, time seems to stand still along the river. The turquoise waters of the Euphrates flow slowly through the northern Syrian provincial city Deir el-Zor, whose name translates as "monastery in the forest." Farmers till the fields, and vendors sell camel's hair blankets, cardamom and coriander in the city's bazaars. Occasionally archaeologists visit the region to excavate the remains of ancient cities in the surrounding area, a place where many peoples have left their mark -- the Parthians and the Sassanids, the Romans and the Jews, the Ottomans and the French, who were assigned the mandate for Syria by the League of Nations and who only withdrew their troops in 1946. Deir el-Zor is the last outpost before the vast, empty desert, a lifeless place of jagged mountains and inaccessible valleys that begins not far from the town center.

But on a night two years ago, something dramatic happened in this sleepy place. It's an event that local residents discuss in whispers in teahouses along the river, when the water pipes glow and they are confident that no officials are listening -- the subject is taboo in the state-controlled media, and they know that drawing too much attention to themselves in this authoritarian state could be hazardous to their health.

Some in Deir el-Zor talk of a bright flash which lit up the night in the distant desert. Others report seeing a gigantic column of smoke over the Euphrates, like a threatening finger. Some talk of omens, while others relate conspiracy theories. The pious older guests at Jisr al-Kabir, a popular restaurant near the city's landmark suspension bridge, believe it was a sign from heaven.

All the rumors have long since muddied the waters as to what people may or may not have seen. But even the supposedly advanced Western world, with its state-of-the-art surveillance technology and interconnectedness through the mass media, has little more solid information than the people in this Syrian desert town. What happened in the night of Sept. 6, 2007 in the desert, 130 kilometers (81 miles) from the Iraqi border, 30 kilometers from Deir el-Zor, is one of the great mysteries of our times.

'This Incident Never Occurred'

At 2:55 p.m. on that day, the Damascus-based Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that Israeli fighter jets coming from the Mediterranean had violated Syrian airspace at "about one o'clock" in the morning. "Air defense units confronted them and forced them to leave after they dropped some ammunition in deserted areas without causing any human or material damage," a Syrian military spokesman said, according to the news agency. There was no explanation whatsoever for why such a dramatic event was concealed for half a day.

At 6:46 p.m., Israeli government radio quoted a military spokesman as saying: "This incident never occurred." At 8:46 p.m., a spokesperson for the US State Department said during a daily press briefing that he had only heard "second-hand reports" which "contradict" each other.

To this day, Syria and Israel, two countries that have technically been at war since the founding of the Jewish state in 1948, have largely adhered to a bizarre policy of downplaying what was clearly an act of war. Gradually it became clear that the fighter pilots did not drop some random ammunition over empty no-man's land on that night in 2007, but had in fact deliberately targeted and destroyed a secret Syrian complex.

Was it a nuclear plant, in which scientists were on the verge of completing the bomb? Were North Korean, perhaps even Iranian experts, also working in this secret Syrian facility? When and how did the Israelis learn about the project, and why did they take such a great risk to conduct their clandestine operation? Was the destruction of the Al Kibar complex meant as a final warning to the Iranians, a trial run of sorts intended to show them what the Israelis plan to do if Tehran continues with its suspected nuclear weapons program?

In recent months, SPIEGEL has spoken with key politicians and experts about the mysterious incident in the Syrian desert, including Syrian President Bashar Assad, leading Israeli intelligence expert Ronen Bergman, International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohammed ElBaradei and influential American nuclear expert David Albright. SPIEGEL has also talked with individuals involved in the operation, who have only now agreed to reveal, under conditions of anonymity, what they know.

These efforts have led to an account that, while not solving the mystery in its entirety, at least delivers many pieces of the puzzle. It also offers an assessment of an operation that changed the Middle East and generated shock waves that are still being felt today.

Syria's Unpredictable President

Tel Aviv, late 2001. An inconspicuous block of houses located among eucalyptus trees is home to the headquarters of the legendary Israeli foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad. A memorial to agents who died in commando operations behind enemy lines stands in the small garden. There are already more than 400 names engraved on the gray marble, with room for many more. In the main building, intelligence analysts are trying to assemble a picture of the new Syrian president.

In July 2000, Bashar Assad succeeded his deceased father, former President Hafez Assad. The Israelis believed that the younger Assad, a politically inexperienced ophthalmologist who had lived in London for many years and who was only 34 when he took office, would be a weak leader. Unlike his father, an unscrupulous political realist nicknamed "The Lion" who had almost struck a deal with the Israelis over the Golan Heights in the last few months of his life, Bashar Assad was considered relatively unpredictable.

According to Israeli agents in Damascus, the younger Assad was trying to consolidate his power by espousing radical and controversial positions. He supplied massive amounts of weapons to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, for their "struggle for independence" from the "Zionist regime." He received high-ranking delegations from North Korea. The Mossad was convinced that the subject of these secret talks was a further upgrading of Syria's military capabilities. Pyongyang had already helped Damascus in the past in the development of medium-range ballistic missiles and chemical weapons like sarin and mustard gas. But when Israeli military intelligence informed their Mossad counterparts that a Syrian nuclear program was apparently under discussion, the intelligence professionals were dismissive.

Nuclear weapons for Damascus, a nuclear plant literally on Israel's doorstep? For the experts, it seemed much too implausible.

Besides, the senior Assad had rebuffed Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani "father of the atom bomb," when Khan tried to sell him centrifuges for uranium enrichment on the black market in the early 1990s. The Israelis also knew all too well how complex the road to the bomb is, after having spent a lengthy period of time in the 1960s to covertly procure uranium and then develop nuclear weapons at their secret laboratories in the town of Dimona in the Negev desert. They took extreme measures to prevent then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein from following their example: On a June night in 1981, Israeli F-16s, in violation of international law, entered Iraqi airspace and destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad.

Key Phase

The Israelis took a pinprick approach to dealing with the "little" Assad. In 2003, the air force conducted multiple air strikes against positions on the Syrian border, and in October Israeli fighter jets flew a low-altitude mission over Assad's residence in Damascus. It was an arrogant show of power that even had many at the Mossad shaking their heads, wondering how Assad would respond to such humiliating treatment.

At that time, the nuclear plant on Euphrates had likely entered its first key phase. In the spring of 2004, the American National Security Agency (NSA) detected a suspiciously high number of telephone calls between Syria and North Korea, with a noticeably busy line of communication between the North Korean capital Pyongyang and a place in the northern Syrian desert called Al Kibar. The NSA dossier was sent to the Israeli military's "8200" unit, which is responsible for radio reconnaissance and has its antennas set up in the hills near Tel Aviv. Al-Kibar was "flagged," as they say in intelligence jargon.

In late 2006, Israeli military intelligence decided to ask the British for their opinion. But almost at the same time as the delegation from Tel Aviv was arriving in London, a senior Syrian government official checked into a hotel in the exclusive London neighborhood of Kensington. He was under Mossad surveillance and turned out to be

incredibly careless, leaving his computer in his hotel room when he went out. Israeli agents took the opportunity to install a so-called "Trojan horse" program, which can be used to secretly steal data, onto the Syrian's laptop.

The hard drive contained construction plans, letters and hundreds of photos. The photos, which were particularly revealing, showed the Al Kibar complex at various stages in its development. At the beginning -- probably in 2002, although the material was undated -- the construction site looked like a treehouse on stilts, complete with suspicious-looking pipes leading to a pumping station at the Euphrates. Later photos show concrete piers and roofs, which apparently had only one function: to modify the building so that it would look unsuspecting from above. In the end, the whole thing looked as if a shoebox had been placed over something in an attempt to conceal it. But photos from the interior revealed that what was going on at the site was in fact probably work on fissile material.

One of the photos showed an Asian in blue tracksuit trousers, standing next to an Arab. The Mossad quickly identified the two men as Chon Chibu and Ibrahim Othman. Chon is one of the leading members of the North Korean nuclear program, and experts believe that he is the chief engineer behind the Yongbyon plutonium reactor. Othman is the director of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission.

By now, both Israeli military intelligence and the Mossad were on high alert. After being briefed, then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert asked: "Will the reactor be up and running soon, and is there is a need to take action?" Hard to say, the experts said. The prime minister asked for more detailed information, preferably from first hand.

The CIA Catches a Big Fish

Istanbul, a CIA safe house for high-profile defectors, February 2007. An Iranian general had decided to switch sides. He was a big fish, of the sort rarely caught in the nets of the CIA and the Mossad.

Ali-Reza Asgari, 63, a handsome man with a moustache, was the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard in Lebanon in the 1980s and became Iran's deputy defense minister in the mid-1990s. Though well-liked under the relatively liberal then-President Mohammad Khatami, Asgari fell out of favor after the election victory of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. Because he had branded several men close to Ahmadinejad as corrupt, there was suddenly more at stake for Asgari than his career: His life was in danger.

Sources in the intelligence community claim that Asgari's defection to the West was meticulously planned over a period of months. However Amir Farshad Ebrahimi, a former Iranian media attaché in Beirut who fled to Berlin in 2003 and who had known Asgari personally for many years, told SPIEGEL that the general contacted him twice to ask for help in his escape -- first from Iran in the second half of 2006 and later from Damascus. In Ebrahimi's version of events, Asgari succeeded in crossing the border into Turkey at night with the help of a smuggler. Ebrahimi says he only notified the CIA and turned his friend over to the Americans after Asgari had reached Istanbul.

But from that point on, the versions of the story coincide again. The Americans and Israelis soon discovered that the Tehran insider was an intelligence goldmine. For the Israelis, the most alarming part of Asgari's story was what he had to say about Iran's nuclear program. According to Asgari, Tehran was building a second, secret plant in addition to the uranium enrichment plant in Natanz, which was already known to the West. Besides, he said, Iran was apparently funding a top-secret nuclear project in Syria, launched in cooperation with the North Koreans. But Asgari claimed he did not know any further details about the plan.

After a few days, the general's handlers flew him from Istanbul, considered relatively unsafe, to the highly secure Rhein-Main Air Base near Frankfurt. "I brought my computer along. My entire life is in there," Asgari told his friend Ebrahimi, who identified him for the Americans. Asgari contacted Ebrahimi another two times, once from Washington and then from "somewhere in Texas." The defector wanted his friend to let his wife know

that he was safe and in good hands. The Iranian authorities had announced that Asgari had been "kidnapped by the Mossad and probably killed." But then nothing further was heard from Asgari. The American authorities had apparently created a new identity for their high-level Iranian source. Ali-Reza Asgari had ceased to exist.

The Need for US Support

Olmert was kept apprised of the latest developments. In March 2007, three senior experts from the political, military and intelligence communities were summoned to his residence on Gaza Street in Jerusalem, where Olmert swore them to absolute secrecy. The trio was to advise him on matters relating to the Syrian nuclear program. Olmert wanted results, knowing that he would have to gain the support of the Americans before launching an attack. At the very least, he needed the Americans' tacit consent if he planned to send aircraft into regions that were only a few dozen kilometers from military bases in Turkey, a NATO member.

In August, Major General Yaakov Amidror, the trio's spokesman, delivered a devastating report to the prime minister. While the Mossad had tended to be reserved in its assessment of Al Kibar, the three men were now more than convinced that the site posed an existential threat to Israel and that there was evidence of intense cooperation between Syria and North Korea. There also appeared to be proof of connections to Iran. Mohsen Fakhrazadeh-Mahabadi, who experts believed was the head of Iran's secret "Project 111" for outfitting Iranian missiles with nuclear warheads, had visited Damascus in 2005. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad traveled to Syria in 2006, where he is believed to have promised the Syrians more than \$1 billion (€675 million) in assistance and urged them to accelerate their efforts.

According to this version of the story, Al Kibar was to be a backup plant for the heavy-water reactor under construction near the Iranian city of Arak, designed to provide plutonium to build a bomb if Iran did not succeed in constructing a weapon using enriched uranium. "Assad apparently thought that, with his weapon, he could have a nuclear option for an Armageddon," says Aharon Zeevi-Farkash, the former director of Israeli military intelligence.

Suspicious Ships

Olmert approved a highly risky undertaking: a fact-finding mission by Israeli agents on foreign soil. On an overcast night in August 2007, says intelligence expert Ronen Bergman, Israeli elite units traveling in helicopters at low altitude crossed the border into Syria, where they unloaded their testing equipment in the desert near Deir el-Zor and took soil samples in the general vicinity of the Al Kibar plant. The group had to abort its daring mission prematurely when it was discovered by a patrol. The Israelis still lacked the definitive proof they needed. However those in Tel Aviv who favored quick action argued that the results of the samples "provided evidence of the existence of a nuclear program."

One of them was the head of the trio of experts, Yaakov Amidror. Amidror, a deeply religious man strongly influenced by his fear of a new Holocaust, also found evidence suggesting that construction on the Syrian plant was to be accelerated. He told Olmert about a ship called the Gregorio, which was coming from North Korea and which was seized in Cyprus in September 2006. It was found to have suspicious-looking pipes bound for Syria on board. And in early September 2007, the freighter Al-Ahmad, also coming from Pyongyang, arrived at the Syrian port of Tartous -- with a cargo of uranium materials, according to the Mossad's information.

At the time, no one was claiming that Al Kibar represented an immediate threat to Israel's security. Nevertheless, Olmert wanted to attack, despite the tense conditions in the region, the Iraq crisis and the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Olmert notified then-US National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and gave his own military staff the authority to bomb the Syrian plant. The countdown for Operation Orchard had begun.

'Target Destroyed'

Ramat David Air Base, Sept. 5, 2007. Israel's Ramat David air base is located south of the port city of Haifa. It is also near Megiddo, which according to the Bible will be the site of Armageddon, the final battle between good and evil.

The order that the pilots in the squadron received shortly before 11 p.m. on Sept. 5, 2007 seemed purely routine: They were to be prepared for an emergency exercise. All 10 available aircraft, known affectionately by their pilots as "Raam" ("Thunder"), took off into the night sky and headed westward, out into the Mediterranean. It was a maneuver designed to deflect attention from the extraordinary mobilization that had been taking place behind the scenes.

Three of the 10 F-15's were ordered to return home, while the remaining seven continued flying east-northeast, at low altitude, toward the nearby Syrian border, where they used their precision-guided weapons to eliminate a radar station. Within an additional 18 flight minutes, they had reached the area around Deir el-Zor. By then, the Israeli pilots had the coordinates of the Al Kibar complex programmed into their on-board computers. The attack was filmed from the air, and as is always the case with these strikes, the bombs were far more destructive than necessary. For the Israelis, it made little difference whether a few guards were killed or a larger number of people.

Immediately following the brief report from the military ("target destroyed"), Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, explained the situation, and asked him to inform President Assad in Damascus that Israel would not tolerate another nuclear plant -- but that no further hostile action was planned. Israel, Olmert said, did not want to play up the incident and was still interested in making peace with Damascus. He added that if Assad chose not to draw attention to the Israeli strike, he would do the same.

In this way, a deafening silence about the mysterious event in the desert began. Nevertheless, the story did not end there, because there were many who chose to shed light on the incident -- and others who were intent on exacting revenge.

Washington , DC , late October 2007. The independent Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) is located less than a mile from the White House. It is more important than some US federal departments.

The office of its founder and president, David Albright, who holds a degree in physics and was a member of the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) group of experts in Iraq, is in suite 500 of the brick building that houses the ISIS. As relaxed as he seems to his staff, in his pleated khaki trousers and rolled up shirtsleeves, they know that it is no accident that Albright has managed to turn the ISIS into one of the leading think tanks in Washington. Albright's words carry significant weight in the world of nuclear scientists.

The ISIS spent four weeks analyzing the initial reports about the mysterious air strike in Syria, combing over satellite images covering an area of 25,000 square kilometers (9,650 square miles) before they discovered the destroyed complex of buildings in the desert.

In April 2008, Albright received an unexpected invitation from the CIA to attend a meeting. There, then-CIA Director Michael Hayden showed him images that the Israelis had obtained from the Syrian computer in London (much to the outrage of officials in Tel Aviv, incidentally, as it provided insights into Mossad sources). The photos enabled Albright, who was familiar with the dimensions and characteristics of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor, to compare the various stages at Al Kibar. "There are no longer any serious doubts that we were dealing with a nuclear reactor in Syria," the scientist concluded.

Albright believes that the CIA's strange behavior had to be understood in the context of the Iraq disaster. At the time, the administration of then-President George W. Bush, citing CIA information, constantly repeated the false

claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. This time around, American intelligence wanted to prove that the threat was real.

But where did the Syrians get the uranium they needed for their heavy-water reactor, and in which secret plants was it enriched? In addition to the North Koreans, were the Iranians also involved? And what did the latest images of this "Manhattan project" in the Syrian desert actually depict -- the conversion of an existing plant or a completely new facility?

The Sisyphus of Non-Proliferation

Vienna, the UN complex on Wagramer Straße, headquarters of the IAEA's nuclear detectives. An impressive collection of national flags hangs in the lobby, like sails waiting for a tailwind. Of the 192 UN member states, 150 are also members of the IAEA, and almost all UN members have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The problem children of the nuclear world, Israel, Pakistan and India, have not signed the treaty. All three of them possess -- or in the case of Israel, are believed to possess -- nuclear weapons.

Signatory states like Syria and Iran are entitled to support in pursuing the peaceful use of nuclear energy. They are also required to either phase out nuclear weapons and prevent their proliferation (in the case of the nuclear "haves") or refrain from developing them in the first place (in the case of the "have-nots").

The IAEA, whose job is to verify compliance with the provisions of the NPT, has 2,200 employees and an annual budget of roughly \$300 million. That may sound impressive, but it is really just peanuts if the claim repeatedly made by politicians around the world is true, namely that the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of blackmailing dictators or terrorists poses the greatest danger to humanity.

During an interview with SPIEGEL in his Vienna office in May 2009, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, 67, sighed as he took stock of his life. At times, the IAEA boss says, he has felt like Sisyphus, the tragic figure in Greek mythology who is constantly pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to lose hold of it shortly before the summit. ElBaradei, the winner of the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize, has repeatedly pointed out that his organization is subject to the whims of the member states. The nuclear detectives can admittedly be deployed to use their highly sensitive testing equipment to obtain a "nuclear fingerprint" in any particular place, but they also need access to reactors. Libya has caused problems in the past, while today's recalcitrants are North Korea and Iran -- in other words, the usual suspects. And now Syria. The news about the desert nuclear plant came as a great shock to the IAEA.

"What the Israelis did was a violation of international law. If the Israelis and the Americans had information about an illegal nuclear facility, they should have notified us immediately," says ElBaradei, who only learned of the dramatic incident from media reports. "When everything was over, we were supposed to head out and search for evidence in the rubble -- a virtually impossible task."

Alarming Findings

But he had underestimated his inspectors. In June 2008, a team of IAEA experts visited the destroyed Al Kibar plant. The Syrians had given in to pressure from the weapons inspectors, but they had also done everything possible to dispose of the evidence first. They removed all the debris from the bombed facility and paved over the entire site with concrete. They told the inspectors that it had been a conventional weapons factory, and not a nuclear reactor, which they would have been required to report to the IAEA. They also insisted that foreigners had not been involved.

The IAEA experts painstakingly collected soil samples, and used special wipes to remove minute traces of material from furnishings or pipes still on the site. The samples were sent to the IAEA special laboratories in

Seibersdorf, a town near Vienna, where they were subjected to ultrasensitive isotope analyses capable of determining whether samples had come into contact with suspicious uranium. And indeed, the analysis produced some very alarming findings.

In its report, the IAEA describes "a significant number of anthropogenic natural uranium particles (i.e. produced as a result of chemical processing)" which were "of a type not included in Syria's declared inventory of nuclear material." The Syrian authorities claimed that the uranium was introduced by the Israeli bombing, something that the IAEA said was of "low probability."

In its latest report, released in June 2009, the IAEA demanded, in no uncertain terms, that Damascus grant it permission for another series of inspections, this time with access to "three other locations" that may have been related to Al Kibar. "The characteristics of the complex, including the cooling water capacities, bear a strong similarity to those of a nuclear reactor, something which urgently requires clarification," says one IAEA expert. In the cautious language of UN officials, this is practically a guilty verdict.

In the Crosshairs

"Syria is not giving us the transparency we require," ElBaradei says angrily. A picture hanging in his office seems to reflect his mood. It is a print of "The Scream," by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, which depicts a deeply distraught person. ElBaradei does not believe that he is too lenient with those suspected of illegally pursuing nuclear weapons programs, as the Bush administration repeatedly claimed, particularly in relation to Iran. The IAEA, he says, will probably receive permission for a new inspection trip to Syria soon. Or at least he hopes it will.

If and when that happens, a different host will greet the UN team. The affable Brigadier General Mohammed Suleiman, an Assad confidant in charge of all manner of "sensitive security issues," was formerly in charge of presiding over the inspections. However he was assassinated in 2008. He landed in the crosshairs of his pursuers, just like Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyah.

For the Israelis, Mughniyah was the epitome of terror, the most notorious terrorist mastermind in the Middle East. He was responsible for the bloody attack on American military headquarters in Beirut in the 1980s and on Jewish institutions in Argentina in the 1990s, attacks in which hundreds of innocent people died. He is regarded by some as the inventor of the suicide attack and was deeply rooted in Iranian power structures.

The Mossad had information that Mughniyah was planning to avenge the air strike on Al Kibar with an attack on an Israeli embassy -- either in the Azerbaijani capital Baku, Cairo or the Jordanian capital Amman.

Assassinated in an SUV

Damascus, the building complex of the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria in the city's Kafar Soussa diplomatic quarter, February 2008. Visitors are not welcome. "Please contact post office box 6091," says the guard at the entrance. There is also an email address (atomic@aec.org.sy). But inquiries sent to both addresses remain unanswered. No wonder, say experts, who speculate that the threads of a secret nuclear weapons program come together in the inconspicuous AECS complex.

It was precisely on the street where the AECS complex is located that Imad Mughniyah, a.k.a. "The Fox," parked his Mitsubishi Pajero on Feb. 12, 2008 while he attended a reception at the nearby Iranian embassy. It was a rare appearance by a man who normally avoided being seen in public. But on that evening Mughniyah knew that he would be among friends, including Hamas leader Khaled Mashal and Syrian General Mohammed Suleiman, whom he had met many times in Tehran and at Hezbollah centers in Lebanon.

Shortly after 10:30 p.m., Mughniyah drank his last glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. Then he kissed the host, the newly installed Iranian diplomat Ahmed Mousavi, on both cheeks, as local custom dictates, and left the party. Mughniyah was "probably the most intelligent, most capable operative we've ever run across," said former CIA agent Robert Baer, who had been tracking him for a long time. The terrorist knew that he was at the very top of the Mossad's hit list, and he also knew that the FBI was offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest. But he felt relatively safe in Syria, as he did in Beirut and Tehran, which he visited on a regular basis.

The explosion completely destroyed the SUV and ripped apart Mughniyah's body. He was killed instantly. But the explosive charge was apparently calculated so carefully that nearby buildings were barely harmed. The terrorist leader remained the only victim on that night in Damascus.

Whoever committed the act, "the world is a better place without this man," the American government announced the next day through State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. Hezbollah, which had no doubts as to who was responsible for the killing, called Mughniyah a "martyr" and vowed to retaliate against the "Zionists."

The Israel government neither confirmed nor denied any involvement in the assassination. But agents at the Mossad could hardly contain their delight. According to information leaked to intelligence expert Uzi Mahnaimi, Israeli agents had removed the driver's seat headrest and filled it with a compound that would detonate on contact. Intelligence expert Ronen Bergman can even describe the reaction of Israelis who were involved. "It was a shame about that nice new Pajero," one of them reportedly said.

Tartous, a medieval stronghold of the Knights Templar on the Syrian Mediterranean coast, five months later. It was at this port city, 160 kilometers northwest of Damascus, that the mysterious freighter Hamed had once berthed with its supposed cargo of cement from North Korea. Here, on a beach 13 kilometers north of the medieval city walls, General Suleiman had a weekend house, not far from the Rimal al-Zahabiya luxury beach resort. In the summer, Suleiman traveled to his weekend house almost every Friday to review files, relax and swim. On this first August weekend in 2008, President Assad's eminence grise must have taken along a particularly large number of documents. A few days later, he had planned to accompany Assad on a secret visit to Tehran.

As always, Suleiman drove from Damascus to Tartous in an armored vehicle. Additional bodyguards were waiting for him at his chalet. They never let him out of their sight, even escorting him into the water when he went swimming. After Mughniyah's murder on a busy Damascus street, security was at the highest possible level. The general, who interacted with the global community as the regime's senior representative on nuclear issues, was considered particularly at risk.

The sea was calm that morning. Yachts were cruising off the coast, and there was nothing to raise suspicions in Tartous, a popular sailing destination for Syria's moneyed aristocracy where boats can be chartered for visits to nearby Arwad Island and its fish restaurants. An unusually sleek yacht came within 50 meters of the coast, but it was not close enough to raise any red flags with the bodyguards when their boss decided to jump into the sea.

No one even heard the gunshots, which were probably fired from precision rifles equipped with silencers. But they clearly came from offshore, striking Sulaiman in the head, chest and neck. The general died before his bodyguards could do anything for him. The yacht carrying the snipers turned away and disappeared into international waters.

Hushed Up

The Syrian authorities kept the news of the murder from the public for days. After that, it issued terse statements about the "vicious crime." According to the official account, the general was "found shot dead near Tartous." There was no mention of a yacht or of the angle from which the shots were fired.

Speculation was rife in Damascus. Diplomats assumed that Suleiman had become too powerful for his fellow cabinet members, and that his killing was evidence of an internal Syrian power struggle. According to Western critics of the president, Suleiman had become a burden for Assad after the debacle involving the bombed nuclear plant and the Mughniyah murder, and he was eliminated on orders from Assad. For experts, however, the most likely scenario is that the Israelis were behind the highly professional assassination.

Suleiman, who was nicknamed "the imported general" because of his European appearance, was buried in a private ceremony in his native village of Draykish two days after his murder. President Assad sent his younger brother Maher to attend the secret funeral, while he himself embarked on his scheduled trip to Tehran. It was important for him to put on a show of self-control, no matter how distressed he may have felt.

Can bomb attacks and hit squads against real or presumed terrorists bring about progress in the Middle East? Is it true that Arabs and Israelis only understand the language of violence, as many in Tel Aviv are now saying? Did the operation against the Al Kibar complex, which violated international law, bring the Syrian president to his senses, or did it merely encourage him to harden his position?

And what does all this mean for a possible Iranian nuclear bomb?

The Consequences of Operation Orchard

"The facility that was bombed was not a nuclear plant, but rather a conventional military installation," Syrian President Bashar Assad insisted during a SPIEGEL interview at his palace near Damascus in mid-January 2009. "We could have struck back. But should we really allow ourselves to be provoked into a war? Then we would have walked into an Israeli trap." What about the traces of uranium? "Perhaps the Israelis dropped it from the air to make us the target of precisely these suspicions."

Damascus, he said, is not interested in becoming a nuclear power, nor does it believe that Tehran is developing the bomb. "Syria is fundamentally opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We want a nuclear-free Middle East, Israel included."

Assad, outraged over Israeli belligerence in the Gaza Strip, has suspended secret peace talks with the enemy, which had been brokered by Turkey. But it is also abundantly clear that Assad is eager to remove himself from the list of global political pariahs and enter into dialogue with the United States and Europe.

In the autumn of 2009, relations between Damascus and the West seem to be on the mend, probably as the result of American concessions rather than Israeli bombs. French President Nicolas Sarkozy received Assad at the Elysée Palace and told him that the normalization of relations would depend on the Syrians meeting a provocatively worded condition: "End nuclear weapons cooperation with Iran." In the first week of October, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad traveled to Washington to meet with his counterparts there. And Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, with Washington's explicit blessing, went to Damascus in an attempt to make a shift to the moderate camp more palatable for Assad.

President Barack Obama will probably send a US military attaché to Damascus soon, followed by an ambassador. Syria could be removed from the US's list of state sponsors of terrorism, a list which also includes Iran, Cuba and Sudan. The prospect of billions in aid, as well as transfers of high technology, is being held out to Assad. The Syrian president knows that this is probably his only hope to revive his ailing economy in the long term.

Relations between Damascus and Tehran have worsened considerably in recent weeks. Western intelligence agencies report that the Iranian leadership is demanding that Syria return -- in full and without compensation -- substantial shipments of uranium, which it no longer needs now that its nuclear program has been destroyed.

The latest news from Damascus, the ancient city where Saulus turned into Paulus according to the old scriptures: According to information SPIEGEL has obtained from sources in Damascus, Assad has been considering taking a sensational political step. He is believed to have suggested to contacts in Pyongyang that he is considering the disclosure of his "national" nuclear program, but without divulging any details of cooperation with his North Korean and Iranian partners. Libyan revolutionary leader Moammar Gadhafi reaped considerable benefits from the international community after a similar "confession" about his country's nuclear program.

The reaction from North Korea was swift and extremely harsh: Pyongyang sent a senior government representative to Damascus to inform Syrian authorities that the North Koreans would terminate all cooperation on chemical weapons if Assad proceeded with his plan. And this regardless whether he mentioned Pyongyang in this context or not.

Tehran's reaction is believed to have been even more severe. Saeed Jalili, the country's leading nuclear negotiator and a close associate of Iran's supreme religious leader, apparently brought along an urgent message from the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in which Khamenei called Assad's plan "unacceptable" and threatened that it would spell the end of the two countries' strategic alliance and a sharp decline in relations.

According to intelligence sources, Assad has backed down -- for the time being. However he is also looking for ways to do business with his enemies, even Israel's hard-line prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Nevertheless, Assad is loath to give up his contacts to Hezbollah and Tehran completely, and he will demand a very high price for the possible recognition of Israel and for playing the role of mediator with Tehran, namely the return of the entire Golan Heights.

Time on Its Side

Did Operation Orchard make an impression on the Iranians, and did they understand it the way it was probably intended by the Israelis: as a final warning to Tehran?

The Iranians have -- literally -- entrenched themselves, and not only since the Israeli attack on Syria. Many of the centrifuges they use for uranium enrichment are now operating in underground tunnels. Not even the bunker-busting super-bombs the Pentagon has requested be made available soon, citing "urgent operational requirements," are capable of fully destroying facilities like the one in Natanz.

The Americans -- or the Israelis -- would have to conduct air strikes for several weeks and destroy more than a dozen known nuclear facilities to set back the Iranian nuclear program by more than a few weeks. It would be a far more complex undertaking than the Israelis' past attacks on the Osirak reactor in Iraq and Syria's Al Kibar nuclear plant. And even after such a comprehensive operation, which would expose them to counterattacks, they could not be entirely sure of having wiped out all key elements of the Iranian nuclear program. Just in September, Tehran surprised the world with the confession that it had built a previously unreported uranium enrichment plant near Qom.

Operation Orchard achieved only one thing: If the Iranians had planned to build a "spare" nuclear plant in Syria, that is, a backup plutonium factory, their plans were thwarted. But Tehran has time on its side. The Iranians are already believed to have reached breakout capacity -- in other words, the ability to begin building a nuclear weapon if they so desire. Iran is on the verge of becoming a nuclear power.

And Syria? There is nothing to suggest that Damascus will or is even able to play with fire once again. A conventional factory has in fact been built over the ruins of the Al Kibar plant. There is no access to the plant -- for "security reasons," as residents of Deir el-Zor say tersely -- at the roadblock near the great river and the desert village of Tibnah.

The turquoise-colored river flows slowly, the river that Moses, according to the Bible, promised to the Israelites as part of their holy land. To this day, many radical Israelis take the relevant passage in the Bible as seriously as an entry in the land register: "Every place that your foot shall tread upon shall be yours. From the desert, and from Libanus, from the great river Euphrates unto the western sea."

Referring to the same river, the Prophet Muhammad is supposed to have said: "The Euphrates reveals the treasures within itself. Whoever sees it should not take anything from it."

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan

Robert Satloff: U.S.-Syria Relations and the Peace Process

Thursday 12 November 2009

Prepared remarks for delivery at debate with Syrian ambassador Imad Moustapha, American University, November 11, 2009.

[EXCERPT]

There are, of course, two other issues that hover above everything I've mentioned so far, issues that hang like a sword of Damocles over the Syrian regime: the UN investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the IAEA investigation of Syria's al-Kibar nuclear reactor destroyed by the Israeli Air Force two years ago. These things clearly take time—time as measured in years. But they are huge issues. Did the Syrians play a role in the murder of Hariri? Right now, speculation ranges from whether it was the Syrians or the Syrians' local allies, Hizballah. Either way, Syria will get its fingers burned, and either way, Syria has already paid a huge price for the perception of involvement. On the nuclear issue, even the IAEA, which normally can't say a bad word about anyone, has roundly criticized Syria for its lack of cooperation in investigating the site that Syria has since paved over like a parking lot. What is remarkable about the nuclear issue is what it says about the Syrian regime: with few assets at its disposal, it jumped into bed with North Korea, one of its few allies, in a vain effort to gain leverage in the region.

[Robert Satloff is the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.](#)

The Washington Institute

George Jonas: The Iranian general vanishes

by NP Editor George Jonas, Iran

Posted: **November 18, 2009**, 10:30 AM

People say life imitates art, but it's not necessarily Shakespeare. Sometimes it's a spy thriller, at other times a canard (the French word meaning false news). Telling thrillers from canards is what investigative journalists, intelligence officers and (eventually) historians get paid for. If they end up giving us value for money, it's only because they don't get paid very much.

Separating the wheat from the chaff is a challenge even in ordinary affairs, as any City Hall reporter can tell you. Trying to disentangle international intrigue is something else again. Consider the case of the Iranian general, Ali-Reza Asgari.

Having vanished about three years ago, Iran's former deputy defense minister came back into the news this week. According to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, Israel's Army Radio monitoring the Iranian investigative news website Alef came up with the claim that Asgari had been kidnapped during a visit to Turkey by a cabal of German, British and Israeli intelligence agencies.

"On the basis of a two-year investigation carried out by concerned bodies, Asgari was abducted by foreign intelligence services and is being held in a Zionist prison," Ha'aretz quotes the Iranian news source reporting. The Iranians say Asgari was kidnapped to get information on Iran's nuclear program as well as on an Israeli Air Force airman missing since 1986. The website claims that, after interrogation, Asgari was secretly transferred to a prison facility in Israel, where he is currently being held.

Hmm. Have the theocrats of Tehran been watching too many Hollywood movies? Or could the Asgari saga, rather than a tall tale for the silver screen, really be an example of life imitating art?

With nothing confirmed, let's see what, if anything, is undisputed. Everyone agrees that Asgari did go missing in Turkey. It happened sometime between December 2006 and February 2007, depending on whether one relies on Ha'aretz's sources or the Farsi News Agency's. Asgari, a one-time commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, age reported as 57 (International Herald Tribune) or 63 (New York Post) might have gone into the olive oil business after his retirement from Iran's defense establishment the previous year. While in Turkey to peddle his wares, he could have aroused the curiosity of Mossad agents. They might have wondered if an Iranian, known as having played a role in setting up Hezbollah in Lebanon, had any information about Ron Arad, the Israeli airman captured by Hezbollah when his plane went down in the vicinity of Sidon, Lebanon, 20-plus years earlier.

But would the Mossad-men have been curious enough to kidnap Asgari and interrogate him? Then — since what the hell, he was there, anyway — ask him about Iran's nuclear program? One of Asgari's two wives, Ziba Ahmadi, certainly thought so. But then, she would have had reason to prefer it to the alternative.

The alternative was that after being pushed out from Mohammad Khatami's cabinet by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Asgari did decide to go into business for himself, except not the olive oil but the olive branch business. This was the merchandize he extended to his Western and Israeli counterparts during a trip to Turkey. In other words, he defected, as some students of cloak-and-dagger, such as Hans Rühle, former planning chief of the German Defense Ministry, suggested.

Any intelligence source may turn out to be the horse's mouth or a horse's ass. Asgari seems to have been the oracular orifice at the happy end of the equine equation. On Sept. 6, 2007, about seven months after his disappearance in Turkey, a squadron of Israeli Air Force warplanes struck a target in Syria. It had to be an important target, because instead of screaming bloody murder over Israel's violation of their airspace, the Syrians initially denied that there was any intrusion at all.

The reason for the subdued Syrian response became evident as more details emerged. Though official Damascus continued to deny it, the target was an Iranian-financed nuclear reactor, built and operated with North Korean assistance. Reportedly ten North Korean advisors lost their lives during the attack. Later several news and intelligence sources agreed that “Operation Orchard” wouldn’t have happened without information supplied by Ali-Reza Asgari. If so, whether he was 57 or 63, and whether his disappearance, either in December 2006 or in February 2007, was due to an olive oil trip going sour or an olive branch trip unfolding as designed, Asgari’s story was taking its place among the three-star entries in the annals of hush-hush.

Could there be a reason for Iranian news sources choosing to revisit Asgari’s defection or abduction last week? In the world of clandestine affairs few things are entirely due to chance. The kidnap-story is almost certainly a canard, but why float it nearly three years after the event?

The answer may be diplomacy, Persian Gulf-style. If this doesn’t immediately make sense, consider the title of the Seventh Annual Isaiah Berlin Lecture, delivered recently by a former head of the Mossad, Efraim Halevy. “Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Middle East: How and Why Are The Two Inexorably Intertwined?”

Stay tuned.

Syria suspected of concealing nuclear activity

November 19, 2009 – 6:41am

J.J. Green, wtop.com

WASHINGTON - The International Atomic Energy Agency and Syria are walking a tightrope and appear to be headed toward a collision over two nuclear sites where undeclared uranium was recently found.

The agency found traces of uranium at the Dair Alzour nuclear site that are not included in Syria's declared inventory, according to a just released report. The Syrians said the uranium came from the Israeli missiles used to destroy the nearby al-Kibar reactor in September 2007.

The presence of uranium particles was detected at a second site near Damascus -- the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor. Syria said it came from the accumulation of samples and reference materials used in neutron activation analysis.

The IAEA is not buying either of the two explanations and is pressing Damascus for more answers and wants to know from where the uranium came. The agency has run its own tests and is certain the Syrian government is not telling the truth.

That's where the tightrope act comes in. The IAEA won't comment on what clearly appears to be evasive behavior by the Syrian government because of concern about its tenuous relationship with Syria.

The Syrian government, also aware of the slippery state of affairs, tells WTOP:

"We are taking up the matter with IAEA, and are in constant consultation with them. We are going through appropriate channels and Syria stands by its legal obligations to the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty)."

A U.S. counter-proliferation official is not convinced.

"Syria has a record of concealing nuclear activities. The whole world saw that with the al-Kibar reactor, an undeclared facility, destroyed in 2007."

Considering Syria's close relationship with Iran, which has refused to bend to international will to stop its nuclear weapons production activities, there is concern Syria is following the same path.

"I think it should be a significant worry," says David Kay, senior research fellow at the Potomac Institute. "This is what the Syria case points to. States can, on their own, clandestinely make arrangements to acquire at least portions of a nuclear weapons production cycle."

The precarious, global nuclear state of affairs involving Iran, North Korea and Pakistan is troubling to Kay.

"[Countries in] the Middle East procuring nuclear weapons would be at the top of my list of concerns. That's why dealing with the Iranian program is so important, and that's why paying continued attention to what's happening in Pakistan is important."

Kay, a former United Nations weapons inspector, says the existence of an underground nuclear weapons network could initiate a irreversible and harmful course of nuclear proliferation.

"Myanmar is a good example," Kay says. "On their own with their indigenous technical capacity to produce either plutonium or highly enriched uranium, it's not something that would keep me awake at night."

They simply don't have it. But this illicit network, government sanctioned and black market certainly means that if they desire it, there may be a real possibility of their gaining it."

The IAEA concluded in a Nov. 16 report that there has been "essentially no progress made" since the last report several months ago.

The report goes on to say Syria's evasive behavior, "gives rise to questions about the correctness and completeness of Syria's declaration, which the agency is obliged to pursue."

The Israeli government has said repeatedly it will not allow Syria's ally, Iran, to develop a nuclear weapons program and "all options are on the table to stop it."

Israeli intelligence suggests Iran could possibly have some type of weapon in 12 months. And because of that, Israeli Ambassador Alon Pinkus says Israel won't wait until a weapon is fully developed to attack.

"There are other stages before that are almost as dangerous," Pinkus says.

His comments lead to speculation that an attack could take place any day between now and a year.

"Not necessarily, because that depends on what happens in the political or diplomatic arena within that 12-month period," says Pinkus.

Syria was attacked quietly by the Israelis in the early morning hours of Sept. 6, 2007 -- but the April 24, 2008 announcement of the attack and the lack of tolerance for rogue nuclear weapons' operations by U.S. government officials was heard loud and clear.

Still the IAEA reports no cooperation from the Syrians on resolving the current issues.

The U.S. counter proliferation official says, "they [the Syrian Government] have a credibility problem, which this latest news will in no way resolve."

When it comes to Iran, 'rules must be binding'

By Jamie M. Fly

Mon, 11/30/2009 - 1:26pm

[EXCERPTS]

The events of the past week pose a challenge to President Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Last week in Vienna, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) met to discuss Iran and Syria's continued stonewalling of IAEA investigations into illicit nuclear activities carried out by each country.

On November 16, IAEA Director General Mohammed ElBaradei submitted reports on both countries to the members of the Board. His report on Iran was perhaps the strongest IAEA report on Iran to date. It found that Iran violated its safeguards obligations by not reporting the existence of a covert enrichment facility near Qom. The report also noted that Iran continues to not cooperate with the IAEA's investigation into Iran's pre-2003 covert weaponization program. It was a damning final report from ElBaradei, who retired at the end of last week having spent much of his twelve years at the helm of the IAEA trying to cajole the Iranians into coming clean, often undermining U.S. and Western efforts to pressure in the process.

[deletia]

On Syria, the Board last week missed an opportunity to send a message to the Assad regime. ElBaradei's latest report makes clear that Syria has adopted the Iranian playbook on handling IAEA investigations. The report says that Syria has not responded to the IAEA's questions about its former covert nuclear reactor at Al Kibar even though some of its early answers contradict information that the IAEA has obtained from other sources. Syria has also refused to give the IAEA access to other facilities related to Al Kibar, claiming that these are sensitive military sites even though the IAEA has reminded Syria that under its safeguards agreement, this is not a reason to deny the IAEA access. In addition to unanswered questions about Al Kibar, the report raises new concerns about illicit activity at Syria's declared research reactor near Damascus.

Unlike Iran, Syria at the moment is experiencing a renaissance in its relations with the United States as well as Europe. This will have to change if the international community is serious about upholding the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The Board of Governors, which has largely been silent on the Syria nuclear issue, should have sent a strong message to Damascus that unless the Assad regime begins to share information, it will be subject to the same treatment as Iran (including eventual referral to the Security Council for further action).

The issue is not that Syria has an ongoing nuclear program (although it is difficult for the IAEA to verify this given Syria's lack of cooperation), but it is about the sanctity of the nuclear nonproliferation regime and the message that needs to be sent to other countries thinking about shirking their commitments. The lesson cannot be that such countries will be slapped on the wrist but then quickly forgiven, only to receive increased trade and diplomatic relations from the United States and Europe.

How President Obama handles these two issues in the coming months will say much about how serious he is about his supposed goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons. As Obama said in his April speech in Prague after North Korea violated several United Nations Security Council Resolutions by conducting a missile test, "Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something."

Last week's IAEA Board resolution on Iran was a start, but there is much work to be done before he can turn this rhetoric into reality.

A Change in Leadership at the IAEA

James M. Acton Q&A

December 1, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

On Monday, Mohammed ElBaradei stepped down after twelve years as head of the UN's nuclear watchdog. Yukiya Amano, ElBaradei's successor as director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, will confront growing proliferation challenges from nuclear weapons programs and nuclear power industries across Asia, the Middle East, and beyond.

In the final days of ElBaradei's tenure, the last week of November, the IAEA issued a stern resolution censuring Iran for continually defying its international nuclear obligations. In response, Iran announced that it would build 10 additional uranium enrichment plants, once again challenging the IAEA's enforcement authority. In a new Q&A, James Acton reflects on ElBaradei's leadership, discusses Amano's agenda, and calls attention to the importance of the IAEA's work.

[deletia]

[Q:] How will Amano's arrival impact international efforts to contain nuclear programs in Iran, North Korea, and Syria?

[deletia]

[A:] Although not so high-profile *[as Iran]*, Amano will also have to make a decision about whether to change tactics in handling the Syria investigation. There is strong evidence that the building the Israelis destroyed in an air strike in September 2007 was a nuclear reactor that Syria failed to declare to the IAEA—in breach of its legal obligations. The IAEA has repeatedly asked Syria for access on a voluntary basis so it can investigate the matter further. Syria has consistently refused. Amano must decide whether to make the Agency's request for access legally binding by asking for a "special inspection"—a step ElBaradei steadfastly refused to take.

Beware the winds of December

By Alastair Crooke

Asia Times

Dec 2, 2009

[EXCERPT]

... We do not yet know that negotiations with Iran will fail; although it seems that the debate within the administration seems to be hardening against the idea of Iran retaining any enrichment capacity. If this does become the administration's position, then failure of negotiations is assured. Iran will not abjure its right to a nuclear fuel cycle for power generation - even at the risk of war. This is the essence of the dilemma: if sanctions seem likely to lead to nothing more than Republican sniping and taunts of weakness, how does the president display "toughness" on Iran - against the backdrop of withdrawal from Iraq, Afghanistan and abstention on the Israeli-Palestinian political process?

It is clear that Israel must be reading the region in the same fashion. Israelis are acutely sensitive to US politics, and the Israeli media already express understanding for the acute dilemma that will face the US president if sanctions do not succeed in persuading Iran to abandon all enrichment (the Israeli objective). How might Israel see the way to help President Barack Obama resolve this dilemma - given the improbability that Israel will be given any "green light" to attack Iran directly, with all the consequences that such military action might entail for US interests in the region?

A recent article by the veteran and well-connected Israeli columnist, Alex Fishman, in the Hebrew language newspaper, Yediot Ahronoth, perhaps offers some insights into how Israelis may be speculating about such issues when he warns about "the approaching December winds". These winds, Fishman tells us, will bring more and new revelations - not about Iran's nuclear ambitions - but about Syria's nuclear projects: the departure of Mohamed ElBaradei from the chair at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), he states, will open the door to new IAEA demands to inspect two suspected nuclear sites in Syria.

Fishman notes that, following the surfacing last month in Germany of stories that Israeli special forces had been on the ground covertly in Syria, no one should be surprised if more evidence and photographs of the nuclear reactor, destroyed by Israeli air attack in September 2007, come to dominate the headlines in the Western press this December.

The "star" turn in this prospective public relations campaign is to be evidence proving a direct Iranian nuclear connection and finance for Syria's alleged nuclear project.

Fishman suggests that it suits "Israel's internal as well as foreign PR efforts" for the time being to play along with talk of peace between Israel and Syria; but that both the December campaign against Syria's alleged Iranian nuclear cooperation in the Western press, and the playing along with the Syrian peace track "are directly linked to negotiations" that the US is conducting with Iran. Fishman concludes that these could end in confrontation with Iran - "and also lead to a military strike", in which case, "whomsoever is in the Iranian camp will also get a pounding" - a reference to Syria.

Does this piece truly reflect Israeli thinking? We do not know; but Fishman certainly is well connected. Does the Israeli security establishment really conceive that the road to military action against Iran passes through Damascus? For those who recall the tacit support given by Europe and the US to Israel's 2007 surprise military attack on Syria, Fishman's scenario is not as unlikely as it may seem.

That earlier episode could easily have escalated to a wider war. More likely is that this is but one of a number of "game changing" scenarios that Israel is considering, but which ultimately all have Iran as the "end game".

In the past, Israel's political parties of the right had a reputation for conceiving unconventional military actions, which sought to transform and invert the political paradigm of that time. Such actions did not always wait on, or seek, a US "green light". There was not direct collusion with the US. Israeli leaders looked more to the direction of the political wind in Washington. It was viewed by Israelis historically as finding a creative way to help a US president "get to yes" - to borrow Obama's own phraseology - by creating the public support and momentum to let a US president feel pulled forward by sentiment from a need to "hold Israel back".

Is a new scandal of Iranian nuclear malfeasance and proliferation into Syria to serve as the pretext? Will a repeat of the 2007 air strikes on Syria lead to a wider conflict? Does the Israeli leadership think to ease Obama out of his Iran dilemma, by using the supposed "provocation" of a "Syrian-Iranian nuclear partnership" for a widening conflict? Perhaps we should beware these December "winds"?

[Alastair Croke is a co-director of the London-based Conflicts Forum.](#)

The end of an era

By EPHRAIM ASCULAI

Dec 3, 2009 15:02 | Updated Dec 3, 2009 15:04

[EXCERPT]

On December 1 Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the threeterm International Atomic Energy Agency director-general and the sharer, with the IAEA, of the Nobel Peace Prize, passed the keys to his office to his successor, Ambassador Yukiya Amano of Japan. It is not possible to describe his controversial term of office in one or two sentences. Yet, he will probably be remembered as the director-general who politicized his position more than any of his predecessors.

The IAEA is a technical organization, with many technical duties, from the peaceful uses of nuclear techniques, in medicine and agriculture, to mention but two of the many useful areas that employ these techniques, to guiding the safe use of nuclear power reactors.

In addition, however, the IAEA was entrusted by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to verify, through inspections, that the Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS) are not engaged in the illicit development of nuclear weapons. Although the IAEA's achievements in its purely technical tasks are impressive, it has failed in many of its non-proliferation duties. To be sure, the performance of the technical duties of inspections within the legal bounds of their authority was commendable.

However, the interpretation of the findings of the safeguards inspectors failed conspicuously in two areas: Not all findings were reported to the IAEA member states, and the interpretations of the findings were not only technically based, they were biased in their leniency toward some of the inspected states.

Moreover, the IAEA chief, in his reports to the board of governors did not explicitly transfer the burden of proof to the inspected states, when they did not provide satisfactory answers to findings that unequivocally implied non-compliance with the NPT. Two cases in point were Iran and Syria. IN THE case of Iran, he refrained from indicting it for its "technical" misdemeanors (according to his judgment) and, for years, kept begging Iran for serious replies to questions concerning information indicating the development of nuclear weapons. He did so instead of putting an end to this by the timely transmission of these serious issues to the Security Council for judgment.

In addition, there are reports that he kept to himself information concerning the weaponization part of the Iranian nuclear project. The fact that the information was not released, and the issue of the unanswered questions was not transmitted to the Security Council gave Iran the precious time it needed for advancing its uranium enrichment program, getting closer to the ultimate target of having the potential to produce nuclear weapons in short order.

A serious shortcoming of the interpretation of the results of inspections in Iran was the repeated statement that their purpose was to verify "the exclusively peaceful nature" of Iran's nuclear drive. Under no circumstances can this ambition be achieved in many countries, including Iran. This statement was conspicuously missing from ElBaradei's final report on Iran.

The case of Syria is even more bizarre, in that the IAEA had all the information it needed (supplied courtesy of the American intelligence agencies) to conclude that Syria had been constructing a nuclear reactor at the AlKibar site, similar in many respects to the North Korean plutonium production reactor. Instead, ElBaradei chose to scold Israel for not coming to the IAEA with the information, and letting it deal with the situation. This he did knowing well that the IAEA could do almost nothing about it. All it could have done was request a "special inspection," which Syria could refuse, in the same way North Korea did.

Meanwhile, Syria could have gone on with first the construction, then with the plutonium production, while fortifying its air defenses around the reactor.

While he earned his kudos for the Iraqi case in 2003, when he did not support the allegations that Iraq had an ongoing nuclear weapons development project, he lost them in his efforts to protect Iran and Syria from the same allegations. The motives for his behavior are uncertain, and will not be speculated on here.

[deletia]

The writer is a senior research associate at the Institute of National Security Studies.

Hope of North Korea's Return to the Six Party Talks

Interviewee: Evans J.R. Revere, President and CEO, Korea Society

Interviewer: Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor, CFR.org

December 11, 2009

[EXCERPTS]

A veteran State Department expert on Northeast Asia, Evans Revere says that the expectations for special envoy Stephen W. Bosworth's initial visit to Pyongyang were "probably pretty low." There were no dramatic results, such as North Korea's agreeing to immediately resume participation in the Six Party Talks on halting its nuclear weapons program. But Revere, who had been a Cyrus Vance Fellow in Diplomatic Studies at CFR, says "the North Koreans do not seem to have slammed the door in terms of coming back to the Six Party Talks, and, in fact, they may have left the door open just a bit more of a crack than it already was, and if that's the case, that's a positive thing."

President Obama's special representative on North Korean policy, Stephen W. Bosworth, has completed two days of talks in Pyongyang. He had a press conference in Seoul where he spoke in diplomatic niceties, saying, essentially, that it was a "candid and businesslike" meeting and they will hopefully have further meetings in the future, but nothing concrete was apparently achieved. He made it clear that the Obama administration was asking North Korea to come to the Six Party Talks to resume the negotiations on halting North Korea's nuclear program, and he got no commitment on this yet. What did you make of this meeting?

My sense is that it went pretty much as expected. I think everybody's expectations were pretty moderate, to put it lightly, probably pretty low in terms of what would come out of this initial encounter at the senior level between somebody from the Obama administration and the North Koreans. I think there was probably a lot of exploratory discussion that took place in this encounter seeking to explore North Korean willingness to come back to the Six Party Talks and to reaffirm its commitment to the agreements that had been made in previous rounds of those talks. The North Koreans almost certainly explored what the United States might be prepared to do to induce them to come back to the talks.

[deletia]

Let's look at this from North Korea's point of view. What is it that's holding them back from just saying, "OK, let's go back to the talks and then see what we can get from it." In other words, what is it that they're waiting for?

The North Koreans are increasingly suspicious, and have been increasingly suspicious of U.S. intentions in recent years. I think there is fundamentally a lack of trust on the part of the North Koreans towards the United States, and vice versa of course. The North Koreans, dealing with the George W. Bush administration, encountered a U.S. administration that they regarded as extremely hostile to them, unwilling to engage them in direct dialogue, unwilling to compromise for the first several years of the Bush term. After four or five years of that sort of a lack of engagement, the Bush administration then changed its approach and adopted a more concessionary or conciliatory approach toward North Korea. That made some very limited progress, but I think at the end of the Bush administration, the North Koreans decided to step back from the process, to reassess where things were.

There was a pretty solid agreement wasn't there? In 2005 and in 2007?

If you read the agreements on paper, yes, they were fairly solid agreements. But there was a decision on the part of the Bush administration to set aside two very critical areas of concern. One of those was the possibility that

the North Koreans were working on a surreptitious uranium enrichment program, and the decision was made to defer that issue until a later date when it could be discussed in a better atmosphere. And then there was also the issue of North Korean cooperation with Syria and the construction of a nuclear reactor facility that was eventually destroyed by the Israeli air force. That was an issue of great concern to many in the United States, but was also set aside. The Bush administration then went back to the North Koreans and said, "We have to intensify the verification requirements of these agreements that we've reached." The North Koreans reacted very badly to that; they said that the United States was moving the goalposts unfairly and inappropriately, and so the North Koreans began to back away from their commitments as well.

With the onset of the new U.S. administration, it's likely that the North Koreans decided to do some goalpost moving of their own, and [they] adopted a much harder, more confrontational posture late last year and early this year. They began to walk away even more dramatically from the commitments that they had made in 2005-2007; began to test the new U.S. administration, talking about launching missiles and restarting its reactor and reprocessing facilities like the Yongbyon nuclear facility in North Korea. They eventually fired off a series of missiles; they conducted another nuclear test after having kicked out the International Atomic Energy Agency monitors who were at the Yongbyon facility; they resumed reprocessing their plutonium. They also declared themselves, in effect, a de facto nuclear weapon state, and then they followed that up by stating that they would not give up their nuclear weapons and material even though they had committed to do so. They took a series of other steps, all of which put tremendous pressure on the other parties participating in the Six Party Talks. And the North Koreans also announced that they were pulling out of the Six Party Talks, that the Six Party Talks were dead. And that was essentially the situation up until President Clinton's visit in August, and it was at that point that the North Koreans began to signal that they might be willing to come back to the Six Party Talks, that they might be willing to reengage with the other parties and recommit themselves to their denuclearization obligations. That's pretty much what brought about, eventually, Bosworth's trip.

Looking ahead, what will happen next do you think?

Well, there's been no announcement that North Korea is coming back to the talks, but it was pretty evident from Ambassador Bosworth's comments that there was some movement on this issue. I think it will probably take a few days for us to be completely clear as to how much movement there was. Obviously, the North Koreans do not seem to have slammed the door in terms of coming back to the Six Party Talks, and, in fact, they may have left the door open just a bit more of a crack than it already was. If that's the case, it's a positive thing. And I suspect there will probably have to be some additional encounters. At what level, I don't know. I don't know if it will be at the Ambassador Bosworth level or whether lower-level officials will be able to follow up on these discussions, but I would expect that there would be an additional meeting (or two or three) to clarify positions. Hopefully at the end of the day, this would result in some sort of a North Korean announcement of its willingness to come back to the Six Party Talks, and this is a process I suspect will take weeks, and perhaps even months.

A Radioactive Situation

BY MARK HIBBS

DECEMBER 30, 2009

As Yukiya Amano takes the helm at the International Atomic Energy Agency, he must contend with escalating conflicts in Iran and Syria, sharp divides among nations on the Board of Governors -- and the long shadow cast by his predecessor.

[EXCERPTS]

Strategists in the United States and Iran are now wrestling with a question central to their high-stakes game of nuclear chicken: Who is Yukiya Amano?

At this point, both sides know little more than the contents of his resume: Amano, a Japanese career diplomat, is the successor of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei. After 12 increasingly high-profile years at the helm of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), ElBaradei departed the organization at the end of November. Unlike ElBaradei, who took about four years to begin making significant changes as director general, Amano may have to make his own mark at the IAEA very soon, because he will be forced to grapple with a range of challenges ElBaradei left behind: unresolved flashpoints in Iran and Syria, infighting among the staff, and political gridlock dividing the nations that sit on the organization's ruling body, the Board of Governors.

The world will be watching carefully. Amano was elected this July to succeed ElBaradei as director general by a single-vote majority of the 35-member board. Amano's support came from advanced, largely Western, powers. In throwing their weight behind Amano, these countries aimed to trim back the activist political agenda that ElBaradei had advanced over the last decade.

An early indicator of how far Amano is willing to depart from his predecessor's approach will come in mid-February, when he will finish drafting reports on Iran and Syria for the board.

[deletia]

Iran is not the only front where Amano will be under pressure to defend the IAEA's prerogatives and credibility. His report on Syria could also reignite an issue about which ElBaradei's critics charge that he failed to enforce international nonproliferation standards and obligations.

This controversy dates back to September 2007, when Israeli jets bombed an installation at a site in northern Syria called al-Kibar. In early 2008, the United States claimed, citing detailed photography of the installation's interior and exterior, that the destroyed plant was a nearly finished nuclear reactor. Since then, the IAEA has been investigating this allegation.

Going back to mid-2008, some Western diplomats and nonproliferation experts have charged that ElBaradei did not make use of the IAEA's established legal authority in pursuing allegations against Syria.

Under ElBaradei there was no internal consensus on this issue. Personnel at the IAEA's Office of Legal Affairs believed that, under Syria's safeguards agreement with the IAEA, the IAEA has the right to request a "special inspection" to get access to data and locations that Syria had previously not declared to the IAEA to be related to its nuclear activities. Such a request has been made only twice -- both times successfully -- in the IAEA's history. But ElBaradei, with the support of EXPO [*IAEA's Department of External Relations and Policy Coordination*], never requested such an inspection in Syria. As in the case of Iran, ElBaradei's reasons for not pushing Syria to the brink appear to have been guided by diplomatic considerations outside the confines of his safeguards mandate.

In September 2008, a senior EXPO official said that the IAEA was disinclined to seek a special inspection because the IAEA had no information suggesting that Syria had failed to declare any nuclear material to the IAEA, as it is required to do under its NPT safeguards agreement. But shortly thereafter, the Department of Safeguards discovered particles of chemically processed uranium in Syrian soil samples, a finding that appeared to corroborate the allegation that Syria had violated its agreement. However, ElBaradei and EXPO were not keen to take any provocative actions that might disrupt the diplomatic efforts of Turkey, EU states, and Israel to pry Syria away from Iran and Hezbollah.

They were also wary that a special inspection request, if denied by Syria, would send the matter to the Board of Governors, which would be intensely divided on how to proceed further. If Syria refused to comply with a special inspection request urged by the United States or other Western board members, the next logical step would be for these states to press for a board finding of noncompliance by Syria. Such a determination would raise the prospect -- as in the case of Iran in 2006 -- that the matter would be referred to the Security Council, and that it would consider imposing sanctions on Syria. Many nonaligned and developing member states, especially Arab and Muslim countries, would object to such a referral.

Today, efforts at engaging Iran appear to be stalled, while Syria continues to stonewall the IAEA's investigation. As Amano addresses these challenges, he will have to pay careful attention to the recent divide that has emerged between the developing and non-aligned countries on the Board of Governors, and the industrialized states that were responsible for his election. Developing nations look to the IAEA to protect their right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful means, and traditionally oppose ambitious programs which would increase their financial obligations. To this end, they supported Abdul Samad Minty, a South African diplomat, during the 2009 election campaign. Advanced nuclear states endorsed Amano hoping that he would reverse what they see as the politicization of the IAEA that occurred under ElBaradei, and fulfil the IAEA's verification mandate to the letter.

Beginning right after his July election, Amano has diligently attempted to win over the countries that opposed him. His initial statements aimed to assure developing countries that he would heed their concerns, and that the advanced states which supported him would not curb their access to nuclear technology or impose additional safeguards burdens. In prepared remarks on Dec. 9, he signalled that he would strictly keep to the IAEA's script in dealing with allegations of nonproliferation transgressions. "I see my role as being to ensure that safeguards agreements are concluded and fully implemented, to provide member states with factual and objective information and analysis, and to act in accordance with relevant resolutions of the U.N. Security Council and the agency's Board of Governors," he said.

His statement also emphasized the IAEA's work on issues such as food security, clean water, health care, cancer control, and assistance in developing nuclear power -- all issues near and dear to the hearts of the board members who did not support Amano in July. It is also no coincidence that Amano's first visit to a member state, in December, was to Nigeria.

As was the case when the Bush administration's actions directly affected ElBaradei's approach to safeguards-related conflicts, the policies of U.S. President Barack Obama will strongly impact Amano's four-year tenure. Should Obama now back off his willingness, displayed throughout 2009, to negotiate with Iran, the IAEA and Amano will come under renewed U.S. pressure to demonstrate firmness in spelling out safeguards noncompliance.

After Amano's election but before he took office, officials from several Western states said these states would urge him to make personnel changes -- particularly at EXPO -- to dismantle the network of aides who had supported ElBaradei and were responsible, in their view, for the IAEA Secretariat's failure to pursue nonproliferation transgressions by Iran and Syria. Pressure on Amano to make key staff changes could be renewed if Obama pursues a more confrontational course with Iran.

So far, however, Amano has made no dramatic interventions in personnel matters. ElBaradei's hand-picked aides at EXPO and in a few other key positions remain in place. Unlike high-ranking U.S. government appointees, senior IAEA staff are civil servants who stay on even when the agency's leadership changes.

As Amano attempts to step out of the long shadow cast by ElBaradei, he will be judged by his ability to re-establish the tradition of consensual governance that characterized the IAEA during most of its half century of existence. This consensus was seriously eroded during the Bush administration, whose propensity for unilateral action polarized member states. Repairing the damage will be no easy task: When Amano submits his two reports on Iran and Syria in February, he will likely face a Western alliance that is quickly losing patience with what it believes have been good-faith negotiations to reach an equitable solution to these countries' disputes with the international community. One thing, however, is certain: As Amano responds to these challenges, the world will begin to discover who he really is.



Uncovering Syria's Covert Reactor

January 2010

Gregory L. Schulte

Summary

- In June 2009, one year after the first and only inspector visit in Syria, the IAEA director general reported that the information provided by the country “does not adequately support its assertions about the nature of the site.” In August, he reported that the IAEA’s investigation was “severely impeded” by Syria’s non-cooperation.
- The IAEA must complete its investigation in order to verify the absence of other undeclared activities in Syria, and the country’s regime must be dissuaded from renewing such nuclear pursuits.
- This case is as much about North Korean proliferation as it is about Syrian violations. Exposing North Korean cooperation with Syria could help to disclose and disrupt North Korea’s global network.
- The IAEA Board of Governors should address the Syrian investigation and North Korean proliferation activities at its next meeting in March 2010, and the issues should also be taken up at the NPT Review Conference in May, and the Six-Party Talks on North Korea.
- Newly-appointed IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano should pursue a special inspection of Syria. The IAEA Board should be ready to back him, including through a report to the UN Security Council if the country’s non-cooperation continues.
- The European Union should condition future economic relations with Syria on its cooperation with the IAEA to demonstrate that non-compliance has real consequences.

“Essentially, no progress....” Thus stated bluntly the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its November 2009 report on the agency’s investigation of undeclared nuclear activities in Syria.

The absence of progress is no fault of the IAEA’s professional cadre of inspectors. Indeed, the IAEA Department of Safeguards has uncovered more than the Syrian government ever wanted to be known about the reactor destroyed by an Israeli air strike in September 2007. The fault for the current stalemate lies with

President Bashar Assad's government, which first buried the remains of the reactor and now seeks to bury the IAEA investigation.

This essay reports on the current state of the IAEA investigation, explains why it must be completed, and suggests a way ahead. The importance of the investigation goes well beyond a destroyed facility in Syria's eastern desert; its outcome will advance or retard world efforts to disrupt North Korea's nuclear exports and to shore up a global nonproliferation regime shaken by Iran's nuclear pursuits.

An Investigation “Severely Impeded”

The IAEA launched its investigation after being briefed by the U.S. government in April 2008 that Syria had been secretly building a nuclear reactor until its destruction seven months before. This reactor, which had no obvious civil purpose, was being built in the remote desert with North Korean assistance. It had striking similarities to the gas-cooled graphite-moderated reactor at Yongbyon, which North Korea had used to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons.

By failing to notify the IAEA before the reactor's construction, Damascus had violated its Safeguards Agreement. Moreover, discovery of the reactor may help explain why Syria had refused to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol. This protocol, already signed by nearly 130 countries, would have granted IAEA inspectors expanded information and access related to Syria's nuclear activities and thus would have increased the likelihood of their finding this secret facility.

The IAEA's investigation was severely impeded by Syria, which vehemently denied the existence of the reactor and vigorously removed and covered up what remained. By the time IAEA inspectors arrived in June 2008, much of an adjacent hill had been bulldozed over the reactor remains and a new building had been constructed on top. Syrian authorities presumably thought that their extraordinary efforts at concealment would succeed in defeating the IAEA's inspectors. They were wrong.

The IAEA inspectors did their homework before the June 2008 visit, gathering and assessing information from a variety of sources. Upon arrival in Syria, the inspectors posed tough questions about the destroyed facility and suspicious procurement activities. The Syrian authorities refused to provide answers. The inspectors asked to visit three other suspect sites. The Syrian authorities again refused. The IAEA later obtained commercial satellite imagery showing apparent cleanup activities at those sites.

The inspectors also took environmental samples at the reactor site. Subsequent analysis by the IAEA's network of laboratories revealed manmade uranium particles of a type that Syria had not declared to the IAEA. Syrian authorities were quick to claim that the particles came from the Israeli air strike. International experts observed that the particles were not from depleted uranium, which is sometimes used in conventional munitions. After a careful assessment, the IAEA Department of Safeguards dismissed Syria's claim as a “low probability”—a very forceful denial by the standards of mildly-worded IAEA reports.

The presence of manmade uranium particles at the reactor site remains a mystery. Was uranium to fuel the reactor already there? Were other clandestine nuclear activities taking place at the site? Did the particles come from clandestine activities elsewhere in Syria, or even from North Korea?

In August 2008, IAEA inspectors discovered more unexplained uranium particles at Syria's Miniature Neutron Source Reactor, a known research reactor in Damascus. As of the November 2009 IAEA report, the Department of Safeguards is still not satisfied with Syrian explanations for the presence of these particles. Their source is another mystery. Were they associated with peaceful research that Syria neglected to declare to the IAEA? Were they associated with the reactor being built in the desert? Or were they associated with a different project entirely?

Despite the mystery, indications of undeclared material at two sites in Syria give the inspectors an indisputable basis for their investigation, in addition to the information provided by member states. Indeed, the existence of undeclared nuclear material in Syria obligates the Agency to investigate its origin.

Syria's cover-up having been less than successful, Damascus changed tactics. Claiming that the reactor site and the other three sites were "military related," Syrian authorities refused to provide any further access or information about those sites or associated activities. IAEA lawyers protested that Syria's Safeguards Agreement did not exclude "military" sites, but to no avail. Syrian cooperation ground to a halt, particularly after reports that a sniper's bullet killed the Syrian general who had escorted the IAEA inspectors on their only visit. Perhaps someone in Damascus or elsewhere did not want Syria's covert activities to be uncovered. Or perhaps someone elsewhere did not want them to be continued.

In June 2009, one year after the first and only inspector visit, the IAEA director general offered a grim report. He informed the IAEA Board of Governors that the information provided by Syria "does not adequately support its assertions about the nature of the site" and that Syria "needs to be more cooperative and transparent." In August, the director general went even further, reporting that the IAEA's "ability to confirm Syria's explanation regarding the past nature of the destroyed building ... is severely impeded because Syria has not provided sufficient access to information, locations, equipment or materials." In November, as described at the outset, he reported that "no progress has been made since the last report to clarify any of the outstanding issues relevant to the implementation of safeguards."

Why Does This Matter?

Syria's secret reactor is history. Bombed, broken, and buried, it will never be resurrected for purposes peaceful or military. The IAEA investigation has some semblance to an archeological expedition in hostile territory. Yet uncovering Syria's clandestine activities is more—much more—than of historic interest.

First, the IAEA must verify the absence of other undeclared activities in Syria. The Syrian reactor had marked similarities to the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon. The Yongbyon reactor had an associated facility for nuclear fuel rod manufacture and another for plutonium reprocessing, where the plutonium was extracted for North Korea's nuclear weapons. Were comparable facilities contemplated or constructed in Syria? What was Syria doing at its research reactor near Damascus? What was it doing at the various sites that IAEA inspectors were not allowed to visit? IAEA inspectors must ensure that Syria is not hiding any other nuclear activities. Or, if further clandestine facilities are found, the IAEA must, at a minimum, put them under safeguards or, better yet, verify their destruction.

Second, the Syrian regime must be dissuaded from renewing such nuclear pursuits. Syria's motives in building a secret nuclear reactor are unknown. Even experts on Syria remain baffled. Was Syria's leadership seeking prestige and a demonstration of technical prowess? Did they see a nuclear program as leverage to regain the Golan Heights or to protect the regime from Israeli attack? Was the young President Assad trying to demonstrate his manhood after replacing his father? Some or all of these motives could still exist. Moreover, Iran's steady progress toward a nuclear weapons capability could give Damascus renewed impetus to renew its clandestine activities. The temptation will be greater if the Syrian regime believes that it can block an IAEA investigation and suffer no consequence.

Third, this case is as much about North Korean proliferation as it is about Syrian violations. North Korea has a long history of military cooperation with Syria and other countries, including Iran. Traditionally, cooperation has involved missile and conventional military equipment. Assistance in building the covert reactor shows that North Korea has also become a nuclear supplier. Where else might Pyongyang be peddling its nuclear wares? We must not allow North Korea to replace A. Q. Khan as the world's supplier of nuclear weapons technology. Exposing North Korean cooperation with Syria could help to disclose and disrupt North Korea's global network.

Finally, the integrity of the nonproliferation regime is at stake. Syria, North Korea, and other countries must not conclude that refusing cooperation with the IAEA protects against international scrutiny and sanction. President Barack Obama has called for a world with no nuclear weapons, a vision that has global appeal. Yet this vision will become fatally distant if the IAEA cannot investigate—let alone detect and deter—the type of clandestine activities conducted by Syria and North Korea.

What Is To Be Done?

First, the IAEA and its member states must keep a spotlight on Syria's illicit activity and the dangerous role of North Korea.

The IAEA investigation should remain on the agenda of the IAEA Board of Governors, and Syria should be kept off the Board. A spotlight must also stay trained on North Korea's involvement. In one of his final acts as director general, Mohamed ElBaradei removed North Korea from the IAEA Board agenda. The Board should use the Syrian investigation to put North Korea back on the agenda with a new focus on DPRK proliferation activities.

Deliberations at the next meeting of the IAEA Board in March should be used to prepare discussion of both Syria's non-cooperation and North Korean proliferation at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May. Review Conference participants should use the illicit cooperation between the two countries to show the importance of strengthening the IAEA's verification capabilities, including the need for the Additional Protocol. They could also use the Syrian investigation to show how sustained non-cooperation should be treated as non-compliance so that safeguards violators are not rewarded for stonewalling IAEA investigations. Some experts may argue that, to avoid controversy, the Review Conference should not address specific cases of non-compliance. But as one leading nonproliferation expert recently remarked, it is irresponsible for firemen to hold a convention while ignoring a fire blazing outside. The presence of two arsonists in the convention should not keep the rest from their duty.

North Korea's role in building the Syrian reactor should also be a subject for the Six-Party Talks on the DPRK. To date, North Korea has merely declined to deny its involvement. This is not enough, particularly if one goal of the talks is to obtain verifiable assurances of nonproliferation. By raising this case with North Korea and pressing Syria at the same time, we may even generate some helpful mistrust between the two illicit nuclear conspirators.

Finally, the Syrian investigation should remain on the agenda of the many visitors to Damascus and the smaller number to Pyongyang. This issue may not be at the top of our diplomatic agenda with the two countries, but it must not fall off the bottom. Moreover, pressing for IAEA cooperation should not be a talking point only of the United States. Convincing Arab states to raise this in Damascus, and China in Pyongyang, would provide a new and useful diplomatic nudge.

Second, the IAEA should move forward with a special inspection.

Syria's Safeguards Agreement allows special inspections "if the Agency considers that information made available by Syria, including explanations from Syria and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the Agency to fulfill its responsibilities." The ongoing investigation, "severely impaired" by Syria's non-cooperation, easily meets this test. Indeed, James Acton, Mark Fitzpatrick, and Pierre Goldschmidt have argued persuasively that Syria is a "textbook definition of a case in which a special inspection is merited."¹

A special inspection need not be restricted to locations that Syria has declared to the IAEA. Special inspections can also encompass any other sites that the inspectors seek to visit or any information that the inspectors need to fulfill their verification task. The IAEA has already laid a strong basis for a special inspection through its written

request on October 23, described in the November report, seeking “access to locations where the debris from the destroyed building, the remains of munitions, the debris from equipment and any salvaged equipment had been and/or are located.” If Syria refuses to grant this request on a voluntary basis, the director general can invoke a special inspection.

If Syria disputes a special inspection, the IAEA Board can decide that action is “essential and urgent” and “call upon Syria to take the required action without delay.” If Syria still refuses, the Board may conclude that Syria’s noncooperation constitutes non-compliance and report this to the UN Security Council. Indeed, the Security Council, in the very first operative paragraph of its Resolution 1887 of September 24, “emphasizes that a situation of noncompliance with non-proliferation obligations shall be brought to the attention of the Security Council.” Syria’s sustained non-cooperation is a “textbook case” for both a special inspection and a report to the Security Council.

If Syria persists in non-cooperation, the IAEA Board would need to make a succession of decisions to declare a special inspection “essential and urgent,” find Syria in non-compliance, and report it to the Security Council. This would provide both leverage and space—perhaps through next autumn—to convince Damascus to change its course. However, the decisions would also likely require a series of contentious votes, since spoilers like Cuba and Venezuela are among the Board’s 35 members. Positive Board decisions should be achievable with sizeable majorities, just as the Board adopted its recent resolution on Iran with 25 members voting in favor and only three voting against. However, the United States and other like-minded countries should start through quiet diplomacy laying the basis for these Board decisions.

While the IAEA Board must be ready to provide its support, special inspections must be initiated by the director general. Special inspections have not been used since North Korea, and a special inspection of Syria could be one of the first decisions for Ambassador Yukiya Amano, the new director general. This will be a difficult decision for Amano, who wants to rebuild consensus in the Board but also understands the critical importance of the IAEA’s verification role. The United States and other like-minded countries should signal to Amano their readiness to back him in initiating a special inspection and to solicit support from a majority of Board members if Syria refuses. This is critical since a failure by the Board to back a request for a special inspection would damage the new director general personally and the nonproliferation regime more broadly.

Some experts may argue that a special inspection that is refused would undercut the nonproliferation regime. I disagree. A refused special inspection that generates a report to the UN Security Council would at least show that the system works. On the other hand, shirking from a special inspection for fear of refusal would only encourage further non-cooperation by Syria and future violators of safeguards commitments. It is better to have a watchdog that barks, rather than one kept locked up and quiet in a cage.

In a recent speech on strengthening the nonproliferation regime, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the IAEA “must make full use of existing verification authorities, including special inspections.” Syria is the textbook case. If not now, then when?

Third, the European Union should condition future economic relations with Syria on its cooperation with the IAEA investigation and adoption of the IAEA’s Additional Protocol.

Syria is accustomed to being under international scrutiny. Moreover, President Assad has been largely successful in diverting international attention from a separate UN investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon. Thus, international attention and special inspections may not be enough to convince Assad to expose past misconduct or to turn on his North Korean partner in proliferation.

In contrast, international trade and investment are vitally important to Assad and his pursuit of economic growth and reform. He and his advisers are eager to increase trade with Europe and attract European investment. Economic opportunity may be the one inducement that could entice Damascus away from Pyongyang.

The EU has signed an Association Agreement with Syria that would improve trade relations. The agreement will not enter into force until it goes over further procedural hurdles, including approval by European parliaments. The agreement with Syria, like many other EU agreements, includes a nonproliferation clause, and EU policy provides for the suspension of ratification in cases of nonproliferation concern. Catherine Ashton, the EU's new high representative, could inform Assad that the Association Agreement will be put "on hold" until the IAEA investigation is closed and Syria takes steps to rebuild international confidence, including by adopting the Additional Protocol.

The European Union stresses the use of multilateral diplomacy to prevent proliferation and strengthen the nonproliferation regime. Here is a case where Europe can back diplomacy with its economic weight. By taking this step before the NPT Review Conference in May, the EU could demonstrate that it is a serious player and that non-compliance has real consequences.

A Watchdog That Barks

President Assad seeks to bury the IAEA investigation just as his bulldozers buried the reactor remains. He undoubtedly hopes that the world's focus on Iran will help him succeed.

Yet as Iran moves closer to possessing nuclear weapons, other countries in the Middle East and elsewhere may follow suit, with North Korea eager and ready to help. If we are serious about achieving a world without nuclear weapons, we must either dissuade or prevent these countries from joining a new arms race. This means that we must be in a position to detect, disrupt, and penalize further proliferation. The IAEA will need to play an important role. For it to be effective and credible, we must aggressively back its investigation of Syria. The stakes go well beyond reconstructing the history of a reactor in ruins.

Yukiya Amano, as the new director general, faces major challenges. Foremost among these is restoring the IAEA's effectiveness and credibility after its investigations of Iran and Syria became mired in obstruction, politics, and personal ambition. Open the cage, and take off the muzzle. Whether investigating Syria or other proliferators, the IAEA must be a watchdog that barks.

The author acknowledges the support of the Carnegie Endowment in helping him to think through this issue, including the discussion that Carnegie organized on September 22, 2009, entitled "Probing the Rubble of Syria's Covert Reactor: Next Steps and Implications for the IAEA." James Acton was the moderator.

Note

¹ James M. Acton, Mark Fitzpatrick, and Pierre Goldschmidt, "The IAEA Should Call for a Special Inspection in Syria," *Proliferation Analysis*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 26, 2009.

Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte was the U.S. permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency from July 2005 to June 2009. He is now a senior visiting fellow at the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Defense University. This article reflects his personal views and not those of NDU or the U.S. government.

http://www.officialwire.com/main.php?action=posted_news&rid=83431

Syria Defence And Security: Syria's Support Of Iran, Hamas And Hizbullah, While Popular Domestically, Is Straining Relations With The West

New report provides detailed analysis of the Defence market

Published on January 27, 2010

by Press Office

(Companiesandmarkets.com and OfficialWire)

LONDON, ENGLAND

[EXCERPT]

Despite the overwhelming sense that relations between Syria and the West are moving forward, ongoing investigations into the country's alleged nuclear programme will raise some concerns. Without greater cooperation from Syria, we believe that the nuclear issue could become a stumbling block in its negotiations with the US. The reported discovery of traces of uranium at a second Syrian site by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) provides an illustration of the numerous obstacles that still remain to the resumption of full and friendly relations between Syria, the US and the wider international community.

Can Iran's Accelerating Nuclear Program Be Stopped?

Leonard S. Spector

10 March 2010

[EXCERPT]

Still more troubling is a report suggesting that North Korea may be assisting the Iranian nuclear effort. Although North Korea was believed to have helped Syria construct a reactor designed to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons no evidence had surfaced publicly that North Korea, Syria, and Iran might be collaborating to advance Tehran's nuclear capabilities.

Israel destroyed the Syrian reactor in a September 2007 air strike. In late February 2010, however, news reports quoting Western officials stated that before the reactor was attacked, North Korea had delivered 45 tons of unenriched uranium concentrate, known as "yellowcake," to Syria – and that North Korea had subsequently moved the material to Iran via Turkey. Iran has limited domestic supplies of uranium, and the US and its allies have been attempting to curtail Iran's access to external suppliers of the material. The 45 tons from North Korea (which has domestic sources of uranium) and Syria, sufficient for several nuclear weapons if enriched to weapons grade, would deal a setback to this US initiative.

A North Korea-Iran nuclear nexus could gravely undermine international nonproliferation efforts. The North Korean yellowcake transfer, for example, could be only the first of many such shipments. As North Korea itself has been attempting to enrich uranium using the same technology as Iran, Tehran could return the favor by assisting Pyongyang make this program a success. After having flagrantly violated relevant UN Security Council resolutions by continuing their respective nuclear operations, it now appears that North Korea and Iran may have begun to assist each other to bypass the Council's demands.

[Leonard S. Spector is Deputy Director of the Monterey Institute's James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and heads its Washington, DC, office.](#)

America, Russia and arms control

It takes two

Arms cuts get you only so far; a safer world needs tighter anti-proliferation rules too

Mar 31st 2010 | From The Economist print edition

[EXCERPTS]

WHEN Barack Obama promised, in Prague a year ago, to “seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” and won a Nobel peace prize for it, even he felt that the accolade was a bit premature. His Prague to-do list was long: reduce the role of nuclear weapons in America’s defences; cut the number of nukes, too, in a bold new treaty with Russia; win Senate ratification of the test-ban treaty; seek a United Nations ban (or “cut-off”) on making fissile material for bombs; and meanwhile secure all nuclear materials from terrorist reach.

The real prize Mr Obama was after was international support for a stronger Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at its upcoming five-yearly review in May. For North Korea, Iran and others have battered its anti-nuclear foundations.

Mr Obama will be back in Prague on April 8th to sign the promised new strategic-arms reduction treaty with Russia’s Dmitry Medvedev. Even as he lifted the spirits of would-be disarmers a year ago, Mr Obama acknowledged that a world without the bomb would probably not come in his lifetime. Since then he has found that ticking off items on his “getting to zero” list is considerably harder than he imagined.

[deletia]

So Mr Obama is hoping that a special nuclear-security summit in Washington, DC, on April 12th and 13th will provide some needed momentum going into the NPT review. The idea is to bring together disparate efforts to prevent illicit trade in nuclear technologies and materials, as part of parallel efforts to encourage countries to buy in nuclear-fuel services from reputable suppliers, rather than make it themselves with technologies that can also be abused for weapons.

But will this be enough? Mr Obama wants to strengthen the NPT’s rules, by getting everyone to sign up to an Additional Protocol of tougher inspections and by making it harder for a cheat simply to shrug off the treaty when caught, as North Korea did. Yet even those obvious steps run into opposition.

Iran is still a treaty member—in good standing, it claims, though others suspect a hidden military programme—and will resist moves that could cramp its nuclear style. Egypt has long refused to accept more intrusive inspections until there is progress on making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. This is a dig at Israel’s arsenal, though others are suspected of having chemical and biological weapons too, and Syria is suspected of having been planning to produce plutonium at a secret nuclear reactor built with North Korean help, and possibly Iranian finance, that was bombed by Israel in 2007 shortly before its completion.

[deletia]

Ukraine Uranium Agreement Gives Obama Summit Result (Update1)

By Viola Gienger and Kate Andersen Brower

April 13, 2010, 1:45 PM EDT

[EXCERPTS]

April 13 (Bloomberg) -- Ukraine's agreement to relinquish its entire stockpile of highly enriched uranium gave President Barack Obama the first concrete result for a summit he convened on securing the world's atomic material.

Under the terms of the accord, Ukraine will dispose of roughly 90 kilograms of the uranium, "enough to construct several nuclear weapons," and convert nuclear research reactors to use lower grade fuel, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said.

[deletia]

Two potentially high-risk sources of illicit nuclear materials, Iran and North Korea, weren't invited to the summit and aren't specifically part of the agenda.

While Iran isn't known to have succeeded in enriching uranium to weapons grade, its suspected support for militant groups raises the specter that it ultimately also might slip material to terrorist allies, said Robert Gallucci, a former U.S. special envoy on the spread of missiles and nuclear weapons.

North Korea

In North Korea, Kim Jong-Il's government has plutonium and said last year that it has almost succeeded in developing highly enriched uranium.

"We should not limit our concern about the nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea to their acquisition of nuclear weapons," said Gallucci, now president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which supports projects to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons.

Tracing material back to its source may be difficult and even tracking movement of nuclear supplies across the globe presents challenges, Gallucci said. He cited North Korea's suspected role in helping Syria construct a nuclear reactor that the Israelis bombed in September 2007.

"To the best of my knowledge, the United States government was surprised to learn that the North Koreans were building a plutonium-production reactor in Syria," Gallucci said. "That tells me that, if we are looking for relatively small amounts of material, we should not expect to catch that movement."

--With assistance from Edwin Chen, Roger Runningen and Julianna Goldman. Editors: Joe Sobczyk, Jim Kirk.

http://www.arirang.co.kr/News/News_View.asp?nseq=102073&code=Ne2&category=2

Former US Officials Express Concern over N. Korea Selling Nuclear Technology

Hwang Sung-hee, Arirang News

APR 13, 2010

Former high-ranking officials in the United States say North Korea may be selling its nuclear know-how to other nations.

At a recent meeting with a group of military officials, Gregory Schultz, the former US ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency from 2005 to 2009, said the latest speculation over a North Korea-Syria deal is a clear example of the communist state's readiness to trade not only its ready-made weapons, but also its nuclear technology.

According to Tuesday's report by Radio Free Asia, or RFA, Schultz said the rumored deal shows Pyongyang's willingness to share its know-how with not just Syria but any countries that seek it, such as Myanmar and Venezuela.

And during an interview with RFA on Monday, Robert Gallucci, an American non-proliferation expert and former ambassador, said many countries are under the illusion that North Korea will never use its nuclear weapons.

War Games

By Yossi Melman

7:00 am Apr 15, 2010

[deletia]

Twice during the last three decades Israeli warplanes destroyed nuclear facilities built by its enemies.

[deletia]

After the [OSIRAK] raid, Begin's strong conviction—described by commentators as the “Begin Doctrine”—held that Israel would never allow any country in the Middle East to possess nuclear weapons that could threaten its existence.

The next time the Begin Doctrine was tested was in September 2007. This time the attack was directed at a nuclear reactor Syria was building on the banks of the Euphrates River, near its borders with Iraq and Turkey. The Syrian reactor was constructed with North Korean technology and expertise, modeled on the Pyongyang reactor, and partly financed by Iran.

Operationally, the second raid resembled the first. Formations of Israeli Air Force F-16 and F-15 fighters took off from the Ramat David base in northern Israel and flew at low altitude, this time over the Mediterranean. They penetrated Syria's air space near its border with Turkey without being detected and fired missiles from a distance of 40 kilometers. The Syrian air defenses were blinded by electronic warfare. By the time they realized what was happening, it was too late: The reactor had been completely destroyed.

There are a few outstanding differences between the two attacks. Before the attack against the Iraqi reactor, Israel shared its intentions with no one, not even its main strategic ally, the United States. After the raid, Israel took full credit and responsibility. In the Syrian case, Israel, led by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, informed the United States a few hours before the attack and since then has neither confirmed nor denied its action.

[deletia]

Both of Israel's current defense leaders—the chief of staff, Major General Gabi Ashkenazi, and Defense Minister Ehud Barak—are considered cautious by nature and checks on the sometimes hasty Netanyahu. Both played key roles in the decision to bomb Syria's reactor, and both expressed private doubts and reservations about the wisdom of an Israeli attack on Iran.

[deletia]

How to React to a Reactor

Using Syria's Nuclear Program to Engage Damascus

Andrew J. Tabler

April 19, 2010

Summary:

The United States must push to reinvigorate the IAEA's investigation of Syria's suspected nuclear program. Washington's insistence would not only strengthen the global nonproliferation regime but also provide the Obama administration with leverage in its trying diplomatic engagement with Damascus.

ANDREW J. TABLER is Next Generation Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and author of the forthcoming book *In the Lion's Den: Inside America's Cold War With Asad's Syria*.

In his confirmation hearing in March, Robert S. Ford, the U.S. ambassador-designate to Syria, listed five issues that will be at the core of the Obama administration's engagement with Damascus. Four were familiar: the United States wants Syria to prevent jihadi fighters from entering Iraq, end its support for Hezbollah, return to peace talks with Israel, and respect human rights at home.

But the fifth issue was a new one: Ford argued that Washington should insist that Syria end its foot-dragging on the International Atomic Energy Agency's investigation into its nuclear activities. For nearly two years, Syria has refused to cooperate with the IAEA's probe of a suspected nuclear reactor that was destroyed by Israel in September 2007. Now the IAEA may request a rare "special inspection" of Syrian sites, making the country's nuclear defiance the international community's main point of contention with Damascus -- eclipsing even the investigation into Syrian officials' involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Premier Rafik Hariri.

Indeed, the international community cannot afford to let Syria's proliferation attempts go unaddressed, since the violations threaten the global nonproliferation regime and may be evidence of a wider nuclear program. Even more, the IAEA's investigation could provide Washington much needed leverage in its increasingly trying diplomatic engagement with Damascus.

The story of Syria's nuclear program has been quietly building for more than two and a half years. On September 6, 2007, Israeli jets took part in Operation Orchard, bombing a nondescript building at a site in eastern Syria called Al-Kibar, near the city of Deir ez-Zor. In April 2008, U.S. intelligence authorities released a video showing that the building had hid construction of a graphite-cooled nuclear reactor similar to North Korea's reactor at Yongbyon, which produces plutonium for the country's nuclear weapons. The video contained satellite photographs of the site, still shots of the reactor under construction, and a photograph of the directors of North Korea's and Syria's nuclear programs standing arm in arm.

In June 2008, Syria allowed the IAEA to access the Al Kibar site, but inspectors were unable to examine the reactor ruins because Syria had cleared the site of wreckage, buried what remained, and constructed a new building on top. Nevertheless, they found particles of chemically processed uranium of a type Syria had not declared to the IAEA. Satellite photos of the site and the list of parts Syria had procured for its construction posed additional questions. Syria soon cut off cooperation with the IAEA investigation, denying further visits to Al Kibar and three associated sites.

Separately, IAEA inspectors found other unexplained uranium particles during a routine inspection of Syria's miniature neutron source reactor, a research reactor outside Damascus that had been declared to the IAEA. Syrian authorities twice tried to explain the presence of these particles, but IAEA inspectors found their

explanations inadequate, believing instead that they raised concerns about possible links to the particles found at Al Kibar. Although Syria allowed IAEA inspectors to return to the research reactor this month, it continues to spurn IAEA requests to visit Al Kibar, citing national “sovereignty.” (A report written by Gregory L. Schulte, who was U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA from 2005 to 2009, lays out the IAEA’s investigation, Syria’s defiance, and the resulting policy recommendations. Schulte also contributed to this article.)

The IAEA’s latest report on the Syria investigation was the first released by the new IAEA director-general, Yukiya Amano, who took office in July 2009. It was blunt and forthright, clearly restating that the destroyed facility had all the characteristics of a nuclear reactor and openly questioning whether Syria’s declarations were correct and complete.

The Syrian government denies that the Al Kibar facility housed a nuclear reactor. At first, it claimed that the uranium particles found at the site came from the bombs Israel had used to destroy it, an explanation the IAEA dismissed as having a “low probability.” Then, at a recent IAEA Board of Governors’ meeting, Syrian Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh claimed that Israeli planes sprinkled the particles over the site -- an equally specious explanation that cannot account for the particles found at the research reactor outside Damascus. Glyn Davies, the current U.S. ambassador to the IAEA, described Syria’s latest assertion as “desperate.” Other ambassadors have shared his disdain: in a three-page statement, the European Union -- Syria’s largest Western donor -- said it was “essential” that Syria clarify its response and provide “access to all locations and documentation.”

Even though Syria’s covert reactor no longer exists, there are a number of reasons why the country’s nuclear program should remain at the top of the U.S. policy agenda in Syria. First, a strong IAEA is important at a time when the international community is confronting the nuclear ambitions of Syria’s ally, Iran. Allowing Syria to rebuff IAEA inspectors would undermine the global proliferation regime -- a particularly dangerous possibility given that Iran’s nuclear violations risk sparking a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. By getting to the bottom of Syria’s clandestine program, the world’s nuclear watchdog can show that it has regained its clout.

Second, the particles found at the research reactor, plus Syria’s refusal to allow the IAEA access to three other suspect sites, suggest the existence of a larger program. Particularly troubling is the apparent involvement of North Korea, a notorious nuclear violator and weapons proliferator. Reports of Iran’s involvement are equally worrisome. The IAEA has an obligation to ensure that there are no other undeclared activities in Syria, and the world has an interest in breaking up further multinational proliferation ventures, whether they traffic in missiles or nuclear weapons technology.

Third, although the precise motives behind Syria’s nuclear activities are unknown, a primary impetus was likely the Assad regime’s obsession with obtaining a deterrent against Israel. Syria’s nuclear program was the capstone of one of the Middle East’s most active chemical and biological weapons programs. This program, together with Syria’s extensive surface-to-surface missile capabilities, is a major source of potential contention and conflict between Syria and Israel. Any future U.S.-negotiated peace treaty between Syria and Israel may need to include a deal -- similar to the one that convinced Libya to end its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions -- for Syria to divulge its nuclear pursuits. Indeed, only a peace treaty with Israel may persuade Damascus that coming clean is in its strategic interest.

U.S. engagement with Syria has already been fraught with difficulty. After a February 25 meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, President Bashar al-Assad mocked the United States’ goals of creating tension between Tehran and Damascus -- just days after U.S. Under Secretary of State William Burns visited Damascus to pursue that agenda. To make matters worse, new reports suggest that Syria has been supplying sophisticated weapons -- including missiles capable of carrying nuclear and chemical payloads -- to Hezbollah. And last but not least, U.S. efforts to foster even indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel have yet to yield results.

Regardless of whether talks between Syria and Israel resume any time soon, if Damascus were to come clean on its nuclear program, the revelation would be a major confidence-building measure that would significantly improve strained U.S.-Syrian relations. The IAEA investigation provides an opportunity for the United States and its Western and regional allies to gain some leverage in getting Syria to make concessions on central issues. To date, the engagement strategies of the United States, France, and the Arab Gulf states have been uncoordinated and conflicting, but all these countries have an interest in convincing Syria to admit its nuclear activities and to lure Damascus to the peace table and away from Tehran. Windows of opportunity to apply pressure -- as well as a way out for Syria -- will arise with every regular IAEA report.

Realistically, Assad is unlikely to move unless the IAEA orders a special inspection of Al Kibar and other sites. Syria's safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which outlines the country's obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, allows special inspections "if the Agency considers that information made available by Syria . . . is not adequate for the Agency to fulfill its responsibilities." As its latest report documented, the IAEA has now reached that point. If Syria refuses to allow inspections, the IAEA Board of Governors can decide that the action is "essential and urgent." If Syria refuses again, it can find Syria in noncompliance and report the country to the UN Security Council.

There is no doubt that Assad wants the IAEA investigation -- like the Hariri tribunal -- to fall off the international agenda. If the IAEA refers the matter to the UN Security Council, it would be an embarrassment that would set back Assad's desire for closer trade and commercial ties with the West. It could even lead to sanctions.

Meanwhile, quiet engagement by the United States, coordinated with permanent members of the Security Council could show Assad a way out through full cooperation with the IAEA. Should Syria seize that opportunity, two major benefits would result: the role of North Korea and any involvement by Iran would be exposed, and the IAEA would prove that it cannot be stymied by uncooperative countries. If Syria balks, referring this issue to the Security Council would maintain the integrity of the nonproliferation regime while providing a source of leverage for the broader agenda of fostering Syrian-Israeli peace. Whatever the outcome, one thing will be clear: Syria's nuclear aspirations will not go unnoticed.

**Achieving Success at the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference :
David Albright Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

April 21, 2010

[EXCERPT]

Syria's purchase of a secret nuclear reactor from North Korea reminds the international community again of the weakness of IAEA inspections absent the Additional Protocol and the unreliability of national intelligence agencies to consistently detect secret nuclear facilities early in their construction. Although Israel's bombing of the reactor in 2007, soon before it would have gone into operation, is widely seen as a harsh criticism of the existing non-proliferation regime, the use of military force offers only short-term success in setting back nuclear ambitions. There is no assurance that Syria will not try again. Moreover, bombing is more of a desperate act of last resort and does not contribute to establishing a system in which confidence can exist that countries are not violating their NPT commitments.

Leon Panetta gets the CIA back on its feet

By David Ignatius

Sunday, April 25, 2010

[EXCERPT]

Panetta put his mark on the agency this month by choosing his own deputy, Michael Morell, 51, to replace Stephen Kappes, a respected career officer who acted as Panetta's adviser on operations. Morell is a 30-year CIA veteran, but he comes from the analytical side of the house. This should give the clandestine service more running room. An autoworker's son from Akron, Morell defies the preppy, blue-blood CIA stereotype; that's another plus.

Morell's top priority will be to increase collaboration between analysts and operators, which is already paying dividends. To cite two examples: The secret Iranian enrichment facility at Qom was discovered after a tip from a human source, with analysts then focusing intelligence collectors on precisely where to look; and Syria's secret nuclear reactor was found in 2007 after analysts studied suspicious fragments of intercepted conversations and warned the operations division to look for the smoking gun.

Security Brief: 'The Agency man' a natural for CIA's #2
April 27th, 2010 11:55 AM ET

[EXCERPTS]

No doubt about it, Michael Morell is an Agency man. As the CIA's current Director for Intelligence, Morell has put in some 30 years and counting and has done an impressive job of climbing the ranks in the intelligence world while keeping critics at bay, no small feat in today's controversial intelligence environment.

[deletia]

"He's been a strong proponent of integrating analysis and operations, something that has led to major intelligence successes such as the discovery of Iran's undeclared uranium enrichment facility and Syria's covert nuclear reactor," says CIA spokesman George Little. "Fusing those two vital aspects of our intelligence mission will remain a top priority for him as Deputy Director."

North Korea and Syria: A Warning in the Desert

Pyongyang's covert sale of nuclear technology to Syria holds broader lesson

Gregory L. Schulte

28 April 2010

WASHINGTON: North Korea has dropped tantalizing hints about rejoining the Six-Party Talks on its nuclear program, having walked out of the talks in 2009. There is at least one catch: After its two nuclear tests, Pyongyang wants to rejoin as a nuclear-weapon state and not as a party that had committed to abandon its nuclear program.

According to South Korean press, North Korea's foreign ministry recently wrote that it is ready to "take part in international efforts on nuclear disarmament on an equal footing with other nuclear weapons states." Perhaps miffed at being excluded from President Barack Obama's recent nuclear security summit, North Korea reportedly proposes to "join forces with the international community in nuclear non-proliferation and safe storage of nuclear materials."

The recent sinking of a South Korean ship may also sink the Six-Party Talks, making moot both their purpose and the agenda. If the talks resume nonetheless, the United States and its diplomatic partners cannot accept North Korea's desire to be recognized as a nuclear weapon state. However, the five countries – US, Russia, Japan, South Korea and China can – and should – accept North Korea's suggestion that the talks address nonproliferation.

North Korea has a penchant to proliferate to earn a living, and warning about this proliferation lies buried in Syria's desert. There, at a remote location near the Euphrates, North Korean technicians were helping Syria build a covert nuclear reactor until Israel warplanes bombed it in September 2007.

North Korea reportedly proposes to "join forces with the international community in nuclear non-proliferation and safe storage of nuclear materials."

This reactor, destroyed before it started operations, had no obvious civil applications. It was built in great secrecy and without the required notification to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Once destroyed by Israeli bombs, Syria quickly hid the remains from international scrutiny. Much of a neighboring hill was bulldozed over the reactor remains, and a new building erected on top.

North Korean experts were reportedly involved in both construction and cover-up.

This gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor was strikingly similar to the North Korean reactor at Yongbyong, the same reactor which produced plutonium for Pyongyang's small stockpile of nuclear weapons. Indeed, the external configuration looked much the same until the shape of the facility in Syria was disguised with a false roof and walls.

Much of this joint Syrian-North Korean venture – from source of reactor fuel to funding – remains shrouded in mystery as do the motives. In the case of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, Syria's president since 2000, may have been seeking personal prestige, regional influence or a reinforced deterrent against Israel. North Korea, for its part, could have been seeking an offshore backup to its reactor at Yongbyong. More likely its leaders just wanted cash.

North Korea is an active trafficker in conventional weapons, missiles and associated technologies. The Syrian reactor provides a stark warning that Pyongyang is ready to extend its illicit marketing to nuclear technology.

In October 2006, after North Korea's first nuclear test, President George W. Bush warned that North Korea's transfer of nuclear weapons or material to states or non-state entities would be considered "a grave threat to the United States" and that the nation "would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action." Yet when the US became aware of North Korea's nuclear cooperation with Syria, there were no consequence other than Israel's destruction of the North Korean reactor in Syria.

In the context of the Six-Party Talks, Syria's illicit venture was seen more as an unwelcome distraction than as a dangerous development. The US chief negotiator at the time was satisfied with North Korea not denying its involvement and promising not to proliferate again. And while the IAEA launched an investigation of the covert reactor – an investigation now stymied by Syria's refusal to cooperate – little was said in Vienna about the role of North Korea. The IAEA director general even removed North Korea from the agency's agenda.

The world's nonproliferation regime has been shaken by North Korea's flagrant violations and by Iran's determined pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities. A nuclear-armed Iran risks sparking a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Middle East countries that might consider acquiring their own atomic arsenals generally lack the necessary bombmaking technologies, would look abroad for equipment, material, and technical assistance. North Korea has shown its availability.

To prevent further proliferation, North Korea's activities need to be exposed, penalized, and disrupted. Three approaches should be pursued with those goals in mind:

- First, proliferation should be moved to the top of the agenda of renewed Six-Party Talks rather than being relegated to the bottom. Effective verification – two words detested by the North Koreans – must be a priority. Promises are not enough, particularly from a regime that has regularly dissembled about the scope of its nuclear activities. A better understanding of North Korea's nuclear activities will not only thwart proliferation but also better position efforts to limit and ultimately roll back the nation's nuclear program.
- Second, the US and like-minded countries should encourage the IAEA to revitalize its investigation of Syria's covert reactor. Convincing President Assad to cooperate will require some adept diplomacy backed by the threat of IAEA special inspections and, if Assad refuses, subsequent referral to the UN Security Council. It is important to ensure that there are no other undeclared activities in Syria, to demonstrate that a country cannot stymie the IAEA by refusing to cooperate, and to protect the integrity of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Getting Damascus to "rat out" Pyongyang would expose the North Korean network, make future joint ventures easier to detect, and discourage other countries – whether in the Middle East or Far East – from embarking on similar projects.
- Third, the US should step up its efforts to interdict North Korea's illicit trafficking and encourage China and others to do the same. The Proliferation Security Initiative, endorsed a year ago by President Obama, needs to be re-energized and targeted on North Korea. It should renew high-level diplomatic efforts to secure participation by countries like China, Indonesia and Malaysia that lie on the maritime routes used by North Korean shipping. The initiative should also be expanded to include financial measures of the type that the US Treasury has used so effectively. Because China is a regular transshipment point for North Korean vessels, it is essential to bring Beijing into maritime and financial interdiction efforts.

If the Six-Party talks remain on hold, the United States should not sit pat. It should instead convene the parties without North Korea, restate international expectations that North Korea disarm, and develop a regional approach to detect and disrupt Pyongyang's black market in weapons technology. The reactor in the Syrian

desert may lie in rubble, but the world cannot ignore its warning of North Korea's readiness to market the most dangerous of technologies.

Gregory L. Schulte was the US ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency from 2005 to 2009. He previously served three tours in the White House under two presidents and six years on the NATO International Staff, working on nuclear policy and the Balkans. He is now a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Defense University. This essay reflects his personal views.

The future of non-proliferation

An awkward guest-list

Apr 29th 2010 | From The Economist print edition

[EXCERPT]

Syria has likewise dug in its heels: it was reported to have been building a nuclear reactor to produce bomb-usable plutonium with North Korea's help, and possibly Iranian cash, until the almost completed structure was bombed by Israel in 2007.

http://blog.washingtonpost.com/spy-talk/2010/04/the_french_spy_the_cia_and_the.html#more

The French spy, the CIA, and the Syrian reactor

By Jeff Stein

April 29, 2010; 7:00 PM ET

September, 2007: CIA officials peered at the “overhead” -- satellite photos.

The pictures were crystal clear: A clandestine Syrian nuclear facility, bombed by Israeli jets, lay in ruins on the edge of the desert, 90 miles south of Damascus.

Most important, the photos showed that the core of the reactor, built with secret North Korean help, had been totally destroyed.

But at CIA headquarters, Deputy Director Stephen R. Kappes was chafing -- at what he didn't have, according to two former intelligence officials, recounting the tale only on condition of anonymity because the incident remains sensitive.

Recently returned from a self-imposed, two-year exile, the career spy wanted somebody to eyeball that wreckage -- get in close, point a camera at it, maybe even take a radiation reading.

Days had passed, however, and the CIA, with an estimated budget of \$10 billion in 2009, had not been able to get a spy out there.

It wasn't that close-in photos would be crucial: It was a point of pride. This is what first-class intelligence services do. They dispatch spies to watch and hear things that their fabulous technology might have missed.

And Kappes, who had quit the agency in 2004 rather than take instruction from the staff of Bush's CIA Director Porter Goss, wanted to show what the spies under his direction could do. Alas, somebody else was about to beat him to it.

How galling it must have been for the CIA: It was the French.

According to the former officials, the French military attaché in Damascus simply took it upon himself to drive out to the reactor on his own and take pictures.

One of the former officials said that the attaché, whose name could not be learned, drove out to the desert site, near the village of At Tibnah, trailing a virtual caravan of Syrian “minders,” domestic security agents assigned to follow him around.

When he pulled up to the reactor site, according to this source, the attaché jerked his thumb over his shoulder and told the bewildered guards, “They're with me.”

Apparently that bought him enough time to snap some pictures.

But the second former official said “there was no sign of security personnel being present” at the site.

The attaché “drove there and took the photos from his vehicle,” said the former official. “A few had the steering wheel and dashboard prominently featured.

“He was never out of the vehicle, and he never got into the wreckage itself. But he was damn close, and it was a really ballsy move,” the source added.

A little while later, the French presented the photos to the CIA.

“It was a major embarrassment for [Kappes], who kept pushing them to come up with a plan on an almost daily basis,” the first former intelligence official maintains.

“I think the big issue was that CIA couldn't come up with a way of obtaining the photos. Near East Division management, as well as the Damascus station, was paralyzed, could not come up with a plan, and here the French just drive up and do it.”

CIA spokesman George Little called “this account ... off the mark.”

“But what is for certain,” Little added, “is that Deputy Director Kappes always encourages bold action and smart risk. The discovery of the Syrian covert nuclear reactor was a textbook intelligence success—one achieved after a careful review of information from multiple sources over a period of time.”

Likewise, the second former official pooh-poohed the idea that Kappes was embarrassed or upset.

“I don't recall him being pissed that we didn't have anyone there,” the former official said. “Syria for us is a tough place, and he understands that.”

“The French photos were nothing more than an unexpected extra, which confirmed the bomb damage we had seen,” the former official said. “We were just struck by how close the attaché got, and the lack of any apparent security. “

“The overhead was far better,” the former official added. “It showed us the reactor was out of action, and also helped later when the Syrians began hiding what was left, bulldozing and covering it with sand.”

Much ado about nothing, a third intelligence operations veteran snorted.

Military attachés everywhere, he said, “love to do ground-level photography, pretending like they're James Bonds or something.

“It's the kind of stunt those services like to perform.”



Editorial Defends Syria's Right To Acquire Nuclear Capability, Faults US Stand

Editorial: "The Russians Are Coming Back Through the Syrian Gateway"

Al-Quds al-Arabi Online

Saturday, May 15, 2010 T16:56:12Z

Document Type: OSC Translated Text

Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev's latest tour of Syria and Turkey, during which discussions were held to sign cooperation agreements on nuclear energy, marks the beginning of Russia's return to the Middle East more forcefully.

The Russian president, who was accorded a hospitable reception in both the Syrian and Turkish capitals, showed a strong desire to help the two countries build nuclear programs for peaceful purposes. This move angered Washington and prompted US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley to express his administration's concern. He said Syria has not answered questions on its compliance with the NPT.

This is a crooked stand in every sense of the word. Any state can sign agreements to build nuclear reactors for peaceful purposes and acquire the necessary technology from Western nations, such as the United States and France, if it is an ally of Washington. However, if any state that does not revolve in the Western orbit attempts to acquire the same technology from Russia or North Korea, it comes under campaigns of doubts and even bombing and aggression, as was the case with the alleged Syrian reactor near Dayr al-Zur in northeastern Syria, which Israeli planes destroyed.

Syria is a state that signed the NPT and declared its full compliance with the treaty's provisions. Therefore, it does not need to answer any US questions regarding its legitimate nuclear ambitions that are in line with international controls and criteria. In fact, we would not be exaggerating if we said that it is rude for the United States, rather than the IAEA, to ask Syria such questions.

It is obvious that Syria, after an Israeli aggression against its newly born nuclear facilities with a green light from the United States, decided to go to and cooperate with Moscow in this field because Israel will not dare to bomb a peaceful Syrian nuclear program, the construction and management of which is overseen by Russian experts.

It is no longer a secret that Russia is building a naval base in the Latakia area on the Syrian coast to serve its fleets, exactly as Washington does in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE. This is because alliances in today's world are based on interests too, not only good intentions.

Syria, Turkey, and all states in the Arab region have the right to develop nuclear expertise in all peaceful and military fields as long as Israel possesses more than 200 nuclear warheads. Israel uses them to terrorize the states of the region, continue to occupy the territories of many of these states, and block the peace process with its provocative settlement activity.

At the same time, Syria has the right not to pay any attention to the invented Israeli-US uproar over the Scud missiles, which Syria reportedly smuggled to Lebanese Hizballah. The reason is that Syrian officials are not so stupid not to know the aim of this uproar. Its aim is to secure an international resolution to deploy international observation forces on the Syrian-Lebanese border.

Israeli violations are increasing to a point where the United States' task of redressing them has become difficult. Therefore, Washington must stop adopting the Israeli policies and being hostile to most states of the region, as is currently happening.

(Description of Source: London Al-Quds al-Arabi Online in Arabic -- Website of London-based independent Arab nationalist daily with strong anti-US bias. URL: <http://www.alquds.co.uk/>)

Can Israel afford to slow down Iran's nuclear program?

Although Prime Minister Netanyahu insists that Israel will not allow Iran to acquire the bomb, it's not clear Israel can afford to pay the price involved in slowing down Iran by even a few years. But what are the alternatives?

By Yossi Melman

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[EXCERPTS]

[deletia]

On two separate occasions within the last quarter century have Israel Air Force pilots destroyed nuclear facilities in hostile Arab countries in order to prevent those states from acquiring nuclear armaments. The first instance occurred on the Shavuot holiday 29 years ago. On June 7, 1981, a squadron of eight IAF F-16 fighter jets, accompanied by eight other F-15s, attacked the nuclear reactor built by French scientists near Baghdad. Within two minutes, the reactor was destroyed.

[deletia]

...the Begin doctrine was put to another test 26 years later. In September 2007, IAF pilots successfully destroyed a nuclear reactor on the banks of the Euphrates River, in Syria. It was a facility built by that country, with financial assistance from Iran as well as expertise and know-how from North Korea.

Israel's image

A number of differences between these two attacks stand out. Prior to the Iraqi incident, Israel did not keep other countries - including the United States, whose president at the time was Ronald Reagan, one of the friendliest leaders Jerusalem has ever had in the White House - abreast of its plans. After the attack, the Israeli government officially announced that its pilots had done the deed. In Syria, the opposite is said to have occurred. Then-prime minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak notified the Americans hours before the strike took place. Since the operation, however, Israel has been vague about its role in the attack, refraining from officially claiming responsibility.

[deletia]

It is not just former and current air force officers who recognize the difficult set of circumstances. An intimate knowledge of the character and behavior of most members of the national military and political echelons leads one to the conclusion that they too are well aware of the limitations of Israeli might. Netanyahu is considered to be hesitant, and someone who easily panics - traits that might well make it difficult for him to order the IDF to take action. Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, under whose tenures Israel launched the strike on Syria, are considered cautious, responsible leaders who are aware of the enormous differences between the Syrian reactor and the Iranian facilities.

[deletia]

Behind the Axis: The North Korean Connection

By JONATHAN SPYER

22/05/2010 05:44

[EXCERPTS]

North Korean spokesmen reacted furiously last week to claims by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman that Pyongyang is supplying weapons technology to Iran and Syria. Representatives of the regime of Kim Jong-Il described Lieberman as an “imbecile.” The official Korean Central News Agency in a memorable phrase accused the foreign minister in an official statement of “faking up sheer lies.”

The indignant denials notwithstanding, recent studies indicate that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, as North Korea is officially known, is indeed playing a crucial but little remarked upon role in facilitating the arming of the Iran-led regional axis, including in the area of weapons of mass destruction. The North Korean role is multifaceted, and evidence has emerged of direct links to terror organizations such as Hizbullah and extensive strategic relations with both Iran and Syria.

A recent study by Christina Lin, a former US Department Defense official and specialist on China, looked into North Korea’s strategic partnership with Iran. Lin noted that North Korea has been described as the “the most important single leak” in the international anti-proliferation effort in the Middle East.

[deletia]

The North Korean strategic link with Iran is not limited to Teheran. Rather, evidence suggests that it extends to cooperation with other, more junior members of the Iran-led regional alliance. Thus, Iranian defector Ali Reza Asghari is reported to have confirmed that Iran helped finance the participation of North Korean personnel in the Syrian plutonium reactor at al-Kibar destroyed by Israel in September 2007. Iranian scientists were also present at the site, the goal of which was to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

[deletia]

The writer is a senior researcher at the Global Research in International Affairs Center, IDC, Herzliya.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704113504575264270768612284.html?mod=WSJ_Opinion_LEFTTopOpinion

Iran and North Korea March On

John Bolton

May 25, 2010

[EXCERPT]

Here, Iran and North Korea intersect. Cooperation between the two on improving their ballistic missiles has been extensive and Iran likely financed the North Korean reactor that was under construction in Syria until it was destroyed by Israel in September 2007.

<http://www.debka.com/article/8806/>

North Korea on war readiness. US-South prepare. Tehran watches

DEBKAFfile Exclusive Analysis **May 25, 2010, 10:42 AM (GMT+02:00)**

[EXCERPT]

The plutonium reactor which the Israeli Air Force destroyed in September 2007 in northern Syria was made in North Korea and, according to debkafile's intelligence sources, North Korean nuclear scientists and technicians are back at work in the country.

The IAEA's Agenda

Mark Hibbs Q&A

June 07, 2010

[EXCERPT]

[*Carnegie*] Is the IAEA's investigation of Syria's nuclear activities proceeding smoothly and will the board move forward on this issue?

[*Hibbs*] As in the case of Iran, it is not anticipated that the board will take any decisive action this month regarding the IAEA's ongoing investigation into Syria's nuclear activities. For over two years, the IAEA has failed to reach a conclusion about allegations raised by the United States and Israel concerning a site Israeli aircrafts bombed in Syria in 2007. Both countries assert that the facility was a clandestine plutonium production reactor built with North Korean assistance.

In principle, the United States supports the idea of the IAEA requesting a so-called "special inspection" in Syria, as the IAEA is empowered to do under its safeguards agreement with that country. If requested, that inspection would be designed to look at a few sites which the United States asserts, based on intelligence data, point to clandestine nuclear fuel cycle cooperation—for plutonium separation or uranium fuel production—between Syria and North Korea.

But neither the United States, nor a majority of board member countries, nor Amano himself is inclined to press for a special inspection in Syria at this time. The United States is in no hurry to call for a special inspection because, in its view, the Israeli attack destroyed the reactor and because the fuel cycle cooperation between Syria and North Korea at the sites identified by U.S. intelligence in Syria was at an early stage when the work was interrupted in 2007.

For political reasons the United States might even be inclined to accept that the IAEA's Syria probe is never decisively concluded, but some other Western board members, in particular European states, are becoming impatient with the IAEA's lack of progress in reaching closure on this issue

Some officials from these states believe that a failure to reach firm conclusions on Syria will damage the IAEA's credibility under Amano, especially since he has already informed the board that, on essential matters, Syria has not cooperated with the IAEA. Some board members may therefore want to see the IAEA request a special inspection later in 2010. But so far, there is not enough political will—either at the top of the IAEA secretariat or in the board—to press Syria for a special inspection.



John Bolton: "We will not tolerate interference in Camp Ashraf"

Friday, 02 July 2010

[EXCERPTS]

John Bolton, former US ambassador to the United Nations, underlined the concerns for Ashraf in his address to the gathering of Iranians in Paris on **June 26 [2010]** and said, "The US presence inside Ashraf has to be continued and perhaps expanded back to something like its previous level. I think the UN mission inside Ashraf has to be extended and I think we need to make it clear to the government of Iraq that we will not tolerate interference in the camp and certainly not the kind of assaults that have occurred on the inhabitants of the camp before. This is again something, I think, of a very high priority in the American Congress.

[deletia]

This meeting today is a signal both to the people still trapped inside Iran and the democratic countries all around the world that the people of Iran seek to have control over their own government and to participate in democratic elections. **It is a tragedy for Iran that its best friend and closest ally in the world is North Korea; North Korea, which has its own nuclear weapons, which pursues ballistic missile technology that threatens peace and security not only in Asia but in the Middle East as well, which financed by the regime in Tehran was building a nuclear reactor in Syria, and which partners with Iran on the nuclear program.**

[deletia]

The Israel-Turkey Imbrolio

By ROGER COHEN

Published: July 8, 2010

NEW YORK — Here's an intriguing nugget, given Turkey's recent decision to close its airspace to Israeli military planes: When Israel attacked a covert Syrian nuclear reactor on Sept. 6, 2007, its bombers overflew Turkey.

A former senior U.S. official who was intimately involved in handling the fallout from the raid told me Turkish officials raised the issue with Israel, were invited to discuss the matter, but in the end let it drop.

Those were different times, before Turkish-Israeli ties entered their current poisonous phase.

[deletia]

Given the military trade between Israel and Turkey (\$1.8 billion in 2007), U.S. godfathering of the Turkish-Israeli relationship, and Turkey's commitment to remaining inside the Western tent even while reaching outside it, I don't expect cooperation to cease between Ankara and Jerusalem. But Israel has real reason for concern.

It could overfly Turkey in 2007 en route to taking out a Syrian facility of North Korean design because of the wink-and-nod nature of its military relationship with its best regional Muslim friend. That's history.

Since then Israel's actions, tactical bluster devoid of strategic sense, have left it far more isolated than before. I hear more hostility to Israel around the world than at any time I can recall.

[deletia]

The Mideast remains volatile. On the Iran drumbeat, some other nuggets from that former senior official are of interest. The Bush administration opposed the 2007 Israeli strike. It was worried the Syrians would respond and ignite a wider Middle East war. It believed tough U.S. diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, would ensure the Syrian reactor never became operational. President Bush's line was: Let me handle it.

Ehud Olmert, then the Israeli prime minister, was disappointed at American inaction. His line was: It's now in our hands. No U.S. green light was asked for, and none given, as Israel bombed.

The fallout was contained through sleight of hand. Israel feigned ignorance. A tight collar was placed for several months around U.S. intelligence. President Bashar al-Assad was not made to feel cornered. It was as if the reactor had gone poof in the night.

Could Iran's Natanz plant go poof in the night? Some people are thinking about it, an attack from "nowhere." I think those are dangerous thoughts. Iran is not Syria.

The Obama-Netanyahu statement said: "The president told the prime minister he recognizes that Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats, and that only Israel can determine its security needs."

Is that plain language or a hall of mirrors?

Hmmm.

Opinion

Beyond the Obama Nuke Policy

How Congress and opinion leaders can counter administration weakness on North Korea and Iran.

BY JOHN R. BOLTON

JULY 13, 2010

[EXCERPT]

So are we consigned to two more years of growing danger? Not if Congress and opinion leaders take steps without White House leadership, beginning with these three initiatives:

First, they must demand increased intelligence collection on the North Korea-Iran connection. Where possible without compromising sources and methods, this information should be disseminated to increase public awareness.

Pyongyang has been a major proliferation player in the Middle East for some time, selling missiles and technology throughout the region. For over a decade, Iran has done extensive ballistic missile testing on its behalf. **Pyongyang's reactor in Syria—destroyed by Israel in September 2007—was likely financed by Iran, and other joint programs may still be underway in Syria and Burma.**

Although North Korea and Iran may be slipping off the front page, their nuclear and ballistic missile cooperation is almost certainly progressing. These proliferation threats are not separate, and a better understanding of the level of joint activity would reveal a much more realistic picture for the U.S. and its allies. Stepped up intelligence gathering and enhanced congressional and public discussion might even awaken the Obama administration.

[Mr. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad" \(Simon & Schuster, 2007\).](#)

Assad celebrates 10 years in power

Smadar Peri

Published: 08.05.10, 09:24

[EXCERPT]

But Assad's problems are not just with Israel. The Syrian president fears that the Iranians also want to do away with him. His advisors warn that Tehran is not ready to forgive his efforts to establish a nuclear reactor behind Iran's back. Iran also recalls the killing of "its man," senior Hezbollah figure Imad Mughniyeh, two years ago in Damascus' most secure compound. If they could, the ayatollahs would get rid of him now, immediately, as soon as possible, and replace him with a Syrian leader from the Muslim Brotherhood. The tension between Hezbollah and Syria reached new heights Tuesday, and both sides alerted the regime in Beirut. Hezbollah warned: Assad wants to destroy us in order to take over Lebanon again.

The long road to Syria

Ynetnews special: New book reveals full story behind bombing of Syrian reactor by Israel

Yedioth Ahronoth

Published: 08.26.10, 14:58

London, end of July 2007. A guest at a large Lexington hotel left his room in the evening, took the elevator down to the lobby, and stepped into a vehicle waiting for him outside. He was a senior Syrian official who arrived from Damascus a short while earlier and rushed to a meeting downtown.

The moment he left the hotel, two men rose from their seats at the corner of the lobby. They stepped into the elevator, reached the guest's room, and opened the door using keys. They searched the room professionally but did not need to work too hard. The Syrian's laptop was right on the desk. The two men installed a Trojan Horse - spyware that created a "backdoor" to the computer. Using this door, it became possible to monitor the computer remotely and copy all the material saved on it. Within minutes, the two men left the room.

The above story, and the information to follow, is based on both foreign and Israeli reports. The laptop provided Mossad with invaluable information, which for the first time exposed Syria's secret nuclear program. The findings were stunning: The blueprints of a nuclear reactor in the Dir al-Zur area; correspondence with North Korean officials; photographs showing the reactor covered with cement. The evidence was unequivocal. It complemented other information accumulated during 2006 and 2007 by Israel's top intelligence officials. According to this information, the Syrian government secretly built a nuclear reactor in the desert, near the Turkish border and roughly 100 miles from the Iraq border. **Officials were surprised to discover that the reactor was constructed with Iranian funding and with the help of North Korean experts.**

The "love affair" between Syria and North Korea started with the Korean prime minister's visit to Syria before the Gulf War, on then-President Hafez Assad's invitation. The two countries signed a military and technological cooperation agreement. Although the nuclear issue was brought up, Assad decided to put it aside and make do with developing chemical and biological weapons. **During his father's funeral in June 2000, Bashar Assad met with members of the North Korean delegation. At that time, they started to secretly push forward the construction of the Syrian reactor. In July 2002, a three-way deal was finalized, with an Iranian representative pledging to finance the reactor's construction (roughly \$2 billion.) As it turns out, for five years Israel's and America's intelligence agencies were in the dark.**

Iranian general tells all

During those years, some warning signs emerged, yet nobody took notice. The American intelligence community misinterpreted the information it received, while Mossad and Military Intelligence officials in Israel estimated that the Syrians have no interest in or ability to acquire nuclear weapons. Hence, nobody bothered to look for information that would shatter the "conception." The Syrians adopted another tactic meant to lull Israel and the US into a false sense of security: They enforced a complete communication moratorium on all employees and experts at the nuclear site. Cellular and satellite phones were banned, and all communication was undertaken via messengers. The activity at the site was not exposed even though American and Israeli satellites photographed it regularly. However, a subsequent dramatic development stunned both Israel and the US.

On February 7, 2007, Iranian General Ali Reza Askari, formerly a senior Revolutionary Guard official and deputy defense minister, arrived in Damascus from Tehran. He stayed in the Syrian capital until he ensured his family was on its way out of Iran, before continuing to Turkey and disappearing in Istanbul. A month later, it

turned out that Askari defected to the West in an operation planned by the US in conjunction with Israel. He was questioned in a US base in Europe – apparently in Germany – and revealed some of Tehran's and Damascus' deepest secrets. Askari exposed the three-way relationship involving Syria, North Korea, and Iran. He told his interrogators that Tehran was encouraging and funding the establishment of the Syrian nuclear reactor. He provided further details about the reactor's condition and about the Iranians assisting and advising the Syrians.

Agent inside the reactor

The information prompted Israel to go into operational alert. The Mossad earmarked manpower and resources to verify the details provided by the Iranian general. Then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert convened Israel's security chiefs for a special meeting; during the session they agreed that Israel must act urgently to acquire credible proof of the reactor's existence. It was clear to all that Israel could not accept the prospect of Syria, its bitter, belligerent rival, turning into a nuclear power. Within a few months, Mossad and Military Intelligence chiefs were able to present the prime minister with the incriminating evidence he sought. Five months after Askari's defection, the search took its next turn: The material uncovered in the Syrian official's computer in London. Meanwhile, Mossad registered another success: It managed to recruit one of the reactor's employees, who provided numerous photographs and a video shot inside the building gradually taking shape.

Israel made sure to update the US, in real-time, about all the material it managed to acquire, including up-to-date satellite images and tapped conversations between North Korea and Damascus. Israeli pressure also prompted the US utilize its own spy satellites. Soon, up-to-date material was accumulated including images elicited through America's advanced satellites and materials acquired via electronic means, showing that the Syrians were building the reactor rapidly.

In June 2007, PM Olmert traveled to Washington to present all the material gathered by Israel; at the conclusion of a lengthy discussion with President George W. Bush, Olmert informed the US president that he decided to strike the Syrian reactor. The Americans were still hesitant, however. Israel recommended a military strike, but the US refused. According to credible American sources, the White House eventually decided that "the US prefers not to strike." Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates attempted to convince Israel to confront the Syrians, but not to attack.

In July 2007, Israel held aerial patrols above the reactor and elicited images of the activity at the site via satellite Ofek 7. The images were analyzed by American and Israeli experts, who ruled that Syria is building a nuclear reactor based on the North Korean model. In fact, the experts reached the conclusion that the reactors were identical. Meanwhile, Israel's intelligence-gathering Unit 8200 provided records of conversations between Syrian scientists and North Korea experts. This information was also handed over to Washington, but the Americans demanded unequivocal proof that the facility will be used as a nuclear reactor, and that nuclear materials are already at the site. Israel decided to supply this information as well.

Behind enemy lines

The "smoking gun" was found in August 2007. The clear-cut evidence was acquired by the elite Sayeret Matkal reconnaissance unit, which headed to the site under cover of darkness on board two helicopters. Nobody spotted the troops as they landed near Dir al-Zur. Using specialized equipment, they took several soil samples that contained radioactive materials. The findings were urgently relayed to US National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, who was stunned by the revelations. He quickly summoned top experts to draw conclusions and report to President Bush during their morning meeting.

Following the expert assessment, Hadley was convinced the matter at hand was serious. He held a lengthy discussion with Israel's Military Intelligence and Mossad chiefs, thereby reaching the conclusion that the reactor constitutes a substantive threat. The US was convinced that the reactor should be destroyed. According to the British Sunday Times, PM Olmert then convened Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi

Livni; the three leaders discussed the expected implications of a military strike in Syria with top security officials. After hours of deliberations, they decided to go ahead and wipe out the reactor. Olmert informed Opposition Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu of the decision.

The strike date was set for September 5, 2007. According to the Sunday Times, elite Air Force troops were deployed in the area on September 4 to mark the targets for the jets using laser. On September 5, 2007, at 11 pm, 10 fighter jets left the Air Force base in Ramat-David and headed towards the Mediterranean. Thirty minutes later, three planes were ordered to turn back. The other seven F-15 jets were ordered to head to the Syrian-Turkish border. En route to the reactor, they bombed a radar station in order to thwart Syria's ability to identify the infiltration. A few minutes later, the jets reached the Dir al-Azur area: They fired Maverick missiles and dropped half-ton bombs at the nuclear facility, recording direct hits. Within minutes, a Syrian reactor that could have been used to produce bombs that would threaten Israel's existence was wiped out.

Officials in Israel feared a Syrian response. PM Olmert called Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and asked that the latter relay a message to President Assad, stressing that Israel was not seeking war. The next day, great confusion prevailed in Damascus. At first, the Syrians maintained complete silence. They reported the strike only at 3 pm. According to the report, Israeli jets infiltrated Syrian airspace at 1 am. "Our Air Force forced them to withdraw after they dropped ammunition over the desert; no injuries or damages were reported," the Syrians said.

In April, 2008, some seven months after the Syrian facility was hit, the US Administration announced that the bombed site was a nuclear reactor built with the help of North Korea and was not meant for peaceful purposes. American intelligence chiefs presented Congress members with photographs highlighting the Syrian facility's similarity to the North Korean reactor, as well as satellite images and sketches. Congress members also watched another fascinating video, which according to reports from Washington was filmed by a Mossad agent inside the Syrian reactor. Israel managed to keep quiet for two weeks, refusing to admit it was behind the strike. But then came Netanyahu, who, as opposition leader, who in response to a question by TV anchor Haim Yavin said, "When the government does something for Israel's security – I support it... And here I was a partner in this matter and I supported it from the very start." Olmert's aides were furious. "We are completely shocked by this man, he is irresponsible and lacks discretion; this is the real Bibi!" one aide said.

Assassination in Syria

On the evening of August 2, 2008, 11 months after the bombing of the reactor, a festive dinner was held on the terrace of a summer house in Rimal al-Zahabiya, north of the Syrian city of Tartous. The summer house was adjacent to the shore and had a magnificent view. The terrace overlooked the sea and served as a refuge from the summer's high humidity. The guests were close friends of the house's owner, General Mohammed Suleiman, who had traveled there for a weekend break.

Suleiman was President Assad's top aide on military and security matters. He was in charge of the reactor's construction and its security. Government circles in Damascus referred to him Assad's shadow. His office was located in the presidential palace, next to Assad's, and few knew him in Syria and abroad. While Suleiman's name was not mentioned in the media, Mossad and Western intelligence agencies knew him and his actions well. The 47-year-old Syrian was an engineering graduate of Damascus University. During his studies he befriended Basil Assad, then-President Hafez Assad's firstborn son and Bashar Assad's older brother. After Basil's death in a road accident, his father was sure to bring Suleiman close to himself and his heir. In 2000, Hafez Assad died and his son Bashar was elected president. With his rise to power, the young president made Suleiman his confidant and close advisor.

Suleiman played a unique role: He was a member of the Syrian research board, which dealt with the development of missiles, chemical and biological weapons and nuclear research and development. As part of his job, he was Syria's contact with North Korea. He coordinated the transfer of the reactor's parts to Syria and was

in charge of security arrangements for the North Korean scientists and technicians involved in its construction. The reactor's bombing was a serious blow for Suleiman, but not a lethal one. After overcoming the initial shock, he began to plan the construction of an alternate reactor, for which a location had yet to be determined. Suleiman's new mission was much more complex and difficult than before, since he was now aware that he was on the Israeli and American intelligence agencies' radars.

Ahead of the next phase of his secret mission, Suleiman took a few days off and traveled to his summer home. A vacation and dinner with his friends was the best medicine for the pressure he was under. From his seat by the table he watched the waves lazily crawling up the shore. But what he didn't see, at a distance of some 150 meters (165 yards) from the terrace, was two figures waiting, motionless in the dark water. They reached this point from a far off distance in a ship that dropped them off some two 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) from Suleiman's house. From there they dived until they neared his home. The two were professional snipers, possessing a wealth of experience and nerves of steel. They carried their weapons in water-proof covers. When they reached the shore they immediately spotted Suleiman's house. The information they received from their country's intelligence agency was accurate. They identified the building and the terrace, scanned the people seated at the table and focused on their target: The general sitting opposite them, among his guests.

Around 9 pm the snipers returned to test their aim and range. They watched Suleiman, sitting on a chair at the center of the table surrounded by his friends. It was crowded around the table, which forced the snipers to reset their focus and aim at the host's head. They continued to hide in the water. Then the signal was given. The two emerged from the water to the shore, moved closer to the house, aimed their rifles and shot Suleiman simultaneously. The hit was lethal. His head was first jolted back and then collapsed forward on the table. Those present did not understand what had happened, because they didn't hear a sound – the rifles were equipped with silencers. Only after they noticed the blood flowing from Suleiman's head did they realize he had been shot. A commotion broke out on the terrace, which enabled the snipers to flee via a pre-planned escape route. The Sunday Times reported a slightly different version, saying the snipers were IDF Flotilla 13 commandoes who arrived in Tartous on a luxury yacht belonging to an Israeli businessman, carried out their mission, and vanished.

Syria's official bodies were shocked. The government initially kept quiet and did not address the reports of an assassination. There was much embarrassment. How did the hit team make it to northern Syria? How did it flee the site? Was there no place left in Syria where the regime's heads could feel safe? Days after the incident a brief official statement was released saying, "Syria is holding an investigation to find those responsible for this crime." But Arab media extensively reported on the affair from day one and raised speculations about the identities of the perpetrators. Arab newspapers focused on elements that had an interest in assassinating the general, and were quick to point to Israel. They also claimed that Israel carried out the assassination because of Suleiman's involvement in the construction of the reactor Dir al-Zur. While Arab media sang Suleiman's praises, Western intelligence agencies had a completely different reaction to his death. In the capitals of the free world, no one shed a tear over the general's untimely passing.

[Article written by Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissim Mishal, authors of recently released book "Mossad – The Great Operations."](#)

ISIS Reports

If Not Now, When? Time for an IAEA Special Inspection in Syria

by **David Albright and Paul Brannan**

September 6, 2010

Glyn Davies, the United States Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, said recently that the time for a special inspection in Syria is fast approaching. Syria was secretly building a nuclear reactor in the Dair Alzour region before it was bombed by Israeli jets in September 2007. In an August 6, 2010 Wall Street Journal report, Davies noted that it has been “years since the IAEA had its one crack at this. And it came away with more questions than answers.” Indeed, Syria continues to deny it even had a reactor under construction. Although Syria allowed the IAEA to partially inspect this site once in June 2008, it has answered very few of the IAEA’s questions. It has repeatedly denied the IAEA’s requests for additional information or access again to the reactor site and to a number of other suspect sites.

Davies added, “We as shareholders in the system need to talk about this and find the way forward for the Agency and to help the [IAEA’s] Director General.” Because of Syria’s refusal to cooperate, and the possibility that the reactor was part of a nuclear weapons effort, Davies is right. The IAEA Secretariat and its Board of Governors should start the process of calling for a special inspection. Without adequate Syrian cooperation, the November 2010 Board of Governors meeting should call for one.

Why a Special Inspection

A special inspection is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of Syria’s undeclared activities, some of which may continue. Syria has refused to sign the IAEA’s Additional Protocol, an advanced inspection agreement aimed at discovering undeclared nuclear facilities and materials. Under the traditional safeguards agreement signed by Syria under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), one of the few tools to investigate undeclared nuclear activities is the special inspection.¹ The IAEA can call for this type of inspection, although in practice the Board of Governors will need to approve it.

The IAEA does not often call for a special inspection—this is reserved for extreme situations where a particularly egregious safeguards violation is suspected and where the member state has demonstrated a lack of cooperation. In 1993, concerned that North Korea had conducted undeclared plutonium reprocessing campaigns, the IAEA requested a special inspection after North Korea denied access to suspect sites. That a NPT signatory could separate plutonium in covert reprocessing campaigns and stonewall the IAEA threatened not only the international community but also the legitimacy of the IAEA and the value of verification measures that NPT parties must adhere to.

Although not as urgent as the North Korean example, the current situation with Syria also warrants a special inspection. The Syrian reactor project stands as one of the most egregious cases of nuclear proliferation. Since the IAEA began to investigate in 2008, Syria has largely refused to cooperate with the IAEA’s investigation. If the IAEA cannot make any further progress in its investigation, its credibility is eroded and verification in general is undermined.

As more time goes by, it will become inherently more difficult for the IAEA to conduct its investigations into Syria’s activities. A special inspection will prevent Syria from further hiding its activities related to the reactor construction project. The passage of time may also make Syria more comfortable stonewalling IAEA requests

for access to certain people, facilities, or documents. Syria can, for example, claim that certain individuals have left the country or died. The sooner a special inspection takes place, the fewer opportunities Syria will have to cover up evidence about the project.

Although the reactor has been destroyed, and despite the manner in which that occurred, the IAEA needs to provide the requisite international verification that Syria does not still have undeclared nuclear facilities or materials, whether of North Korean-origin or not.

The IAEA Remains Suspicious

The IAEA has good reason to remain suspicious about Syria's nuclear activities and North Korea's role in supplying Syria's reactor project. The photographic evidence of the reactor site is the most compelling. However, the IAEA developed other evidence as well that points to undeclared nuclear activities and facilities.

The most striking proof is an April 2008 U.S. intelligence community video briefing on the reactor. The video shows the likely location of the reactor core and spent fuel pond. It also shows the extraordinary efforts taken by the Syrians to camouflage the building.²

The IAEA's June 2008 inspection at the reactor site uncovered traces of chemically-processed uranium, which had properties implying it could have originally been uranium metal. This form of uranium is used in a North Korean gas-graphite reactor. Syria claimed that the uranium originated from Israeli anti-armor weapons, but the IAEA found no evidence supporting this claim. The IAEA assessed that there is a low probability that the uranium was introduced by the use of missiles. It found that the isotopic and chemical composition and the morphology of the particles are all inconsistent with what would be expected from the use of uranium based munitions. Moreover, the uranium was found in an out-of-the-way place at the site, which raised questions about whether Syria had purposely cleaned the site in order to prevent the IAEA from discovering traces of materials linked to a reactor.

The IAEA also found undeclared chemically-processed uranium at Syria's Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR). Syria subsequently provided information on previously unreported small-scale uranium conversion and irradiation activities at the MNSR.

A reactor requires uranium fuel. Did North Korea provide natural uranium fuel or was Syria, with North Korean help, building its own fuel fabrication plant? Perhaps, North Korea provided the initial fuel while Syria built a fuel fabrication plant that could provide the fuel for later core loadings. The uranium particles found at the reactor site imply that some uranium had been delivered to the site. Nonetheless, the IAEA has little information about the fuel for this reactor. Kyodo news reported in February 2010 that "North Korea provided about 45 tons of 'yellowcake' uranium to Syria in September of 2007 for production of fuel for an undeclared reactor." ISIS has learned, however, that the IAEA does not have any evidence that confirms this media report.

In 2008, a member state communicated the location of three suspect sites to the IAEA. The IAEA states in its safeguards reports that these sites may be of relevance to the activities at the reactor site. ISIS learned during April 2008 briefings by U.S. government experts and officials that some U.S. intelligence information indicated that one of the suspect sites might be a fuel fabrication facility. A senior official close to the IAEA said in an interview on November 16, 2009 that the IAEA received information that showed that equipment was seen coming and going between the reactor and these three sites. ISIS has also learned that the IAEA has identified a fourth suspect site. Syria denied the IAEA's request to visit these sites. Adding to suspicions, shortly after the request for a visit, IAEA analysis of satellite imagery taken of these locations indicated that landscaping activities and the removal of large containers took place.

The IAEA's investigation of Syria's procurement activities aimed at supplying its nuclear program revealed further discrepancies. An investigation of Syrian procurement patterns can be an extremely difficult

undertaking. Based on interviews with European intelligence officials, Syria's sensitive procurements are often exceptionally difficult to ascertain. Syria has used a variety of techniques to disguise its sensitive overseas purchases. Moreover, a direct transfer of goods on North Korean ships or planes would have left few detectable traces. Nonetheless, the IAEA has uncovered suspicious information.

Regarding equipment that could be tied to the site, the IAEA discovered that Syria had told the IAEA and suppliers different versions of the equipment's end use. The IAEA also learned that Syria had procured "large quantities of barium sulphate."³ This material is used to increase the effectiveness of concrete in stopping penetrating radiation from a reactor core or irradiated fuel being processed in hot cells to extract plutonium. Syria denies any intended use in a reactor or hot cells, but the size of the order remains suspicious.

The IAEA also learned of Syria's purchase of large quantities of graphite from China, but it was unable to tie this graphite to the reactor. North Korea has made large quantities of graphite for its own reactors, so perhaps North Korea supplied the graphite itself.

The IAEA detected graphite in samples taken at the reactor site but in small concentrations. It could not determine if this graphite came from the core of the reactor. But given the widespread public discussions of the importance of sampling for graphite prior to the inspection and suspicions that Syria thoroughly cleaned the site, small graphite concentrations remain inconclusive.

Three years after the bombing of the reactor, the nature of North Korean assistance to this reactor project still remains unclear, including persons involved, technical or design support given, and equipment and materials provided. North Korea is generally believed to have supplied or organized the bulk of the procurements for the reactor, but these transfers remain extremely difficult to reconstruct. North Korea may have also organized the purchase of goods for the reactor via China. A Chinese office of Namchongang Trading Corporation (NCG), a North Korean trading company subordinate to its General Bureau of Atomic Energy, was involved in purchases of sensitive material linked to the construction of the nuclear reactor in Syria.⁴ IAEA officials have speculated that Syria depended upon direct exports from North Korea for most of the reactor components, but if it wanted higher quality equipment, it shopped elsewhere for the goods, either relying on NCG or its own procurement network.

With its investigations inconclusive, the IAEA needs greater access to sites and more cooperation from Syria in order to resolve its outstanding questions about Syria's nuclear program.

Nature of a Syrian Special Inspection

The IAEA will need to address several issues before calling for a special inspection. In its effort, assistance from member states is critical. In addition, a special inspection will likely include several sites in Syria.

The IAEA needs far more satellite imagery from the time period immediately following the bombing. Member states should assist the IAEA by providing relevant satellite imagery of the destroyed building site from the morning of the bombing up until the remnants of the building were buried. Until the U.S. intelligence community's video briefing in April 2008 on the destroyed reactor building, the first publicly available satellite image of the site after the bombing came after ISIS successfully located the reactor building. ISIS released the report on October 23, 2007 and the first new satellite image was taken the next morning. In the U.S. briefing, several satellite images from before October 24, 2007, but after the bombing, show the bombed building at various stages of deconstruction.⁵ Commercial satellite images from immediately after the bombing may exist, but governments would have most likely purchased them on an exclusive basis. If they did do so, they should now share the images with the IAEA. But these images cannot compare to the quantity and quality of U.S. imagery, and the United States should declassify additional imagery for use by the IAEA, just as it did in the case of the 1993 North Korean special inspection.

A special inspection should include excavation aimed at finding rubble at the reactor site and more sampling for evidence of a reactor project and any associated fuel cycle activities. In one of the images in April 2008 video briefing, bulldozers can be seen pushing soil excavated from a nearby hill down into the remains of the building, which likely still contained parts of the reactor and spent fuel pond.⁶ Syria later constructed a new building overtop of the existing site.⁷ If Syria has not performed any excavation activities under the roof of the new structure in the last two and a half years, the remains of heavy reactor structures would still remain buried at the site. A special inspection should include excavation of the earth around or possibly underneath the new building constructed after the bombing. Excavation was slated for the 1993 special inspection in North Korea, so its use in this case has a precedent. The IAEA should also insist on taking samples of the remaining debris or rubble at the site or located elsewhere. Syria did not allow the IAEA to sample any of the rubble during the June 2008 inspection.

A special focus of a special inspection should be the sites that may be associated with uranium storage, uranium conversion, or fuel fabrication. A special inspection should include visits to the three additional suspect sites, and perhaps the fourth one. At these sites, the IAEA should be able to freely take samples, interview key personnel, and order excavation as necessary.

The irradiated fuel from this type of reactor is difficult to store long-term in water. As a result, this irradiated fuel is usually chemically processed and the plutonium separated. If Syria planned to make nuclear weapons, this step is required. Little information exists about any Syrian plans for a spent fuel reprocessing facility. A special inspection should seek to clarify what Syria planned to do with the spent fuel from the reactor.

With a lack of clarity on procurements for the reactor, a special inspection can fill significant gaps in what is known about the reactor construction project and its associated fuel cycle. If Syria made purchases for the reactor in Europe or Asia, a special inspection can help identify them.

Conclusion

Syria may have intended that the reactor only be for peaceful purposes and it could have ultimately planned to place it under IAEA safeguards. But this possibility appears less likely in view of Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA and its continual denials of any reactor project despite substantial evidence to the contrary. In the worst case, Syria's reactor was part of a nuclear weapons program that it has not abandoned. It may merely seek to outlast the international community's concern and restart its quest for nuclear weapons at some point in the future.

The time to start the process of calling for a special inspection has arrived. The first step is for member states to discuss this issue at the September Board of Governors meeting and the upcoming General Conference. These meetings should make clear to Syria that patience is running out. At the subsequent November Board of Governors meeting, full debate of a resolution calling for a special inspection in Syria should take place. If Syria still refuses to cooperate, the Board should vote for a special inspection.

¹ Syria has a traditional safeguards agreement with the IAEA under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, referred to as an INFCIRC/153 safeguards agreement. Article 73 of the INFCIRC/153 agreement states: "The Agreement should provide that the Agency may make special inspections subject to the procedures laid down in paragraph 77 below: (a) In order to verify the information contained in special reports; or (b) If the Agency considers that information made available by the State, including explanations from the State and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the Agency to fulfill its responsibilities under the Agreement, An inspection shall be deemed to be special when it is either additional to the routine inspection effort provided for in paragraphs 78—82 below, or involves access to information or locations in addition to the access specified in paragraph 76 for ad hoc and routine inspections, or both."

² Albright and Brannan, *The Al Kibar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications*, Institute for Science and International Security, May 12, 2008.

³ *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic*, Report by the Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency, 5 June 2009: GOV/2009/36

⁴ U.S. Treasury, *United States Designates North Korean Entities and Individuals for Activities Related to North Korea's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program*, TG-840, August 30, 2010.

⁵ See figure 1 in *The Al Kibar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications*, op. cit.

⁶ See figure 11 in *The Al Kibar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications*, op. cit.

⁷ *New Construction at Syrian Site*, Institute for Science and International Security, January 14, 2008

Interview

A Cautionary Note on Iran

Interviewee:

Matthew Fuhrmann, CFR Nuclear Security Fellow

Interviewer:

Bernard Gwertzman, Consulting Editor, CFR.org

September 8, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

Two recent reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency—one on Iran's nuclear program (PDF) and one on Syria's (PDF)—have increased concerns about Middle East nuclear proliferation. Nuclear expert Matthew Fuhrmann says that while "Iran's behavior is consistent with past behavior of proliferation," there is no definitive proof it is pursuing nuclear weapons. The United States should oppose Iran's nuclear program, Fuhrmann says, but the case of China – which became a nuclear country yet has not posed a threat to its neighbors – should temper concerns about a nuclear Iran. "[There were] claims about China becoming more aggressive, starting regional wars, causing cascades, where everyone in the region was going to build nuclear weapons—all of the things we're hearing about Iran today," says Fuhrmann. "But none of that happened, or very little of that happened once China built nuclear weapons."

[deletia]

[CFR:] The IAEA also issued a report about Syria's program. Syria had a facility bombed by Israel in 2007, although Israel has never publically acknowledged this. The United States has issued information suggesting this was going to be a nuclear weapons facility, helped by North Korea, which already has tested nuclear weapons. How do you see that problem?

[Fuhrmann:] For the agency, Syria and Iran pose different problems, and the reason is that the Israeli strike against the al-Kibar plant in September 2007 was really an indictment of the agency's safeguards regime. And the agency took that very personally and now feels obligated to get in there and do something about the problem to show that it still has some sort of institutional credibility and authority, and that countries can in fact have some confidence in the safeguards regime. Iran is also obviously a problem, because it has on a number of instances defied IAEA safeguards, but from the agency's perspective these are two related but distinct problems.

[CFR:] In another words, Syria isn't in the business right now of making anything nuclear, since they have no obvious facility.

[Fuhrmann:] Well, that we know about, right? I mean the al-Kibar facility was unknown until it was bombed. But as far as we know, you're right. There are no facilities other than a small research reactor.

Reaching Consensus at the IAEA

Mark Hibbs Q&A

September 13, 2010

[EXCERPTS]

This month, the two decision-making bodies of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—the board of governors and the general conference—will convene in Vienna for their annual fall meetings. On the agenda will be the nuclear programs of Iran, Syria, and Israel, and the goal of a nuclear-free Middle East. Following on the heels of two new IAEA reports criticizing Iran and Syria for continued lack of cooperation with the IAEA—including allegations of covert nuclear work—the two countries' nuclear programs will remain in the spotlight.

In a Q&A, Mark Hibbs explains that the lack of action expected on these major issues underscores the dysfunctional relationship between advanced, largely Western, nuclear countries, and the developing and non-aligned states that constitute the majority of the IAEA's membership.

[deletia]

The United States wants to launch a special investigation into Syria's activities. Is the board likely to take action?

No. In the view of the IAEA's legal experts, the terms of Syria's safeguards agreement would legally permit IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano to request a special inspection based on the information about Syrian nuclear activities obtained from the United States and other IAEA member states. But so far Amano is not willing to make the request given the perceived political risks involved.

The last time the IAEA made a special inspection request was for North Korea in 1993. U.S. spy satellite photos conclusively demonstrated that North Korea was concealing reprocessing waste from what appeared to be a facility separating plutonium and the IAEA board reached a consensus that a special inspection was "urgent and essential," as legitimated by the terms of North Korea's safeguards agreement.

As it's widely believed that the 2007 Israeli air attack decapitated Syria's clandestine nuclear activities, there will not be a consensus that a special inspection in Syria is "urgent" today. And board members who are wary of a special inspection request point out that the request made for North Korea in 1993 led Pyongyang one month later to quit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Furthermore, if Syria complies with a request for a special inspection and the IAEA fails to confirm alleged clandestine nuclear activities—a concern some Vienna experts say is justified given evidence indicating that Damascus has covered its tracks in the three years since Israel bombed the suspected reactor site in Syria—that would profoundly damage the IAEA's credibility. Syria, Arab states, and other NAM members have expressed concern that should a special inspection be requested on the basis of U.S.-supplied information, the IAEA would be acting on behalf of U.S. intelligence agencies that supposedly aim to use the IAEA to obtain access to military activities in Syria even though they are not necessarily nuclear.

On the other hand, a few IAEA verification officials have argued that there is little to lose in requesting a special inspection in the light of Syria's lack of cooperation. Regardless of the political risks, they think the request would establish an important benchmark and bring the matter to the attention of the UN Security Council. But this is not the view expressed internally and in bilateral meetings with member states by Amano and his senior aides and, given their reluctance, and Amano's apparent desire to accommodate NAM concerns on the board, it's unlikely board members will force the matter during this month's meeting.

Is it possible that the IAEA will agree to call a special inspection in Syria in exchange for an agreement by Israel to participate in a nuclear disarmament conference?

An agreement like this is highly unlikely. During and after a recent visit by Amano to the country, Israel underscored that it will not make any major concessions on its nuclear program.

At the 2009 general conference, Arab states, led by Egypt, succeeded in getting a resolution passed urging Israel to join the NPT and put all its nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards. A similar resolution will be floated during the 2010 conference. Still, it's likely that action on Israel's nuclear program—both in the boardroom and especially at the general conference—will be dominated by rhetoric, but not result in any decisions of substance.

At the 2010 NPT Review Conference in May, the NAM was able to extract from the United States and other Western states an endorsement of the proposal to hold a conference of all states in the Middle East in 2012 to establish a regional zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Out of a fear that the NPT could collapse if two consecutive review conferences failed to reach a consensus conclusion, the United States and Western states agreed. Israeli officials have since warned that Israel may not attend the 2012 conference—Israel is not obligated to take part because it is not a party to the NPT.

The IAEA safeguards a limited amount of declared nuclear activity in Israel, but now and in the future the Vienna agency will have no leverage to significantly influence decision making by Israel about the future of its overall strategic nuclear policy.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bennett-ramberg-phd/syrias-challenge-to-nucle_b_715048.html?view=print

Syria's Challenge to Nuclear Proliferation and What IAEA Could Do

Bennett Ramberg, Ph.D.

The Huffington Post September 14, 2010

Posted: September 13, 2010 03:12 PM

"Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites."

So concludes the September 6, 2010 International Atomic Agency report revealing the nuclear investigative dead end bearing on suspect Syrian nuclear activities. Simply reissuing the conclusion, as IAEA does on a quarterly basis, marks a policy to nowhere. The time is long overdue for the nuclear watchdog to take a more assertive stand not simply to hold Damascus accountable for past and continued nuclear cheating but to use Syria as an example to buttress the flailing nonproliferation regime. IAEA can start this week at the Board of Governors meeting.

Syria's nuclear weapons ambitions came to light in September 2007 when Israeli aircraft destroyed what had been a concealed nuclear weapons reactor. Subsequent revelations by American intelligence and media uncovered a number of troubling facts. First, IAEA safeguards had failed to detect even a inkling of Syria's nuclear cheating. The failure continues a pattern found elsewhere--Iraq (in the 1980s), Libya and Iran--raising troubling questions about NPT safeguards generally. Second, even when evidence reveals a nuclear violator, Syria demonstrates IAEA impotence to force transparency or reverse behavior. Indeed, Damascus has done Tehran one better: following its sole material concession--granting inspectors access to the bombed reactor site, but only after Syrian engineers had carted away debris and placed a new building over the plant's footprint to conceal evidence--it repeatedly has said "no" to IAEA requests to provide additional information about past and current nuclear activity and gotten away with it.

The collusion of other countries in Syria's venture remains equally troubling. North Korea provided reactor technology and Iran, financing. Tehran's contribution marks the first time an NPT party helped another to develop a weapons capacity.

The implications for the region are not hard to foresee. Fast forward a decade or two. Nuclear energy has spread across the Middle East implementing plans begun in 2010 or earlier: Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and others have in place the skeleton for a weapons program shrouded by "peaceful" energy reactors. Suspicions mount. Rumors spread about hidden weapons activities. IAEA either remains clueless or inspectors report concerns to a sclerotic Board of Governors. Governments and pundits express dismay: how did we get to this point?

This week IAEA's Board of Governors can act to promote a different history by confronting Syria. The Board has the ability to do so by calling for a "special inspection" of all suspect Syrian sites as provided by the safeguards agreement the Agency entered into with Damascus: "If the Agency considers that information made available by the State, including explanations from the State and information obtained from routine inspections, is not adequate for the Agency to fulfill its responsibilities under the Agreement..." it may order "special inspection." Discovery of nuclear contraband would demand elimination.

Were Syria to balk, the Board of Governors should declare Damascus in noncompliance and send the matter to the Security Council to take action including sanctions. No doubt the course will bring out the cynic in many of

us. After all, Iran's continuing sanctions defiance and North Korea's success in detonating a nuclear weapon despite economic penalties and political isolation suggest sanctions offer little.

But this may misread history. At times, sanctions worked to halt nuclear efforts. They helped defeat Iraq's inclinations after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. They stunted Libya's nuclear program. And because Syria remains economically weak, sanctioning Damascus can bring results. Swift and robust application--rather than the Council's historic incremental approach--can make the strategy work. The alternative--more toothless IAEA reports--will only set the stage for a proliferating world none of us can wish for.

Ten Lessons from September's IAEA Diplomacy

Mark Hibbs

Proliferation Analysis,

October 7, 2010

Last month, the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) two decision-making bodies—the 35-member Board of Governors and the General Conference comprising 151 IAEA member states—held back-to-back conclaves. The meetings were routine, but some results were not.

The Board of Governors witnessed a showdown between Iran and IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano in which Iran, supported by others in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), overtly challenged Amano's leadership. Thereafter, at the 2010 General Conference, U.S.-led diplomacy narrowly defeated an Arab effort to try to compel Israel to give up its nuclear weapons.

The conclusions from the foregoing events are tenfold:

* First, Amano's policy of courting the NAM, a group of 118 developing countries representing the majority of the IAEA's members, hasn't helped his approval rating. Amano succeeded Mohamed ElBaradei a year ago after winning a contentious Board election which was divided on North-South lines. Last month, the NAM and especially Arab states harshly attacked Amano's handling of Middle East-related issues, keeping Amano under pressure to heed NAM interests.

* In 2009, Amano's election divided developing countries and advanced, mostly Western nations. Mutual suspicion in the two camps has not abated. A year ago, many observers predicted that the departure of ElBaradei and U.S. President George W. Bush would clear the air. That turned out to be wrong.

* The NAM is now a formidable player in IAEA affairs. Until 2003, when the NAM established a chapter in Vienna, it focused on diplomacy in Geneva and New York. In Vienna, the NAM now demands that the IAEA trim its nuclear security, safety, and verification ambitions and instead focus on technical cooperation. The NAM enjoys a General Conference majority, but it aims to change the rules to secure a majority in the Board.

* Iran's influence in the Vienna Chapter of the NAM is considerable. At the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, held in New York, a balance was struck between Iran and the more restrained positions of Egypt and many NAM states. In Vienna, this balance is largely absent. Iran has nuclear expertise that most NAM states do not, and Iran comes to NAM meetings well prepared to advance its views.

* Syria is winning its battle with the IAEA over safeguards compliance. Fearing a confrontation, Amano is not willing to request from Damascus a special inspection to probe allegations raised by Western states and Israel that Syria built a clandestine reactor. Last month, Syria and its NAM/Arab allies defied calls from the European Union and the United States to cooperate with Amano. Western states complained that NAM and Arab states are ignoring safeguards compliance deficits.

* At the General Conference, the defeat of an Arab resolution calling on Israel to subject all its nuclear activities to IAEA safeguards did not signal a change in attitudes about Israel's nuclear weapons. Rather, it resulted from concerted U.S.-led diplomacy to persuade about a dozen of the IAEA's 151 members—none of them in the Middle East—not to support the resolution, which was similar to a resolution passed in 2009. A handful of states in Africa and Asia agreed to abstain in the interest of furthering Middle East peace and disarmament initiatives embraced by U.S. President Barack Obama.

* However, the resolution's defeat will have little impact on the Middle East peace process, which will be dominated by local issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians. Nuclear matters will hardly factor.

* Nor does the defeat of the resolution necessarily imply that Israel will attend a Middle East nuclear disarmament conference in 2012. In May, the United States agreed to this NAM demand to assure that the 2010 five-year review of the NPT did not end without a final consensus agreement, following a failure in 2005. President Obama wants Israel to attend the conference, but Israel will pressure Obama to limit the meeting's scope to permit Israel to attend without taking political risks. Whether Israel attends will depend hugely on developments in Iran the next two years—but not on IAEA diplomacy.

* So far, Amano has played a firm hand on Iran. Iran's boardroom war of words may have been an attempt to intimidate Amano, but it was also an act of frustration at the IAEA's resilience in raising outstanding safeguards compliance issues. Amano, however, has also made concessions to Iran in pledging to modify public information policies and protect confidential information. But some of these changes are also favored by the advanced nuclear states which supported Amano's election.

* In the coming year, Iran and Syria will be hard-pressed to retain influence over the NAM in the boardroom. Of the NAM states that unflinchingly backed Iran and Syria, only Venezuela remains on the Board through late 2011. Six of the seven NAM states newly elected as non-permanent members last month are countries that want to develop nuclear power in cooperation with advanced states; the seventh is a leading uranium exporter. These states might not follow Iran and Syria. Egypt, currently the global leader of the NAM, is now off the IAEA Board. In 2012, Egypt's NAM role will be taken over by Iran, which has heretofore failed to win election to the Board.

For nearly a year, Amano has walked an increasingly fine line between the NAM's technical cooperation agenda and advanced states' verification concerns in the Middle East. Conflict escalated last month because Iran and Syria were supported by the NAM members of the Board and because the same states also attacked Amano's hands-off approach to Israel, a subject that preoccupied ElBaradei. Taking advantage of the IAEA's lack of leverage over Israeli policy, Arab states may continue to squeeze Amano on this issue and thereby mobilize the NAM in Iran and Syria's favor. But this outcome is not inevitable, since the NAM may also be increasingly challenged to enforce discipline among members that seek cooperation from advanced states to deploy nuclear power reactors.

A rough balance between nonproliferation and technical cooperation interests, with the IAEA at the center, has for decades governed the global system which manages nuclear technology exchange. This system could break down if either of these two objectives were to be focused on in a way that would cause serious detriment to the other. A very few states, particularly those in breach of their safeguards obligations, might favor such a development, but most others that want the benefit of nuclear cooperation will think twice before driving the system to the wall. Likewise, to obtain the cooperation of the NAM, advanced nuclear states must assure developing countries that they will be reliable, transparent, and fair.

Analysis: U.N. nuclear agency faces dilemma over Syria

By Fredrik Dahl

VIENNA

Wed Oct 13, 2010 5:30am EDT

(Reuters) - The U.N. nuclear agency says Syria is stonewalling its investigation into suspected atomic activity, but it may hold back from escalating the dispute to avoid opening a new front at a time of rising tension with Iran.

It has been more than two years since Syria allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the Dair Alzour desert site, where secret nuclear work may have taken place before it was bombed to rubble by Israel in 2007.

U.S. intelligence reports said it was a nascent North Korean-designed nuclear reactor intended to produce bomb fuel. Syria, like its ally Iran, denies having an atomic weapons programme.

Washington has suggested the Vienna-based U.N. agency could invoke its "special inspection" mechanism to give it the authority to look anywhere in Syria at short notice.

Damascus would probably refuse such a demand and IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano would then have to choose between raising the stakes further or, in effect, accepting his office can do little more to make an unwilling member state cooperate.

Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace referred in a report to inspections and other means used by the agency to make sure countries do not acquire atom bombs.

"Syria is winning its battle with the IAEA over safeguards compliance," he said.

"Fearing a confrontation, Amano is not willing to request from Damascus a special inspection to probe allegations raised by Western states and Israel that Syria built a clandestine reactor."

URANIUM TRACES

In its latest report on Syria in September, the IAEA said the country's refusal to allow U.N. inspectors access to the area was endangering potential evidence in the investigation.

Earlier this year, it gave some weight to suspicions of illicit atomic activity by saying uranium traces found in a visit by inspectors in 2008 pointed to nuclear-related activity.

In a debate in the IAEA's 35-nation board last month, U.S. ambassador Glyn Davies said Washington would back the agency's use of all tools at its disposal to advance the investigation.

Syrian envoy Mohammed Badi Khattab said the IAEA did not need to go back to Dair Alzour because it already had ample proof it was a non-nuclear military site.

Syria has previously suggested uranium particles found at the site came from Israeli weapons used in the strike or were dropped from the air, an assertion dismissed by the West.

The Syrian case has been overshadowed by a more high-profile dispute over Iran's nuclear programme, which the West fears is aimed at making bombs and Tehran says is for producing electricity.

One important difference between the two, diplomats say, is that Iran's work is still going on while the Syrian site was destroyed.

The IAEA last resorted to special inspection powers in 1993 in North Korea, which still withheld access and later developed nuclear bomb capability in secret.

SPECIAL INSPECTION

Shannon Kile of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said the evidence raised questions about whether Syria was breaking legally-binding commitments.

"It seems to me that this is a case which really calls out for a special inspection," he said.

Any such move may anger Damascus, whose relations with Washington improved after Barack Obama took office in 2009.

If Syria were to reject a possible special inspection request, the IAEA board could vote to refer the issue to the U.N. Security Council, as it did with Iran four years ago.

This seems unlikely in the near future and Syria may be backed by board members from developing countries, but Western states are expected to keep up the pressure.

"We're likely to see a continued stalemate, with associated low-level tension at the (IAEA) board, for some time to come," said Andreas Persbo, Executive Director of the Verification Research, Training and Information Center (VERTIC) in London.

Syria has allowed inspectors to visit an old research reactor in Damascus where they have been checking whether there is a link with Dair Alzour after discovering unexplained particles of processed uranium at both.

Hibbs said that, as time passed, it would be easier to hide any non-declared nuclear activities. "The U.S. and other Western states are getting increasingly concerned that time is running out on the IAEA in Syria."

Kile said it would be troubling if North Korea was supplying nuclear weapon-relevant technology to a country without such arms. "I think that for many...is really a red line," he said.

(Editing by Andrew Dobbie)

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703377504575651130446186898.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

Break the Silence on Syria's Nuclear Program

Three years after Israel destroyed its Al-Kibar reactor, the Bashar Assad regime continues to stonewall the IAEA.

By GRAHAM ALLISON AND OLLI HEINONEN

DECEMBER 4, 2010

The United States has joined other major powers in a dangerous conspiracy of silence on Syria's nuclear program. Syria foreswore nuclear weapons when it ratified the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1969. To assure the world that it is fulfilling that commitment, Syria also signed a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1992.

Yet Syria was able to secretly buy a nuclear reactor from North Korea, a country facing the most restrictive sanctions regime in the world. If Israel had not bombed the Al-Kibar reactor site in an air strike in September 2007, it would be producing plutonium by now for Syria's first nuclear bomb.

But this violation of Syria's treaty commitments was not discovered by IAEA inspectors. And the program was not halted by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. So it has been convenient for world powers to let Syria slip off the radar and to move on as if these events had not occurred.

It is by no means certain that Damascus has given up its nuclear ambitions. Since November 2008, nine IAEA reports (the latest released last month) have documented Syria's noncompliance with its requests for more details about its nuclear program.

Syria has not provided plausible explanations for the presence of man-made uranium particles found by the IAEA in 2008 at Dair Alzour, the site of the bombed reactor. More worrying, the agency has discovered uranium conversion experiments at a research reactor in Damascus, which Syria had failed to report. (Uranium conversion is a necessary step toward creating weapons-grade uranium.)

Syria has acknowledged that it has used yellowcake (necessary to initiate uranium enrichment) in these experiments from the Homs facility, which benefited from IAEA technical assistance. However, it has not provided access to the facility, saying it will postpone substantive discussions and verification of these materials until March or April 2011.

It is essential that the IAEA establish whether there is a link between the uranium found in Dair Alzour, Homs, and the research reactor in Damascus to ensure that all nuclear material in Syria is declared to the world's international nuclear watchman. But there has been no progress in establishing facts about the destroyed reactor or three other locations that may be functionally related to it. Syria continues to argue that due to the military and nonnuclear nature of these sites, it has no obligation to provide more information to the IAEA. But the safeguards agreement contains no such limitation on access to information, activities or sites.

The design of the Dair Alzour project appears very similar to the North Korean reactor in Yongbyon. And North Korea is capable of producing fuel for such a reactor.

We recently learned from U.S. nuclear expert Sigfried Hecker that North Korea, with Pakistan's help, has been able to build a small uranium enrichment facility. Syrian President Bashar Assad told the Austrian newspaper Die Presse in December 2007 that Pakistani nuclear proliferator A.Q. Khan had offered his nuclear technology to Syria. Many Syrian engineers and scientists would have been involved in the Dair Alzour project. What are they doing today, three years after that site was bombed?

While Syria stalls, the authority of the whole nonproliferation regime is eroding. This sets another unwelcome precedent for future proliferators.

A feasible next step is readily available. According to Syria's contract with the IAEA, the agency must be provided access to locations that have benefited from its technical support. More specifically, the safeguards agreement allows the IAEA to conduct a "special inspection" of the Dair Alzour site and other suspected sites. On Dec. 3, a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers called upon President Obama to press the IAEA to conduct such an inspection. Otherwise, the world risks awakening to a Syria that has become the next North Korea.

Mr. Allison is director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University's Kennedy School and author of "Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe" (Times Books, 2004). Mr. Heinonen is a former deputy director of the IAEA and is now a senior fellow at the Belfer Center.

Syria's Nuclear Program Requires Stronger International Response

Posted December 6th, 2010 at 10:00am

Although Iran and North Korea have received far more attention, Syria is belatedly becoming a prime focus of international concern over nuclear proliferation.

On December 1, the Institute for Science and International Security released satellite photos of suspected Syrian nuclear sites linked to the covert Al-Kibar nuclear reactor that Israeli warplanes bombed in 2007, shortly before it could begin operations. The CIA later confirmed that the site contained a North Korean–designed nuclear reactor that would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons.

Syria blocked inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from investigating the suspected nuclear facility until after it had cleaned up the bombed site to remove incriminating evidence. Under strong international pressure, it reluctantly permitted IAEA inspectors a brief visit in 2008 but since then has stonewalled IAEA efforts to investigate its nuclear program.

On Thursday, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said that he sent a letter to Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem formally requesting access to suspected nuclear sites. If Syria continues to block the IAEA investigation, its failure to comply with its nonproliferation commitments can be referred to the United Nations Security Council for further action. Similar nuclear defiance by Iran led to an escalating series of U.N. sanctions.

Iran is suspected of financing the covert Syrian reactor in an end run to acquire plutonium for nuclear weapons without risking the discovery of additional nuclear facilities on its own territory. Syria, which has little oil, does not have the economic resources or technological infrastructure to independently build an expensive nuclear weapons program. The tyrannical Syrian and Iranian regimes are close allies that have developed strong ties with North Korea, an outlaw nuclear power that has provided important military and nuclear assistance to both.

In February, Western officials leaked the fact that before Israel destroyed the Syrian reactor in September 2007, North Korea had delivered 45 tons of un-enriched uranium “yellow cake” to Syria and subsequently moved it to Iran via Turkey after the Israeli strike.

Despite U.N. sanctions, North Korea has continued to provide both Iran and Syria with missiles, components, and technology, and the recently revealed North Korean uranium enrichment plant at Yongbyon poses an additional proliferation risk. The Yongbyon facility appears to have a design similar to Iran's uranium enrichment facility at Natanz. North Korea may have obtained Iranian help on uranium enrichment in exchange for its extensive assistance for Iran's ballistic missile force, which is largely based on North Korean missile technology. Or there may have been a nuclear quid pro quo in the form of a transfer of its nuclear technology or plutonium to Iran.

Whatever the arrangement is, it is clear that Tehran and Pyongyang have secretly undertaken extensive nuclear cooperation. According to a senior North Korean defector: “The nuclear power and missile research institutes in the North and Iran are effectively one body. North Korean nuclear and missile scientists are in Iran and Iranian scientists are working in the North. They share everything.”

While Iran and North Korea have been forced by sanctions to pay a growing price for their nuclear defiance, Syria has so far escaped any consequences. This should be rectified as soon as possible. Polite letters from the IAEA will have little effect unless they are strongly backed by an international coalition determined to punish Damascus if it continues to drag its feet on its nonproliferation obligations. This requires firm American leadership.

The Obama Administration could start by abandoning its diplomatic wooing of Syria and taking a harder line on Syria's nuclear violations. A bipartisan group of eight congressional leaders wrote a December 2 letter to President Obama urging him to take stronger action against Syria's nuclear program. The signers included Representatives Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Edward Markey (D-MA), Ed Royce (R-CA), and Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Senators John Ensign (R-NV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Jon Kyl (R-AZ), and Joseph Lieberman (I-D-CT).

If the Obama Administration fails to provide the strong leadership needed to ensure more effective action at the IAEA and the U.N. Security Council, then Syria, a junior partner in the nuclear axis of evil, will continue to advance its illicit nuclear program with impunity.

Special Inspections

Posted by Andreas Persbo (andreas.persbo) on Mar 04 2011

Last changed: Mar 04 2011 at 10:08 PM [*Accessed 2011-03-09T17:42Z*]

Background

Last week's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Syria was widely anticipated. The country has been under suspicions of non-compliance with the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for some time. The background is well-known. In September 2007, the Israeli Air Force suddenly and without warning bombed a facility in the middle of the Syrian desert. The Syrian and Israeli governments then remained surprisingly tight-lipped about the strike. The Israelis did not want to implicate an ally whose airspace they used for the strike. The Syrians seemingly only wanted to hush up the affair as quickly as possible.

For its part, the IAEA, faced with very little open-source information on the site itself and two member states who didn't want to talk about it, did nothing to investigate the matter further. Meanwhile, the Syrians got busy clearing up the site. As the IAEA notes in its latest report: 'by the end of October 2007, large scale clearing and levelling operations had taken place at the site which had removed or obscured the remains of the destroyed building' (GOV/2011/8). The 'destroyed building' in question was widely suspected to be an uncompleted graphite-moderated natural-uranium fuelled reactor---supplied by the North Korean government no less.

It was June 2008 before the IAEA first visited the site and took samples. Later analysis showed 'particles of anthropogenic natural uranium' nearby, indicating the processing of uranium. It could have been natural uranium fuel---or it could have been something else. The Syrians themselves said that the Israeli Air Force used the uranium in their munitions. The IAEA is not entirely convinced by this explanation.

Since then, the Agency has repeatedly requested access to information, material, equipment and locations in Syria. Their overtures, however, have been met by silence. And this silence has led some to forcefully call for a 'special inspection' to be deployed into Syria. On 26 February 2009, for instance, James Acton, Mark Fitzpatrick and Pierre Goldschmidt wrote that:

"Syria is the textbook definition of a case in which a special inspection is merited. If the IAEA fails to ask for one, it will hand future states suspected of non-compliance an extraordinarily powerful precedent to use in opposing a special inspection request. IAEA officials regularly complain about their lack of legal authority—and rightly so. But, in this instance, they will have only themselves to blame if they let the authority that they do have atrophy" (Carnegie Endowment, Proliferation Analysis, February 2009).

Over the past year, there were few references in the media about the the need to invoke this tool. Lately, however, it would seem like diplomatic pressure is increasing on the IAEA. Indeed, in the run-up to next week's meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors, several observers have speculated that the Director-General would call for a special inspection in the country. This did not happen, as the Director-General's recently issued report shows, and rumours are now circulating that several IAEA Governors will refrain from pushing the issue at next week's meeting.

Special inspections

The special inspection tool itself has been around for a while. It features in the facility-specific safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/66) as well as the comprehensive safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/153) obligatory for all non-nuclear-weapon state parties to the NPT.

There are two principal routes to getting a special inspection agreed. First, the state itself can submit a special report, which then will have to be verified by a special inspection. Second, the IAEA may consider that information made available to it by the state (including explanations from the state as well as information gathered through routine inspections) is not adequate for it to fulfill its responsibilities under its comprehensive safeguards agreement. In the latter case, the IAEA should, in other words, have some indication that not all relevant nuclear material, or relevant facilities, in the country has been declared.

Two special inspections have been invoked to date. The first, on the invitation by the Romanian government aimed to clear up misunderstandings surrounding the country's large nuclear fuel cycle. The second was invoked against North Korea, after information had come to light that indicated that the country had not been entirely forthcoming in its initial declaration. The IAEA so has some experience in invoking special inspections using both of the two principal routes.

Consultation is key

The special inspection tool is subject to any consultations between the IAEA and the inspected state. The Board of Governors, when deciding on the last special inspection in 1992 (North Korea, even though the inspection in question was blocked by the government in Pyongyang), reaffirmed the Agency's right to carry out these inspections at undeclared locations. However, the agreement itself clearly stipulates that such access should be obtained in agreement with the inspected state party. If the state doesn't agree with the Agency, paragraph 18 of INFCIRC/153 clearly lays out the procedure:

"The Agreement should provide that if the Board, upon report of the Director General, decides that an action by the State is essential and urgent in order to ensure verification that nuclear material subject to safeguards under the Agreement is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices the Board shall be able to call upon the State to take the required action without delay, irrespective of whether procedures for the settlement of a dispute have been invoked."

It is very likely, at that point, that the state will not heed the Board's call. The Board then has the option to report this fact to the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly. It would also notify all IAEA member states that it has been unable to verify that there has been no diversion of nuclear materials from peaceful use.

The techniques deployed during a special inspection are similar to those of routine inspections. The IAEA has a right to:

1. Examine records;
2. Make independent measurements of all nuclear materials subject to safeguards under the agreement;
3. Verify the functioning and calibration of equipment;
4. And use other objective measures which has been demonstrated to be technically feasible.

Calling an inspection: what to gain, what to lose?

The problem with the special inspection is that it is likely to go unheeded unless the state itself requests it (through submitting a special report). There is only one case, of course, to base this conclusion on, and that is North Korea. It still makes sense to assume that this is the likely outcome. If the state is hiding something, it will have little incentive to invite inspectors to view the very secrets it wishes to protect. It could attempt to control the special inspection, by having an elaborate deception strategy in place. If the IAEA, for instance, requests access to installations which are irrelevant, the state could even afford this access. After the fact, it can broadcast to the world that it has done everything that the IAEA have asked for--and that the Agency found nothing. But

the risk is, of course, that the IAEA will know what it is looking for. And once the precedence of giving access has been set, it is very difficult to backtrack.

So, in most cases where an inspection is called against the will of the inspected state, it is likely to go straight to the Board of Governors for further action. Unless the state is under intense international pressure, a special inspection request is therefore likely to shut down the inspection effort before it has even started. This, naturally, doesn't progress the investigation at all. A special inspection should, from that perspective, only be called if there is a reasonable chance that the state will accommodate it.

From another perspective, however, it may be desirable to call the inspection anyway. If the Director-General of the IAEA feels that there is very little room for further progress in inspections whatsoever, he may feel inclined to draw the line under the effort by invoking the inspection tool. This would, after all, signal that the Agency is close to drawing a conclusion that it can no longer certify that all materials remain in peaceful use. The special inspection request represents 'the final offer' from the Agency, after which the issue will be raised with the UN Security Council and the General Assembly. This threat could, possibly, act as an incentive for the stalling state to cooperate with inspectors.

Syria and the IAEA

Mark Hibbs Q&A,

March 6, 2011

The main decision-making body of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Board of Governors, meets in Vienna on Monday for the first of four quarterly meetings in 2011. In a Q&A, Mark Hibbs examines the IAEA's ongoing standoff with Syria over the country's persistent refusal to cooperate with the IAEA to probe allegations of covert nuclear activities. Recent reports have raised the possibility of additional undisclosed sites where uranium processing may have occurred. But the IAEA and its board will likely avoid escalating the conflict with Syria in part not to distract from its dispute with Iran, but also so not to endanger a possible accord between Syria and Israel which might in turn favor a political resolution of Syria's suspected clandestine nuclear activities.

- * What is the IAEA investigating in Syria? Is Syria cooperating?
- * What is the significance of the three undeclared sites? What is the IAEA saying about them?
- * Will the IAEA turn up the pressure on Damascus in the wake of reports suggesting that Syria was engaged in more covert nuclear activities?
- * Will the IAEA board pass a resolution condemning Syria, following up on discussions last month with the United States?
- * IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano suggested in media interviews in recent weeks he would consider asking for a "special inspection" in Syria. Is he likely to do so?
- * Will Syria continue to simply ignore the IAEA?
- * Is there any truth to rumors that Syria has or had a covert uranium enrichment program?
- * Will board members avoid taking action on Syria and Iran in fear of negatively impacting popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa?
- * A year and a half into his term, how do board members regard Amano?

What is the IAEA investigating in Syria? Is Syria cooperating?

The IAEA is continuing to investigate the claim that Syria secretly built a reactor designed for plutonium production between 2001 and 2007. For the seventh consecutive quarter since August 2009, the IAEA said in a report written for its board of governors last month that Syria has not cooperated with ongoing investigations.

The IAEA wants information from Syria about the alleged reactor site, Dair Alzour, plus three other locations which, according to intelligence information provided to the IAEA by the United States and other countries, appear related to the reactor project.

But since 2008, Syria has blocked access to these sites. Based on information from IAEA member states, plus data from environmental samples taken by IAEA inspectors during a single visit to Dair Alzour in 2008 and at a research reactor in Damascus the last three years, the IAEA has argued that Syria's explanations are both incomplete and increasingly inconsistent.

In 2009 and 2010, for example, the IAEA found out during routine oversight at the Damascus reactor that Syria had chemically processed raw uranium oxide at a heretofore undeclared location—a phosphate plant in Homs in western Syria—and did not declare that activity to the IAEA. IAEA analysis, including of open source scientific publications and explanations provided by Syria, suggests that Syria may have carried out still more undeclared nuclear processing activities. The IAEA is therefore keen to investigate whether uranium processing was carried out at these three other sites.

What is the significance of the three undeclared sites? What is the IAEA saying about them?

The three sites were first referred to by the IAEA in its reports to the board in 2008, but the IAEA has said virtually nothing publicly about their possible significance. Last month, however, names, locations, photographs, and other information concerning these sites were made public by a German newspaper and a U.S.-based researcher, ostensibly with the cooperation of officials from the governments which had provided the information to the IAEA. Their appraisal concluded that at one of the sites, Marj as-Sultan near Damascus, Syria may have covertly processed uranium oxide into a uranium-fluorine compound, UF₄, for the production of uranium metal fuel for the now destroyed alleged reactor at Dair Alzour.

The IAEA did not provide this information to the board, including in its most recent report written last month. We don't yet know the backstory on why the IAEA has not done this. When the IAEA drafted its most recent report to the board in February, it may not have reached a firm conclusion that the evidence pointed to specific nuclear activities. The IAEA may also have judged that making these details known would not contribute to Syria making a candid disclosure about the sites.

It is possible that the information on Marj as-Sultan was leaked to the media to give the IAEA an open-source reference upon which to justify asking Syria for an explanation of the sites. But the IAEA has requested access to these sites since 2008. It is therefore possible that the information was leaked by officials for other reasons, including rising frustration that the IAEA investigation has effectively been stonewalled by Syria for three years.

While it is true that until last month no information about the three sites had been made public, the IAEA, with help from member states, has been investigating them since 2008. Intelligence information, in particular photos of equipment said to be inside facilities at these sites, may have been leaked recently, suggesting that the findings are new. However, IAEA investigators have seen some of this intelligence evidence as early as last fall and perhaps earlier.

Will the IAEA turn up the pressure on Damascus in the wake of reports suggesting that Syria was engaged in more covert nuclear activities?

Don't bet on it. Prior to and since the 2007 Israeli attack, the United States, Israel, and European states have been trying to persuade Syria to agree to a peace settlement with Israel and to abandon its political alliance with Iran. Recent signs that the sides might be considering re-launching peace talks further complicate the situation. This effort is going on behind the scenes now and board members, who otherwise are prepared to deplore Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA, are reluctant to provoke a crisis with Syria over its nuclear program which could torpedo talks between Syria, Israel, and other states.

Some board members believe that, in the longer term, the only conceivable favorable outcome of the Syria crisis with the IAEA would be for Damascus to cut a political deal with the West which would allow Syria—as Libya did in 2003—to terminate all undeclared nuclear activities in return for a political engagement. Without that, as long as Syria has significant current or past covert activities to hide, it has little incentive to come clean to the IAEA.

The IAEA's response toward Syria is complicated by its ongoing inquiry into Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA's investigation on Iran has been hampered in the boardroom by an acrimonious divide between advanced, mostly Western countries, which favor a tougher IAEA posture, and some developing countries, which support Tehran's claim that Iran has the right to develop sensitive nuclear capabilities.

Given this backdrop, the IAEA and many board members are wary about raising potentially explosive allegations about Syria—particularly if they are based on intelligence information obtained by the United States, European states, or Israel. The matter is further complicated by the fact that some board members are dismayed that Israel bombed the facility and that, thereafter, the United States withheld knowledge about Dair Alzour from the IAEA for more than half a year.

Will the IAEA board pass a resolution condemning Syria, following up on discussions last month with the United States?

A month ago, the United States discussed with other board members bringing forth a resolution which would object to Syria's lack of cooperation with the IAEA. Some board members voiced reservations that doing so would take pressure off Iran at a time when Iran is becoming more recalcitrant. They also urged the United States to consider a resolution which would not directly condemn Syria but would, more generally, urge Syria and other states to cooperate with the IAEA.

Because of ongoing Middle East peace talks, even if the United States were to introduce a resolution on Syria, it would likely not cite Syria specifically for non-compliance, since the board would then be compelled, under the IAEA statute, to refer the non-compliance to the UN Security Council and the General Assembly.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano suggested in media interviews in recent weeks he would consider asking for a "special inspection" in Syria. Is he likely to do so?

Likewise, the answer is no. Since 2009 the United States has been urging Amano to request a special inspection. U.S. officials warned—indirectly referring to actions by Syria since 2008 to cover-up activities at Dair Alzour and other sites—that valuable evidence would be lost if action continued to be delayed.

Because Syria is believed to have been covering its nuclear tracks, as time progresses, Amano may be less and less willing to request a special inspection. Were the IAEA to go to these sites and find nothing, Syria would be vindicated and the political credibility of the IAEA could be damaged. As he has done in the past, Amano spelled out to member states in advance of this month's board meeting that he is not eager to request a special inspection in Syria in view of the political risks. In some bilateral meetings, Amano has warned that launching a special investigation would further isolate Israel in the region.

Will Syria continue to simply ignore the IAEA?

Damascus will cooperate just enough to keep the IAEA at bay. In November, Amano wrote to Syria's foreign minister urging Syria to resolve the conflict. Last month, Syria replied and once again did not agree to provide access to Dair Alzour or the three sites that were the focus of last month's media reports.

But Syria dangled what one Vienna diplomat called a "tiny carrot" by offering to permit the IAEA to inspect the Homs site. Syria and the IAEA had agreed last September on modalities for access to this and other sites, but no progress was made. Amano's report to the board concluded that Syria's February offer "could represent a step forward...to resolve all outstanding technical issues."

The Homs site, however, is not the location prompting the most IAEA concern. Far more critical are Dair Alzour and the three sites believed to be related to it. But Syria's offer to discuss access to Homs adds another reason why the board will not pass a resolution deploring Syria's lack of cooperation.

Is there any truth to rumors that Syria has or had a covert uranium enrichment program?

The IAEA has investigated for several years whether Syria has been trying to enrich uranium. If Syria has produced UF₄, this material could be fluorinated further to create UF₆, the feedstock for enrichment plants. But if the IAEA believes that Marj as-Sultan, or another site, Masyaf, are related to uranium enrichment, it has not told the board that.

Unless the board is notified of such a finding, the governors will not take any action to investigate that allegation. Since about 2004 Western intelligence agencies have made some findings suggesting that Syria may be operating gas centrifuges. A senior Syrian official told me in 2007 that he personally rebuffed an offer by Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, who proliferated Pakistan's centrifuge know-how to Iran, Libya, and North Korea, to do "joint academic research" in Syria.

Will board members avoid taking action on Syria and Iran in fear of negatively impacting popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa?

The protests have thus far had little direct impact on the thinking of board members because no one can predict the outcome of the uprisings. Some officials from board member countries said last week that the wave of political change across the greater Middle East should prompt caution by the board because none of the states with significant uprisings so far have been concerned with nuclear issues.

A year and a half into his term, how do board members regard Amano?

From the outset Amano was seen by developing countries as favoring the interests of advanced, Western nuclear states. U.S. diplomatic cables from 2009 obtained by Wikileaks suggest that Western governments likewise see Amano in this light. They also view Amano as both politically astute and cautious—in step with his actions vis-à-vis Syria.

Since last fall, the board includes a group of developing countries seeking cooperation from Western states on nuclear energy development. They may see Amano more favorably than other developing states do. At a board meeting last December, these states supported the creation of an IAEA nuclear fuel bank—a project which Amano had been wary of embracing in light of criticism from many developing countries against the project. At this month's board meeting, the developing countries on the board may vote in favor of a resolution to establish another multilateral fuel assurance program involving the IAEA designed to ensure that contracts for the supply of enriched uranium reactor fuel are not broken for non-commercial reasons. The resolution will likely be tabled by the European Union, the United States, and Russia.

Amano was elected in 2009 by a narrow margin with the board divided between advanced and developing countries, and some observers predicted he would not be re-elected for a second four-year term. Pundits quip that, during the last six months, Amano reshuffled the secretariat to allow his key aides to manage the agency and let Amano concentrate on his re-election in 2013. In fact, all incoming IAEA leaders have made major personnel and organizational changes.

Amano's changes are now becoming apparent. Most significant among them was Amano's announcement to the board last month that, effective April 1, Amano will liquidate the small but—under past director general Mohammed ElBaradei—extremely influential—department called External Relations and Policy Coordination (EXPO) and combine it with the Director General's Office (DGO) to form the Director General's Office for Policy (DGOP). It will be headed by Rafael Grossi, Amano's chef de cabinet.

ElBaradei's final years were punctuated by damaging and bitter rivalries among a few key aides and deputies and Amano's reorganization was in part meant to eliminate the bureaucratic source of these conflicts. Western states which in 2009 supported Amano's candidacy did so in part because they believed that ElBaradei had run the IAEA too independently. In February Amano told the board that establishing DGOP would ensure that the agency's activities are in line with the guidance of member states. This will mean that the IAEA will be less subject to politicization of its work, but tighter control at the top might discourage transparency.

Major General Edward Bolton
Director, Cyber and Space Operations
Air Force Headquarters

"Cybersecurity: Emerging Threats"

CyberFutures Conference
National Harbor, Maryland
1 April 2011

[EXCERPT]

So let's look at these couple of examples here. Everyone knows what Israel did to Syria back in '06, '07. Syria had the biggest, they thought the best, Russian-made, Soviet-made air defense system. Israel turned them out, flew in, and then bombed a North Korean built nascent nuclear facility.

ISIS Analysis of IAEA Report on Syria: IAEA Concludes Syria “Very Likely” Built a Reactor

Paul Brannan

May 24, 2011

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has released its [May 24, 2011 report on the implementation of NPT safeguards in Syria](#). The report outlines in detail the evidence it has collected of a suspected covert nuclear reactor building under construction in Syria which was bombed by Israeli jets in September 2007. Syria has long denied that it was building a covert nuclear reactor. **Based on its analysis of the evidence, the IAEA “concludes that the destroyed building was very likely a nuclear reactor,” and that Syria should have declared it.**

This safeguards report provides strong support for the IAEA Board of Governors to recommend a referral of Syria’s case to the United Nations Security Council. Such a move would send a strong signal that the international community will not tolerate egregious acts of nuclear proliferation.

In addition to this action, member states should continue to urge the IAEA Director General to call for a special inspection in Syria. Though years have passed since Syria removed and buried remnants of the reactor building and carried out other acts of concealment, a special inspection would be valuable in uncovering further evidence and accounting for the activities that took place in support of the reactor project.

Evidence

While the IAEA has assessed in previous reports that the equipment and materials associated with the destroyed building were similar to what would be expected at a reactor, it did not offer a conclusion or explain the evidence in detail until now. The report notes that the dimensions of the destroyed reactor building were similar to the dimensions of North Korea’s reactor at Yongbyon. After locating the destroyed building in commercial satellite imagery in October of 2007, ISIS noted that the dimensions of the Syrian building, as well as what would later be revealed as the top of the main reactor hall, were very similar to those of the Yongbyon reactor (see figure 1).¹

The IAEA also said that imagery of the building after the bombing showed the presence of such features as a containment structure, heat exchangers and a spent fuel pond—all of which would be

¹ *Suspect Reactor Construction Site In Eastern Syria: The Site of the September 6 Israeli Raid?* David Albright and Paul Brannan, Institute for Science and International Security, October 23, 2007: http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/SuspectSite_24October2007.pdf

expected in a nuclear reactor. In an April 2008 briefing, the US intelligence community presented a satellite image from after the bombing and highlighted some of these features (see figure 2).²

The IAEA report outlines the suspicious concealment activity that took place at the site of the reactor building after the bombing. It cites commercial satellite imagery showing “Syrian efforts to recover equipment and material from the destroyed building,” and notes that whatever remained of the building was “demolished and buried.” ISIS noted in an October 2007 report that Syria had used earth from a nearby hill to bury the remaining foundation of the reactor building (see figure 3).³ Figure 4 is a satellite image from the US intelligence community briefing in April 2008 showing bulldozers in the process of burying the foundation.

Syria stated that the piping and pumping equipment near the reactor building was intended to supply water to a nearby water treatment facility. The Agency has assessed, however, that prior to the bombing the water pumping system was connected to the suspected reactor building, not to the water treatment facility. It found that after the bombing, Syria “reconfigured the pumping infrastructure to remove sections of the return pipe and to install a new large diameter water pipe connection from the [Dair Alzour Site Pump House] to the [Water Treatment Facility].” This activity can be seen in commercial satellite imagery in a January 2008 ISIS report (see figure 5).⁴

In the same report, ISIS noted that there was a faint line between the reactor building and the water treatment facility in imagery prior to the bombing and speculated that there may have been existing buried piping between the sites (see figure 6). The IAEA has assessed that there was small diameter piping between the reactor building and the water treatment facility which likely contained treated water or power lines. US government experts also assessed that there existed buried piping between the reactor building and the water treatment facility prior to the bombing, and that it contained power lines—supplying electrical power to the reactor building.⁵

² *The Al Kilbar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications*, David Albright and Paul Brannan, Institute for Science and International Security, May 12, 2008: http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/SyriaReactorReport_12May2008.pdf

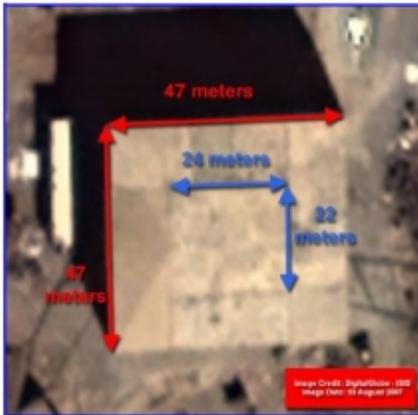
³ *Syria Update II: Syria Buries Foundation of Suspect Reactor Site*, Institute for Science and International Security, October 26, 2007: <http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/SuspectSiteUpdate26October2007.pdf>

⁴ *New Construction at Syrian Site*, Institute for Science and International Security, January 14, 2008: <http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Syria14January2008.pdf>

⁵ *The Al Kilbar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications*, David Albright and Paul Brannan, Institute for Science and International Security, May 12, 2008, p.22: http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/SyriaReactorReport_12May2008.pdf



The five megawatt electric reactor building at Yongbyon, North Korea.



Possible Syrian reactor construction site.

Figure 1. Commercial satellite imagery comparison of the Yongbyon reactor in North Korea and the Syrian reactor building approximately a month before the bombing. The outer dimensions of the building are very similar and the dimensions of the center reactor hall are also similar.

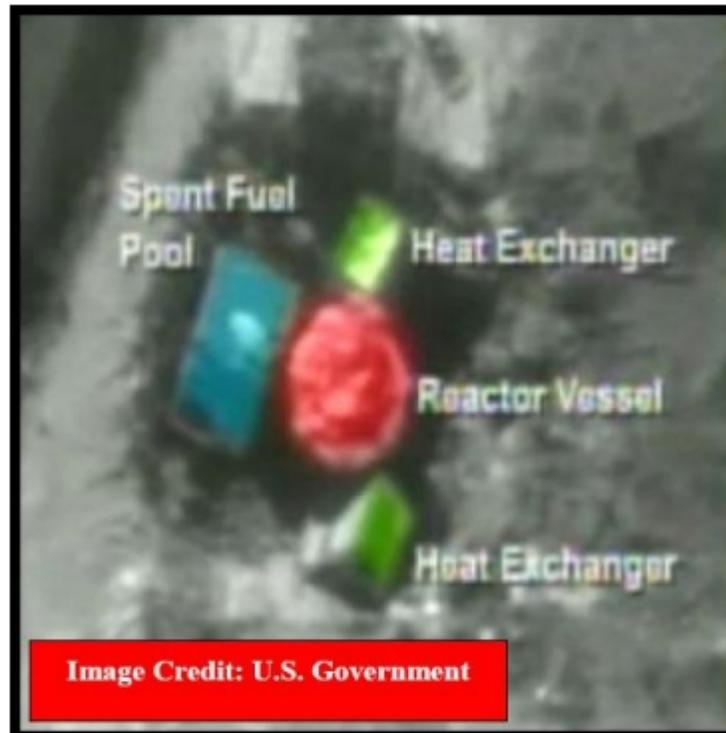
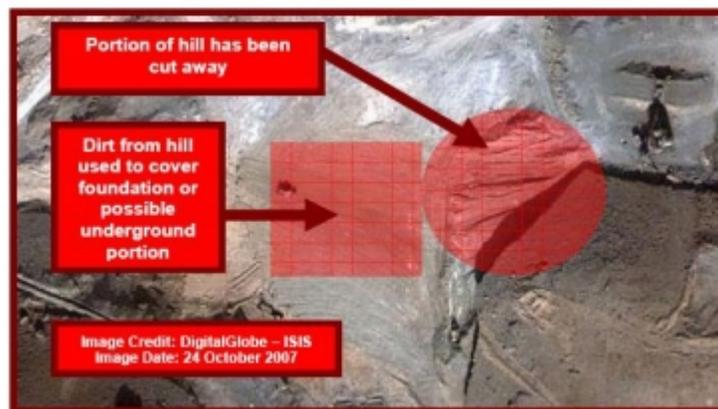


Figure 2. Image of the site of the bombed Syrian reactor building from US intelligence community briefing in April 2008. The image highlights the reactor vessel, heat exchangers, and a spent fuel pond.



Suspect reactor site before September 6, 2007 Israeli raid.



Suspect reactor site after September 6, 2007 Israeli raid.

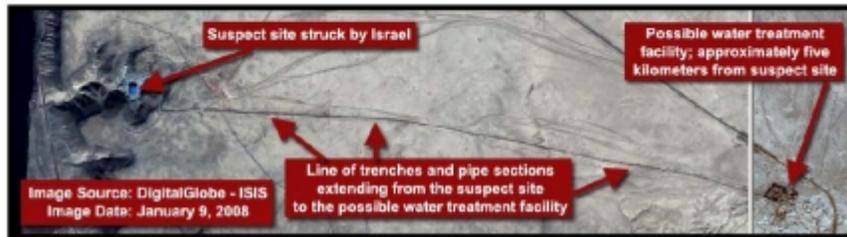
Figure 3. Commercial satellite imagery showing the site of the reactor building before and after the bombing. In the second image, a section of the hill has been removed in order to bury the remaining building foundation.



Figure 4. Satellite image from US intelligence community briefing in April 2008 showing bulldozers taking dirt from the hill and burying the remaining building foundation.

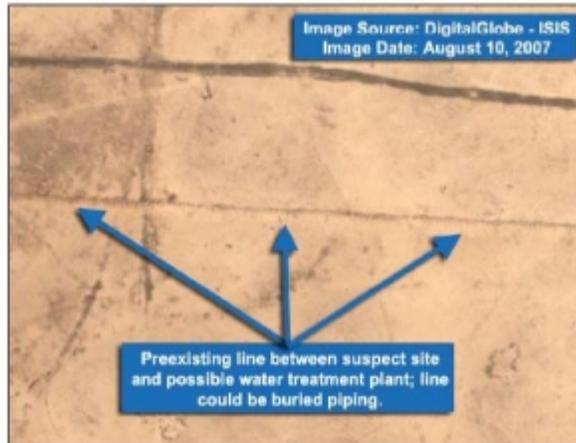


August 10, 2007 wide image of suspect site and possible water treatment facility.



January 9, 2008 wide image of suspect site and possible water treatment facility.

Figure 5. Comparison of commercial satellite imagery before and after the bombing, showing the area in between the reactor building and the water treatment facility. The line of trenches and pipe sections between the two sites after the bombing likely represents this effort by Syria to install a large diameter pipe from the Dair Alzour site to the water treatment facility.



August 10, 2007 image of an area between suspect site and possible water treatment facility.



January 9, 2008 image of the same area with line of trenches and pipe sections between suspect site and possible water treatment facility. The preexisting line in the August 10, 2007 imagery follows virtually the exact same path of the entire length of the line of trenches and pipe sections between the suspect site and the possible water treatment facility in the January 9, 2008 imagery.

Figure 6. Close-up commercial satellite image showing what was likely buried piping containing power lines between the reactor and the water treatment facility, before and after the September 2007 bombing.

The Syria Probe

Cross-posted from VERTIC's blog.

Thursday, 26 May 2011

Director-General Amano has recently given an interview stating that Syria may indeed have built a nuclear reactor. In an interview with Reuters, he has at a minimum said that he has 'information that indicates that this is the case'. Some speculated that this means the Secretariat is preparing to have the country reported to the UN Security Council. The Agency's recently released report on the country (GOV/2011/30), however, is ambiguous.

Most in the non-proliferation community know the story by now. Israel bombed a site in September 2007. Suspicions soon arose that the site might have hosted a graphite-moderated natural-uranium fuelled reactor. Eventually, The International Atomic Energy Agency, which at first did not comment on the event, was allowed to look into the matter in June 2008. This was long after the Syrian authorities—in literal cover-up—had demolished the ruins, removed all debris, sent it off or buried it and scraped away some soil to top it all off.

The Agency's inspectors, strolling around the site in the hot Syrian summer, took samples from an area just outside the cleared site. The results were telling: particles of anthropogenic (processed) natural uranium, graphite, and stainless steel. The presence of this material strongly suggested the vanished site had been a reactor, and possibly that fuel was present. The latter is uncertain, as Syria has no known fuel fabrication plant, but possible. Israeli officials, speaking to VERTIC on condition of anonymity, have all stressed the reactor was close to operational status, and have suggested that fuel was ready to be loaded into the reactor. The Syrians have claimed the natural uranium comes from Israeli munitions.

The IAEA has tried to engage with the Syrian government. Letters have been exchanged but the country's authorities have not been forthcoming. The government has stonewalled any requests about, among other matters, technical documentation related to the construction of the building.

Syria's attempt to cover up has complicated on-site inspections. However, the overhead imagery, released several years ago, and supplemented by authenticated ground images of the site, together forms a convincing body of evidence. This body has been convincing enough for many to argue that the burden of proof now lies with the Syrian government.

The latest IAEA report now firmly puts the onus on the Syrians. A careful analysis of overhead imagery, a technical analysis of the water piping arrangement supporting the building as well as an assessment of electrical supplies, all points, in the IAEA's assessment, to the building being a clandestinely built reactor.

As for the uranium, the IAEA 'has not been able to determine the origin of the particles'. Many suggestions have been offered, including the supply of fresh fuel from North Korea. But so far, few convincing hypotheses has been brought to the table. The existence of an undeclared fuel manufacturing plant cannot be ruled out.

On balance, the IAEA infers the reactor was 'very likely' a nuclear reactor, and so should have been declared to the Agency under articles 42 and 43 of Syria's safeguards agreement.

The problem with very likely violations

The language in the Director-General's report puts the Board of Governors in a difficult place. The report does not contain any firm recommendations—it does not even firmly state that the Secretariat finds itself unable to verify that all nuclear material in the country remains in peaceful use. Instead, the secretariat simply notes the 'very likely' former presence of a clandestine nuclear facility in one of its member states. Governors wishing to

argue for stronger measures against Syria will find them faced with a predictable counter-argument. A violation has not been confirmed, after all, it is simply likely. ‘And by the way’, the opposing side might argue, ‘the report contains nothing on whether nuclear material has been diverted’. Most governors will probably scratch their heads, thinking the report does not add much to the state of knowledge, or rather lack of knowledge, about Syria’s nuclear programme.

It is now up to the Board to assess the Director-General’s report and decide what to do with it. In my mind, there are three choices: call a special inspection, refer the case direct to the UN Security Council, or do nothing.

Calling the inspection...

Some have been calling on the IAEA to call for a special inspection in Syria, which undoubtedly would raise the diplomatic stakes (see Special Inspections, 4 March 2011).

For sure, calling a special inspection, or referring Syria to the Security Council in some other manner, would be problematic for the country, which is already facing unilateral sanctions by the United States. However, it is doubtful that the inspection call would be dealt with at once by the ministries in Damascus. The government is in all likelihood focussed on the domestic situation, which has been decaying steadily over the last few months. And even if it were not, it is not likely to play along with the request. It would first try to stall it for as long as it could. It would then either do as North Korea, break off any attempts to enforce the inspection, or engage in a piecemeal fashion, as it has already.

On the other hand, modern on-site inspection techniques (especially so environmental sampling) has yielded impressive detection rates. Syria would need to be convinced that the inspection team will not find any rouge particles, mislaid documentation, or errant memory sticks loaded with North Korean designs anywhere.

...going straight to the Council...

Going straight to the Council is theoretically possible. It may also be the preferred choice for many governments seeking to increase the pressure on Damascus. Syria’s actions against its own people have made most states open to the direct action route. However, it is not without its difficulties. Some would argue that it makes no sense to go to the Council as long as the Secretariat still has authority to continue the probe. They would also reiterate that no violation has been proved, simply a likely one. Others are likely to challenge the Secretariat’s conclusions on technical grounds.

Syria still has regional friends, who would not want to see the country censured in an international forum. The question is how many friends it may have left. As the repression of the Syrian people intensifies, the country is finding itself increasingly isolated, and increasingly vulnerable. For sure, being censured by the United Nations as a country that seeks weapons of mass destruction, on top of one that violates fundamental human rights, will not be in Damascus best interests. As well as piling up the international pressure, and perhaps even fuelling domestic dissent, it will make the task to recover the country’s lost standing difficult. It may be that the Board would want to exploit this window of vulnerability. The threat of stepped up diplomatic censure may force Damascus to play along with the inspection process, at least for a while.

...or doing nothing.

The final alternative would be to decide to be undecided. This is likely if the Board debate becomes exceptionally fractured and divisive. The so-called Vienna spirit has been badly damaged in later years, and attempts to rebuild it have been lackluster at best. Some governors might feel that Syria isn’t worth the row—even if the site was a nuclear reactor, and that is ‘very likely’ after all, it doesn’t pose much of a threat anymore. So why bother?

The problem, however, is not what we know, but what we don’t know. While we know that the Syrian reactor has vanished from the face of the Earth, we do not have any further understanding on what else might hide in the Syrian desert. This might be one compelling reason to act.

Another reason is more diffuse, and relates to the credibility of the non-proliferation regime as a whole. If no action is taken, it would be argued, Syria's actions will show that it is possible to openly flout the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to turn its back to the safeguards regime, without reaction. And this, some would argue, is not a good signal to send to other potential seekers of the Bomb.

I.H.T. Op-Ed Contributor

The I.A.E.A. and Syria

By BENNETT RAMBERG

Published: May 31, 2011

“The Agency concludes that the destroyed building was very likely a nuclear reactor and should have been declared by Syria” according to the safeguards agreement.

So writes the International Atomic Energy Agency’s director general, Yukiya Amano, in his May 24, 2011 report to the I.A.E.A. board of governors about the installation the Israeli Air Force bombed in September 2007. Although he does not explicitly say so, Mr. Amano’s finding places Syria in violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Three years in the making, the I.A.E.A. certainly cannot be accused of a rush to judgment.

Now comes the hard part: At its meeting next week, the I.A.E.A. board of governors must decide whether to formally declare Syria in noncompliance with the nonproliferation treaty. Doing so will place the matter before the U.N. Security Council, opening the way for sanctions.

The decision will test whether responsibility overrides timidity. At stake, the agency’s reputation as the world’s nuclear watchdog. To date Damascus has gamed that reputation and succeeded.

For a decade, Syria has been an embarrassment to the I.A.E.A.’s nonproliferation policing responsibility. First the agency’s safeguards failed to detect construction of the plant designed and engineered by North Korea. Even today, the I.A.E.A. knows little about how the installation fit into Syria’s planning. Did Damascus have a secret reprocessing facility to extract weapons-useable plutonium? If not, why not? Did Syria intend to export the spent fuel to North Korea for reprocessing? The international community remains in the dark.

Second, following the Israeli strike, the I.A.E.A. proved very slow off the mark to investigate Damascus. For months, the then director general, Mohamed ElBaradei, ignored media accounts that Syria had built the reactor. Instead, he complained repeatedly that governments failed to provide information. By the time the agency began its investigation in mid-2008, Syria had demolished the remnants of the plant, carted away the debris and built a new non-nuclear structure to conceal evidence of the old.

To its credit, the I.A.E.A.’s inspectors did break the cover-up. Once Damascus refurbished the bombed site, it invited investigators to visit, confident they would find nothing. But inspectors uncovered suspicious nuclear particles.

Rather than follow up with an ultimatum that Damascus fess up or face the U.N. Security Council, the I.A.E.A. dithered, relying on a coaxing strategy to get Damascus to come clean. The Assad regime refused. This marked the third embarrassment.

The agency’s response to Syria’s stonewalling proved to be the fourth embarrassment. The I.A.E.A. froze, much like the deer in the headlights, issuing inconsequential report after inconsequential report. Its February 2011 review, for example, concluded, “Syria has not cooperated with the Agency since June 2008 in connection with the unresolved issues related to the Dair Alzour site and the other three locations allegedly functionally related to it. As a consequence, the Agency has not been able to make progress towards resolving the outstanding issues related to those sites.”

Mr. Amano’s timidity continued even in the May 2011 findings. Rather than affirmatively state that Syria had built a reactor, the director general said that it “was very likely a reactor.” An accompanying footnote said,

“Securing absolute proof of compliance” may not be possible, but “reasonable inferences must be drawn, taking to account all the available information.”

The term “reasonable inferences” downplays definitive photos of the reactor made available to the agency by the U.S. government, NGOs and the media many months prior to the May 24 report.

Finally, the agency’s reputation for timidity arguably prompted Israel’s attack. After years of watching the I.A.E.A. fret with Iran, Israel had no confidence the agency would forcefully deal with Syria.

Now that the director general has published his findings, the I.A.E.A. board of governors must decide whether to report Syria to the Security Council. There are reports that Washington and its allies plan to introduce a resolution at the June meeting. But resistance remains. Some board members argue that Israel’s successful strike makes Syria’s nuclear violations moot.

But mootness certainly does not apply to the remaining suspect sites. Furthermore, the I.A.E.A. must get to the bottom of Syria’s atomic enterprise to prevent repeats either in there or elsewhere. The agency must understand what role North Korea and possibly others played.

Unfortunately, getting the board of governors to forward Syria to the Security Council marks only the first step in holding the Assad regime accountable. The Council itself must cobble together a strategy to move Damascus, not an easy task given political divisions.

Yet failure will only encourage prospective nuclear proliferators to follow Syria’s path. If the international community believes in the nuclear nonproliferation regime, it must act with conviction. Syria is a test case.

[Bennett Ramberg served as a policy analyst in the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs under President George H.W. Bush.](#)

Syria's Nuclear Transgressions

Mark Hibbs Q&A

June 5, 2011

Israel destroyed a building in the Syrian desert nearly four years ago that both the United States and Israel argue was a covert nuclear reactor designed to produce plutonium. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) last month shared this assessment, countering assertions by Syria.

When the IAEA's main decision-making body, the board of governors, meets in Vienna this week, Syria's nuclear activities will be front and center. In a new Q&A, Mark Hibbs says the board will likely vote in favor of a resolution—prepared by a group of Western nations, including the United States—condemning Syria's failure to cooperate with the IAEA's probe of the allegation and may declare Syria out of compliance with its bilateral safeguards agreement with the IAEA and the nonproliferation treaty. Citing Syria for noncompliance would bring the matter to the attention of the United Nations Security Council and open the door to possible future sanctions. But sanctions in the near term are unlikely.

- Why did the IAEA take so long to conclude that the facility bombed by Israeli warplanes was a nuclear reactor?

For the first six months after the Israeli attack in September 2007 the IAEA started investigating the allegations without any significant cooperation from either Israel or the United States—the two states that collected most of the intelligence justifying Israel's military strike. Before the bombing, neither the United States nor Israel informed the IAEA about what it knew because they feared that if the agency was informed and brought the matter to Syria's attention, Damascus would preempt an attack on the reactor by declaring the facility to the IAEA.

Beginning in August 2009, the IAEA noted in every quarterly report to the board of governors that Syria was not cooperating with its investigation. During this period, member states—and particularly the United States—provided the IAEA with intelligence findings supporting the claim that the bombed facility, built at a site called Dair Alzour beginning in 2001 and virtually completed in 2007, was indeed a reactor. On the basis of this information, the IAEA told the board last month that in its view the destroyed facility at Dair Alzour was very likely a reactor.

- Are the claims that the IAEA has been dithering in its response true?

Not really. Right from the outset, when news reports first asserted that Israel had attacked a clandestine nuclear facility in Syria, virtually all IAEA member states—including the United States and Israel—were in no hurry to press Syria for a clarification. Many IAEA member states felt that the matter wasn't urgent since the installation had been destroyed. The United States, Israel, and European states acted with caution because they sought to “flip” Syria and terminate its long-standing alliance with Iran. And Israel had no interest in drawing attention to its aggressive act against a regime it was trying to negotiate with.

When President Obama took office in 2009, he reassessed the Syria nuclear issue and restrained U.S. officials who sought to increase the pressure on Syria in Vienna, in the interest of bettering bilateral ties with Damascus. It's also important to note that many nations on the IAEA board were reluctant to bring the matter to a dramatic head so that pressure wasn't taken off Iran. Unlike Syria's nuclear program, which may have been nipped in the bud by the Israeli attack, the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program continues to grow. When Yukiya Amano succeeded Mohamed ElBaradei as head of the IAEA in late 2009, he chose to give Syria time to respond to the U.S. and Israeli charge before drawing an independent conclusion.

- How will the governors respond now that the IAEA has told the board that it broadly shares the American conclusion about the complex at Dair Alzour?

The board meeting will actually begin with less controversial topics—a review of the IAEA’s technical cooperation program and preparations for an upcoming international conference on the Fukushima nuclear accident—and is likely to get around to the IAEA’s Syria dossier on Wednesday, June 8. When the issues comes up, a group of largely Western states, including the United States, will press for a vote on a resolution that is now being drafted.

Draft language originally proposed by the United States cited Syria for noncompliance with its safeguards obligations for having failed to cooperate with the IAEA’s investigation of Dair Alzour. Other board members would be more comfortable with a resolution that—as in the case of Iran in 2006—implied that the board would, in a follow-on resolution, refer Syria to the Security Council for noncompliance if it did not immediately and fully cooperate with the IAEA.

To pass, the resolution requires a simple majority of 18 votes in favor. On the eve of the board meeting, enough board members are prepared to support a noncompliance resolution for it to succeed.

For several months, the United States has been urging board members to join it in launching a resolution to condemn Syria. But at the last board meeting in March, many states—including a number of U.S. allies in Europe—objected, feeling that it was still premature.

This time, the United States and enough other states are prepared to push the resolution through to a vote. In doing so, they will argue that Syrian President Assad has become increasingly threatened and isolated by popular domestic unrest. Diplomats favoring the resolution are telling reluctant board members—Russia, China, some developing countries, and Arab states—that “it is time to wipe the slate clean” on the IAEA’s Syrian file and report the matter to the Security Council.

- What would the Security Council do?

The IAEA statute requires that the board of governors “shall report any [safeguards] noncompliance to the Security Council and General Assembly of the United Nations.” But it doesn’t require the Security Council or the General Assembly to take any actions.

In 2006, the Security Council responded to an IAEA board referral of noncompliance by Iran by imposing financial and nuclear trade sanctions on Iran. But if the IAEA board reports Syria to the Security Council for noncompliance, it is very likely that Russia and China would veto any sanctions drive launched by other states. Indeed, Syria’s letter to the IAEA in late May pledging full cooperation with the IAEA will almost guarantee that, if the board cites Syria for noncompliance this week, the Security Council will not take any immediate action.

- The IAEA board traditionally makes decisions by consensus. Are there any worries that the absence of consensus in reporting Syria to the Security Council would detract from its legitimacy?

The consensus rule for nearly all decision making on the board began breaking down on key issues during the last decade of former IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei’s tenure. The loss of consensus can be attributed to three factors: the end of the Cold War and the rise of multipolarity; acrimony between ElBaradei and the U.S. administration under President George W. Bush; and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in UN politics in the last decade.

Many states routinely deplore the erosion of consensus, but some IAEA governors argue that under Amano—whose 2009 election divided board members along North-South lines—the board is increasingly ready and willing to take non-consensual decisions on contentious issues if the absence of consensus means that no action will be taken.

Still, the United States and other Western states drafting the resolution for this week's board meeting know that they will have a stronger case if consensus is attained. Some European states and developing countries argue that, if only three of the P5 countries at the IAEA vote in favor of the resolution, and if Arab states oppose it, the resolution will have far less weight. These states may therefore propose language that gives Syria one last chance to explain itself to Amano.

- Will action by the board this week mean there will be an IAEA "special inspection" in Syria?

No. A special inspection—permitted under Syria's safeguards agreement—was for Amano a non-starter in view of the political risk should Syria not agree to it. Instead, Amano last month announced that the IAEA concluded that the evidence strongly suggests that the installation destroyed at Dair Alzour was a reactor—leaving it up to the board to decide whether Syria is out of compliance with its safeguards obligations.

In 2003, the United States went to war against Iraq having claimed wrongly that Iraq had restarted a nuclear weapons program that the IAEA concluded had been terminated. Unless the IAEA gets first hand access to Dair Alzour and other sites it wants to inspect in Syria—which so far Syria has refused to permit—Amano is unlikely to declare Dair Alzour to have been a reactor without a doubt.

<http://www.sana.sy/eng/22/2011/06/10/351766.htm>

IAEA Chief Inspector: Politics Interfered in IAEA Work in Syrian File

Fadi Allafi /al-Ibrahim

Jun 10, 2011

VIENNA, (SANA) – Former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Inspector Yusri Abu Shadi said that referring the Syrian nuclear file to the Security Council at this time, in coincidence with an attempt by some countries to issue a resolution condemning Syria, asserts that the Syrian nuclear issue was interfered by politics.

In an interview aired on Syrian TV, Abu Shadi said he has refuted for the last three years all lies about the existence of a nuclear reactor in Syria, pointing out that he composed a book of 60 points proving that all information by US intelligence is false.

He added that the US claims that it knew 9 years ago that Syria has a nuclear reactor similar to the one in North Korea as to increase pressure on Damascus, reiterating that " the Agency is using false information about this issue".

<http://hibbs.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/192/syria-gov40-and-the-unsc-a-bridge-too-far#comments>

Syria, GOV/40, and the UNSC: A bridge too far?

By mark *[Mark Hibbs]*

11 June 2011

I left the M Building at the Vienna International Centre at the end of the day on Thursday just after 6 p.m., as the cleaning brigade arrived to pick up the debris of official statements and coffee cups scattered about the place about an hour after the IAEA's June Board of Governors meeting wrapped up. The arrival of the Putzkolonnie upon my departure for the U1 metro and my hotel was appropriate because by the end of the meeting on Thursday things on the ground were certainly a lot messier than they seemed when the board began meeting on Monday.

The board meeting opened that day with a few fairly ho-hum items—the IAEA's annual report on the technical cooperation programme, and some doings concerning preparation for a pending ministerial meeting on Fukushima (which doesn't look likely to be very ministerial)—and the board members on Wednesday waded into serious verification matters beginning with Iran. We got into Syria late on Thursday morning and what transpired was duly recorded by my friends at Reuters:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/09/us-nuclear-syria-iaea-idUSTRE7583WM20110609>

But I don't want to get ahead of myself.

When I arrived in Vienna at the beginning of the week I saw a draft resolution—GOV/2011/40—which had been sponsored by 13 countries—a bunch of Euros plus Australia, Canada, South Korea, and the U.S.—which on the face of it looked pretty straightforward.

On Tuesday evening our time in Vienna, Jeffrey posted the resolution here.

http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/files/2011/06/gov2011_40.pdf

The bottom line is right there in operative paragraph 1.: Syria's construction of a covert nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour and its clear breach of its Code 3.1 obligation in not submitting the design information to the IAEA in advance of that fact "constitute non-compliance with its obligations under its Safeguards Agreement with the Agency in the context of Article XII.C of the Agency's Statute"

Open and shut case—right?

It might have been had the road been exceedingly carefully prepared and had things gone well. That wasn't out of the question because we began the week with a very hard fact that should have supported passage of the resolution by a wide margin: an IAEA investigation that arrived at no resolution for nearly four years because Syria didn't cooperate. Basta. Sounds like shooting fish in a barrel. Well, it wasn't.

The U.S. gave the IAEA a bunch of intelligence information which backed its claim that the site was a construction site of a plutonium production reaction that was virtually finished when Israel bombed it in August 2007. The data, we hear, looks pretty good. There are some procedural quibbles regarding some of the environmental sample data. But concerning the task of establishing something like a one-to-one spatial correlation between what was at Dair Alzour and what we know a North Korean plutonium production reactor looks like, the IAEA may have been onto something that looks like a smoking gun at least. Over the last couple of years, before the IAEA reported its findings last month, it had a satchel full of extremely close-resolution photographs of the site taken over time.

DG Yukiya Amano agrees that the data looks solid but he has got to be more than a little careful. We've been there before: In 2002, his predecessor Mohamed ElBaradei had reaffirmed the IAEA's conclusion that, Iraq, in the crosshairs then, had given up on trying to acquire nuclear weapons. President Bush and General Powell claimed they had intelligence to the contrary and went to war with Iraq. They were wrong. Before that, more generally, back in the 1990s and after the first Gulf War, the safeguards buzz in Vienna was all about empowering the IAEA to use intelligence data to look for non-declared, hidden activities. A bunch of member states—including a few important US allies—then kicked up a ruckus about how the IAEA could become hooked on data provided by big powerful countries like the United States with so-called “national technical means” to collect intelligence. So there's a little sensitivity in the VIC about intelligence information. As there should be.

So what does Amano do after he succeeds ElBaradei in late 2009 ? Two things at once. The first is, he gives Syria about a year to decide to clear the air over Dair Alzour. That's a lot of time in this business. But he's willing to give it to them because he narrowly escaped a defeat in the election to the Director-Generalship at the hands of G-77 states. At least a few of these were spoiling for a fight after South African Ambassador Abdul Minty lost the election at the hands of the same states who now want to turn up the heat on Damascus.

While Amano is giving Syria time, he's also collecting and sifting through the U.S. intelligence data which is beginning to accumulate. But he's also hunting for, and getting, data from other sources to validate findings of the super-secret stuff. For instance, the Department of Safeguards found some pretty interesting and unclassified French satellite radar information. At the end of last month, Amano tells the board the IAEA thinks that building at Dair Alzour was a reactor. The U.S. and the others then put forth a draft resolution making note of that fact, calling Syria out of compliance, and bringing the matter to the attention of the UN Security Council, which is what the IAEA Statute says is supposed to happen in such a case.

So on Monday, we see a resolution with 13 sponsors. For it to pass, according to the IAEA Statute, it needed a simple majority. I was told on Monday that, by all accounts, the simple majority was there. When it came to a vote on Friday afternoon around 4 p.m., that turned out to be the case. The sponsors had their majority. As U.S. Ambassador Glyn Davies explained to the Vienna press corps after the vote, in fact the resolution's sponsors did better than that, because “we got a result of nearly three-to-one in favor.” In fact they recorded 17 votes in favor against just five opposed. That meant that, beyond the 13 sponsors, they picked up a few more supporters. Singapore, in nuclear matters a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with a difference; Cameroon—for reasons that escape me; the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is working hand in glove with key resolution drafting states to set up its nuclear power program; and, finally, Japan, which didn't get on to the resolution bandwagon until late because it is understandably beset with other more immediate nuclear problems these days. The nay-sayers were Azerbaijan, China, Ecuador, Pakistan, Russia, and Venezuela.

That's where things get a little complicated. There are a bunch of wrinkles. What are they? For now I'll just list 'em, because I'm about to walk out the door and down the street and get on a bus at Schwedenplatz to take me to the Vienna airport.

- To begin with, there are 35 countries on the board. The resolution referring Syria to the UNSC passed with fewer than half the members supporting it.
- The resolution passed with just three of the P-5 countries on the board signing on. Russia and China opposed it. That wasn't a surprise, especially after NATO took a strong interest in the future of Muammar Qaddafi.
- Then there are all those abstentions—11 of them: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Jordan, Kenya, Niger, Peru, South Africa, Tunisia, and Ukraine. Mongolia was absent.

- The resolution reported Syria to the UNSC without the benefit of a firm judgment from the IAEA Department of Safeguards and the DG that that thing at Dair Alzour was a reactor. Amano told the board it was “very likely” a reactor, but to some people in NAM delegations, that ain’t the same as saying you know its a reactor.
- Amano appears to have discounted for good the idea of calling a special inspection in Syria to get access to Dair Alzour and other sites. I asked a number of people in the board meeting this week whether a non-compliance citation would have had more credibility if Amano had beforehand requested a special inspection which was rejected by Syria. Some of the answers to this question, and especially after reading Ambassador Davies’ lips late on Friday afternoon, seem to have been ”yes.”
- The preambulatory language in GOV/40 also presented a problem. It’s reference to “concerns regarding the maintenance of international peace and security” is clearly aimed at the UNSC with a wink at Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, authorizing the UNSC to use non-military and military means to ”restore international peace and security” Until now, a lot of IAEA member states have doubted whether the nuclear situation in Syria represents such a threat, since the installation in question at Dair Alzour has been destroyed.
- And that issue raised among a number of board members the concern that the Syria resolution—on the eve of a UNSC resolution brought forth by France and the U.K. concerning Syria’s action in brutally suppressing domestic dissent—was “meant to further the goal of regime change,” as one NAM country ambassador told me in the middle of the board discussion on Thursday.

It certainly wasn’t the case that, inside the closeted board meeting, Syria made an intellectually brilliant, stunning case for its shopworn claim that the facility Israel destroyed wasn’t a reactor. The Syrian ambassador in fact came close to putting a few delegates to sleep with a dirge that lasted about 50 minutes and that basically informed the board that ”we don’t see the reason why we should have had to cooperate with you for the last three years and so therefore there is no reason for tabling this resolution.”

The NAM group likewise missed a golden opportunity to raise the above objections in my bullet points. Instead, it disingenuously ignored the fact that there is a serious non-compliance issue here, and instead droned on and on in the room about its outrage in the aftermath of Israel’s air raid which in 2007 destroyed the building. And instead of getting after the indeed weighty and real issues raised by the veiled reference in the resolution to Chapter VII and the issues of consensus-formation, the Egyptian Ambassador waxed on in the boardroom about his objections about what the IAEA told or didn’t tell Syria about its findings, about Syria’s airy offer in late May to “fully cooperate” with the IAEA, and expressing solace in the—largely irrelevant—conclusion by the IAEA that particles of anthropogenic uranium found at the MNSR facility under safeguards would be further considered as a routine safeguards issue.

A few of the states making interventions and statements to the board on Thursday—South Africa, for instance—did their homework, and they got it. You don’t have to agree with their conclusions, but they raised some sticky problems on Thursday after lunch.

All in all, this resolution had its virtues. I may try to explain them on the Carnegie site over the next few days. The resolution also has its problems. Because of these, there are some people who were in the boardroom in Vienna—by no means all of them among the abstainers and that Mongolia delegation that didn’t show up to vote—who will breathe a sigh of relief that this resolution won’t fly in New York because the Russians and the Chinese will assure that outcome.

Lastly, questions will be asked about what the resolution’s’ sponsors’ expectations were this week. GOV/40 was left open for amendments until the vote was taken on Thursday afternoon. I had figured that implied that the sponsors would along the road this week decide whether it would be better off in the final analysis to put to a vote a weaker resolution, warning Syria to get on the stick in a hurry or face the collective wrath of the board in

September. That might have gotten a bigger majority. Astoundingly, however, on Thursday afternoon the text of GOV/40 was more or less the same text we saw at the top of the week. The U.S. group really wanted a non-compliance resolution from the outset, was the word from people in the boardroom. Washington was prepared to lower the pressure just a notch—by considering a text that might cite Syria for non-compliance without an immediate referral to New York—so went the explanation in some quarters—but the U.S. and others gave up on that option when it turned out after canvassing delegations that just one more country was prepared to switch its abstention into a yes vote.

The IAEA and Syria: A new paradigm for noncompliance?

Mark Hibbs

Commentary

June 17, 2011

The board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), by nearly a three-to-one margin, declared Syria out of compliance with its safeguards obligations and reported the issue to the UN Security Council on June 9.

Advocates of the successful resolution said it was necessary to defend the credibility of IAEA safeguards after nearly four years of Syrian defiance. Some also claimed that it offers a new paradigm for dealing with countries that refuse to cooperate with the IAEA in addressing weighty allegations that they are secretly proliferating.

What was new? IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano first evaluated intelligence provided by the United States and then found data in the public domain that appeared to validate American analysis before concurring that a building at Dair Alzour destroyed by Israel in 2007 was a covert reactor. The board reported this as noncompliance—and it did so without IAEA inspectors verifying the findings first hand in Syria.

It is far from certain that this approach will become an accepted and effective way forward. Its credibility might be boosted if the IAEA board and secretariat cooperate to define what specifically constitutes noncompliance. But given recent increased politicization of the board, the biggest challenge is that many members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) no longer trust the IAEA secretariat in matters of verification.

In the short term, Syria may be off the hook. Resolution sponsors are correct that passing it “wiped clean” the IAEA’s Syria dossier after years of no action. But because Russia and China voted no, there will also be no action in New York.

When Syria stymied the IAEA’s investigation into Dair Alzour, Washington urged Amano to request Syria to permit a “special inspection” to look for evidence of undeclared nuclear activities. Amano did not comply.

He did try to corroborate U.S. intelligence findings—primarily high-resolution aerial photographs—with other evidence available in the public domain. Amano was then willing to join the conclusion, first asserted by the United States in early 2008, that Dair Alzour was a reactor.

Is this a new paradigm? We’ll see. Three months from now, at its next routine conclave, the board may consider a resolution on North Korea’s lack of cooperation with the IAEA, supported by reporting from Amano. Three months later, toward the end of the year, the board may follow up with a noncompliance resolution on Iran, on the basis of evidence that the IAEA believes to be genuine and compelling, that Iran has been developing a nuclear weapons capability. As in the case of Syria, Iran has refused to discuss these allegations with the IAEA for three years.

In the IAEA boardroom last week, the absence of a common understanding about what constitutes noncompliance with a state’s safeguards obligations, encouraged many delegations to allow extraneous political considerations to take precedence over what should have been a safeguards judgment. Instead of contributing to a common resolve to put Syria on notice, many of these states abstained or voted no.

If the board and secretariat now set up an expert panel to draft a working definition of safeguards noncompliance, it may encourage all states in the future to report noncompliance without consideration of political agendas deterring them from meeting their responsibility to combat proliferation. But if noncompliance is too clearly defined, that might prevent the board from making a finding in an unusual or unexpected case.

Strictly defining noncompliance might also result in proliferators identifying a roadmap permitting them to cheat.

U.S. Ambassador Glyn Davies said last week that “there were a lot of reasons why states abstained.” In the view of NAM country ambassadors, most represented a vote of no confidence in Amano and IAEA safeguards.

NAM states objected that Amano’s conclusion—that Dair Alzour was “very likely” a reactor—was not strong enough to justify a noncompliance finding. But the IAEA informed these states in May that safeguards experts were virtually certain. The “very likely” qualification was tagged on by cautious IAEA lawyers.

The IAEA’s technical safeguards judgment was not accepted by many NAM states. This lack of trust and confidence in the IAEA’s verifiers is the most fundamental obstacle to any future noncompliance finding. It has no simple fix and restoring confidence will require a long time and a concerted effort by the IAEA member states and secretariat.

There is no Band-Aid solution because the board has always been—and is now—a political body. For over three decades, the two superpowers on the board enforced compliance among their client states. Most of the others had no nuclear capabilities. Today’s board reflects a multipolar world and the aspirations of developing countries, many of which set up a Vienna chapter of the NAM in 2003. Their talking points have since prevailed among many board members—including those that would not support a noncompliance resolution on Iran in 2005 and many of the states that abstained last week.

Since the 2005 Iran resolution, and again last week, the board’s Western and advanced members have been inclined to disregard the board’s tradition of consensus and to simply discount the NAM’s abstention votes to get a result. But there is also the P-5 to consider if and when the Syria resolution inspires an attempt to cite Iran for noncompliance related to charges it has been doing weapons-related work. Unlike the case made by the United States that the destroyed Dair Alzour facility represented a threat to world peace—this was viewed as problematic even by some resolution supporters—a strong case could be made that Iranian nuclear weapons research and development justifies Security Council action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The Iranian threat may convince China and Russia. Behind Russia’s no vote last week stood NATO’s resolve to assist regime change in Libya and Moscow’s comfortable relationship with the Syrian regime. But before the Syria vote, Russia and China joined France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States in a strong statement vowing to keep pressure on Iran to cooperate with the IAEA.

Carlson on Syria

By Jeffrey

1 July 2011

John Carlson sent along a comment about Mark's post, A Bridge Too Far? Syria & GOV/40. It was too important to bury in the comments, so I thought I would put it here:

Syria and safeguards non-compliance – a “new paradigm”?

John Carlson

In a recent article (Carnegie Commentary 17 June 2011) Mark Hibbs suggests the decision of the IAEA Board of Governors that Syria is in non-compliance with its safeguards agreement sets a “new paradigm” for non-compliance. This is because, according to Hibbs, the IAEA based its assessment on intelligence and other information without inspectors verifying the findings first hand in Syria.

This is not a correct representation of the situation. In fact IAEA inspectors did visit the Dair Alzour site, in June 2008. Despite Syrian efforts to destroy evidence of its activities at the site, inspectors found a significant number of particles of uranium, graphite and stainless steel – all consistent with information indicating there had been a natural uranium-fuelled, gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor at the site. The IAEA has since continued to seek access to locations where debris from the destroyed building had been moved, to locations that appeared to be functionally related to the Dair Alzour site, and to further information, but Syrian authorities have refused to cooperate.

Clearly a state's lack of cooperation cannot be allowed to obstruct the IAEA's efforts to implement safeguards agreements. Far from being a new paradigm, this non-compliance finding is consistent with previous findings where lack of cooperation with the IAEA has been a major factor, e.g. Iraq, North Korea and Iran. Readers interested in a detailed discussion of safeguards non-compliance are referred to my article NPT safeguards agreements – Defining non-compliance in Arms Control Today, May 2009.

John Carlson was Director General of the Australian Safeguards and Non-proliferation Office 1989-2010, and Chair of the IAEA's Standing Advisory Group on Safeguards Implementation (SAGSI) 2001-06. He is currently a consultant to NTI and a Visiting Fellow at the Lowy Institute.

<http://hibbs.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/241/after-gov40-dprk-and-iran-may-be-next#comments>

After GOV/40: Tale of Two Narratives

By mark [Hibbs]

3 July 2011

In comments addressed to and posted by Jeffrey on Friday, John Carlson drew attention to my omission of a 2008 IAEA visit to Syria in my Carnegie article on the IAEA board of governors' resolution GOV/2011/40, concerning IAEA access to Syria following the August, 2007 Israeli air attack which destroyed the alleged reactor at Dair Alzour.

Thanks to Jeffrey having posted Carlson's remarks about my article, I was able to read them, and afterward I modified the offending sentence in paragraph three of that article: "*The board reported [IAEA safeguards conclusions] as noncompliance—and it did so without IAEA inspectors verifying the findings first hand in Syria*" to conclude "*since June 2008.*"

That should take care of the issue at hand.

Did I not know about that June, 2008 visit to Syria? Of course I did. In 2008 and 2009 I published in *Nuclear Fuel* and *Nucleonics Week* a half-dozen articles about it. In drafting the Carnegie piece, which was intended as a very short "Commentary" on our website, I didn't explicitly refer to that early and never-repeated IAEA visit to Dair Alzour for reasons of editorial brevity.

In retrospect, I realize that not mentioning it was a mistake. That's because—as Carlson's response made clear—anything I write on the subject of Syria's safeguards compliance following the passing of GOV/40 can put me in the crossfire of competing narratives about the resolution which began unfolding even before it was passed last month, and which may well continue playing out through the end of this year.

One of those narratives—Carlson's—asserts that GOV/40 represented nothing really new or departing from previous noncompliance findings. There is a second one which was circulating among its advocates at the time the resolution was under consideration that asserted that GOV/40 was a new departure for dealing with noncompliance.

Carlson wrongly attributed to me the view that GOV/40 "sets a 'new paradigm' for noncompliance" with IAEA safeguards. That's the second narrative.

I never said or "suggested" that I supported that interpretation.

Notwithstanding the question mark in the title of my article, and the text which specifically states that the matter is unresolved, I wrote:

"Some advocates of the successful resolution... claimed that [GOV/40] offers a new paradigm for dealing with countries that refuse to cooperate with the IAEA in addressing weighty allegations that they are secretly proliferating."

This is not, as Carlson wrote, the view "according to Hibbs." I would argue, however, that the fact that people in the resolution sponsoring camp argued that GOV/40 was a new departure was not insignificant.

The "new paradigm" narrative goes like this:

After Syria beginning in mid-2008 barred the IAEA from Dair Alzour and other related sites, the IAEA then called on member states to corroborate its initial but inconclusive findings suggesting that the site could have

hosted a reactor. Most was provided by the U.S. The IAEA then looked for other sources—especially open sources—to corroborate the secret data, and it succeeded. After three years, the IAEA was prepared to bite the bullet and declare that in its view Dair Alzour was a reactor, regardless of the fact that it hadn't been able to actually verify that conclusion in Syria because Syria had refused to cooperate for over three years.

But is this really a new development? Didn't something like that also happen in other, previous noncompliance cases, I asked? Well, not exactly, those holding the "new paradigm" view said. They argued, for example, that Iraq was called out of compliance after IAEA inspectors themselves unearthed a clandestine nuclear program; that Iran was cited for non-compliance after it acknowledged to the IAEA that it failed to report specific nuclear activities and IAEA inspectors in Iran then independently verified that; and that Romania and Libya were found to be out of compliance after they themselves had disclosed specific activities to the IAEA.

There is another narrative on GOV/40—Carlson's—which asserts that "this non-compliance finding is consistent with previous findings where the lack of cooperation with the IAEA has been a major factor, i.e., Iraq, North Korea, and Iran." Nothing really new, no new approach or paradigm.

So which narrative is true?

Now, if I were a country that co-sponsored GOV/40 and if I were trying to convince other board member countries to join, or thereafter to get them to see GOV/40 as a kind of template for pursuing future cases, Carlson's argument is the one I would make.

Why? As I have written in previous posts and in the above Carnegie article, GOV/40 last month encountered a lot of resistance and in fact was passed by fewer than half the board's 35 members. In particular, members of the Non-Aligned Movement, which in Vienna increasingly since 2003 have taken their cues on key verification issues from Iran, have been on the lookout for anything that looks like the IAEA or the board are departing from standard verification procedures. Anything that suggests that GOV/40 represents a novel approach to noncompliance would therefore represent a political challenge for its sponsors and advocates.

Whether GOV/40 will change the tilt of the playing field is ultimately what this interchange is about—including in coming months and perhaps beyond.

On to DPRK and Iran

If this was only about GOV/40 and Syria I don't think there would be any debate over this on this blog site; I don't believe Carlson would spend his valuable time writing Jeffrey a carefully-drafted response to my article; and I wouldn't waste my time writing this because GOV/40 will be dead-ended at the UN Security Council in New York.

But as I said in the Carnegie article, according to what you hear from those who argue that GOV/40 represents a new departure on noncompliance, board member states which sponsored and supported GOV/40 want to go further and in coming months raise outstanding compliance issues in North Korea and Iran.

We'll see if that develops.

If so, the DPRK might be next in line. The Republic of Korea (ROK) or Japan, for example, might in advance request Director General Yukiya Amano to prepare a report on safeguards compliance in the DPRK. The ROK (which co-sponsored GOV/40) and other like-minded states on the board might then float a resolution citing the DPRK for noncompliance with its safeguards obligations. How this would play out isn't exactly clear, since in fact for a long time the IAEA has had no access to the DPRK and, accordingly, if judged by Amano's own yardsticks, the IAEA may have very little if anything in the way of new official information on the DPRK to report to the board. (Don't forget that, two years ago, Amano had been asked by the IAEA General Conference

to report on Israel's nuclear capability, and the DG complied by submitting a one-page statement which testified that because the IAEA had no official information beyond what Israel was obliged to provide to the IAEA to fulfill Israel's Infirc-66 agreement, he had in fact virtually nothing to say).

More interesting and significant will be how the board of governors deals with Iran in the aftermath of GOV/40.

Again, according to those who say that GOV/40 is a template for a new way forward, the board could request a report from Amano on outstanding safeguards issues with Iran, and in particular, concerning the allegations of nuclear weapons-related experiments and R&D, which the IAEA Department of Safeguards has compiled in its dossier and which Iran—like Syria on Dair Alzour—has claimed are fabrications and therefore has refused to discuss with the IAEA for three years. The board might ask Amano to make a judgment as to whether the IAEA is satisfied that the allegations are supported by evidence, perhaps permitting the IAEA to conclude—as in the Syrian case concerning the reactor—that Iran “very likely” was engaged in weaponization-related activities. As in the case of the reactor allegations concerning Syria, the allegations of Iranian weaponization activities currently are based primarily upon member state intelligence information and, to a lesser extent, upon some corroborative findings that the IAEA has made in the field. As in the case of Syria, were Amano to tell the board that the IAEA deems it likely that Iran conducted weaponization activities, if the current state of affairs persists Amano would report that conclusion regardless of Iran having refused to discuss these allegations with the IAEA.

Since Carlson incorrectly associated me with the view that GOV/40 is a “new paradigm,” I feel obligated to outline what is, in fact, my very modest take on this.

It would appear that the Syria dossier is a composite of different kinds of information. Some of it was obtained in the field early, in June 2008, by the IAEA during the initial stage of its probe from Dair Alzour. It was inconclusive. The IAEA then got other information which, in its view, was consistent with the thesis that Dair Alzour was a reactor. The IAEA also took the trouble of trying to get third-party information, including open source data, to quality control the intelligence data it received from the U.S. and other member states. Some sought-for aerial reconnaissance data was missing. There were questions raised about why the building at Dair Alzour was so much smaller than its apparent prototype in the DPRK. So in the end it was a judgment call by the IAEA.

I never said GOV/40 is a “new paradigm.” Thirty-five members of the board may decide that during the next six months.

Nukes on a Blog

Tough Choices Facing the IAEA and the Non-Aligned Movement

Matthew

Jul 05, 2011

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) stand at a crossroads over the nuclear ambitions of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

On June 9, the Board of Governors at the IAEA declared Syria in noncompliance with IAEA safeguards.

Notably, the resolution was predicated not on information from unbiased IAEA inspections, but on intelligence provided by the United States and verified by data in the public domain. Eleven NAM countries chose to abstain from the vote to report Syria, in part because they were hesitant to rely on intelligence provided by the U.S. and its allies. The resolution stands no chance in New York as Russia and China, both of which possess veto power over possible sanctions as permanent members of the UN Security Council, will certainly oppose it.

India in particular faces a dilemma that typifies the choices facing the NAM. On October 1st, 2008 the U.S. Senate approved HR 7081: the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act. Championed by the Bush administration, the “123 agreement” elevated India to a de-facto internationally recognized nuclear weapons state despite New Delhi’s refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

A “123 agreement” is a peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement that includes the transfer of U.S.-origin nuclear material; it requires Congressional approval according to nine nonproliferation criteria stipulated in Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act. The Henry J. Hyde U.S.-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006 exempted the nuclear cooperation deal with India from some of these requirements. The deal therefore allows India to import nuclear materials and technology to fuel its nuclear power program without renouncing its nuclear arsenal, effectively reversing three decades of non-proliferation policies designed to punish India for the first ever illegal use of civilian nuclear facilities and materials in 1974.

As Michael Krepon has outlined in great detail, the U.S. appears to have received very little in return for the deal, while nuclear stability in South Asia and nonproliferation norms have suffered. Most recently, India was one of the eleven states on the IAEA Board of Governors that voted to abstain from referring Syria to the UN Security Council.

It is now obvious that the U.S.-India deal legitimized an expanding nuclear power, allowed New Delhi to operate outside the NPT standards fundamental to the global nonproliferation regime, and failed to win India’s cooperation on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

India’s noncooperation on the Syria vote illustrates the challenges facing the international non-proliferation community. The vote was complicated and politicized by wariness over an American conflict of interest in the region. Mark Hibbs, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment’s Nuclear Policy Program, made a perceptive assessment of the political concerns facing the NAM, which included:

1. The credibility of information was called into question, since IAEA inspectors on the ground never actually verified the suspected nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour. The NAM countries are wary of relying on superpower intelligence that operates with an inherent bias.

2. The lack of a decisive judgment by IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano exacerbated the credibility issue. Mr. Amano was only willing to assert that Dair Alzour was “very likely” a reactor, and urged that “reasonable inferences must be drawn.”
3. The destruction of the installation at Dair Alzour by an Israeli air raid in 2007 has severely reduced the urgency of a Syrian nuclear threat.
4. Non-Aligned countries continue to express their outrage over the gross breach of national sovereignty constituted by the 2007 Israeli strike.
5. The resolution for noncompliance was presented at a time when popular uprisings threaten the stability of the Assad regime, engendering the suspicion that the resolution is motivated by a desire for regime change.

Given these extraneous political considerations, our failed attempt to purchase the cooperation of an NAM leader is crippling.

In another astute commentary, Mr. Hibbs suggests that reliance on combined U.S. and public domain intelligence could become a new paradigm for verifying noncompliance with IAEA safeguards. Given that most NAM countries remain at best skeptical and self-interested actors in the non-proliferation community, this paradigm would severely undermine IAEA credibility and trust unless a clearer definition of noncompliance is established. If the increasing politicization of the IAEA board of governors can be separated from clearly defined technical requirements for a resolution on noncompliance, then NAM countries may be more willing to overlook “biased” sources of intelligence or disregard offensive unilateral action like the 2007 Israeli air strike.

Later this year, the board of governors at the IAEA may vote on a resolution to once again declare Iran in noncompliance with IAEA safeguards. The evidence that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons capability will probably be decisively more convincing than the case against Syria. Nevertheless, the political thicket that hampered the Syria resolution may foreshadow the political impediments that will need to be surmounted vis a vis Iran.

Arms Control Today » **July/August 2011**

IAEA Sends Syria Nuclear Case to UN

Peter Crail

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on June 9 referred Syria to the UN Security Council for violating its safeguards obligations, following a three-year investigation into that country's alleged secret nuclear activities.

Western governments said the agency's move was important to maintain the integrity of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, but the vote divided the 35-member IAEA Board of Governors, with several states calling into question the agency's grounds for sending the issue to the United Nations.

The board referred Syria's case to the UN in a 17-6 vote following a May 24 IAEA report concluding that a facility that Damascus had been constructing "was very likely a nuclear reactor." Israel destroyed the facility, located at a site called Dair al Zour, in a September 2007 air strike. (See ACT, October 2007.)

The June 9 board resolution found Syria in noncompliance with its safeguards obligations for failing to declare the alleged reactor to the agency and for not providing the IAEA with design information for the facility prior to construction. U.S. Permanent Representative to the IAEA Glyn Davies said during a press briefing following the board vote that Syria's action "represents one of the most serious safeguards violations possible." Washington accuses Syria of building the suspected reactor to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. (See ACT, June 2008.)

China and Russia voted against the resolution. Both countries are veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council and can block any attempted council action against Syria. Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Pakistan, and Venezuela also opposed the measure.

In a statement before the vote, Russia said that although Syria might have engaged in some wrongdoing, the issue was not one that the council needed to address.

"The site at Dair al Zour no longer exists and therefore poses no threat to international peace and security," the statement said. The resolution's preamble says that Syria's actions "have given rise to concerns regarding international peace and security," language consistent with the Security Council's responsibilities under the UN Charter.

Although the resolution received the simple majority needed to pass, 11 board members abstained, leaving the resolution with approval from roughly half of the board. One country, Mongolia, was absent for the vote.

The abstentions included three countries currently holding rotating seats on the Security Council: Brazil, India, and South Africa.

Diplomats from countries that abstained said last month that their governments did not believe that the case for referral was strong enough. They noted that the IAEA assessment concluding that the Dair al Zour facility "was very likely" a reactor was not definitive. "The legal basis was fragile," one diplomat told Arms Control Today by e-mail June 24.

The diplomat also issued a judgment similar to Russia's, saying that "if there ever was a threat, it was destroyed by the Israelis."

IAEA's 'Best Assessment'

In his opening statement during the board's June 6-10 meeting, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano said, "[T]his is the best assessment of the agency, based on all the information in its possession." Although diplomats from abstaining countries did not directly dispute the IAEA technical findings on the alleged Syrian reactor, they raised concerns about the agency's reliance on intelligence information from other countries.

The United States has been a key source of information on the Dair al Zour facility. It first briefed the IAEA on the matter in April 2008, leading to the agency's investigation.

Former U.S. and IAEA officials said that the board's decision to act on the agency's "best assessment" rather than definitive proof of noncompliance was new territory for the IAEA.

Mark Fitzpatrick, former deputy assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation, said in a June 24 e-mail that the IAEA's "willingness and ability to draw reasonable conclusions in the Dair al Zour case despite Syria's refusal to cooperate with the investigation set an important precedent."

In a separate June 24 e-mail, former IAEA Deputy Director-General for Safeguards Bruno Pellaud said that the decision is "a new tool for the IAEA," but cautioned that it was not as strong as a referral based on a clear noncompliance determination.

Such a precedent may have implications for the IAEA investigation into Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program. The United States has asked the IAEA to make a determination regarding Iran's suspected work related to development of a nuclear warhead even though Iran has not cooperated with the agency's investigation into those suspicions.

"We reiterate the urgent need for the Director General to provide to the Board as soon as possible his best assessment of the information related to possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program," Davies said in a June 9 statement to the board.

Special Inspection Unlikely

Diplomatic sources and former officials said that the IAEA board's decision to refer Syria's case to the UN made it unlikely the agency would call for a special inspection to require greater access to sites and information from Damascus.

IAEA safeguards agreements allow the agency to conduct a special inspection if the existing inspection mechanism "is not adequate for the agency to fulfill its responsibilities under the agreement." Amano has consistently said in his reports to the board that Syria has not provided sufficient cooperation for the agency to carry out its work.

Amano also said in his opening statement that "it is deeply regrettable that the facility was destroyed" rather than being reported to the agency.

The United States had previously said that the IAEA needed to consider calling for a special inspection in Syria. (See ACT, October 2010.) Former IAEA Deputy Director-General for Safeguards Olli Heinonen, who led the agency's investigation in Syria until last August, also has argued that the agency should make use of this authority.

"It would have been a logical step," he said in a June 27 interview, adding, "In my view, the case would have been clearer, if the [IAEA] Secretariat would have used all authorities at its disposal."

Heinonen told the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 23, “The special inspection option should still be pursued, or the UN Security Council could also choose to provide wider authorities to the IAEA.”

Pellaud said that “a refusal of a special inspection [by Syria] would have lent much more substance to the referral.”

The special inspection provision has been used only twice: in Romania in 1992 at the Romanian government’s request, and in North Korea in 1993. Pyongyang rejected the inspection, touching off an international crisis leading to a nuclear freeze agreement with the United States a year later.

In an apparent response to the IAEA’s judgment that the Dair al Zour facility was very likely a nuclear reactor, Damascus sent a letter to Amano pledging to work with the agency to resolve the issue. According to diplomats familiar with the letter, sent two days after Amano’s May 24 report, Syria’s Atomic Energy Commission said that it was “ready to fully cooperate” with the IAEA but did not offer any details of what new information or access Damascus would provide to inspectors.

A senior Western official said during a June 3 background briefing that, on the issue of Syria’s sincerity in providing such cooperation, “the proof came yesterday” during a June 2 technical briefing by the IAEA Secretariat. When the IAEA made its case for why it had concluded the Dair al Zour facility was likely a reactor, Syria simply challenged the IAEA assessment rather than offering evidence to back its own claims, the official said.

Syria Already in UN Spotlight

The board decision to refer Syria’s nuclear file to the UN came at the same time that European governments are seeking to place pressure on Damascus for its crackdown against political protests. The day before the IAEA action, France, Germany, Portugal, and the United Kingdom circulated a draft resolution with the Security Council condemning Syria for human rights abuses. Facing veto threats from China and Russia, the sponsors pulled the resolution from consideration, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé told the French National Assembly June 14.

Some IAEA board members were wary of taking action in that political context. A Russian diplomatic source called the IAEA resolution “untimely.”

The senior Western official said June 3 that other members of the board raised concerns that a referral might inflame the political situation in Syria, a prospect the official said was unlikely. “I don’t see a link directly between this [nuclear] issue” and political developments in Syria, he said, arguing that the IAEA has a responsibility to address Syria’s nuclear program irrespective of events in the country.

Covert Nuclear Facility in Syria

Ankita Shree

Research Intern, IPCS

email: ankkita.delhi@gmail.com

#3426, 11 July 2011

Syria was recently the subject of international attention, over its suspected nuclear weapons program, after the IAEA, in its latest report, recommended the issue to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Syria's nuclear program first came to light following an Israeli air-strike on a suspected nuclear facility at Dair Alzour in 2007. The IAEA in its findings buttressed Western claims, concluding that Syria was indeed developing a covert nuclear facility. Attempts to punish Syria in the UNSC were thwarted by Russia and China, who argued that the facility having been destroyed, the need for punishment had become redundant. The IAEA, however, called upon Syria to sign an additional protocol to the NPT, for violating articles 41, 42, and XII C of the agency statute. These protocols would allow the agency intrusive inspections at undeclared facilities. This episode has raised important questions- First, what are the reasons behind Syria's development of covert nuclear facilities, and what are the regional and international implications of such a programme? Second, what is the relevance of the NPT in such a scenario?

While Syria is presently energy sufficient, its oil stockpiles are declining, and therefore had taken recourse to nuclear energy. Its ambitions to go nuclear will be fulfilled only by 2020, when a reactor being built with Chinese assistance goes critical. The covert weaponization program however may be dictated by the Syrian military, which has been a major stakeholder in Syria's nuclear programme since the 1970s. Though Syria has denied allegations of developing nuclear weapons, it has plausible reasons to do so. Syria's adversarial relationship with Israel is a significant one. Others include the insecurities caused by American presence in the region, and dwindling Syrian influence in the region, following its withdrawal from Lebanon. Additionally, NATO's military action against Libya would have justified Syria's nuclear ambitions, to use its nuclear programme as a survival tool.

Syria played the international community by eliciting overt nuclear assistance from the IAEA, China, Russia, and covert assistance from Iran and North Korea. Links between Iran and Syria over their nuclear program, may have formed to evade the international attention presently on Iran. According to a statement given to the Guardian newspaper, an Israeli advisor suggested that Syria could produce the plutonium desired by the Iranians. For this assistance, Syria would get reprocessing technology, which its nuclear facilities lacked. This claim was earlier reported in Der Spiegel (June 23, 2008). According to the US intelligence community, Syrian cooperation with North Korea began in 1997, with its covert reactor design matching those of North Korea's Yongbyon reactor.

The destruction of one of its nuclear facilities does not mean that Syria's nuclear capabilities have been eroded. According to the IAEA report, Syria has three more secret sites, similar to Dair Alzour, where its weaponization developments are taking place. While the report did not give details of the facilities or of their locations, the US think tank, Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) released satellite images of three additional sites which are functionally related to Al-Kibar. These are located near the cities of Maysaf, Marj as-Sultan, and Iskandariyah, and all three are situated in naturally secure locations, or have added security elements, according to imagery analysis.

Syria's nuclear ambitions have serious regional and international implications. The Middle East has traditionally been a zone of instability, and the presence of an additional nuclear weapon state will only aggravate its volatility. Owing to the symbiotic nature of Syria and Iran's nuclear program to, it raises the spectre of a conjoined nuclear umbrella, which enhances the chances of direct confrontation with the international

community. Failure to halt such a programme will be a setback for the international communities' efforts towards non-proliferation.

This raises concerns about the relevance of the NPT, especially when the signatories are violating the treaty, by developing secret nuclear facilities, as seen in the preceding cases of Libya, North Korea and Iran. These fears are accentuated by the lowering of the technology threshold and the connivance of proliferators, such as Pakistan, Iran and North Korea, which lends them to becoming business models for nuclear weapons. The NPT in such a scenario loses its relevance both as a security mechanism as well as being a move towards nuclear non-proliferation. The treaty needs to be revisited and revised to emerge as an effective mechanism towards international security.

With Syria presently battling a domestic crisis; international pressure on President Assad, has forced Damascus to take a moderate approach with the IAEA. While Syria has ducked a UNSC censure, the crisis possesses characteristics which can worsen matters in the future. With serious ramifications for both Middle East and international security, the Syrian nuclear case needs to be addressed before it turns into another unstable nightmare like North Korea or Pakistan.

A still-open nuclear file

By Emanuele Ottolenghi

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On September 6, 2007, Israel bombed the al-Kibar site, a small industrial complex in north eastern Syria, near the town of Deir al-Zour. What precipitated Israel's daring operation was, apparently, the looming delivery of nuclear fuel to a clandestine reactor on the site, designed to produce weapons-grade plutonium, and which by then was almost operational.

Details about the compound's real purpose became public knowledge in April 2008, when a U.S. intelligence briefing revealed that al-Kibar was a North Korean-built, gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor almost identical to the one North Korea built in its own Yongbyon facility to produce weapons-grade plutonium. The briefing offered conclusive evidence of collusion between North Korean and Syrian scientists, confirmed that North Korea had built the Syrian reactor, for cash, and hinted at the trigger for Israel's raid - the reactor's readiness.

More than three years later, this past spring, the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that al-Kibar was a nuclear reactor similar to that at Yongbyon and declared Syria to be in noncompliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is now up to the UN Security Council to decide whether to punish Syria for its failure to declare the reactor's existence and for its cover-up both before and after the raid, which did "irreparable damage" to the facility.

Israeli security sources speaking off-the-record say that the Syria nuclear file is not a closed case. There are good reasons to agree.

Syria's ability to quickly develop a nuclear program on its own soil was surprising. The late Hafez Assad never pursued nuclear weapons as a deterrent against Israel because he knew his country lacked the financial resources, the industrial infrastructure, the intellectual prowess and the wherewithal to develop such a program. Instead, Assad relied for most of his career on other nonconventional weapons for deterrence. Hence, his change of course, which took place in 1997, and which was vigorously pursued by his son and heir Bashar after the father's death, raises questions. After all, the basic facts of Syria's scientific and industrial backwardness have not changed significantly of late. A Syrian nuclear program could come online only because it was a turnkey project: built, fueled and possibly operated by North Korea.

But nuclear weapons need more than weapons-grade fissile material. And while in April 2008, U.S. intelligence was adamant that the reactor's purpose was "to create fuel for a nuclear weapons program," it had no conclusive evidence of the kind of additional components needed to weaponize plutonium - namely, a reprocessing facility and a weapons-design program. Nor does Syria have indigenous supplies of uranium.

This elicits several questions:

- Where was the reactor's fuel supposed to come from?
- If Syria was about to start producing weapons-grade plutonium, why is there no trace of the other pieces of a nuclear jigsaw puzzle?
- Why take the risk and incur the costs of such a project, if there is no way to dispose of the nuclear fuel?

In short, if this reactor was built in Syria for Syria, where was the rest of the program?

One possible answer to all these questions is that the program was built in Syria for Iran. Ronen Bergman's 2008 book, "The Secret War with Iran," suggests that al-Kibar was clandestinely developed with Iran's financial support. A 2009 Spiegel piece, quoting diplomatic sources in Vienna, agreed, citing revelations by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' former general Ali Reza Asgari to Western intelligence agencies. Asgari, a former deputy defense minister, disappeared in Istanbul in February 2007 after a visit to Syria, possibly defected to the West, and may have revealed Iran's funding of al-Kibar.

According to the same article, in 2005, Mohsen Fakrizadeh, the shadowy IRGC official in charge of Iran's nuclear military program, visited Damascus, very likely in order to forge an agreement on the terms of Iranian funding for Syria's nuclear program. That may explain why there is no trace of Syrian reprocessing activities: Al-Kibar was built by North Korea and financed by Iran, in order to sustain Iran's plausible deniability about its nuclear program.

Skeptics could rightly object that Iran does not have known reprocessing facilities either, but it has a reactor in Arak designed for plutonium production - so why the need for surrogate production lines elsewhere? The answer may be that, with its covert nuclear activities in Arak exposed in 2002, Iran may have sought an alternative that could ensure a supply of weapons-grade plutonium even under the increased scrutiny of the international community. Besides, Iran's program hit many technical hurdles. According to the U.S. 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's program, "Iran will not be technically capable of producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015."

With such a lengthy timetable, IAEA inspectors roaming Iran, and American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, Tehran may have chosen to outsource plutonium production to Syria - a safer option, because al-Kibar was still undetected, and a faster one, because by then North Korea was technologically ahead of the game.

Syria's violations would be grave enough if al-Kibar reflected a Syrian attempt to build nuclear weapons for its own arsenal. They would be even graver if Syria did it to share the plutonium with Iran. And they constitute a threat, given that Assad, earlier this week, threatened "surprises" if Syria was attacked by foreign forces, in reference to Syrian military capabilities.

Though the Security Council is currently deadlocked on how to respond to Syria's ferocious domestic repression, come September, it must punish Syria's proliferating activities.

Whether Iran's involvement can be proven is immaterial: Syria's nuclear file is far from closed, and leaving it open is a risk the international community, mindful of the cruelty of the regime in Damascus, cannot afford to take.

Emanuele Ottolenghi is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and author of the forthcoming "The Pasdaran: Inside Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps" (FDD Press, September 2011).

Column: This is no time to slash defense spending, Kyl says

by Jon Kyl

Sept. 9, 2011 02:23 PM

[EXCERPTS]

On this day seared eternally in the American consciousness, we pause to consider nearly 3,000 lives lost and families forever affected.

In cities and towns across the United States, we offer prayers, moments of silence and heartfelt remembrances for loved ones, co-workers, acquaintances and fellow Americans taken abruptly from us 10 years ago, as well as those who have sacrificed to secure our safety since. These rituals are a natural and fitting way to honor the innocent victims of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Yet the greatest tribute we can pay is to confront head-on the terrorists and rogue regimes seeking to do us harm. Some scholars refer to this conflict as the Long War because the struggle against the radical political Islamists will likely take a very long time to conclude.

[deletia]

We must continue to pursue economic and political sanctions against states and terrorists seeking illicit biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. In addition to Iran, we remain concerned about the proliferation activities of North Korea, Syria and Myanmar (Burma). And we know that al-Qaida affiliates continue to seek to acquire materials to produce deadly poisons such as ricin and cyanide.

[deletia]

[Jon Kyl is a U.S. senator from Arizona. He is the Senate Republican whip and serves on the Finance and Judiciary committees.](#)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-cheneys-memoir-its-clear-iraqs-lessons-didnt-sink-in/2011/09/09/>

In Cheney's memoir, it's clear Iraq's lessons didn't sink in

By Bob Woodward

Sunday, September 11, 6:18 PM

A key lesson of the 9/11 decade for presidents and other national security decision makers is the importance of rigorously testing intelligence evidence: poking holes in it, setting out contradictions, figuring out what may have been overlooked or left out. It is essential to distinguish between hard facts and what is an assessment or judgment.

The so-called slam-dunk case that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction illustrates the failure. If anyone should have learned this, it is former president George W. Bush and former vice president Dick Cheney.

Yet in his new memoir, "In My Time," Cheney shows he has not fully absorbed that lesson when he writes about the administration's response to the 2007 discovery of a nuclear reactor in Syria that the North Koreans had helped build.

In Cheney's telling, the evidence showed "a clandestine nuclear reactor, built by two terrorist-sponsoring states." Given the potential threat, he argued privately to Bush, and later to top national security officials, that the United States should destroy the reactor.

In a National Security Council session that June, he writes, "I again made the case for U.S. military action against the reactor. Not only would it make the region and the world safer, but it would also demonstrate our seriousness with respect to non-proliferation. It would enhance our credibility in that part of the world But I was the lone voice. After I finished, the president asked, 'Does anyone here agree with the vice president?' Not a single hand went up around the room. I had done all I could, and I'm not sure the president's mind would have been changed if the others had agreed with me."

He notes with some relish that two months later the Israelis took unilateral action and destroyed the reactor. The clear implication is that Bush and the others had lost their nerve, that they lacked the necessary spine to act as he had recommended.

But accounts from others in these meetings, a public briefing and Bush's own memoir present a dramatically different picture of the intelligence on the Syrian reactor.

Cheney does not reveal that then-CIA Director Michael V. Hayden had a team working for months to examine the intelligence on the Syrian reactor. Participants at the meetings say that Hayden presented his findings to Bush, Cheney and the others before Cheney made his arguments for a military strike.

According to a principal participant, Hayden made four points, saying: "That's a reactor. I have high confidence. That Syria and North Korea have been cooperating for 10 years on a nuclear reactor program, I have high confidence. North Korea built that reactor? I have medium confidence. On it is part of a nuclear weapons program, I have low confidence."

Hayden emphasized the last sentence to underscore his uncertainty. He later told others that he stuck to the intelligence facts and intentionally shaped his presentation that way to discourage a preemptive strike because the intelligence was weak.

According to the CIA, there was no evidence of plutonium reprocessing capability at the site or nearby in that region of Syria, though a reactor of that type would be capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. In addition, there was no identifiable means to manufacture uranium fuel.

Hayden's declaration of low confidence was, in effect, his anti-slam dunk.

On April 24, 2008, two senior U.S. intelligence officials and a senior White House official briefed reporters on the Syrian reactor after extensive testimony to congressional committees on the issue. One of the briefers restated Hayden's conclusions and said there was not much physical evidence the reactor was part of a weapons program, so they had only "low confidence" that it was.

His assessment, he said, was that the reactor was planned to be part of a weapons program, but in an apparent reference to the Iraq WMD mistake, the briefer said, "There are lessons learned that are — that came out of previous experience about how to put more rigor into our process. So there's a difference between evidence and an assessment."

In his memoir, Bush described the debate about the Syrian reactor, writing that Hayden and the other intelligence experts "had only low confidence of a Syrian nuclear weapons program."

"Mike [Hayden]'s report clarified my decision," Bush wrote, adding that he called then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who wanted the United States to destroy the reactor. Bush says he told Olmert, "I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it's a weapons program."

Bush didn't reveal, however, that his vice president wanted a military strike in the face of "low confidence" intelligence that the reactor was part of a nuclear weapons program. Cheney said he wanted the United States to commit an act of war to send a message, demonstrate seriousness and enhance credibility — a frightening prospect given the doubts.

Two participants in the key National Security Council meeting in June 2007 said that after Cheney, the "lone voice," made his arguments, Bush rolled his eyes.

At the CIA afterward, the group of specialists who had worked for months on the Syrian reactor issue were pleased they had succeeded in avoiding the overreaching so evident in the Iraq WMD case. So they issued a very limited-circulation memorial coin. One side showed a map of Syria with a star at the site of the former reactor. On the other side the coin said, "No core/No war."

Bob Woodward is an associate editor of *The Post*. His assistant, Evelyn M. Duffy, contributed to this column.

The right call on the Syrian threat

By Elliott Abrams, Eliot Cohen, Eric Edelman and John Hannah,

[2011-09-15]

Bob Woodward wrote a curious op-ed this week about the Bush administration's response to the secret al-Kibar nuclear reactor built by Syria and North Korea. As officials who participated in the administration's deliberations, we believe that Woodward's account — and that of the anonymous sources who gave him background information — represents a revisionist and misleading history. Woodward's op-ed purports to demonstrate that then-Vice President Dick Cheney, who advocated a U.S. strike to destroy the Syrian reactor, failed to learn important lessons from intelligence failures in Iraq. In fact, it is Woodward who misunderstands the reality of al-Kibar.

First, Woodward's account of the intelligence about Syria's nuclear program is woefully incomplete. He neglects to mention three other sites in Syria that the CIA suspected were related to al-Kibar. In the four years since Israel destroyed the reactor, Syria has refused access to these sites, despite repeated requests from the International Atomic Energy Agency. Together, these activities indicated a broad-based covert nuclear program that had been underway for nearly a decade. As for the reactor itself, it was in the middle of the desert and — according to the CIA — “was not configured to produce electricity.” For what likely purpose was it built, then, if not to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons?

As a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Syria could have legitimately built a civilian nuclear power plant under the auspices of the IAEA. Instead, it chose to violate its international treaty obligations by secretly cooperating with North Korea to build a reactor well-suited for producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. At no point during our deliberations were U.S. intelligence analysts able to identify a reprocessing facility to turn the spent fuel into weapons-grade plutonium, and everyone was mindful of the debacle surrounding the bad intelligence in Iraq. But we also knew that in 1991, the world had dramatically underestimated how close Saddam Hussein was to a nuclear device. More often than not, history teaches that foolproof evidence becomes available only when it is too late. At al-Kibar, no intelligence analysts were able to alert policymakers that a reactor even existed until irrefutable evidence emerged in April 2007.

As Cheney relates in his memoir, he asked repeatedly over a period of years before 2007 about reports of North Korean nuclear officials traveling to Syria. U.S. intelligence analysts acknowledged the reports but had low confidence that any nuclear cooperation existed because of a lack of hard evidence. It was only when the Israelis produced photos of a nearly completed reactor in mid-2007 that low-confidence judgments switched to high-confidence judgments. Still, because we had no photos of a reprocessing facility, the analysts stuck to their low-confidence judgment about a weapons program.

Woodward's benign view aside, advisers to President George W. Bush had few doubts about the true nature of Syria's nuclear cooperation with North Korea and treated it as a deadly threat. Senior policymakers, including CIA Director Michael Hayden, reached consensus early on about Syria's intentions. In meetings with the president's top advisers, Hayden made it clear that he believed the facility was connected to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The New York Times reported in April 2008 that, despite having failed to identify a reprocessing facility, the intelligence community “had told President Bush . . . they could think of no other explanation for the reactor” than developing nuclear weapons.

The real dispute was what to do about the most brazen nuclear proliferation case in history. Despite Bush's October 2006 threat of serious consequences if North Korea proliferated nuclear technology, Pyongyang and Damascus persisted with the reactor. Here was the world's worst proliferator providing nuclear assistance to one of the world's worst state sponsors of terrorism — which also happened to be facilitating attacks on American

troops in Iraq. It is hard to imagine a more egregious challenge to the Bush Doctrine and America's war against terrorism.

There were legitimate policy arguments for and against destroying the reactor, and the president's advisers made them. Some were concerned, for example, about sparking a wider war with Syria. Some believed that the threat could be handled diplomatically. Cheney cast valid doubt on the international community's meager record in preventing rogue states from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Some of us believed the United States should attack the reactor. Some believed Israel should act. Others were sympathetic, in principle, to a U.S.-led diplomatic initiative. Whatever our individual views, Woodward is dead wrong to present the vice president's arguments as unreasonable. His advice was seriously considered at the time, and his claims look even more prescient in hindsight.

Ultimately, when President Bush decided against military action, the Israelis took it upon themselves to destroy the reactor. Syria then spent months trying to sanitize the site and stonewall the IAEA — confirmation of its non-peaceful intentions. The Israeli attack in September 2007 was flawless, Syria and North Korea did not lash out, and a dire proliferation threat was eliminated for good. America and the world are safer for it.

Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, was deputy national security adviser in 2007. Eliot Cohen, a professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, was counselor of the State Department in 2007. Eric Edelman, the Hertog practitioner in residence at SAIS, was undersecretary of defense for policy in 2007. John Hannah, a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, was national security adviser to the vice president in 2007.

<http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/4503/revisiting-the-decision-not-to-strike-al-kibar#comments>

Revisiting Bush's Decision on Al Kibar

By Jeffrey | 12 September 2011 | 38 Comments

Something about the whole Syria nuclear reactor story has never seemed quite right to me. When anonymous US officials began to hint that the facility struck by Israel was in some way nuclear, I wondered how solid that intelligence was. Why couldn't they just call the damned thing a reactor?

I noted that "we haven't heard from the people who ... were 'cautious about fully endorsing Israeli warnings' or 'remain unconvinced that a nascent Syrian nuclear program could pose an immediate threat.' They might have important information to add, were they willing to leak it."

Now, thanks to Bob Woodward, we have the beginnings of the other side of the story from those who successfully opposed a strike on the reactor building — but it just deepens the mystery.

In their memoirs, both George Bush (Decision Points) and Dick Cheney (In My Time) recount the crucial meeting on the question of whether or not to strike the reactor under construction at Al Kibar.

Cheney's book, with its implicit criticism of everyone else in the room, has reignited that debate, leading Woodward to recount the opposition to a strike in light detail:

But accounts from others in these meetings, a public briefing and Bush's own memoir present a dramatically different picture of the intelligence on the Syrian reactor.

Cheney does not reveal that then-CIA Director Michael V. Hayden had a team working for months to examine the intelligence on the Syrian reactor. Participants at the meetings say that Hayden presented his findings to Bush, Cheney and the others before Cheney made his arguments for a military strike.

According to a principal participant, Hayden made four points, saying: "That's a reactor. I have high confidence. That Syria and North Korea have been cooperating for 10 years on a nuclear reactor program, I have high confidence. North Korea built that reactor? I have medium confidence. On it is part of a nuclear weapons program, I have low confidence."

Hayden emphasized the last sentence to underscore his uncertainty. He later told others that he stuck to the intelligence facts and intentionally shaped his presentation that way to discourage a preemptive strike because the intelligence was weak.

According to the CIA, there was no evidence of plutonium reprocessing capability at the site or nearby in that region of Syria, though a reactor of that type would be capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. In addition, there was no identifiable means to manufacture uranium fuel.

[snip]

Two participants in the key National Security Council meeting in June 2007 said that after Cheney, the "lone voice," made his arguments, Bush rolled his eyes.

At the CIA afterward, the group of specialists who had worked for months on the Syrian reactor issue were pleased they had succeeded in avoiding the overreaching so evident in the Iraq WMD case. So they issued a very limited-circulation memorial coin. One side showed a map of Syria with a star at the site of the former reactor. On the other side the coin said, "No core/No war."

First, some house-keeping. Most of the details in Woodward's account have been reported elsewhere. Woodward relies both on Bush's memoir, as well as the not-for-attribution briefing given to reporters by senior intelligence officials 1 and 2 ("Ace" and "Deuce" were McConnell and Hayden as far as I can tell). And the detail about the coin stamped "No Core, No War" previously appeared (with slightly different punctuation) in US News and World Report's Washington Whispers by Paul Bedard and an Associated Press story by Deb Riechmann. What is new in Woodward's reporting is the pair of first person accounts of the President rolling his eyes at Cheney.

Second, "no core, no war" needs some explanation. This is not "If it does not fit, you must acquit." Rather, the phrase expresses the two high-level political goals that the intelligence community supported: (1) "No core," ie do not allow the reactor to become operational and (2) "No war," ie that efforts to stop the reactor from becoming operational should not lead to a wider conflict in the Middle East. Hayden explained the coin in the context of the trade-off between better analysis and maintaining secrecy necessary to control escalation, during a talk at Georgetown.

So, the big question: Why did Bush roll his eyes at Cheney?

Syria was building a clandestine nuclear reactor in a manner that was inconsistent with any explanation other than a nuclear weapons program, something all the principals appear to agree on. For some reason, the inability of the intelligence community to find a reprocessing or a fuel fabrication facility was dispositive for all the other parties other than the Vice-President.

But what if the intelligence community simply didn't know the location of either site? Bush is extraordinarily clear that he believes Syria intended to use the reactor to produce nuclear weapons. The little video the IC released, which ought to have cleared text, stated that "start of operations could have begun at any time although additional weeks to months of testing were likely." If there was a time to strike the reactor, it was before it went hot. In other words, the decision to wait could have resulted in the operation of the reactor had Israel not destroyed it.

I just don't understand why the failure to find fuel fabrication or reprocessing facilities was reassuring to anyone. One of the core reasons for my initial skepticism that the box was a reactor was my conviction that any American president, when presented with unequivocal evidence that a state-sponsor of terrorism was building a covert nuclear reactor, would act decisively to eliminate that reactor before it began operations. I have always assumed, for example, that no President would allow the Iranian reactor at Arak to come online. If the standard is actually "no covert reprocessing facilities," then I am really at a loss. Maybe I've been too warped by *Quick and Secret Construction of Plutonium Reprocessing Plants: A Way to Nuclear Weapons Proliferation?* (General Accounting Office, October 6, 1978).

I can't help but wonder whether there is some sort of technical detail that the principals are leaving out of the account. Something like the intelligence community concluding that not only did Syria not have a core for the reactor but that it had no reasonable prospect of acquiring one. But how could one have confidence in a judgment like that?

Anyway, as I say, I find the whole episode a continuing mystery. I am genuinely interested in hearing the opinions of others. And seeing a picture of one of those medals!

38 Responses to "Revisiting Bush's Decision on Al Kibar"

Jeffrey | September 12, 2011

Here is the relevant passage from Decision Points:

Iran was not the only nation endangering the freedom agenda by seeking nuclear weapons. In the spring of 2007, I received a highly classified report from a foreign intelligence partner. We pored over photographs of a suspicious, well-hidden building in the eastern desert of Syria.

The structure bore a striking resemblance to the nuclear facility at Yongbyon, North Korea. We concluded that the structure contained a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. Since North Korea was the only country that had built a reactor of that model in the past thirty-five years, our strong suspicion was that we had just caught Syria red-handed trying to develop a nuclear weapons capability with North Korean help.

That was certainly the conclusion of Prime Minister Olmert. “George, I’m asking you to bomb the compound,” he said in a phone call shortly after I received the report.

“Thank you for raising this matter,” I told the prime minister. “Give me some time to look at the intelligence and I’ll give you an answer.”

I convened the national security team for a series of intense discussions. As a military matter, the bombing mission would be straightforward. The Air Force could destroy the target, no sweat. But bombing a sovereign country with no warning or announced justification would create severe blowback.

A second option would be a covert raid. We studied the idea seriously, but the CIA and the military concluded that it would be too risky to slip a team into and out of Syria with enough explosives to blow up the facility.

The third option was to brief our allies on the intelligence, jointly expose the facility, and demand that Syria shutter and dismantle it under the supervision of the IAEA. With the regime’s duplicity exposed, we could use our leverage to press Syria to end its support for terror and meddling in Lebanon and Iraq. If Syria refused to dismantle the facility, we would have a clear public rationale for military action.

Before I made a decision, I asked CIA Director Mike Hayden to conduct an intelligence assessment.

He explained that the analysts had high confidence that the plant housed a nuclear reactor. But because they could not confirm the location of the facilities necessary to turn the plutonium into a weapon, they had only low confidence of a Syrian nuclear weapons program.

Mike’s report clarified my decision. “I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it’s a weapons program,” I said to Olmert. I told him I had decided on the diplomatic option backed by the threat of force. “I believe the strategy protects your interests and your state, and makes it more likely we can achieve our interests as well.”

The prime minister was disappointed. “This is something that hits at the very serious nerves of this country,” he said. He told me the threat of a nuclear weapons program in Syria was an “existential” issue for Israel, and he worried diplomacy would bog down and fail. “I must be honest and sincere with you. Your strategy is very disturbing to me.” That was the end of the call.

On September 6, 2007, the facility was destroyed.

The experience was revealing on multiple fronts. It confirmed Syria’s intention to develop nuclear weapons. It also provided another reminder that intelligence is not an exact science. While I was told that our analysts had only low confidence that the facility was part of a nuclear weapons program, surveillance after the bombing showed Syrian officials meticulously covering up the remains of the building. If the facility was really just an innocent research lab, Syrian President Assad would have been screaming at the Israelis on the floor of the United Nations. That was one judgment I could make with high confidence.

Prime Minister Olmert's execution of the strike made up for the confidence I had lost in the Israelis during the Lebanon war. I suggested to Ehud that we let some time go by and then reveal the operation as a way to isolate the Syrian regime. Olmert told me he wanted total secrecy. He wanted to avoid anything that might back Syria into a corner and force Assad to retaliate. This was his operation, and I felt an obligation to respect his wishes. I kept quiet, even though I thought we were missing an opportunity.

Finally, the bombing demonstrated Israel's willingness to act alone. Prime Minister Olmert hadn't asked for a green light, and I hadn't given one. He had done what he believed was necessary to protect Israel.

Reply

Anon | September 12, 2011

I am not a lawyer but I have a related legalistic question: if countries can be sanctioned via Chapter 7 of the UN Charter for being a "threat to the peace or a breach of peace or an act of war" for having an alleged nuclear weapons program, can other nations who attack said nations also be sanctioned via Chapter 7 of the UN Charter for being a "threat to the peace or a breach of peace or an act of war" ?

Reply

Nick | September 12, 2011

No, they can't be sanctioned.

As Bolton has mentioned before, under the auspices of Article 51, P5 and their friends can destroy sites that could pose harm to them in the near future. This includes heavy water reactors, enrichment plants, and reprocessing facilities. One may include PWRs as well, since again Bolton opined not too long ago that spent uranium fuel rods could easily be reprocessed into pure PU 239 for bomb making.

Reply

bradley laing | September 12, 2011

–The fall of K., dictator of Libya, has already led to claims of official secrets coming out. If the Assad government in Syria is overthrown, what would come out about the "Box On the Euphrates"?

Reply

Andy | September 12, 2011

I'll have a more substantive comment a bit later when I have some more time, but for now I wonder if you happen to have any relevant passages to quote from Cheney's book?

Reply

Anon | September 12, 2011

"The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe." ~ H.L.Mencken

Reply

kme | September 12, 2011

I am not so sure that the secrecy itself is particularly convincing evidence of the reactor being part of a weapons program – after all, ask yourself if you were the President of Syria and did hypothetically want to build a non-weapons-related nuclear reactor, would you announce it widely or would you try and keep it secret for as long as possible?

Much more damning is the design of the reactor itself.
Reply

blowback | September 13, 2011

What is so damning about the alleged design of the alleged reactor. It is the British Magnox design which my government in a fit of benevolence/stupidity released into the public domain many years ago. An obvious choice if you are a poor technically-backward country that wants to establish a successful nuclear programme.

BTW, is there any evidence that the US passed its or rather Israel's "intelligence" by some of the people from the UKAEA and the like who were actually involved in building these things originally? Maybe the reason Bush was rolling his eyes was that someone had done so and the word had come back that the intelligence was fake but Bush didn't want to say so because he didn't want the scheissesturm that would come his way for being an "existential threat" to Israel.

Reply

rwendland | September 13, 2011

blowback, the "fit of benevolence/stupidity" you refer to was of course Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace. I think the Calder Hall design was declassified for the Atoms for Peace conference, though there had already been considerable description in journals.

krepon | September 13, 2011

Good eye, Jeffrey.

Until more information is revealed, I'm inclined to suspect that President Bush and those around him (with the exception of the Vice President) much preferred that Israel do the deed, and conveyed indirect messages that increased this likelihood.

MK

Reply

pkR | September 13, 2011

One of the so called functionally related sites, the one referred to as Marj as-Sultan, appears to have been a uranium conversion facility. That points to fuel production...

With regard to reprocessing the only reference I am aware of is in the last book by Collins/Frantz ("Fallout", p. 206). They mention that Jacques Baute, sifting through the Tinner files in Switzerland, came across "a set of files that described Syria's attempted purchase of type of remote manipulator devices for handling radioactive material, almost never used outside a plutonium reprocessing facility".

Reply

Mark Lincoln | September 13, 2011

Why do North Korean graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium production reactors require stacks to vent gases and North Korean built graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium, production reactors in Syria not?

Reply

Cheryl Rofer | September 13, 2011

Hi Jeffrey –

Of course I have an opinion on this, but it's a little long for a comment.

So here's a link.

The short version is that I don't think there's much to learn in the Bush, Cheney, and Woodward versions.
Reply

Anon | September 13, 2011

Thanks.

There's any number of bad things that the Syrians could have been doing with the NKs that would not be nuclear weapons-related: missiles, bio, chem, game-boy modifications.

Even if it was a reactor: how do you go from that to a weapon? Not all things Nuc-cu-ler are weapons, as most people on this blog surely can confirm.

So their covert behavior and NK connection and elusive answers do not *NUCLEAR WEAPONS*.

In any case, Reuters is reporting that the Syrians are going to cooperate with the IAEA on this today.

Anon | September 13, 2011

What the UNSC says w/r/t Iran seems very important these days and is reported far and wide.

Here is what this super-important international body said post-Osirak:

FYI — UN Security Council resolution 487:

2. *****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****
3. Further considers that the said attack constitutes a serious threat to the entire IAEA safeguards regime which is the foundation of the non-proliferation Treaty;
4. Fully recognises the inalienable sovereign right of Iraq, and all other States, especially the developing countries, to establish programmes of technological and nuclear development to develop their economy and industry for peaceful purposes in accordance with their present and future needs and consistent with the internationally accepted objectives of preventing nuclear-weapons proliferation;
5. *****Calls upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards; *****

And you wonder why NAM nations are pissed off.

Reply

rwendland | September 13, 2011

Jeffrey, the absence of reprocessing plant development for a Magnox-type reactor is (I think) more significant than for a heavy water reactor, as at Arak. Spent Magnox-type fuel cannot be stored indefinitely (wet or dry stored[*]), so it would be technically stupid to startup a Magnox-type reactor without assured access to a working reprocessing plant within 5 years. And if you don't already have experience of reprocessing chemistry,

it would be foolish not to get at least a small-scale prototype reprocessing plant in trials before first criticality (or plan to export the spent fuel as per Italy & Japan).

So the absence of any sign of a reprocessing plant does strongly suggest startup was not imminent (or perhaps it was not a reactor).

Do you know if there are storage time limits on spent zirconium clad fuel from heavy water reactors? I suspect it can be stored for a long time, similar to LWR fuel, so startup of a HWR does not put you onto a non-stop express train to reprocessing.

[*] The UK Magnox dry stores at Wylfa worked fairly well, but water penetration did corrode some of the fuel, which created a very difficult fuel extraction problem, and as I recall a priority path to the reprocessing plant. A dry-store would not be easy to hide anyway, as it has significant similarities to a reactor – 2 metre concrete shielding and a large fault tolerant gas cooling system.

Reply

Allen Thomson | September 13, 2011

krepon said,

> Until more information is revealed, I'm inclined to suspect that President Bush and those around him (with the exception of the Vice President) much preferred that Israel do the deed, and conveyed indirect messages that increased this likelihood.

That's certainly my reading. The available evidence persuades me that the US really did believe, courtesy of Israeli intelligence delivered in the Spring of 2007, that Syria was within months of putting a plutonium production reactor into operation. And, due to the embarrassments of 2003, the US really didn't want to bomb another Arab/Muslim state on a WMD pretext if it could help it. Israel, which was also apparently convinced of the basic story line, would do the deed if the US couldn't be persuaded and that was what the US, minus Cheney, went with.

P.S.: I think Trey was Hadley.

P.P.S.: Low confidence in a weapons program coupled with high confidence in a plutonium production reactor is obviously nonsensical and points to other considerations at work in the IC (c.f. 2003). If you see a plant producing tank turrets, you can be fairly sure there's a tank program somewhere, even if you have no other evidence.

Reply

Andy | September 13, 2011

Allen,

I agree with your take.

Regarding your PPS, however, the IC was making a distinction between what it deduced or inferred based on its conclusion that the facility was a reactor, and actual evidence indicating a weapons program. On the latter there was little to no evidence, but at the same time the implications of the reactor were clear. Here's how administration officials put it in the non-for-attribution briefing Jeffrey linked to in his post:

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: No, you need to understand. I'm sorry to dwell on the point. This is very, very important.

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: This is very important.

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We told our President four things: This is a reactor; the North Koreans and the Syrians are cooperating on nuclear activities; the North Koreans and Syrians are cooperating on the construction of this reactor; and this reactor – its purpose – is to create fuel for a nuclear weapons program. Those are the things we concluded.

“Now, when you look at the body of evidence of those four sentences and begin to sort out how much of that is based on an overwhelming body of evidence as opposed to a more limited body of evidence and therefore more reliant on assessment, the fact that it was a nuclear reactor – absolutely high confidence; the fact of Syrian-Korean nuclear cooperation spanning a decade at an intense level, high confidence. At the time of the strike, fact of North Korean-Syrian cooperation in the building of that reactor, medium confidence that then got higher because of events, some of which we have alluded to in the briefing, okay. The fact that that material was going to be used for a weapons program – we believe that to be true, but because we did not have, as [Senior Intelligence Official 1] points out, additional clinical evidence of other activities, we could only give it a low confidence level. But you need to – and I think you understand what I’m trying to say. That’s not more or less sure; it’s just that it’s a way of communicating that for which you have a large body of evidence and that for which you may not.”

Also, there is this tibit from the same briefing discussing the decision of what to do about the reactor:

“SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We obviously were looking very closely at options, and we had looked at some approaches that involved a mix of diplomacy and the threat of military force with the goal of trying to ensure that the reactor was either dismantled or permanently disabled, and therefore never became operational.

“We looked at those options. There were, as I mentioned to you, conversations with the Israelis. Israel felt that this reactor posed such an existential threat that a different approach was required. And as a sovereign country, Israel had to make its own evaluation of the threat and the immediacy of the threat, and what actions it should take. And it did so.”

Jeffrey | September 14, 2011

Yes, my notes suggest that Trey was Hadley. What I cannot remember is who told me that. I think it was a reporter at the briefing.

Anon | September 14, 2011

Thank you Dan!

You will see my quote from UNSCR487 above told Israel not to repeat the Osirak-type attack AND told Israel to place its facilities under IAEA safeguards.

From a lawyerly perspective, do you think it is appropriate that Iran has Ch. 7 sanctions when there has been no breach of the peace but Israel does not when it has done so at least twice (over nuclear matters that we know of, not including assassinations and cyberattacks)?

Do cyberattacks count as a breach of the peace or a threat to the peace?

If Israel attacks Iran physically, do you think there will be a strong case for Ch 7 sanctions on Israel?

UN Security Council resolution 487:

2. *****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****

3. Further considers that the said attack constitutes a serious threat to the entire IAEA safeguards regime which is the foundation of the non-proliferation Treaty;

...

5. *****Calls upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards; *****
Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

The UNSC is at its essence a political body. It was structured to be that way. The fact that Iran has been sanctioned by the UNSC and Israel has not is, in my opinion, completely a product of the identity of the permanent members of the UNSC, all of whom have veto power over any Council decision. But only one such member really matters on this question – the US. The US has consistently vetoed any UNSC resolution that would condemn or even speak negatively about Israeli actions, with very few exceptions. Its all there in the UNSC record.

Anon | September 14, 2011

>Why do North Korean graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium production reactors require stacks to vent gases and North Korean built graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium, production reactors in Syria not?

Mark,

Interesting observation. The stack seen on Calder Hall-type Magnox reactors are to exhaust cooling air from between the steel reactor pressure vessel and the concrete shielding.

This isn't present on later Magnox designs which use an all concrete pressure vessel. The earlier design has the interesting feature that they neutron activate things in this cooling air and thus emit copious amounts of Ar-41.

It's enough that when these things were operating in the UK, the operators environmental monitoring teams had to make a plan based on wind direction, as you really can't do useful work in the "argon plume".

As an update, I'd think it was pretty simple to engineer, especially if the original operating pressure (~7 bar) is kept.

Reply

Andy | September 14, 2011

Ok, here's my take on your questions:

The eye-rolling. Obviously we can't read the man's mind, so anything is just a guess. My guess is that Bush (and everyone else) already knew the VP was going to advocate bombing and already knew that the VP would be alone in his advocacy. I also suspect the VP also knew he'd be alone and so his advocacy was simply to register his dissent to something that had already been decided. "Yes, yes, Dick, we already know you want to bomb Syria and you already know it ain't gonna happen."

Secondly, I don't share your assumptions about what Presidents will do in the face of an al Kibar or Arak. In this case, I think the President and his advisers knew that Israel had both the capability and will to take the

reactor out. Israel, perhaps predictably, came knocking hoping to get the US to do its dirty work. The President thankfully declined and uncertainty in the intelligence became the excuse.

Additionally, let's consider what else was going on in the spring/summer of 2007. US policy was completely focused on the "Surge" in Iraq and the President had just taken a big risk by doubling-down there. It doesn't make sense for him to increase that risk by bombing Syria, especially considering there was a completely viable (and completely superior, in my view) option of diplomacy backed by the threat of force. Not only that, but Syria certainly had the capability to cause more trouble in Iraq and bombing al Kibar could well have caused Syria to take the gloves off and more actively oppose the US there.

So what are the upsides to the US taking action and bombing the reactor? I don't really see any.

On the Arak reactor, absent something else going on, I don't think a President will bomb it as long as it remains under safeguards.

Reply

Malenki Sasha | September 14, 2011

I think we are missing the bigger picture here.

There is no way that the US would be able to get away with bombing Syria and it is absolutely shocking that Cheney ever said it was on the table.

Keep in mind up until the recent uprising, Syria was an extremely useful ally in the War on Terror and the Iraq war, and never mind that this was coming at the heels of the surge. The last thing the US needs is the very active participation of the Syrian government in supporting Iraq insurgents during one of the most critical times of the war.

Reply

Malenki Sasha | September 14, 2011

This is an instance of a preventive strike. Preemptive attacks are far easier to identify and legally support as where preventive strikes are murky at best.

This was an instance of a preventive strike which lacks the legal framework in which to effectively argue. The problem with nuclear weapons is that unlike conventional war, there is far too little time between identifying an imminent attack and annihilation. With a conventional armies intelligence can intercept plans, movements can be observed well in advance as where a leader's decision and the actual launch of a nuclear weapon can be done within moments of each other. Even if intelligence were to discover the leaders decision it will most likely be too late to react.

This is the dilemma that international legal framework is unprepared to deal with. By constructing a clandestine nuclear weapons program it is easy for a state to exploit this dilemma. They can simply claim it is for peaceful purposes while obscuring facilities and operations. Keeping stuff secret usually doesn't result in being bombed. Although it does happen every now and then.

What is particularly unnerving about al Kibar is that Syria denied being bombed along with the scramble to bury evidence of the facility. While signs of guilt don't warrant 100% certainty it is obvious they were up to something and that nipping their program in its infancy was the best course of action.

Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

No you are quite right that calls upon language in one resolution has equal legal weight (i.e. pretty much none) to calls upon language in another resolution.

Reply

Mark Gubrud | September 17, 2011

I've previously speculated here that the reason the US didn't bomb the Syrian reactor is that the US had long known about it and the project had been halted, along with the Iranian nuclear weapon program, possibly in response to a direct American threat. North Korea, hoping for a deal with the US and sensing that the game was over in any case, may have sold out its customer. Or some North Korean may have sold out for asylum and cash.

This is a pure guess on my part, but I still don't see any solid facts that don't fit in this picture. It would explain the absence of a reprocessing plant and the IC's peculiar "confidence," as you put it, in "no core, no war."

I think what happened in 2007 is that although the Syrians had put the program on ice, they hadn't dismantled the building, and the Israelis sent a bunch of stuff Bush's way in another effort to gin up a case for endless war and to take the heat off themselves on Palestine. The CIA was not impressed, and prevailed as per Bush's account, although he's leaving out the part that this was nothing new. But it was okay if the Israelis went ahead and bombed the site, mainly for their own political purposes, and to send a message to Syria and Iran on behalf of both Israel and the US.

I'm puzzled by your statement that you assume "that no President would allow the Iranian reactor at Arak to come online." The Iranians have made a considerable investment in the heavy water production plant and in the reactor. I was not aware that they were doing anything on that project other than moving forward with it. Assuming Obama is still president when they are ready to activate the reactor, what do you think he will do?

Reply

Jeffrey | September 18, 2011

I would have expected an air strike. I am still surprised that Bush did not authorize one against Al Kibar.

kme | September 21, 2011

Is a (presumably safeguarded) HWR any more concerning than safeguarded uranium enrichment cascades? (As I understand it, your position is that in the latter case the real worry is hidden non-safeguarded sites – doesn't the same apply in the former case too, with the added factor that it's difficult to hide a sizeable reactor?)

Anon | September 12, 2011

What is important to note is that the US properly kept out of this and did not (evidently) see any proof of a connection to a weapons program even if it was a reactor, whatever snake-oil the Israelis may have been pedaling.

What is also important to note is that Israel was not sanctioned by the UNSC for a clear "threat to the peace, breach of the peace or an act of aggression" even though its actions probably much more clearly satisfied these conditions as compared to other middle eastern countries who have nuclear programs, and whose low-level weaponization research (such as it ever probably was) was wrapped up in 2003 according to our own DNI.

It ought not be UNSC policy to only sanction NPT members.

Does Israel have a right to pre-emptively bomb whomever it feels like without so much as a slap on the hand from international bodies? Debatable.

But a couple of things are crystal clear: there may be, well, asymmetrical blowback when this happens; and, the attack on Iraq (Osirak) actually kicked off Iraq's weaponization work, in earnest; and, the perception of even-handedness and lack of double-standards by international bodies is important else others will properly thumb their nose at said bodies. Note I speak not only of the IAEA but of the UNSC itself.

Reply

Dan Joyner | September 13, 2011

A couple of comments here have raised questions about the legal issues related to the Israeli strike. I wrote a short piece for the American Society of International Law on this precise question in 2008. Here is an excerpt from the piece:

“Whether the activity at the Syrian site was weapons related or civilian in character, Israel's action in attacking and destroying the site was almost certainly a breach of international law. Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, of which Israel is a member, prohibits uses of force “against the territorial integrity” of any other state. States retain the inherent right of self-defense as defined in Article 51 of the Charter. Article 51 allows unilateral acts of force in self-defense on a temporary basis “if an armed attack occurs” against a member of the United Nations. As Syria had not yet attacked Israel, any justification for Israel's use of force pursuant to Article 51 must be found, if at all, by resort to the principle of anticipatory self-defense.

Anticipatory self-defense was part of pre-Charter customary law, and many argue that states are still entitled to rely upon the principle. However, even if this contention is correct, anticipatory self-defense must be understood to be limited in its applicability to situations of imminent threat. As observed by U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster during the 1841 Caroline controversy, in order for the principle of anticipatory self-defense to apply, there must be a “necessity of self-defense, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.” Even if such a situation of imminence arises, a use of force in anticipatory self defense may only be carried out in accordance with the customary international law principles of necessity and proportionality.

There are no facts alleged against Syria which would meet the required test of imminence under the principle of anticipatory self-defense. Again, there are no allegations or evidence that the site served a weapons development purpose. The sort of imminence of threat demanded by the doctrine of anticipatory self-defense is clearly not presented by the simple fact of the construction and maintenance of a nuclear reactor in Syria. Neither Syria's breach of its IAEA safeguards agreement, nor its breach of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718, have any bearing on this analysis. Israel's attack on Syrian territory thus constitutes a breach of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter.

The September 2007 action by Israel is reminiscent of its 1981 attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor under construction at Osirak. On that occasion as well, the reactor was destroyed. However, in the aftermath of the attack, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 487, which denounced the incident as a “clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations.”[17]

Though a subject of ongoing debate, it is doubtful that the substance of international use of force law regarding anticipatory self-defense has changed in any material respect since 1981. However, the Israeli attack upon Syria will no doubt stimulate renewed discussion on this point.”

Reply

Scott Monje | September 13, 2011

“However, the Israeli attack upon Syria will no doubt stimulate renewed discussion on this point.”

And did it?

Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

There has certainly been no end of discussion about it in legal literature since then. I wrote extensively on the topic of counterproliferation uses of force in my 2009 book. One problem is that there are so few data points in this area – I.e. Relatively few instances of counterpro use of force like in Syria – that it's difficult to say convincingly that new patterns of state practice are emerging to effectively change the classical rules. I think the best assessment is that the basic rules have not changed.

Reply

Anon | September 14, 2011

Dan, thanks for your very useful input. Do you think UNSCR 487's statement:

*****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****

carries any real weight?

Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

“Calls upon” language in UNSCR’s is nonbinding. However, the importance of UNSCR 487 was to show the UNSC’s judgment that the attack on Osirak was unlawful.

Reply

Anon | September 14, 2011

Dan, thank you again — that is what I thought.

But now I have another related question: since Israel ignored UNSCR487 and bombed Syria AFTER Osirak, and because the UNSC resolution calling for sanctions on Iran also contain the same phrase “calls upon” Iran repeatedly — is it also OK for Iran to thumb its nose at the UNSC, just as Israel has done; or, in your view, does this constitute double-standards?

TEXT of UNSC sanction resolution on Iran:

<http://www.bicc.org.uk/downloads/UN%20Resolution%201929.pdf>

e.g.

“..calls upon

Iran to confirm, as requested by the IAEA, that it has not taken a decision to construct, or authorize construction of, any other nuclear facility which has as yet not been declared to the IAEA,”

“calls upon Iran to act strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Additional Protocol to its IAEA Safeguards Agreement that it signed on 18 December 2003, calls upon Iran to ratify promptly the Additional Protocol”

“calls upon all States to exercise vigilance over those transactions involving the IRGC that could contribute to Iran’s proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities or the

development of nuclear weapon delivery systems;”

“Calls upon all States to inspect, in accordance with their national authorities and legislation and consistent with international law, in particular the law of the sea and relevant international civil aviation agreements,

all cargo to and from Iran, in their territory, including seaports and airports, if the State concerned has information that

provides reasonable grounds to believe the cargo contains items the supply, sale, transfer, or export of which is prohibited by paragraphs 3, 4 or 7 of resolution 1737 (2006), paragraph 5 of resolution 1747 (2007), paragraph 8 of

resolution 1803 (2008) or paragraphs 8 or 9 of this resolution, for the purpose of ensuring strict implementation of those provisions;”

“Calls upon all States, in addition to implementing their obligations pursuant to resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and this resolution, to prevent the provision of financial services, including insurance or reinsurance,

or the transfer to, through, or from their territory, or to or by their nationals or entities organized under their laws (including branches abroad), or persons or financial institutions in their territory, of any financial or other assets or

resources if they have information that provides reasonable grounds to believe that such services, assets or resources

could contribute to Iran’s proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, or the development of nuclear weapon delivery

systems, including by freezing any financial or other assets or resources on their territories or that hereafter come within

their territories, or that are subject to their jurisdiction or that hereafter become subject to their jurisdiction, that are

related to such programmes or activities and applying enhanced monitoring to prevent all such transactions in accordance with their national authorities and legislation;”

ETC. Etc.

Is it OK for Iran and all other nations to thumb their collective noses at the litany of UNSC “calls upon” just like Israel did in bombing Syria?

Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

The difference from a legal perspective is that in Resolutions 1737 and 1929, the UNSC has acted under Chapter VII and “Decided” that Iran shall cease uranium enrichment, etc. “Decides” is the word the UNSC uses to make a binding decision, which all members have agreed to comply with in UN Charter Article 25. So Iran is in violation of UNSC decisions, which under Article 25 are legally binding.

Reply

Anon | September 14, 2011

Yes, thank you — OK I see.

But as the quote from the UNSC resolution above shows there are some “decided” ’s and plenty of “calls upon”.

I am perhaps wrong but it seems that the “calls upon” parts in the sanctions’ resolutions are as optional as Israel not stopping bombing nations when being “called upon” to do so. Also Israel was called upon to place its nuclear program under IAEA safeguards.

Please feel free to correct me if I am wrong — I’m no lawyer after all.

Correcting the record about that Syrian nuclear reactor

By Michael V. Hayden,

[2011-09-23]

Intelligence estimates about foreign nuclear programs seem to lead unhappy, often controversial, lives.

There was the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program. That was wrong, of course. But there is a body of thought, built up on the American left, that the estimate was beyond wrong. It holds that there was a conspiracy to cook the intelligence to support a preconceived course of action; that the Bush administration, especially the vice president, pressured intelligence workers to reach the conclusions they did. “Bush lied, Americans died” was the commonly heard mantra.

In fact, we just got it wrong. In one of my last meetings with Leon Panetta when he was taking over as director of the CIA, I cautioned against accepting the left’s urban legend and said, “Leon, this was our fault. It was a clean swing and a miss.”

To be clear about the last point: I told the president that al-Kibar was part of a nuclear weapons program. Why else would the Syrians take such a risk if they were not gambling on such a game-changer? And, besides, we could conceive of no alternative uses for the facility. But since we could not identify the other essentials of a weapons program (a reprocessing plant, work on a warhead, etc.), we cautiously characterized this finding as “low confidence.”

Woodward describes the intelligence as fact-based but then says it was shaped to discourage a preemptive U.S. strike.

That’s not what intelligence does, and confusion on that point may have been generated by a coin, mentioned by Woodward, that CIA folks working on al-Kibar made after the facility was destroyed. On that coin, emblazoned across a map of Syria, were the four words that had been the rallying cry of this effort: “No core, no war.”

Except that “no war” was never taken to mean no kinetic option against al-Kibar. Rather, it referred to the overall policy direction we were following: Whatever we did to make this reactor go away (“no core”), it could not lead to a generalized conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean (“no war”).

Hence, knowledge of the facility was closely held within the U.S. government. Congressional notifications were limited. Even within the executive branch, the data were compartmentalized. All of this was designed to prevent a leak and preclude a circumstance in which we put Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a position where he felt publicly humiliated and thought he had to respond if the facility were attacked.

As it happened, the plutonium plant at al-Kibar was destroyed by the Israelis in September 2007. Neither the Syrian, U.S. nor Israeli governments said much about it. Assad let the facility’s destruction pass. “No core, no war.”

It’s puzzling to me why al-Kibar has been resurrected. We were wrong about Iraq’s nuclear program. Fair enough. History will tell how right or wrong we were about Iran. I can accept that.

But we got al-Kibar right. And the debate in the U.S. government over its fate was informed by hard facts. The debate reflected differing views, differing approaches. They were aired. Decisions were made. Isn’t that how it’s supposed to work?

The writer was director of the CIA from 2006 to 2009.

Revisiting Bush's Decision on Al Kibar

By Jeffrey

12 September 2011

38 Comments

Something about the whole Syria nuclear reactor story has never seemed quite right to me. When anonymous US officials began to hint that the facility struck by Israel was in some way nuclear, I wondered how solid that intelligence was. Why couldn't they just call the damned thing a reactor?

I noted that "we haven't heard from the people who ... were 'cautious about fully endorsing Israeli warnings' or 'remain unconvinced that a nascent Syrian nuclear program could pose an immediate threat.' They might have important information to add, were they willing to leak it."

Now, thanks to Bob Woodward, we have the beginnings of the other side of the story from those who successfully opposed a strike on the reactor building — but it just deepens the mystery.

In their memoirs, both George Bush (Decision Points) and Dick Cheney (In My Time) recount the crucial meeting on the question of whether or not to strike the reactor under construction at Al Kibar.

Cheney's book, with its implicit criticism of everyone else in the room, has reignited that debate, leading Woodward to recount the opposition to a strike in light detail:

But accounts from others in these meetings, a public briefing and Bush's own memoir present a dramatically different picture of the intelligence on the Syrian reactor.

Cheney does not reveal that then-CIA Director Michael V. Hayden had a team working for months to examine the intelligence on the Syrian reactor. Participants at the meetings say that Hayden presented his findings to Bush, Cheney and the others before Cheney made his arguments for a military strike.

According to a principal participant, Hayden made four points, saying: "That's a reactor. I have high confidence. That Syria and North Korea have been cooperating for 10 years on a nuclear reactor program, I have high confidence. North Korea built that reactor? I have medium confidence. On it is part of a nuclear weapons program, I have low confidence."

Hayden emphasized the last sentence to underscore his uncertainty. He later told others that he stuck to the intelligence facts and intentionally shaped his presentation that way to discourage a preemptive strike because the intelligence was weak.

According to the CIA, there was no evidence of plutonium reprocessing capability at the site or nearby in that region of Syria, though a reactor of that type would be capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. In addition, there was no identifiable means to manufacture uranium fuel.

[snip]

Two participants in the key National Security Council meeting in June 2007 said that after Cheney, the "lone voice," made his arguments, Bush rolled his eyes.

At the CIA afterward, the group of specialists who had worked for months on the Syrian reactor issue were pleased they had succeeded in avoiding the overreaching so evident in the Iraq WMD case. So they issued a very limited-circulation memorial coin. One side showed a map of Syria with a star at the site of the former reactor.

On the other side the coin said, “No core/No war.”

First, some house-keeping. Most of the details in Woodward’s account have been reported elsewhere. Woodward relies both on Bush’s memoir, as well as the not-for-attribution briefing given to reporters by senior intelligence officials 1 and 2 (“Ace” and “Deuce” were McConnell and Hayden as far as I can tell). And the detail about the coin stamped “No Core, No War” previously appeared (with slightly different punctuation) in US News and World Report’s Washington Whispers by Paul Bedard and an Associated Press story by Deb Riechmann. What is new in Woodward’s reporting is the pair of first person accounts of the President rolling his eyes at Cheney.

Second, “no core, no war” needs some explanation. This is not “If it does not fit, you must acquit.” Rather, the phrase expresses the two high-level political goals that the intelligence community supported: (1) “No core,” ie do not allow the reactor to become operational and (2) “No war,” ie that efforts to stop the reactor from becoming operational should not lead to a wider conflict in the Middle East. Hayden explained the coin in the context of the trade-off between better analysis and maintaining secrecy necessary to control escalation, during a talk at Georgetown.

So, the big question: Why did Bush roll his eyes at Cheney?

Syria was building a clandestine nuclear reactor in a manner that was inconsistent with any explanation other than a nuclear weapons program, something all the principals appear to agree on. For some reason, the inability of the intelligence community to find a reprocessing or a fuel fabrication facility was dispositive for all the other parties other than the Vice-President.

But what if the intelligence community simply didn’t know the location of either site? Bush is extraordinarily clear that he believes Syria intended to use the reactor to produce nuclear weapons. The little video the IC released, which ought to have cleared text, stated that “start of operations could have begun at any time although additional weeks to months of testing were likely.” If there was a time to strike the reactor, it was before it went hot. In other words, the decision to wait could have resulted in the operation of the reactor had Israel not destroyed it.

I just don’t understand why the failure to find fuel fabrication or reprocessing facilities was reassuring to anyone. One of the core reasons for my initial skepticism that the box was a reactor was my conviction that any American president, when presented with unequivocal evidence that a state-sponsor of terrorism was building a covert nuclear reactor, would act decisively to eliminate that reactor before it began operations. I have always assumed, for example, that no President would allow the Iranian reactor at Arak to come online. If the standard is actually “no covert reprocessing facilities,” then I am really at a loss. Maybe I’ve been too warped by *Quick and Secret Construction of Plutonium Reprocessing Plants: A Way to Nuclear Weapons Proliferation?* (General Accounting Office, October 6, 1978).

I can’t help but wonder whether there is some sort of technical detail that the principals are leaving out of the account. Something like the intelligence community concluding that not only did Syria not have a core for the reactor but that it had no reasonable prospect of acquiring one. But how could one have confidence in a judgment like that?

Anyway, as I say, I find the whole episode a continuing mystery. I am genuinely interested in hearing the opinions of others. And seeing a picture of one of those medals!

Jeffrey | September 12, 2011

Here is the relevant passage from Decision Points:

Iran was not the only nation endangering the freedom agenda by seeking nuclear weapons. In the spring of 2007, I received a highly classified report from a foreign intelligence partner. We pored over photographs of a suspicious, well-hidden building in the eastern desert of Syria.

The structure bore a striking resemblance to the nuclear facility at Yongbyon, North Korea. We concluded that the structure contained a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. Since North Korea was the only country that had built a reactor of that model in the past thirty-five years, our strong suspicion was that we had just caught Syria red-handed trying to develop a nuclear weapons capability with North Korean help.

That was certainly the conclusion of Prime Minister Olmert. “George, I’m asking you to bomb the compound,” he said in a phone call shortly after I received the report.

“Thank you for raising this matter,” I told the prime minister. “Give me some time to look at the intelligence and I’ll give you an answer.”

I convened the national security team for a series of intense discussions. As a military matter, the bombing mission would be straightforward. The Air Force could destroy the target, no sweat. But bombing a sovereign country with no warning or announced justification would create severe blowback.

A second option would be a covert raid. We studied the idea seriously, but the CIA and the military concluded that it would be too risky to slip a team into and out of Syria with enough explosives to blow up the facility.

The third option was to brief our allies on the intelligence, jointly expose the facility, and demand that Syria shutter and dismantle it under the supervision of the IAEA. With the regime’s duplicity exposed, we could use our leverage to press Syria to end its support for terror and meddling in Lebanon and Iraq. If Syria refused to dismantle the facility, we would have a clear public rationale for military action.

Before I made a decision, I asked CIA Director Mike Hayden to conduct an intelligence assessment.

He explained that the analysts had high confidence that the plant housed a nuclear reactor. But because they could not confirm the location of the facilities necessary to turn the plutonium into a weapon, they had only low confidence of a Syrian nuclear weapons program.

Mike’s report clarified my decision. “I cannot justify an attack on a sovereign nation unless my intelligence agencies stand up and say it’s a weapons program,” I said to Olmert. I told him I had decided on the diplomatic option backed by the threat of force. “I believe the strategy protects your interests and your state, and makes it more likely we can achieve our interests as well.”

The prime minister was disappointed. “This is something that hits at the very serious nerves of this country,” he said. He told me the threat of a nuclear weapons program in Syria was an “existential” issue for Israel, and he worried diplomacy would bog down and fail. “I must be honest and sincere with you. Your strategy is very disturbing to me.” That was the end of the call.

On September 6, 2007, the facility was destroyed.

The experience was revealing on multiple fronts. It confirmed Syria's intention to develop nuclear weapons. It also provided another reminder that intelligence is not an exact science. While I was told that our analysts had only low confidence that the facility was part of a nuclear weapons program, surveillance after the bombing showed Syrian officials meticulously covering up the remains of the building. If the facility was really just an innocent research lab, Syrian President Assad would have been screaming at the Israelis on the floor of the United Nations. That was one judgment I could make with high confidence.

Prime Minister Olmert's execution of the strike made up for the confidence I had lost in the Israelis during the Lebanon war. I suggested to Ehud that we let some time go by and then reveal the operation as a way to isolate the Syrian regime. Olmert told me he wanted total secrecy. He wanted to avoid anything that might back Syria into a corner and force Assad to retaliate. This was his operation, and I felt an obligation to respect his wishes. I kept quiet, even though I thought we were missing an opportunity.

Finally, the bombing demonstrated Israel's willingness to act alone. Prime Minister Olmert hadn't asked for a green light, and I hadn't given one. He had done what he believed was necessary to protect Israel.

Anon | September 12, 2011

I am not a lawyer but I have a related legalistic question: if countries can be sanctioned via Chapter 7 of the UN Charter for being a "threat to the peace or a breach of peace or an act of war" for having an alleged nuclear weapons program, can other nations who attack said nations also be sanctioned via Chapter 7 of the UN Charter for being a "threat to the peace or a breach of peace or an act of war" ?

Nick | September 12, 2011

No, they can't be sanctioned.

As Bolton has mentioned before, under the auspices of Article 51, P5 and their friends can destroy sites that could pose harm to them in the near future. This includes heavy water reactors, enrichment plants, and reprocessing facilities. One may include PWRs as well, since again Bolton opined not too long ago that spent uranium fuel rods could easily be reprocessed into pure PU 239 for bomb making.

bradley laing | September 12, 2011

-The fall of K., dictator of Libya, has already led to claims of official secrets coming out. If the Assad government in Syria is overthrown, what would come out about the "Box On the Euphrates"?

Andy | September 12, 2011

I'll have a more substantive comment a bit later when I have some more time, but for now I wonder if you happen to have any relevant passages to quote from Cheney's book?

Anon | September 12, 2011

“The truth that survives is simply the lie that is pleasantest to believe.” ~ H.L.Mencken

kme | September 12, 2011

I am not so sure that the secrecy itself is particularly convincing evidence of the reactor being part of a weapons program – after all, ask yourself if you were the President of Syria and did hypothetically want to build a non-weapons-related nuclear reactor, would you announce it widely or would you try and keep it secret for as long as possible?

Much more damning is the design of the reactor itself.

blowback | September 13, 2011

What is so damning about the alleged design of the alleged reactor. It is the British Magnox design which my government in a fit of benevolence/stupidity released into the public domain many years ago. An obvious choice if you are a poor technically-backward country that wants to establish a successful nuclear programme.

BTW, is there any evidence that the US passed its or rather Israel’s “intelligence” by some of the people from the UKAEA and the like who were actually involved in building these things originally? Maybe the reason Bush was rolling his eyes was that someone had done so and the word had come back that the intelligence was fake but Bush didn’t want to say so because he didn’t want the scheissesturm that would come his way for being an “existential threat” to Israel.

rwendland | September 13, 2011

blowback, the “fit of benevolence/stupidity” you refer to was of course Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace. I think the Calder Hall design was declassified for the Atoms for Peace conference, though there had already been considerable description in journals.

krepon | September 13, 2011

Good eye, Jeffrey.

Until more information is revealed, I’m inclined to suspect that President Bush and those around him (with the exception of the Vice President) much preferred that Israel do the deed, and conveyed indirect messages that increased this likelihood.

MK

pkp | September 13, 2011

One of the so called functionally related sites, the one referred to as Marj as-Sultan, appears to have been a uranium conversion facility. That points to fuel production...

With regard to reprocessing the only reference I am aware of is in the last book by Collins/Frantz (“Fallout”, p. 206). They mention that Jacques Baute, sifting through the Tinner files in Switzerland, came across “a set of

files that described Syria's attempted purchase of type of remote manipulator devices for handling radioactive material, almost never used outside a plutonium reprocessing facility".

Mark Lincoln | September 13, 2011

Why do North Korean graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium production reactors require stacks to vent gases and North Korean built graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium, production reactors in Syria not?

Cheryl Rofer | September 13, 2011

Hi Jeffrey –

Of course I have an opinion on this, but it's a little long for a comment.

So here's a link.

The short version is that I don't think there's much to learn in the Bush, Cheney, and Woodward versions.

Anon | September 13, 2011

Thanks.

There's any number of bad things that the Syrians could have been doing with the NKs that would not be nuclear weapons-related: missiles, bio, chem, game-boy modifications.

Even if it was a reactor: how do you go from that to a weapon? Not all things Nuc-cu-ler are weapons, as most people on this blog surely can confirm.

So their covert behavior and NK connection and elusive answers do not *NUCLEAR WEAPONS*.

In any case, Reuters is reporting that the Syrians are going to cooperate with the IAEA on this today.

Anon | September 13, 2011

What the UNSC says w/r/t Iran seems very important these days and is reported far and wide.

Here is what this super-important international body said post-Osirak:

FYI — UN Security Council resolution 487:

2. *****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****
3. Further considers that the said attack constitutes a serious threat to the entire IAEA safeguards regime which is the foundation of the non-proliferation Treaty;
4. Fully recognises the inalienable sovereign right of Iraq, and all other States, especially the developing countries, to establish programmes of technological and nuclear development to develop their economy and

industry for peaceful purposes in accordance with their present and future needs and consistent with the internationally accepted objectives of preventing nuclear-weapons proliferation;

5. ****Calls upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards; ****

And you wonder why NAM nations are pissed off.

rwendland | September 13, 2011

Jeffrey, the absence of reprocessing plant development for a Magnox-type reactor is (I think) more significant than for a heavy water reactor, as at Arak. Spent Magnox-type fuel cannot be stored indefinitely (wet or dry stored[*]), so it would be technically stupid to startup a Magnox-type reactor without assured access to a working reprocessing plant within 5 years. And if you don't already have experience of reprocessing chemistry, it would be foolish not to get at least a small-scale prototype reprocessing plant in trials before first criticality (or plan to export the spent fuel as per Italy & Japan).

So the absence of any sign of a reprocessing plant does strongly suggest startup was not imminent (or perhaps it was not a reactor).

Do you know if there are storage time limits on spent zirconium clad fuel from heavy water reactors? I suspect it can be stored for a long time, similar to LWR fuel, so startup of a HWR does not put you onto a non-stop express train to reprocessing.

[*] The UK Magnox dry stores at Wylfa worked fairly well, but water penetration did corrode some of the fuel, which created a very difficult fuel extraction problem, and as I recall a priority path to the reprocessing plant. A dry-store would not be easy to hide anyway, as it has significant similarities to a reactor – 2 metre concrete shielding and a large fault tolerant gas cooling system.

Allen Thomson | September 13, 2011

krepon said,

> Until more information is revealed, I'm inclined to suspect that President Bush and those around him (with the exception of the Vice President) much preferred that Israel do the deed, and conveyed indirect messages that increased this likelihood.

That's certainly my reading. The available evidence persuades me that the US really did believe, courtesy of Israeli intelligence delivered in the Spring of 2007, that Syria was within months of putting a plutonium production reactor into operation. And, due to the embarrassments of 2003, the US really didn't want to bomb another Arab/Muslim state on a WMD pretext if it could help it. Israel, which was also apparently convinced of the basic story line, would do the deed if the US couldn't be persuaded and that was what the US, minus Cheney, went with.

P.S.: I think Trey was Hadley.

P.P.S.: Low confidence in a weapons program coupled with high confidence in a plutonium production reactor is obviously nonsensical and points to other considerations at work in the IC (c.f. 2003). If you see a plant producing tank turrets, you can be fairly sure there's a tank program somewhere, even if you have no other evidence.

Andy | September 13, 2011

Allen,

I agree with your take.

Regarding your PPS, however, the IC was making a distinction between what it deduced or inferred based on its conclusion that the facility was a reactor, and actual evidence indicating a weapons program. On the latter there was little to no evidence, but at the same time the implications of the reactor were clear. Here's how administration officials put it in the non-for-attribution briefing Jeffrey linked to in his post:

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: No, you need to understand. I'm sorry to dwell on the point. This is very, very important.

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 1: This is very important.

“SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL 2: We told our President four things: This is a reactor; the North Koreans and the Syrians are cooperating on nuclear activities; the North Koreans and Syrians are cooperating on the construction of this reactor; and this reactor – its purpose – is to create fuel for a nuclear weapons program. Those are the things we concluded.

“Now, when you look at the body of evidence of those four sentences and begin to sort out how much of that is based on an overwhelming body of evidence as opposed to a more limited body of evidence and therefore more reliant on assessment, the fact that it was a nuclear reactor – absolutely high confidence; the fact of Syrian-Korean nuclear cooperation spanning a decade at an intense level, high confidence. At the time of the strike, fact of North Korean-Syrian cooperation in the building of that reactor, medium confidence that then got higher because of events, some of which we have alluded to in the briefing, okay. The fact that that material was going to be used for a weapons program – we believe that to be true, but because we did not have, as [Senior Intelligence Official 1] points out, additional clinical evidence of other activities, we could only give it a low confidence level. But you need to – and I think you understand what I'm trying to say. That's not more or less sure; it's just that it's a way of communicating that for which you have a large body of evidence and that for which you may not.”

Also, there is this tibat from the same briefing discussing the decision of what to do about the reactor:

“SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We obviously were looking very closely at options, and we had looked at some approaches that involved a mix of diplomacy and the threat of military force with the goal of trying to ensure that the reactor was either dismantled or permanently disabled, and therefore never became operational.

“We looked at those options. There were, as I mentioned to you, conversations with the Israelis. Israel felt that this reactor posed such an existential threat that a different approach was required. And as a sovereign country, Israel had to make its own evaluation of the threat and the immediacy of the threat, and what actions it should take. And it did so.”

Jeffrey | September 14, 2011

Yes, my notes suggest that Trey was Hadley. What I cannot remember is who told me that. I think it was a reporter at the briefing.

Anon | September 14, 2011

Thank you Dan!

You will see my quote from UNSCR487 above told Israel not to repeat the Osirak-type attack AND told Israel to place its facilities under IAEA safeguards.

From a lawyerly perspective, do you think it is appropriate that Iran has Ch. 7 sanctions when there has been no breach of the peace but Israel does not when it has done so at least twice (over nuclear matters that we know of, not including assassinations and cyberattacks)?

Do cyberattacks count as a breach of the peace or a threat to the peace?

If Israel attacks Iran physically, do you think there will be a strong case for Ch 7 sanctions on Israel?

UN Security Council resolution 487:

2. *****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****
3. Further considers that the said attack constitutes a serious threat to the entire IAEA safeguards regime which is the foundation of the non-proliferation Treaty;
...
5. ****Calls upon Israel urgently to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards; ****

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

The UNSC is at its essence a political body. It was structured to be that way. The fact that Iran has been sanctioned by the UNSC and Israel has not is, in my opinion, completely a product of the identity of the permanent members of the UNSC, all of whom have veto power over any Council decision. But only one such member really matters on this question – the US. The US has consistently vetoed any UNSC resolution that would condemn or even speak negatively about Israeli actions, with very few exceptions. Its all there in the UNSC record.

Anon | September 14, 2011

>Why do North Korean graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium production reactors require stacks to vent gases and North Korean built graphite moderated, gas cooled, magnox, plutonium, production reactors in Syria not?

Mark,

Interesting observation. The stack seen on Calder Hall-type Magnox reactors are to exhaust cooling air from between the steel reactor pressure vessel and the concrete shielding.

This isn't present on later Magnox designs which use an all concrete pressure vessel. The earlier design has the interesting feature that they neutron activate things in this cooling air and thus emit copious amounts of Ar-41.

It's enough that when these things were operating in the UK, the operators environmental monitoring teams had to make a plan based on wind direction, as you really can't do useful work in the "argon plume".

As an update, I'd think it was pretty simple to engineer, especially if the original operating pressure (~7 bar) is kept.

Andy | September 14, 2011

Ok, here's my take on your questions:

The eye-rolling. Obviously we can't read the man's mind, so anything is just a guess. My guess is that Bush (and everyone else) already knew the VP was going to advocate bombing and already knew that the VP would be alone in his advocacy. I also suspect the VP also knew he'd be alone and so his advocacy was simply to register his dissent to something that had already been decided. "Yes, yes, Dick, we already know you want to bomb Syria and you already know it ain't gonna happen."

Secondly, I don't share your assumptions about what Presidents will do in the face of an al Kibar or Arak. In this case, I think the President and his advisers knew that Israel had both the capability and will to take the reactor out. Israel, perhaps predictably, came knocking hoping to get the US to do its dirty work. The President thankfully declined and uncertainty in the intelligence became the excuse.

Additionally, let's consider what else was going on in the spring/summer of 2007. US policy was completely focused on the "Surge" in Iraq and the President had just taken a big risk by doubling-down there. It doesn't make sense for him to increase that risk by bombing Syria, especially considering there was a completely viable (and completely superior, in my view) option of diplomacy backed by the threat of force. Not only that, but Syria certainly had the capability to cause more trouble in Iraq and bombing al Kibar could well have caused Syria to take the gloves off and more actively oppose the US there.

So what are the upsides to the US taking action and bombing the reactor? I don't really see any.

On the Arak reactor, absent something else going on, I don't think a President will bomb it as long as it remains under safeguards.

Malenki Sasha | September 14, 2011

I think we are missing the bigger picture here.

There is no way that the US would be able to get away with bombing Syria and it is absolutely shocking that Cheney ever said it was on the table.

Keep in mind up until the recent uprising, Syria was an extremely useful ally in the War on Terror and the Iraq war, and never mind that this was coming at the heels of the surge. The last thing the US needs is the very active participation of the Syrian government in supporting Iraq insurgents during one of the most critical times of the war.

Malenki Sasha | September 14, 2011

This is an instance of a preventive strike. Preemptive attacks are far easier to identify and legally support as where preventive strikes are murky at best.

This was an instance of a preventive strike which lacks the legal framework in which to effectively argue. The problem with nuclear weapons is that unlike conventional war, there is far too little time between identifying an imminent attack and annihilation. With a conventional armies intelligence can intercept plans, movements can be observed well in advance as where a leader's decision and the actual launch of a nuclear weapon can be done within moments of each other. Even if intelligence were to discover the leaders decision it will most likely be too late to react.

This is the dilemma that international legal framework is unprepared to deal with. By constructing a clandestine nuclear weapons program it is easy for a state to exploit this dilemma. They can simply claim it is for peaceful purposes while obscuring facilities and operations. Keeping stuff secret usually doesn't result in being bombed. Although it does happen every now and then.

What is particularly unnerving about al Kibar is that Syria denied being bombed along with the scramble to bury evidence of the facility. While signs of guilt don't warrant 100% certainty it is obvious they were up to something and that nipping their program in its infancy was the best course of action.

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

No you are quite right that calls upon language in one resolution has equal legal weight (i.e. pretty much none) to calls upon language in another resolution.

Mark Gubrud | September 17, 2011

I've previously speculated here that the reason the US didn't bomb the Syrian reactor is that the US had long known about it and the project had been halted, along with the Iranian nuclear weapon program, possibly in response to a direct American threat. North Korea, hoping for a deal with the US and sensing that the game was over in any case, may have sold out its customer. Or some North Korean may have sold out for asylum and cash.

This is a pure guess on my part, but I still don't see any solid facts that don't fit in this picture. It would explain the absence of a reprocessing plant and the IC's peculiar "confidence," as you put it, in "no core, no war."

I think what happened in 2007 is that although the Syrians had put the program on ice, they hadn't dismantled the building, and the Israelis sent a bunch of stuff Bush's way in another effort to gin up a case for endless war and to take the heat off themselves on Palestine. The CIA was not impressed, and prevailed as per Bush's account, although he's leaving out the part that this was nothing new. But it was okay if the Israelis went ahead and bombed the site, mainly for their own political purposes, and to send a message to Syria and Iran on behalf of both Israel and the US.

I'm puzzled by your statement that you assume "that no President would allow the Iranian reactor at Arak to come online." The Iranians have made a considerable investment in the heavy water production plant and in the reactor. I was not aware that they were doing anything on that project other than moving forward with it. Assuming Obama is still president when they are ready to activate the reactor, what do you think he will do?

Jeffrey | September 18, 2011

I would have expected an air strike. I am still surprised that Bush did not authorize one against Al Kibar.

kme | September 21, 2011

Is a (presumably safeguarded) HWR any more concerning than safeguarded uranium enrichment cascades? (As I understand it, your position is that in the latter case the real worry is hidden non-safeguarded sites – doesn't the same apply in the former case too, with the added factor that it's difficult to hide a sizeable reactor?)

Anon | September 12, 2011

What is important to note is that the US properly kept out of this and did not (evidently) see any proof of a connection to a weapons program even if it was a reactor, whatever snake-oil the Israelis may have been pedaling.

What is also important to note is that Israel was not sanctioned by the UNSC for a clear “threat to the peace, breach of the peace or an act of aggression” even though its actions probably much more clearly satisfied these conditions as compared to other middle eastern countries who have nuclear programs, and whose low-level weaponization research (such as it ever probably was) was wrapped up in 2003 according to our own DNI.

It ought not be UNSC policy to only sanction NPT members.

Does Israel have a right to pre-emptively bomb whomever it feels like without so much as a slap on the hand from international bodies? Debatable.

But a couple of things are crystal clear: there may be, well, asymmetrical blowback when this happens; and, the attack on Iraq (Osirak) actually kicked off Iraq's weaponization work, in earnest; and, the perception of even-handedness and lack of double-standards by international bodies is important else others will properly thumb their nose at said bodies. Note I speak not only of the IAEA but of the UNSC itself.

Dan Joyner | September 13, 2011

A couple of comments here have raised questions about the legal issues related to the Israeli strike. I wrote a short piece for the American Society of International Law on this precise question in 2008. Here is an excerpt from the piece:

“Whether the activity at the Syrian site was weapons related or civilian in character, Israel's action in attacking and destroying the site was almost certainly a breach of international law. Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, of which Israel is a member, prohibits uses of force “against the territorial integrity” of any other state. States retain the inherent right of self-defense as defined in Article 51 of the Charter. Article 51 allows unilateral acts of force in self-defense on a temporary basis “if an armed attack occurs” against a member of the United Nations. As Syria had not yet attacked Israel, any justification for Israel's use of force pursuant to Article 51 must be found, if at all, by resort to the principle of anticipatory self-defense.

Anticipatory self-defense was part of pre-Charter customary law, and many argue that states are still entitled to rely upon the principle. However, even if this contention is correct, anticipatory self-defense must be understood to be limited in its applicability to situations of imminent threat. As observed by U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster during the 1841 Caroline controversy, in order for the principle of anticipatory self-defense to apply,

there must be a “necessity of self-defense, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.” Even if such a situation of imminence arises, a use of force in anticipatory self defense may only be carried out in accordance with the customary international law principles of necessity and proportionality.

There are no facts alleged against Syria which would meet the required test of imminence under the principle of anticipatory self-defense. Again, there are no allegations or evidence that the site served a weapons development purpose. The sort of imminence of threat demanded by the doctrine of anticipatory self-defense is clearly not presented by the simple fact of the construction and maintenance of a nuclear reactor in Syria. Neither Syria’s breach of its IAEA safeguards agreement, nor its breach of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718, have any bearing on this analysis. Israel’s attack on Syrian territory thus constitutes a breach of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter.

The September 2007 action by Israel is reminiscent of its 1981 attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor under construction at Osirak. On that occasion as well, the reactor was destroyed. However, in the aftermath of the attack, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 487, which denounced the incident as a “clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations.”[17]

Though a subject of ongoing debate, it is doubtful that the substance of international use of force law regarding anticipatory self-defense has changed in any material respect since 1981. However, the Israeli attack upon Syria will no doubt stimulate renewed discussion on this point.”

Scott Monje | September 13, 2011

“However, the Israeli attack upon Syria will no doubt stimulate renewed discussion on this point.”

And did it?
Reply

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

There has certainly been no end Of discussion about it in legal literature since then. I wrote extensively on the topic of counterproliferation uses of force in my 2009 book. One problem is that there are so few data points in this area – I.e. Relatively few instances of counterpro use of force like in Syria – that it’s difficult to say convincingly that new patterns of state practice are emerging to effectively change the classical rules. I think the best assessment is that the basic rules have not changed.

Anon | September 14, 2011

Dan, thanks for your very useful input. Do you think UNSCR 487’s statement:

*****Calls upon Israel to refrain in the future from any such acts or threats thereof;*****

carries any real weight?

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

“Calls upon” language in UNSCR’s is nonbinding. However, the importance of UNSCR 487 was to show the UNSC’s judgment that the attack on Osirak was unlawful.

Anon | September 14, 2011

Dan, thank you again — that is what I thought.

But now I have another related question: since Israel ignored UNSCR487 and bombed Syria AFTER Osirak, and because the UNSC resolution calling for sanctions on Iran also contain the same phrase “calls upon” Iran repeatedly — is it also OK for Iran to thumb its nose at the UNSC, just as Israel has done; or, in your view, does this constitute double-standards?

TEXT of UNSC sanction resolution on Iran:

<http://www.bicc.org.uk/downloads/UN%20Resolution%201929.pdf>

e.g.

“..calls upon Iran to confirm, as requested by the IAEA, that it has not taken a decision to construct, or authorize construction of, any other nuclear facility which has as yet not been declared to the IAEA,”

“calls upon Iran to act strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Additional Protocol to its IAEA Safeguards Agreement that it signed on 18 December 2003, calls upon Iran to ratify promptly the Additional Protocol”

“calls upon all States to exercise vigilance over those transactions involving the IRGC that could contribute to Iran’s proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities or the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems;”

“Calls upon all States to inspect, in accordance with their national authorities and legislation and consistent with international law, in particular the law of the sea and relevant international civil aviation agreements, all cargo to and from Iran, in their territory, including seaports and airports, if the State concerned has information that provides reasonable grounds to believe the cargo contains items the supply, sale, transfer, or export of which is prohibited by paragraphs 3, 4 or 7 of resolution 1737 (2006), paragraph 5 of resolution 1747 (2007), paragraph 8 of resolution 1803 (2008) or paragraphs 8 or 9 of this resolution, for the purpose of ensuring strict implementation of those provisions;”

“Calls upon all States, in addition to implementing their obligations pursuant to resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and this resolution, to prevent the provision of financial services, including insurance or reinsurance, or the transfer to, through, or from their territory, or to or by their nationals or entities organized under their laws (including branches abroad), or persons or financial institutions in their territory, of any financial or other assets or resources if they have information that provides reasonable grounds to believe that such services, assets or resources could contribute to Iran’s proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, or the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems, including by freezing any financial or other assets or resources on their territories or that hereafter come within their territories, or that are subject to their jurisdiction or that hereafter become subject to their jurisdiction, that are related to such programmes or activities and applying enhanced monitoring to prevent all such transactions in accordance with their national authorities and legislation;”

ETC. Etc.

Is it OK for Iran and all other nations to thumb their collective noses at the litany of UNSC “calls upon” just like Israel did in bombing Syria?

Dan Joyner | September 14, 2011

The difference from a legal perspective is that in Resolutions 1737 and 1929, the UNSC has acted under Chapter VII and “Decided” that Iran shall cease uranium enrichment, etc. “Decides” is the word the UNSC uses to make a binding decision, which all members have agreed to comply with in UN Charter Article 25. So Iran is in violation of UNSC decisions, which under Article 25 are legally binding.

Anon | September 14, 2011

Yes, thank you — OK I see.

But as the quote from the UNSC resolution above shows there are some “decided” ‘s and plenty of “calls upon”.

I am perhaps wrong but it seems that the “calls upon” parts in the sanctions’ resolutions are as optional as Israel not stopping bombing nations when being “called upon” to do so. Also Israel was called upon to place its nuclear program under IAEA safeguards.

Please feel free to correct me if I am wrong — I’m no lawyer after all.

Al-Kibar

Last Modified: Aug. 14, 2012

Other Name: Dair Alzour

Location: Dayr Az Zawr region, 140 km from Iraqi border, 10 km north of At Tibnah

Subordinate To: n/a

Size: 20-25MWt

Facility Status: Alleged reactor destroyed

On 6 September 2007, Israeli warplanes destroyed a building near the Euphrates River in northeastern Syria. The structure is alleged to have been a gas-cooled graphite-moderated nuclear reactor under construction, capable of producing enough plutonium for one or two weapons per year.[1] Syria has consistently denied these allegations. In the days and weeks after the raid, Israel maintained official silence; Syria quietly protested the violation of its airspace, but also largely refrained from comment.[2] An explanation for the September operation took shape chiefly through leaks from officials inside the U.S. and Israeli governments. In broad strokes, the narrative was that North Korea had helped Syria construct a reactor modeled on its 25MWt research reactor at Yongbyon. Israel, convinced the Syrian reactor was intended for plutonium production, consulted the United States and then attacked the facility before it could be completed.[3] The Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) publicized satellite photographs of the site in October and offered cautious support for the idea that Al-Kibar had been a reactor.[4] Other nonproliferation experts, including Joseph Cirincione and IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei, were skeptical.[5] ISIS released further photographs showing that Syria had razed the ruined facility shortly after the bombing and erected a new building in its place.[6]

More information was revealed in 2008. U.S. intelligence officials provided a background briefing to Congress on the suspected nuclear facility in April, presenting ground-level photographs reportedly taken at Al-Kibar before its destruction.[7] The photographs show apparent reactor components and the construction of additional outer walls to conceal the shape of a building which resembled North Korea's Magnox design reactor at Yongbyon. [8] U.S. officials expressed high confidence in their assessment that the facility had been a nuclear reactor under construction. They also alleged that Syria and North Korea had cooperated for more than a decade in the nuclear field, and had medium confidence that North Korea was involved in the construction of the facility at Al-Kibar.[9] Finally, the U.S. officials assessed that the purpose of the reactor was to create fuel for a nuclear weapons program; this judgment was made with less confidence because although they found the reactor to be unsuitable for research or power generation, the officials did not have any evidence of a reprocessing facility to separate plutonium from the spent fuel.[10]

Syria disputed the allegations, pointing to U.S. claims about Iraqi weapons prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[11] But Syria relented to an IAEA request to visit the Al-Kibar site, allowing one inspection on 23 June 2008.[12] By the time IAEA inspectors arrived, the Syrians had bulldozed much of an adjacent hill over the reactor remains and constructed a new building on top.[13] Despite these concealment efforts, the IAEA released a report in November revealing that a significant number of chemically processed natural uranium particles had been found during the inspection, warranting continued investigation. [14] Agency requests to visit related sites were denied.

In February 2009, the IAEA issued a follow-up report on Al-Kibar, requesting more cooperation from Syria and revealing that additional examination of environmental samples had yielded further traces of uranium. According to the report, characteristics of the uranium particles found at the site made it unlikely the uranium came from Israeli munitions, as Syria had previously suggested.[15] Syria reiterated its claim that the destroyed structure had a conventional military function and therefore was not subject to its safeguards agreement, to which the IAEA responded that the safeguards agreement "places no limitation on Agency access to information,

activities or locations simply because they may be military related." [16] Syria also informed the agency that reported procurement efforts of graphite, barium sulphate, as well as water pumping equipment observed at the Al-Kibar site were civilian and non-nuclear in nature.[17]

Throughout 2010 the IAEA repeatedly requested that Syria provide further documentation about the infrastructure and construction of the destroyed building, and that the country grant access to the Al-Kibar site, the storage location of any debris from the site, and three other locations "allegedly functionally related" to Al-Kibar. [18] According to the Institute for Science and International Security, these three locations were at Masyaf, Marj as-Sultan, and Iskandariyah. [19] However, Syrian officials have not provided any further information, and have not responded to any of the IAEA's letters since August 2009. [20] On 24 May 2011, the IAEA concluded that "the destroyed building was very likely a nuclear reactor" and therefore should have been declared to the Agency.[21] This assessment was based on the dimensions of the building seen in ground photographs and satellite imagery, the layout of the site and its water pumping facilities, the presence of nuclear materials found in environmental samples, and the inconsistencies with Syria's stated function of the site.[22] Despite referring Syria to the United Nations Security Council, the IAEA has not made any further progress in clarifying the nature of the facility, and the passage of time and Syria's cover-up activities at the site make it increasingly difficult to do so.[23]

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IAEA Board of Governors Meeting
March 4-8, 2013

Agenda Item 5(e)

Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic
U.S. Statement
Ambassador Joseph Macmanus
Permanent U.S. Representative to the IAEA

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Director General for his remarks underscoring the serious and unresolved issue of Syria's safeguards noncompliance. The United States deeply regrets that the Asad regime continues in its refusal to engage the Agency substantively, or to provide any of the cooperation necessary to remedy Syria's noncompliance. Instead, the regime continues to focus on a brutal repression of the Syrian people. As we have said previously, we categorically reject any suggestion that the instability caused by the regime's own violent and reprehensible actions could somehow serve as justification for its failure to meet Syria's NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations.

It has been nearly two years since the Board of Governors found Syria in noncompliance with its Safeguards Agreement for the clandestine construction of a nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour. In June 2011, the Board called on Syria urgently to remedy its noncompliance and to bring into force an Additional Protocol. The Board also requested that the Director General report the matter to the UN Security Council. Since that time, the Asad regime has shown no interest whatsoever in addressing Syria's noncompliance. It has instead fully disregarded Syria's international obligations, and has displayed nothing but contempt for this Board.

It remains essential that Syria cooperate with the Agency to remedy its noncompliance. That cooperation must include access to all relevant locations, materials, and persons, including the three sites suspected of having a functional relationship to Dair Alzour. Until the Agency is able to resolve all outstanding questions about the exclusively peaceful nature of Syria's nuclear program, Syria's noncompliance will remain a matter of serious concern to the international community.

The Board must remain seized of the matter, and should be prepared to consider further action if necessary. We will continue to look forward to further reporting from the Director General on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE
**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN VIENNA**



IAEA Board of Governors Meeting
September 9-13, 2013

Agenda Item 6(e):

Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic
U.S. statement as delivered by Ambassador Macmanus
U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency

We thank the Director General for his latest report concerning the serious and long-standing issue of Syria's safeguards noncompliance. The United States regrets deeply that this issue remains unresolved, and that as the Director General reports, the Asad regime has not engaged substantively with the Agency on the nature of the Dair Alzour site, or the three other locations cited in the Director General's reports, since 2008. Such cooperation remains essential to remedying Syria's noncompliance. Instead, the regime has intensified its brutal suppression of the Syrian people, resorting to indiscriminate and unconscionable tactics, including the use of chemical weapons. As we have made clear, the regime's own violent and reprehensible actions, and the instability it has wrought, are no justification for its failure to meet Syria's NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations.

Over two years ago, the Board of Governors found Syria in noncompliance with its Safeguards Agreement for the clandestine construction of an undeclared nuclear reactor at Dair Alzour. At that time, the Board called on Syria to urgently remedy its noncompliance, and to bring into force an Additional Protocol. Shortly thereafter, and at the Board's request, the Director General reported the matter to the UN Security Council. In over two years since that time, the Asad regime has demonstrated no serious intent whatsoever of addressing Syria's noncompliance. It has instead ignored Syria's international obligations, and has disregarded the decisions of this Board.

It remains essential that Syria fully cooperate with the Agency to remedy its noncompliance. That cooperation must include access to all relevant locations, materials, and persons, including the three sites suspected of having a functional relationship to the reactor at Dair Alzour. Until the Agency is able to resolve all outstanding questions about the exclusively peaceful nature of Syria's nuclear program, Syria's noncompliance will remain a matter of serious concern.

The Board must remain seized of this matter, and should be prepared to consider further action if necessary. We again thank the Director General for his continued efforts to resolve Syria's safeguards noncompliance, and look forward to further reporting from the Director General on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

U.S. also demands Syrian transparency on nuclear research

By Joby Warrick,

Published: September 12 [2013]

The Obama administration urged Syria on Thursday to come clean about its past nuclear research as well as its chemical arsenal, accusing President Bashar al-Assad of blocking access to facilities linked to a Syrian nuclear reactor destroyed by Israel in 2007.

The top U.S. diplomat to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Syria's two-year-old civil war was no excuse for its failure to answer questions about its alleged nuclear program, which Western intelligence officials believe was on a path toward making nuclear weapons.

"It remains essential that Syria fully cooperate," Ambassador Joseph Macmanus told a meeting of the U.N. watchdog agency's 35-nation governing board in Vienna.

Macmanus specifically pressed for access to three sites inside Syria that he said were suspected of having a "functional relationship" to the Deir al-Zour reactor destroyed by Israeli warplanes six years ago. One of the sites has been described by U.S. officials as a pilot plant for making the reactor's uranium fuel.

The three facilities have long been a focal point of an IAEA investigation into the size and scope of Syria's nuclear program, which is believed to have been halted by the 2007 Israeli air raid dubbed Operation Orchard. The presumed cornerstone of the program was the plutonium reactor built with North Korean help on the banks of the Euphrates River in Syria's eastern desert.

A report [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Marj_as_Sultan_12sept2013.pdf] Thursday by independent nuclear researchers said ancillary facilities built to support the Syrian reactor could still contain uranium and other material of potential value to terrorist groups or black-market profiteers. The Deir al-Zour reactor was still under construction at the time of the 2007 attack, and it is unclear what became of the hundreds of uranium fuel rods that would have been required to operate the facility.

"The uranium could be anywhere within government controlled areas today, if it even remains in Syria," warned the report by the Institute for Science and International Security, a Washington-based nonprofit group. "Determining its fate must be a priority."

The report acknowledged that any uranium fuel remaining in Syria is not weapons-grade and could not be used in nuclear bombs without further processing. While Syria's thousands of chemical weapons remain a higher priority, its nuclear assets "deserve significant attention," the study said.

The ISIS report included satellite photographs of one of the suspected ancillary sites, a large compound in Marj as-Sultan, east of Damascus. The facility was first identified two years ago in a German newspaper, Süddeutsche Zeitung, which also obtained what was purported to be photographs of equipment inside the facility as well as a large stack of metallic rods that resembled uranium fuel.

A technical expert who reviewed the images for ISIS said they appear to depict reaction vessels, manifolds and other machines commonly used in processing uranium fuel. ISIS acknowledged that it could not independently verify where, when and by whom the photographs were taken.

The collapse of government control over parts of Syria has brought new urgency to long-standing questions about the security of Syria's remaining nuclear assets. In February, Islamist rebel militias swept through the town of Deir al-Zour and posted videos of gun-toting fighters clambering over the site where the reactor had stood. The Marj as-Sultan region also has seen fighting between rebels and government forces in recent weeks.

"If the United Nations Security Council places Syria's stocks of chemical weapons under international control, it should also address Syria's undeclared nuclear assets," the ISIS study said. "The goal should be to verifiably determine that the undeclared program and its assets are fully understood, rendered harmless, and dismantled."

Five nuclear engineers, one of them Iranian, killed in Syria: monitor

By Rasha Ellass and Fredrik Dahl

BEIRUT/VIENNA Mon **Nov 10, 2014** 9:49am EST

(Reuters) - Gunmen killed five nuclear engineers, four of them Syrian and one Iranian, on the outskirts of Damascus on Sunday, a monitoring group said on Monday.

No one claimed responsibility and Syrian and Iranian state media did not mention the attack, which occurred in an area controlled by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

It was not clear in what capacity the Iranian nuclear engineer was in Syria, if his presence were to be confirmed.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the engineers were shot dead while traveling in a small convoy to a research center near the northeastern district of Barzeh.

Iran has supported Assad throughout Syria's three-year civil war and Iranian military advisers are working with Syrian forces throughout the country, which is partly under insurgent control.

Both Iran and Syria are under investigation by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the IAEA. Both countries have repeatedly denied ever having any nuclear weapons ambitions.

The IAEA said last year that Syria declared a "small amount of nuclear material" at a Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR), a type of research reactor usually fueled by highly enriched uranium, near Damascus.

Former IAEA chief inspector Olli Heinonen said there are two nuclear centers on the outskirts of Damascus and that the MNSR is one of them. Heinonen, now at Harvard University's Belfer Center, said that the centers do not appear to have had extensive nuclear fuel cycle activities.

The IAEA used to visit the MNSR about once a year to check nuclear material there but canceled such inspections last year due to the violence in the country. The MNSR is believed to hold less than a kilogram of highly-enriched uranium, well below the roughly 25 kg which experts say would be needed for any bomb.

IAEA inspectors in mid-2008 examined a site in the eastern province Deir al-Zor that U.S. intelligence reports say was a nascent, North Korean-designed reactor geared to making plutonium for nuclear bombs. Israel bombed it in 2007.

But Syrian authorities later repeatedly rebuffed IAEA requests to revisit the site to gather evidence, saying it had been a conventional military base only. The Deir al-Zor region is now largely under the control of Islamist insurgents.

Iran, the United States and European Union began a second day of talks in Oman on Monday to discuss ways to resolve a confrontation over Tehran's nuclear program.

(Additional reporting by Oliver Holmes in Beirut; Editing by Mark Heinrich)

It's the Proliferation, Stupid

By John Hannah

April 25, 2016 - 1:05 pm

[EXCERPT]

I well remember the day in spring 2007 when I got an urgent call from Vice President Cheney to drop everything and get over to his White House office. The head of Israel's Mossad, the late Meir Dagan, had just been in to brief Cheney and President Bush. What he revealed was chilling: compelling evidence that in the Syrian desert east of Damascus, near the town of Al-Kibar, North Korea was covertly building a plutonium-producing nuclear reactor. It was more or less a replica of the North's own reactor at Yongbyon, which formed the centerpiece of its weapons program.

Making matters worse, Al-Kibar was perilously close to completion. Options for getting rid of it would narrow considerably once operations began and the reactor went "hot." At that point, any effort to destroy it through military strike or covert action would run a high risk of dispersing deadly radioactive materials that could poison thousands of innocent civilians.

For its part, the U.S. intelligence community had totally missed Al-Kibar. It was completely taken aback by Dagan's stunning revelations. Indeed, since the early days of the Bush administration, senior officials like Cheney and Undersecretary of State John Bolton had repeatedly queried the CIA about indications that Syria was pursuing nuclear weapons, including via cooperation with North Korea. After all, ample evidence existed that Pyongyang had for years assisted Syria's ballistic missile efforts. Government officials with connections to the North's WMD programs were regular visitors to Damascus. Yet until the day in 2007 that Dagan showed up at the White House, the CIA's answer never changed: The evidence was insufficient to suggest that the Assad regime might be seeking nukes. In fact, when Bolton raised his suspicions publicly in a 2003 congressional hearing, the intelligence community went berserk, launching a furious campaign of leaks to undermine Bolton's credibility.

The fact is that the United States dodged a bullet in Syria — and, it's worth stressing, all courtesy of the Israelis. Not only did they discover Al-Kibar in the nick of time. They also carried out the attack that was almost certainly the only means of ensuring the reactor never went hot.

John Hannah is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, focusing on U.S. strategy. During the presidency of George W. Bush, he served for eight years on the staff of Vice President Cheney, including as the vice president's national security advisor.

Israel's Ploy Selling a Syrian Nuke Strike

November 18, 2017

By Gareth Porter

In September 2007, Israeli warplanes bombed a building in eastern Syria that the Israelis claimed held a covert nuclear reactor that had been built with North Korean assistance. Seven months later, the CIA released an extraordinary 11-minute video and mounted press and Congressional briefings that supported that claim.

But nothing about that alleged reactor in the Syrian desert turns out to be what it appeared at the time. The evidence now available shows that there was no such nuclear reactor, and that the Israelis had misled George W. Bush's administration into believing that it was in order to draw the United States into bombing missile storage sites in Syria. Other evidence now suggests, moreover, that the Syrian government had led the Israelis to believe wrongly that it was a key storage site for Hezbollah missiles and rockets.

The International Atomic Agency's top specialist on North Korean reactors, Egyptian national Yousry Abushady, warned top IAEA officials in 2008 that the published CIA claims about the alleged reactor in the Syrian desert could not possibly have been true. In a series of interviews in Vienna and by phone and e-mail exchanges over several months Abushady detailed the technical evidence that led him to issue that warning and to be even more confident about that judgment later on. And a retired nuclear engineer and research scientist with many years of experience at Oak Ridge National Laboratory has confirmed a crucial element of that technical evidence.

Published revelations by senior Bush administration officials show, moreover, that principal U.S. figures in the story all had their own political motives for supporting the Israeli claim of a Syrian reactor being built with North Korean help.

Vice President Dick Cheney hoped to use the alleged reactor to get President George W. Bush to initiate U.S. airstrikes in Syria in the hope of shaking the Syrian-Iranian alliance. And both Cheney and then CIA Director Michael Hayden also hoped to use the story of a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in Syria to kill a deal that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was negotiating with North Korea on its nuclear weapons program in 2007-08.

Mossad Chief's Dramatic Evidence

In April 2007 the chief of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence agency, Meir Dagan, presented Cheney, Hayden and National Security Adviser Steven Hadley with evidence of what he said was a nuclear reactor being constructed in eastern Syria with the help of the North Koreans. Dagan showed them nearly a hundred hand-held photographs of the site revealing what he described as the preparation for the installation of a North Korean reactor and claimed that it was only a few months from being operational.

The Israelis made no secret of their desire to have a U.S. airstrike destroy the alleged nuclear facility. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called President Bush immediately after that briefing and said, "George, I'm asking you to bomb the compound," according to the account in Bush's memoirs.

Cheney, who was known to be a personal friend of Olmert, wanted to go further. At White House meetings in subsequent weeks, Cheney argued forcefully for a U.S. attack not only on the purported reactor building but on Hezbollah weapons storage depots in Syria. Then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who participated in those meetings, recalled in his own memoirs that Cheney, who was also looking for an opportunity to provoke a war with Iran, hoped to “rattle Assad sufficiently so as to end his close relationship with Iran” and “send a powerful warning to the Iranians to abandon their nuclear ambitions.”

CIA Director Hayden aligned the agency clearly with Cheney on the issue, not because of Syria or Iran but because of North Korea. In his book, *Playing to the Edge*, published last year, Hayden recalls that, at a White House meeting to brief President Bush the day after Dagan’s visit, he whispered in Cheney’s ear, “You were right, Mr. Vice-President.”

Hayden was referring to the fierce political struggle within the Bush administration over North Korea policy that had been underway ever since Condoleezza Rice had become Secretary of State in early 2005. Rice had argued that diplomacy was the only realistic way to get Pyongyang to retreat from its nuclear weapons program. But Cheney and his administration allies John Bolton and Robert Joseph (who succeeded Bolton as the key State Department policymaker on North Korea after Bolton became U.N. Ambassador in 2005) were determined to end the diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang.

Cheney was still maneuvering to find a way to prevent the successful completion of the negotiations, and he saw the story of a Syrian nuclear reactor built secretly in the desert with help from the North Koreans as bolstering his case. Cheney reveals in his own memoirs that in January 2008, he sought to sandbag Rice’s North Korea nuclear deal by getting her to agree that a failure by North Korea to “admit they’ve proliferating to the Syrians would be a deal killer.”

Three months later, the CIA released its unprecedented 11-minute video supporting the entire Israeli case for a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor that was nearly completed. Hayden recalls that his decision to release the video on the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor in April 2008 was “to avoid a North Korean nuclear deal being sold to a Congress and a public ignorant of this very pertinent and very recent episode.”

The video, complete with computer reconstructions of the building and photographs from the Israelis made a big splash in the news media. But one specialist on nuclear reactors who examined the video closely found abundant reason to conclude that the CIA’s case was not based on real evidence.

Technical Evidence against a Reactor

Egyptian national Yousry Abushady was a PhD in nuclear engineering and 23-year veteran of the IAEA who had been promoted to section head for Western Europe in the operations division of agency’s Safeguards Department, meaning that he was in charge of all inspections of nuclear facilities in the region. He had been a trusted adviser to Bruno Pellaud, IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards from 1993 to 1999, who told this writer in an interview that he had “relied on Abushady frequently.”

Abushady recalled in an interview that, after spending many hours reviewing the video released by the CIA in April 2008 frame by frame, he was certain that the CIA case for a nuclear reactor at al-Kibar in the desert in eastern Syria was not plausible for multiple technical reasons. The Israelis and the CIA had claimed the alleged reactor was modeled on the type of reactor the North Koreans had installed at Yongbyon called a gas-cooled graphite-moderated (GCGM) reactor.

But Abushady knew that kind of reactor better than anyone else at the IAEA. He had designed a GCGM reactor for his doctoral student in nuclear engineering, had begun evaluating the Yongbyon reactor in 1993, and from 1999 to 2003 had headed the Safeguards Department unit responsible for North Korea.

Abushady had traveled to North Korea 15 times and conducted extensive technical discussions with the North Korean nuclear engineers who had designed and operated the Yongbyon reactor. And the evidence he saw in the video convinced him that no such reactor could have been under construction at al-Kibar.

On April 26, 2008, Abushady sent a “preliminary technical assessment” of the video to IAEA Deputy Director General for Safeguards Olli Heinonen, with a copy to Director General Mohamed ElBaradei. Abushady observed in his memorandum that the person responsible for assembling the CIA video was obviously unfamiliar with either the North Korean reactor or with GCGM reactors in general.

The first thing that struck Abushady about the CIA’s claims was that the building was too short to hold a reactor like the one in Yongbyon, North Korea.

“It is obvious,” he wrote in his “technical assessment” memo to Heinonen, “that the Syrian building with no UG [underground] construction, can not hold a [reactor] similar [to] NK GCR [North Korean gas-cooled reactor].”

Abushady estimated the height of the North Korean reactor building in Yongbyon at a 50 meters (165 feet) and estimated that the building at al-Kibar at a little more than a third as tall.

Abushady also found the observable characteristics of the al-Kibar site inconsistent with the most basic technical requirements for a GCGM reactor. He pointed out that the Yongbyon reactor had no less than 20 supporting buildings on the site, whereas the satellite imagery shows that the Syrian site did not have a single significant supporting structure.

The most telling indication of all for Abushady that the building could not have been a GCGM reactor was the absence of a cooling tower to reduce the temperature of the carbon dioxide gas coolant in such a reactor.

“How can you work a gas-cooled reactor in a desert without a cooling tower?” Abushady asked in an interview.

IAEA Deputy Director Heinonen claimed in an IAEA report that the site had sufficient pumping power to get river water from a pump house on the nearby Euphrates River to the site. But Abushady recalls asking Heinonen, “How could this water be transferred for about 1,000 meters and continue to the heat exchangers for cooling with the same power?”

Robert Kelley, a former head of the U.S. Department of Energy’s Remote Sensing Laboratory and former senior IAEA inspector in Iraq, noticed another fundamental problem with Heinonen’s claim: the site had no facility for treating the river water before it reached the alleged reactor building.

“That river water would have been carrying debris and silt into the reactor heat exchangers,” Kelley said in an interview, making it highly questionable that a reactor could have operated there.

Yet another critical piece that Abushady found missing from the site was a cooling pond facility for spent fuel. The CIA had theorized that the reactor building itself contained a “spent fuel pond,” based on nothing more than an ambiguous shape in an aerial photograph of the bombed building.

But the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and all 28 other GCGM reactors that had been built in the world all have the spent fuel pond in a separate building, Abushady said. The reason, he explained, was that the magnox cladding surrounding the fuel rods would react to any contact with moisture to produce hydrogen that could explode.

But the definitive and irrefutable proof that no GCGM reactor had been present at al-Kibar came from the environmental samples taken by the IAEA at the site in June 2008. Such a reactor would have contained nuclear-grade graphite, Abushady explained, and if the Israelis had actually bombed a GCGM reactor, it would have spread particles of nuclear-grade graphite all over the site.

Behrad Nakhai, a nuclear engineer at Oak Ridge National Laboratory for many years, confirmed Abushady’s observation in an interview. “You would have had hundreds of tons of nuclear-grade graphite scattered around the site,” he said, “and it would have been impossible to clean it up.”

IAEA reports remained silent for more than two years about what the samples showed about nuclear-grade graphite, then claimed in a May 2011 report that the graphite particles were “too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor.” But given the tools available to laboratories, the IAEA claim that they couldn’t determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not “doesn’t make sense,” Nakhai said.

Hayden acknowledged in his 2016 account that “key components” of a nuclear reactor site for nuclear weapons were “still missing.” The CIA had tried to find evidence of a reprocessing facility in Syria that could be used to obtain the plutonium for a nuclear bomb but had been unable to find any trace of one.

The CIA also had found no evidence of a fuel fabrication facility, without which a reactor could not have gotten the fuel rods to be reprocessed. Syria could not have gotten them from North Korea, because the fuel fabrication plant at Yongbyon had produced no fuel rods since 1994 and was known to have fallen into serious disrepair after the regime had agreed to scrap its own plutonium reactor program.

Manipulated and Misleading Photographs

Hayden’s account shows that he was ready to give the CIA’s stamp of approval to the Israeli photographs even before the agency’s analysts had even begun analyzing them. He admits that when he met Dagan face-to-face he didn’t ask how and when Mossad had obtained the photographs, citing “espionage protocol” among cooperating intelligence partners. Such a protocol would hardly apply, however, to a government sharing intelligence in order to get the United States to carry out an act of war on its behalf.

The CIA video relied heavily on the photographs that Mossad had given to Bush administration in making its case. Hayden writes that it was “pretty convincing stuff, if we could be confident that the pictures hadn’t been altered.”

But by his own account Hayden knew Mossad had engaged in at least one deception. He writes that when CIA experts reviewed the photographs from Mossad, they found that one of them had been photo-shopped to remove the writing on the side of a truck.

Hayden professes to have had no concern about that photo-shopped picture. But after this writer asked how CIA analysts interpreted Mossad's photo shopping of the picture as one of the questions his staff requested in advance of a possible interview with Hayden, he declined the interview.

Abushady points out that the main issues with the photographs the CIA released publicly are whether they were actually taken at the al-Kibar site and whether they were consistent with a GCGM reactor. One of the photographs showed what the CIA video called "the steel liner for the reinforced-concrete reactor vessel before it was installed." Abushady noticed immediately, however, that nothing in the picture links the steel liner to the al-Kibar site.

Both the video and CIA's press briefing explained that the network of small pipes on the outside of the structure was for "cooling water to protect the concrete against the reactor's intense heat and radiation." But Abushady, who specializes in such technology, pointed out that the structure in the picture bore no resemblance to a Gas-Cooled Reactor vessel. "This vessel cannot be for a Gas-Cooled Reactor," Abushady explained, "based on its dimensions, its thickness and the pipes shown on the side of the vessel."

The CIA video's explanation that the network of pipes was necessary for "cooling water" made no sense, Abushady said, because gas-cooled reactors use only carbon dioxide gas — not water — as a coolant. Any contact between water and the Magnox-cladding used in that type of reactor, Abushady explained, could cause an explosion.

A second Mossad photograph showed what the CIA said were the "exit points" for the reactor's control rods and fuel rods. The CIA juxtaposed that photograph with a photograph of the tops of the control rods and fuel rods of the North Korean reactor at Yongbyon and claimed a "very close resemblance" between the two.

Abushady found major differences between the two pictures, however. The North Korean reactor had a total of 97 ports, but the picture allegedly taken at al-Kibar shows only 52 ports. Abushady was certain that the reactor shown in the photograph could not have been based on the Yongbyon reactor. He also noted that the picture had a pronounced sepia tone, suggesting that it was taken quite a few years earlier.

Abushady warned Heinonen and ElBaradei in his initial assessment that the photo presented as taken from inside the reactor building appeared to an old photo of a small gas-cooled reactor, most likely an early such reactor built in the U.K.

A Double Deception

Many observers have suggested that Syria's failure to protest the strike in the desert loudly suggests that it was indeed a reactor. Information provided by a former Syrian air force major who defected to an anti-Assad military command in Aleppo and by the head of Syria's atomic energy program helps unlock the mystery of what was really in the building at al-Kibar.

The Syrian major, “Abu Mohammed,” told The Guardian in February 2013 that he was serving in the air defense station at Deir Azzor, the city nearest to al-Kibar, when he got a phone call from a Brigadier General at the Strategic Air Command in Damascus just after midnight on Sept. 6, 2007. Enemy planes were approaching his area, the general said, but “you are to do nothing.”

The major was confused. He wondered why the Syrian command would want to let Israeli fighter planes approach Deir Azzor unhindered. The only logical reason for such an otherwise inexplicable order would be that, instead of wanting to keep the Israelis away from the building at al-Kibar, the Syrian government actually wanted the Israelis to attack it. In the aftermath of the strike, the Damascus issued only an opaque statement claiming that the Israeli jets had been driven away and remaining silent on the airstrike at al-Kibar.

Abushady told this writer he learned from meetings with Syrian officials during his final year at the IAEA that the Syrian government had indeed originally built the structure at al-Kibar for the storage of missiles as well as for a fixed firing position for them. And he said Ibrahim Othman, the head of Syria’s Atomic Energy Commission, had confirmed that point in a private meeting with him in Vienna in September 2015.

Othman also confirmed Abushady’s suspicion from viewing satellite photographs that the roof over the central room in the building had been made with two movable light plates that could be opened to allow the firing of a missile. And he told Abushady that he had been correct in believing that what had appeared in a satellite image immediately after the bombing to be two semi-circular shapes was what had remained of the original concrete launching silo for missiles.

In the wake of the Israel’s 2006 invasion of Southern Lebanon, the Israelis were searching intensively for Hezbollah missiles and rockets that could reach Israel and they believed many of those Hezbollah weapons were being stored in Syria. If they wished to draw the attention of the Israelis away from actual missile storage sites, the Syrians would have had good reason to want to convince the Israelis that this was one of their major storage sites.

Othman told Abushady that the building had been abandoned in 2002, after the construction had been completed. The Israelis had acquired ground-level pictures from 2001-02 showing the construction of outer walls that would hide the central hall of the building. The Israelis and the CIA both insisted in 2007-08 that this new construction indicated that it had to be a reactor building, but it is equally consistent with a building designed to hide missile storage and a missile-firing position.

Although Mossad went to great lengths to convince the Bush administration that the site was a nuclear reactor, what the Israelis really wanted was for the Bush administration to launch U.S. airstrikes against Hezbollah and Syrian missile storage sites. Senior officials of the Bush administration didn’t buy the Israeli bid to get the United States do the bombing, but none of them ever raised questions about the Israeli ruse.

So both the Assad regime and the Israeli government appear to have succeeded in carrying out their own parts in a double deception in the Syrian desert.

<https://consortiumnews.com/2017/11/19/how-syrian-nuke-evidence-was-faked/>

How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked

November 19, 2017

By Gareth Porter

When Yousry Abushady studied the highly unusual May 2008 CIA video on a Syrian nuclear reactor that was allegedly under construction when Israeli jet destroyed it seven months earlier, the senior specialist on North Korean nuclear reactors on the International Atomic Energy Agency's staff knew that something was very wrong.

Abushady quickly determined that the CIA had been seriously misled by Israeli intelligence and immediately informed the two highest officials of the Vienna-based IAEA, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei and Deputy Director for Safeguards, Olli Heinonen, that the CIA's conclusions were not consistent with the most basic technical requirements for such a reactor.

But it did not take long for Abushady to realize that the top IAEA officials were not interested in drawing on his expertise in regard to the alleged Syrian reactor. In fact, the IAEA cited nonexistent evidence linking the site to a Syrian nuclear program while covering up real evidence that would have clearly refuted such a claim, according to Abushady and other former senior IAEA officials.

When Abudhsady met with Heinonen to discuss his analysis of the CIA's case in May 2008, Abushady asked to be included on the team for the anticipated inspection of the al-Kibar site because of his unique knowledge of that type reactor.

But Heinonen refused his request, citing an unwritten IAEA rule that inspectors are not allowed to carry out inspections in their countries of origin. Abushady objected, pointing out that he is Egyptian, not Syrian, to which Heinonen responded, "But you are an Arab and a Muslim!" according to Abushady. Heinonen declined a request for his comment on Abushady's account of the conversation.

A Curious Inspection

In June 2008, an IAEA team consisting of Heinonen and two other inspectors took environmental samples at the al-Kibar site. In November 2008, the IAEA issued a report saying that laboratory analysis of a number of natural uranium particles collected at the site "indicates that the uranium is anthropogenic," meaning that it had been processed by humans.

The implication was clearly that this was a reason to believe that the site had been connected with a nuclear program. But former IAEA officials have raised serious questions about Heinonen's handling of the physical evidence gathered from the Syrian site as well as his characterization of the evidence in that and other IAEA reports.

Tariq Rauf who headed the IAEA's Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office until 2011, has pointed out that one of the IAEA protocols applicable to these environmental samples is that "the results from all three or four labs to have analyzed the sample must match to give a positive or negative finding on the presence and isotopes of uranium and/or plutonium."

However, in the Syrian case the laboratories to which the samples had been sent had found no evidence of such man-made uranium in the samples they had tested. ElBaradei himself had announced in late September, three months after the samples had originally been taken but weeks before the report was issued, “So far, we have found no indication of any nuclear material.” So the November 2008 IAEA report claiming a positive finding was not consistent with its protocols.

But the samples had been sent to yet another laboratory, which had come up with a positive test result for a sample, which had then touted as evidence that the site had held a nuclear reactor. That in itself is an indication that a fundamental IAEA protocol had been violated in the handling of the samples from Syria.

One of the inspectors involved in the IAEA inspection at al-Kibar later revealed to a fellow IAEA inspector what actually happened in the sample collection there. Former senior IAEA inspector Robert Kelley recalled in an interview that, after the last results of the samples from the al-Kibar inspection had come back from all the laboratories, the inspector, Mongolian national Orlokh Dorjkhaidav, came to see him because he was troubled by the results and wanted to tell someone he trusted.

Negative Results

Dorjkhaidav told Kelley that all the samples taken from the ground in the vicinity of the bombed building had tested negative for man-made uranium and that the only sample that had tested positive had been taken in the toilet of the support building.

Dorjkhaidav later left the IAEA and returned to Mongolia, where he died in December 2015. A video obituary for Dorjkhaidav confirmed his participation in the inspection in Syria. Kelley revealed the former inspector’s account to this writer only after Dorjkhaidav’s death.

In an e-mail response to a request for his comment on Kelley’s account of the Syrian environmental samples, Heinonen would neither confirm nor deny that the swipe sample described by Dorjkhaidav had been taken inside the support building. But in January 2013, David Albright, Director of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, D.C., who has co-authored several articles with Heinonen, acknowledged in a commentary on his think tank’s website that the al-Kibar uranium particles had been “found in a changing room in a building associated with the reactor.”

Given the dispersal of any nuclear material around the site by the Israeli bombing, if man-made uranium was present at the site, it should not have shown up only inside the support facility but should have been present in the samples taken from the ground outside.

Former IAEA senior inspector Kelley said in an e-mail that a “very likely explanation” for this anomaly is that it was a case of “cross contamination” from the inspector’s own clothing. Such cross contamination had occurred in IAEA inspections on a number of occasions, according to both Kelley and Rauf.

Kelley, who had been in charge of inspections in Iraq in the early 1990s, recalled that a set of environmental swipes taken from nuclear facilities that the United States had bombed in Iraq had appeared to show that that Iraq had enriched uranium to 90 percent. But it turned out that they had been taken with swipe paper that had been contaminated accidentally by particles from the IAEA laboratory.

But what bothered Abushady the most was that the IAEA report on Syria had remained silent on the crucial fact that none of the sample results had shown any trace of nuclear-grade graphite.

Abushady recalled that when he challenged Heinonen on the absence of any mention of the nuclear graphite issue in the draft report in a Nov. 13, 2008 meeting, Heinonen said the inspectors had found evidence of graphite but added, “We haven’t confirmed that it was nuclear-grade.”

Abushady retorted, “Do you know what nuclear-grade graphite is? If you found it you would know it immediately.”

Heinonen was invited to comment on Abushady’s account of that meeting for this article but declined to do so.

After learning that the report scheduled to be released in November would be silent on the absence of nuclear graphite, Abushady sent a letter to ElBaradei asking him not to release the report on Syria as it was currently written. Abushady protested the report’s presentation of the environmental sampling results, especially in regard to nuclear-grade graphite.

“In my technical view,” Abushady wrote, “these results are the basis to confirm the contrary, that the site cannot [have been] actually a nuclear reactor.”

But the report was published anyway, and a few days later, ElBaradei’s Special Assistant Graham Andrew responded to Abushady’s message by ordering him to “stop sending e-mails on this subject” and to “respect established lines of responsibility, management and communication.”

A Clear Message

The message was clear: the agency was not interested in his information despite the fact that he knew more about the issue than anyone else in the organization.

At a briefing for Member States on the Syria reactor issue on Feb. 26, 2009, the Egyptian representative to the IAEA confronted Heinonen on the absence of nuclear-grade graphite in the environmental samples. This time, Heinonen had a different explanation for the failure to find any such graphite. He responded that it was “not known whether the graphite was in the building at the time of the destruction,” according to the diplomatic cable reporting on the briefing that was later released by WikiLeaks.

But that response, too, was disingenuous, according to Abushady. “Graphite is a structural part of the reactor core in the gas-cooled reactor,” he explained. “It is not something you add at the end.”

The IAEA remained silent on the question of graphite in nine more reports issued over more than two years. When the IAEA finally mentioned the issue for the first time officially in a May 2011 report, it claimed that the graphite particles were “too small to permit an analysis of the purity compared to that normally required for use in a reactor.”

But American nuclear engineer Behrad Nakhai, who worked at Oak National Laboratories for many years, said an interview that the laboratories definitely have the ability to determine whether the particles were nuclear grade or not, so the claim “doesn’t make sense.”

News outlets have never reported on the IAEA's role in helping to cover up the false CIA claim of a North-Korean-style nuclear reactor in the desert by a misleading portrayal of the physical evidence collected in Syria and suppressing the evidence that would have made that role clear.

Heinonen, who was directly responsible for the IAEA's role in the Syria cover-up, left the IAEA in August 2010 and within a month was given a position at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He has continued to take positions on the Iran nuclear negotiations that were indistinguishable from those of the Netanyahu government. And he is now senior adviser on science and non-proliferation at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank whose positions on the Iran nuclear issues have closely followed those of the Likud governments in Israel.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-strike-on-syrian-nuclear-reactor-lessons-learned-for-iran-1.6028813>

Analysis Israel's 2007 Strike on Syrian Nuclear Reactor: Lessons Learned for Iran
Michael Herzog

Apr 25, 2018 6:14 AM

The destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007 contains lessons that have been overwhelmed by the battle over who gets the credit. As the defense minister's chief of staff at the time, I followed the decision-making process closely. I would like to illuminate three major dimensions.

The Intelligence

The fact is that a neighboring state hostile to Israel had been building a nuclear reactor for military purposes for about five years before Israel discovered it, close to it becoming "hot." From a result-oriented point of view, Israeli intelligence did succeed in discovering it in time, but it certainly needs some soul-searching with regard to the process. In my judgment, during the years preceding the reactor's discovery, Israeli intelligence subscribed to the mistaken conception that it was unreasonable for Syrian President Bashar Assad to try to develop nuclear military capabilities. As a result, proper collection efforts were not directed at this issue and relevant information was misinterpreted.

This conception had been correct for the era of Hafez Assad, Bashar's father. But after the younger Assad assumed power in 2000, there should have been intelligence attention focused on whether the new, inexperienced player would be tempted to go in new directions, first and foremost the nuclear one. However, due to inertia, Israel's intelligence remained mired in the old conception for several years.

That's how in 2004, when I was the defense minister's military secretary, we received an intelligence report to the effect that the Syrian regime was dealing with nuclear military issues. I asked the director of Military Intelligence to address the report in a meeting with the defense minister. The director rejected this possibility, both for lack of supporting evidence and on grounds it was "illogical." As we know, by then Syria was vigorously proceeding with the project, with strict compartmentalization within the Syrian government echelons themselves (and vis-à-vis their Iranian allies). Our intelligence missed the younger Assad's logic and the fact that rather than build local nuclear infrastructure, he had decided to buy the whole thing "off the shelf" from North Korea.

The methodology lesson here is that Israeli intelligence must constantly give real, practical priority to the acquisition of nuclear capabilities by countries in the region, given the strategic significance of this issue. Moreover, it must always check the validity of its assumptions when the leader of a country changes. The younger Assad was a relatively unknown quantity during his first years, but one could increasingly discern an adventurous side to his unbaked personality.

Israel's intelligence is worthy of praise for coming up with the critical information in time and for the precise accompaniment of the operation, including its assessments of possible responses to it. But along with patting itself on the back, it must investigate this case and learn its lessons, just as the Israel Air Force investigates "near misses" as if they were actual hits on its planes.

The decision-making process

From my years at the nexus of decision-making, I cannot recall a decision-making process that was as thorough and orderly as in this case. For months, a small forum of security establishment heads met every Friday in the Prime Minister's Residence to discuss each and every aspect of the attack and its ramifications.

During these discussions it was decided to provide Assad with a "zone of deniability" that would allow him to restrain himself from retaliating for the destruction of the reactor. Among other things, this decision was based on an assessment of the Syrian leader prepared by a designated group of psychologists. Throughout the process there was a fruitful dialogue between Israeli and American leaders and there was a series of secret cabinet debates before the decision was made. Israel exploited the advantage it had – that Assad didn't know that we knew – to work through a detailed process that also managed to maintain secrecy.

Weighing on this orderly course was the high tension between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, which combined a personal struggle with real differences in approach.

Barak believed that Olmert lacked the appropriate background and skills to make such fateful decisions. We often heard him criticize the problematic management of the Second Lebanon War the preceding year, and especially how the war was launched without considering all dimensions and calculating a few steps ahead.

When Barak assumed the defense post in June 2007, he found that the main operating plan to attack the reactor would leave a heavy footprint that would be liable to demand a Syrian response. Moreover, he argued that since the operation carried a risk – however low – of an escalation into war, Israel had to be prepared so that if war would break out, the military would pursue unequivocal victory and not an ambiguous end, as in the Second Lebanon War. The Israel Defense Forces was in the midst of a significant process of rehabilitating itself from that war; Barak thought more time was needed in order to prepare for another possible major conflict, and that Israel had the necessary months at its disposal.

Barak definitely had a point in his assertions and his input inserted a dimension of depth to the decision-making process. The plan that was eventually executed indeed left a small footprint and the IDF took good advantage of the time provided to improve its readiness. Nevertheless, at some point during the summer it was no longer clear why Barak was continuing to delay the operation. Many in the decision-making circle wondered whether he had some hidden motive. Barak has considerable knowledge and experience in the real diplomatic-security realm, but it's often hard to know at any given time what his primary motive is among the ensemble of motives that coexist in his complex personality.

Ironically, the synthesis of the contrasts represented by Olmert and Barak contributed to the successful outcome, despite the obstacles along the way. But the ultimate responsibility rests on the prime minister's shoulders, and just as Olmert was justifiably criticized for the management of the Second Lebanon War, he deserves the credit for the destruction of the Syrian reactor.

A challenge to the Begin Doctrine

The destruction of the reactor reflects the deep assimilation of the Begin Doctrine – that is, not allowing the development of any threatening nuclear capabilities in our region. Among those involved, there was broad consensus that there was no choice but to destroy the reactor in a military operation, even at the risk of a possible escalation.

Therefore, no other option was seriously considered suitable, including U.S. President George W. Bush's suggestion to Olmert to issue Assad an ultimatum: allow international inspectors to visit the reactor within a short, defined time or it would be attacked. There was a reasonable concern that under the "diplomacy first" option, Assad would take immediate steps to conceal and protect the reactor so as to make it impossible to destroy. Deep in the minds of decision-makers there was the view that Israel must not place the keys to critical parts of its national security in the hands of outside parties, as friendly as they might be. This principle remains valid.

The Iranian nuclear program presents a far more significant challenge to the Begin Doctrine than the programs destroyed in Iraq and Syria. The Iranian project is not built around a single reactor, but rather combines the uranium and plutonium tracks within a broad framework of human capital, know-how, facilities and infrastructures, in a country that's farther away and which is building a substantial regional array – some of it close to us – and which has the ability to respond and cause significant damage to Israel, by acting either directly or through proxies like Hezbollah.

Unlike Assad at the time, Iran knows that Israel and the world are closely following its nuclear program and act accordingly. Moreover, the Iranian nuclear program has a broad and deep international context, and any action against it will necessarily influence and be influenced by this context. The nuclear agreement between Iran and the leading countries in the international community bought precious time, but did not take Iran's nuclear ambitions off the table, did not deprive Iran of its nuclear infrastructure and will eventually allow it to become a nuclear threshold state. To this must we must add the ties between Iran and North Korea and the apparent mutual influence of each country's progress or regression in the nuclear realm.

In light of all this, the major questions facing Israeli decision-makers relate mainly to the effectiveness of an Israeli military thwarting initiative and its potential impact on the chances of preventing Iran's accelerated return to the nuclear path "the day after," this time going underground and rushing to the weapon.

This is a challenge of a different magnitude. It requires close and continuous monitoring and thorough and complex strategic thinking. We must not be passive because of the time bought by the nuclear agreement, which could be shortened if U.S. President Donald Trump decides to abandon it. We must begin preparing today for the time a concrete decision might be necessary; this includes focused intelligence, preparation of operational options, a close dialogue with the United States and the creation of regional partnerships to the extent possible.

The challenge to Israel may be exacerbated by the possibility that some of the civilian nuclear programs now proliferating in the region will lay a foundation for future military programs. Saudi Arabia, which has issued an international tender to build two of 16 planned reactors, is demanding that the U.S. government deviate from the "Golden Standard" it applies to civilian nuclear programs and allow it to have nuclear fuel facilities in its territory as was permitted to Iran, with its crown prince warning that if Iran acquires military nuclear capability, his country will as well.

The bottom line is that while preparing options and laying the ground for the continued implementing the Begin Doctrine, Israel must constantly ask itself whether the conditions for enforcing this doctrine effectively still exist and if not, what the alternative may be.

Brig. Gen. (res.) Michael (Mike) Herzog was head of the strategic planning division of the IDF's Planning Branch, military secretary and chief of staff for four defense ministers. He is currently an international fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute and BICOM.

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/exclusive-interview-general-eli-ben-meir-meet-the-man-who-took-out-a-syrian-nuclear-reactor/2018/04/25/>

Exclusive Interview: General Eli Ben Meir: Meet the Man Who Took Out a Syrian Nuclear Reactor
By David Israel -
11 Iyyar 5778 – April 25, 2018

Recently retired, General Eli Ben Meir was the intelligence officer who, in 2006, overcame resistance from both Israeli and Bush administration intelligence officials—led by then Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte—to advocate for the bombing of a Syrian nuclear facility developed by North Korean scientists.

Just after midnight on September 6, 2007, Israel launched operation Outside the Box, an airstrike against the nuclear reactor in the Deir ez-Zor region of Syria. Israeli F-15I fighter jets armed with laser-guided 500-pound bombs, escorted by F-16I fighter jets and signal intelligence aircraft, raided and destroyed the Syrian radar site in Tall al-Abuad, followed by the demolition of the nuclear reactor. Israeli special-forces had arrived at the nuclear site the day before to highlight the target with laser designators.

General Ben Meir was appointed head of the Technological Intelligence Department at the IDF Military Intelligence in 2005. “Signs of nuclear activity were evident at the beginning of 2000, before I dealt with this issue,” he told The Jewish Press this week. “However, many signs had been proven false or could be shown to be related to something else entirely.”

“By the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006, my suspicions regarding a Syrian nuclear covert activity increased, and I decided that there was enough evidence to prove its existence, and that something should be done about it,” Ben Meir said. He called for additional resources and manpower to focus on the reactor, “and the more people that dealt with it the more information we found,” he recalled.

At that point, Israeli and American intelligence officials began to push back against the newly appointed head of tech intel’s hyper interest in the alleged Syrian reactor. “Even within my own unit, many thought that there wasn’t a case to be made that this was a nuclear reactor, or even that there was any nuclear activity,” Ben Meir recalled. “They studied the same information and provided a different logical explanation to what had been discovered. My unit and I were pretty much alone in trying to find more evidence for the nuclear reactor, and also in getting everyone else to understand that there is something going on there.”

“Once all the necessary people were convinced that there was a Syrian nuclear reactor, and leading up to the attack in 2007, my team’s main role was to provide the relevant information for the military discussions,” Ben Meir said. “This included the decision of what level of damage needed to be caused so that the facility was no longer operational. We prepared the operational intelligence for an aerial attack and we were responsible for providing an assessment of how much time was left before the plant became operational, because the moment the nuclear plant became operational you could no longer attack it, it would have been like diffusing a nuclear bomb.”

According to 2018 Israeli media accounts, the debate over striking before or after the Syrian nuclear reactor had gone live was conducted between outgoing PM Ehud Olmert and his incoming

replacement, Ehud Barak. Barak, according to those reports, did not have a problem striking the facility after it had gone online, because he insisted on not being rushed into executing his predecessor's plan. Ben Meir was asked to brief Olmert on a weekly basis, and the PM, who was being forced to resign under suspicion of corruption, was eager to get the credit for the attack.

The retired general sums up the impact of operation Outside the Box: "Everyone knows about the situation in Syria over the last 10 years, and especially in the last five years. The situation in the Middle East would have been completely different had Syria possessed nuclear capabilities – not only because of developments in Syria, but even more alarmingly, because of the way Hezbollah and Iran would have used the Syrian nuclear capability as an umbrella for their terror activities and the spread of their revolution. Destroying the Syrian nuclear weapons capability was one of the most important actions that the Israeli leadership has carried out. It didn't solve all the problems in the Middle East, but it certainly helped lessen the severity of the situation today."

General Ben Meir is convinced Iran is "by far" Israel's biggest threat. "It is a direct threat via their missile capabilities when and if they have nuclear capabilities, but we are not there yet," he said. "Iran is the biggest engine in the world for terror activity and unrest in countries like Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. All of them are directed against the Sunni world but also against Western interests, including Israel."

"They are directly involved in open and covert activities, especially in Syria and Lebanon. They are the financier, trainer and arms supplier for Hezbollah – everything that they have and will have comes from Iran. It is the only country in the world that says openly that they want to destroy Israel and erase it from the map," he concludes.

General Ben Meir has been involved with Migdal Ohr (Hebrew: Lighthouse), a group providing education and social guidance to children from underprivileged and troubled homes across Israel. Thousands of children come to the group's programs from overcrowded apartments, single-parent families, homes with drug problems, impoverished and crime-ridden families. They are enrolled in all areas of the educational spectrum, and the charity's goal is to transform them students into proud and productive citizens of Israel.

"A lot of Israeli citizens know about Migdal Ohr and their wonderful activities," said the retired general. "During my military career I came across soldiers who were graduates of Migdal Ohr programs. Migdal Ohr is involved with the army, and it very much speaks to me."

These days, according to Ben Meir, Migdal Ohr is starting a new program to prepare and supports their students before, during and after their service in the IDF.

"Now that I have reentered civilian life, I want to be more involved in helping strengthen Migdal Ohr with my connections in the army, and to support their new program by sharing my experiences," he said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/04/us/politics/trump-syria-north-korea-meeting.html>

Trump Greet Plans for North Korea-Syria Meeting With Deafening Silence

By David E. Sanger and Mark Landler

June 4, 2018

[EXCERPTS]

WASHINGTON — When Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, met with top Chinese and Russian officials before a planned summit meeting with President Trump, the American leader raised a red flag. But North Korea's announcement that Mr. Kim is also planning to meet President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has brought no similar protest from Mr. Trump — even though Syria and North Korea have a longstanding shared history of nuclear proliferation.

The last time Mr. Assad did business with the Kim family, the result was one of the most brazen cases of proliferation in history: North Korean engineers built a replica of their main nuclear reactor in the Syrian desert. It was the beginnings of a nuclear program that ended in fiery ruins in September 2007, when the building was destroyed in a secret Israeli bombing run.

At the time, Vice President Dick Cheney and others in the George W. Bush administration argued that the United States should have bombed the reactor itself, to make a point about its seriousness in stopping the export of bomb-making technology.

Now North Korea says it is resuming the relationship, and is expecting a visit to Pyongyang by Mr. Assad — who has rarely left Damascus since the uprising against his government began seven years ago.

[deletia]

The sale of the reactor to Syria was the first, and only, time North Korea has been caught selling a complete nuclear facility. It was an exact replica of the plutonium reactor at Yongbyon.

The chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence service at the time, Meir Dagan, visited Washington and showed pictures of the reactor to the C.I.A. chief at the time, Michael V. Hayden, and the national security adviser to Mr. Bush, Stephen J. Hadley. That touched off a lengthy debate over whether the United States should destroy the facility.

Mr. Bush ultimately overruled Mr. Cheney and said the United States would go to the United Nations before intervening. Instead, the Israelis acted to destroy the reactor. All involved kept the action secret, in hopes of keeping Mr. Assad from retaliating, but it was revealed, by The New York Times and others, a few weeks later.

[deletia]

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/mks-warned-of-syrias-nuke-plans-years-before-reactor-strike-report/>

MKs warned about Syria's nuke plans years before 2007 reactor strike – report
Committee headed by Yuval Steinitz sent PM Sharon a memo in 2004 saying that Damascus was working on a nuclear program

By TOI staff

Today, 6:12 am [Accessed 2018-06-06T18:25Z]

[EXCERPT]

A Knesset committee warned of Syria's nuclear ambitions two years before Israeli spies found evidence a reactor was being built, leading to its eventual destruction in an air raid, according to a report Tuesday.

In March, the State of Israel officially confirmed it was responsible for a September 6, 2007 airstrike that blew up the reactor near Deir Ezzor, ending a 10-and-a-half-year policy of silence about the operation.

According to officials, Israeli spies only received definitive proof of the reactor's existence in mid-2006, when it was well underway, in what was described as a major intelligence failure. Both the Mossad and Military Intelligence took credit for uncovering the reactor's existence.

However, documents aired by the Hadashot TV news outlet Tuesday show that a small team of lawmakers flagged what looked like a possible Syrian nuclear program in 2004.

“Analysis of all intelligence information indicates with a high level of probability that a Syrian military nuclear project is going on,” a commission of inquiry wrote in a top secret, emergency memo to then-prime minister Ariel Sharon. “Since the issue is of the utmost strategic importance, I request that the prime minister urgently hold a comprehensive discussion on the subject.”

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, then the head of the Knesset's powerful Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, had set up the commission of inquiry with the goal of making sure Israel knew if any country in the region was pursuing nuclear capabilities.

The official *raison d'être* for the panel was to examine the intelligence failures that led to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi pursuing a nuclear program without Israel being able to thwart him.

“A nuclear project is growing in a hostile Arab state with a madman like Gaddafi, and we do not know until we are told,” warned Steinitz at the time.

Former MK Haim Ramon, who was on the panel, said he was tipped off by Syrian President Bashar Assad saying that “We need to reach a strategic parity with Israel.”

“What strategic parity could Syria reach with Israel other than non-conventional weapons?” Ramon told Hadashot. He said it was clear Assad was referring to nuclear weapons.

However, defense officials thought Assad was speaking only of his intent to develop ballistic missiles and chemical weapons.

Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, a general who headed military intelligence from 2002 until 2006, told Hadashot he didn't remember the events as they had been described in the report. But he added that Syria was not the army's top priority at a time when the Second Intifada was at its peak, the Hezbollah terror group was growing on Lebanese border and concerns were rampant about other countries' nuclear ambitions, likely a reference to Iran.

The committee only made nine copies of its report, and until Hadashot requested the censor declassify it for publication it had never been made public.

[deletia]

Appendix B

Imagery and Related Materials

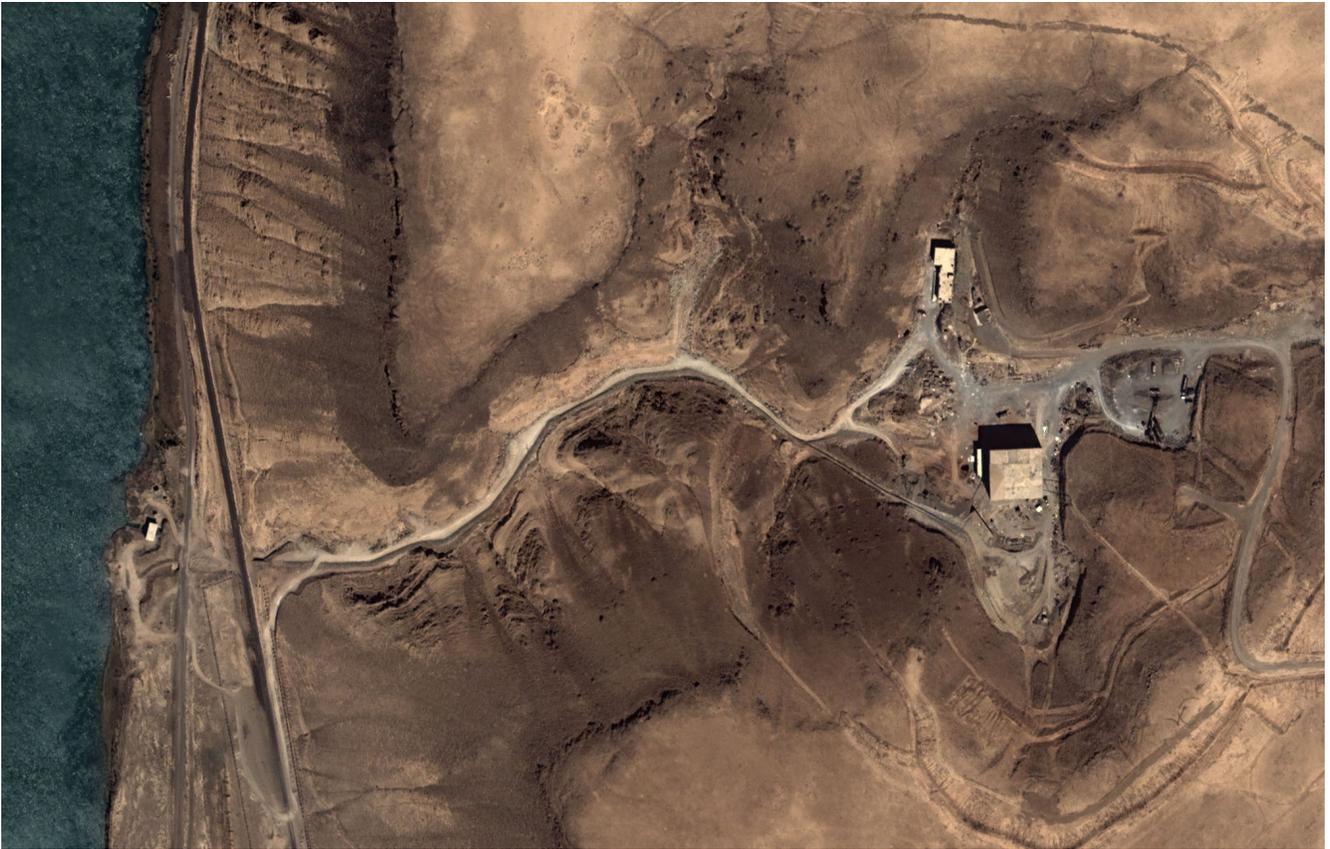


Image Credit: ISIS & DigitalGlobe

2007-08-10 DigitalGlobe Image.

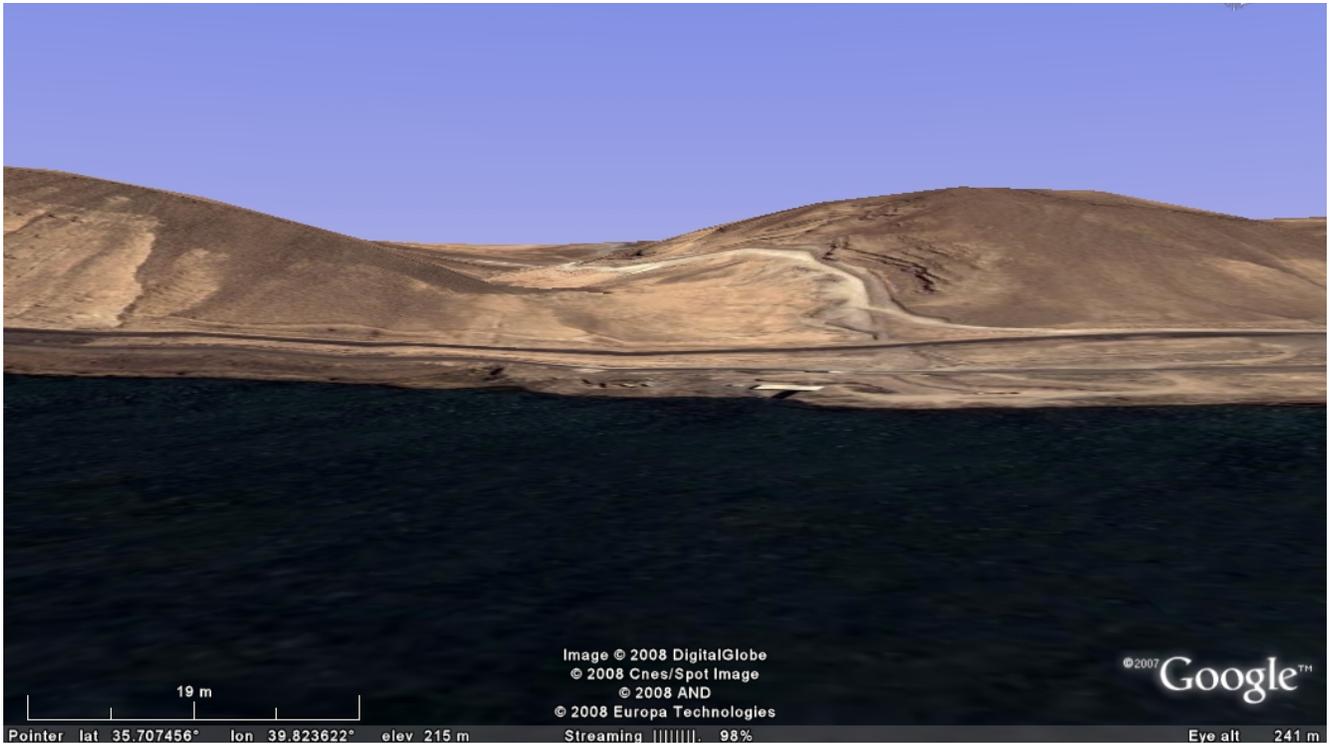
Note the presence of a riverside building and what may be a trench on the south side of the wadi leading to the large building



DigitalGlobe imagery of the “pump house” on the Euphrates retrieved from GoogleEarth 2008-04-27. Estimated date of imagery is August, 2007.



*DigitalGlobe imagery of the facility retrieved from
GoogleEarth 2008-04-27. Estimated date of imagery is August, 2007.*



Rotated view of DigitalGlobe image as displayed in Google Earth, 2008-04-27. This represents the view of the wadi containing the facility as seen from a point on the west bank of the Euphrates some 25 meters above river level. Note that the curves in the lower course of the wadi block a direct view of the facility. The “pump house” is the thin white rhombus to right center on the opposite shore.



Rotated view of DigitalGlobe image as displayed in Google Earth on 2008-04-29 showing the facility and surrounding terrain in perspective. According to the Google Earth display, the elevation of the river surface is 216 meters, the plateau nearest the river 277 meters, the plateau adjacent to the facility 316 meters and the floor of the wadi adjacent to the large building 285 meters.

Caution: the heights of the buildings at the facility are not represented in the Google Earth image: i.e., they appear “flat.”

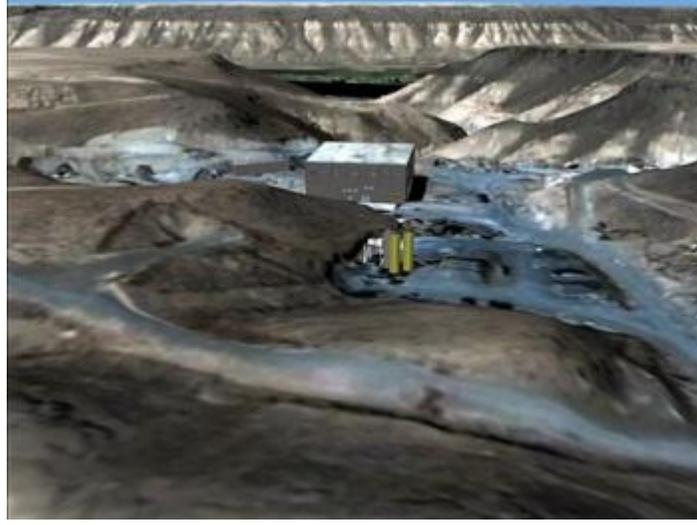


Image provided by the U.S. Government, April 2008



Image Credit: DigitalGlobe

2007-08-05



2007-08-05



2007-10-24

[DigitalGlobe imagery of the presumed pump house near the Euphrates. Note that there appears to be a modest outflow of turbid water through the flume connecting the building and the river in the August image. In addition, the shoreline appears to have altered between the two images.]



2007-08-10



2007-10-24



2007-08-24

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/1689/syrian-and-nuclear-weapons-again#comment>

Jeffrey,

Actually the large square-top building which has apparently now been removed from the site has been on the site for over FIVE years. Shown below is a piece of an astronaut photo I cropped from an online collection accessible at a NASA website

This photo was taken in September of 2002.



[Segment of image dated 2002-09-05T08:51:57Z; 2002248.369410Z]

Server: 2 This service is provided by the International Space Station program.
Recommended Citation:
Image Science and Analysis Laboratory, NASA-Johnson Space Center. "The Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth."
<<http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/sseop/clickmap/>> (10/29/2007 18:12:19)
Send questions or comments to the NASA Responsible Official at
jsc-earthweb@mail.nasa.gov
Curator: Earth Sciences Web Team
Notices: Web Accessibility and Policy Notices, NASA Web Privacy Policy
Last Update: 10/29/2007 18:12:19



The technical information about the photo I cropped this piece from is shown in the image below.

View ISS005-E-12691.JPG 70762 639 435 No No

Large Images to Request for Downloading

Request	File Name	File Size (bytes)	Width	Height	Annotated	Cropped	Purpose	Comments
	ISS005-E-12691.JPG	1019430	3032	2064	No	No		

Electronic Image Data

View camera file Camera Files >> No sound file available.

Identification

Mission: **ISS005** Roll: **E** Frame: **12691** Mission ID on the Film or Image: **ISS005**
 Country or Geographic Name: **SYRIA**
 Features: **EUPHRATES R. VALLEY, AGR.**
 Center Point Latitude: **35.6** Center Point Longitude: **39.7** (Negative numbers indicate south for latitude and west for longitude)

Calculate photo footprint

Stereo: (Yes indicates there is an adjacent picture of the same area)
 ONC Map ID: JNC Map ID:

Camera

Camera Tilt: **49**
 Camera Focal Length: **400mm**
 Camera: **E4: Kodak DCS760C Electronic Still Camera**
 Film: **3060E : 3060 x 2036 pixel CCD, RGBG array.**

Quality

Film Exposure:
 Percentage of Cloud Cover: **10** (0-10)

Nadir

Date: **20020905** (YYYYMMDD) GMT Time: **085157** (HHMMSS)
 Nadir Point Latitude: **32.9**, Longitude: **42.7** (Negative numbers indicate south for latitude and west for longitude)
 Nadir to Photo Center Direction: **Northwest**
 Sun Azimuth: **171** (Clockwise angle in degrees from north to the sun measured at the nadir point)
 Spacecraft Altitude: **208** nautical miles (385 km)
 Sun Elevation Angle: **64** (Angle in degrees between the horizon and the sun, measured at the nadir point)
 Orbit Number: **1657**

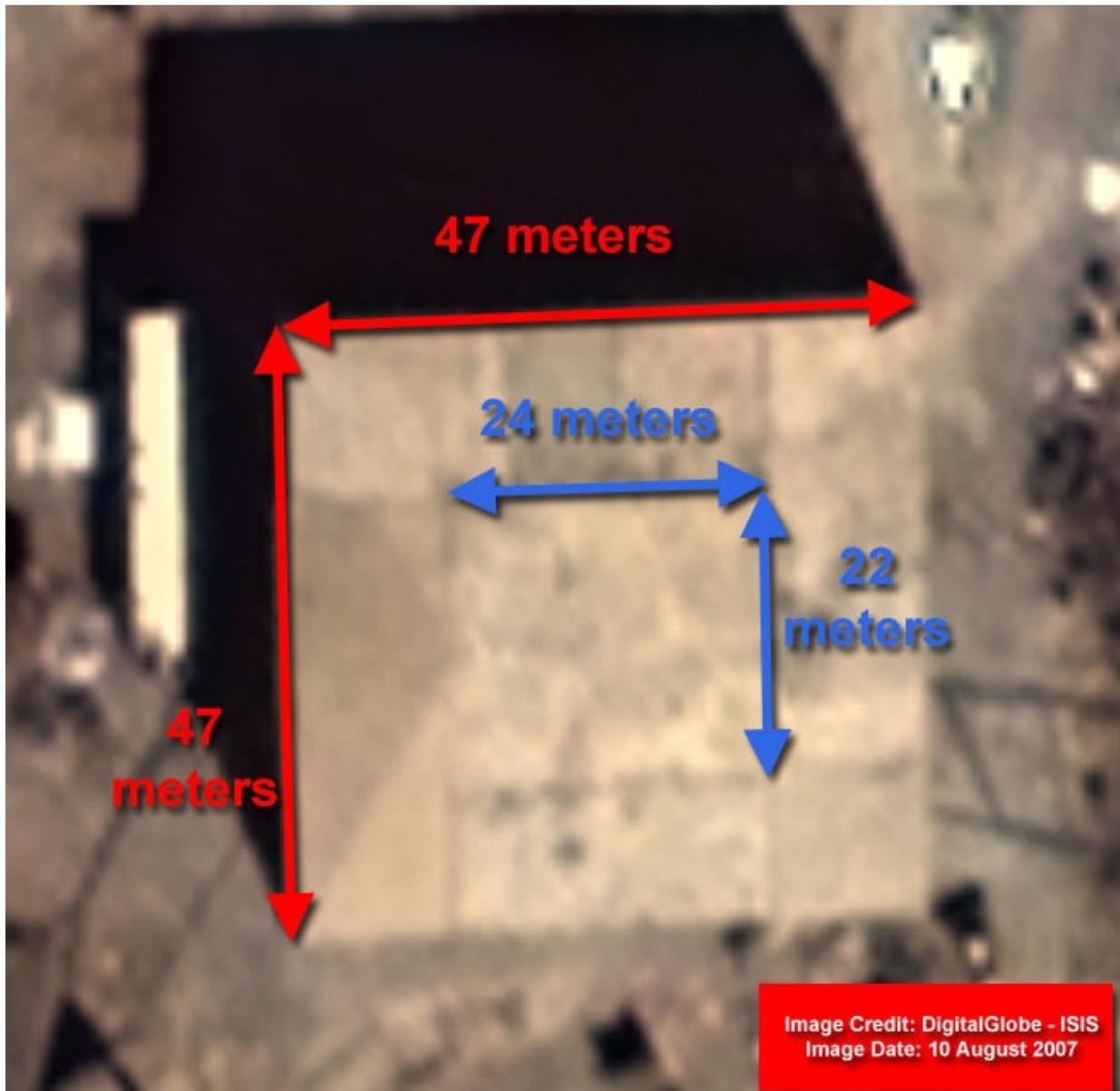
I am currently looking for older photos online to see if I can find one where the building is not yet present so we can bracket the time frame over which the structure was built. Will keep everyone informed if I find one.

— John · Oct 29, 06:36 PM ·

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1 25544U 98067A 02248.15325231 .00043399 00000-0 54223-3 0 1188
2 25544 51.6391 11.6363 0015293 222.4936 139.9474 15.59260317216505
ISS orbital elements for day of photograph from http://celestrak.com/NORAD/archives/zarya.zip

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<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/1689/syrian-and-nuclear-weapons-again#comment>

[EXCERPT OF COMMENT]

I played around with some shadow geometry and got some interesting tentative results.

If we assume that the truck trailer stands 4 meters tall:



then the “Secondary Structure” stands a reasonable 8 meters (about 26 feet):



But the “Big Box” stands over 24 meters (78 feet) high:





Above is a side view of the “Big Box”. The red arrow points at a person-sized line for comparison

If these calculations are even roughly correct, and the building is, as Syria claims, just a “warehouse”, what are they storing?? Dinosaurs?

Yale Simkin

— yale · Oct 30, 10:14 PM ·

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/1689/syrian-and-nuclear-weapons-again#comment>

I was just looking at the 24 October post-strike picture and noticed that the line representing the putative water pipe from/to the Euphrates leads not to the former big building, but to the smaller one just south of it.

And indeed, a key ABC News story of Oct 19 (<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/story?id=3752687&page=1>) says, “The official said there was a larger structure just north of a small pump station; a nuclear reactor would need a constant source of water to keep it cool.”

So I wonder if the building on the Euphrates identified as a pump station in http://www.isis-online.org/publications/SuspectSite_24October2007.pdf might not be just one of two.

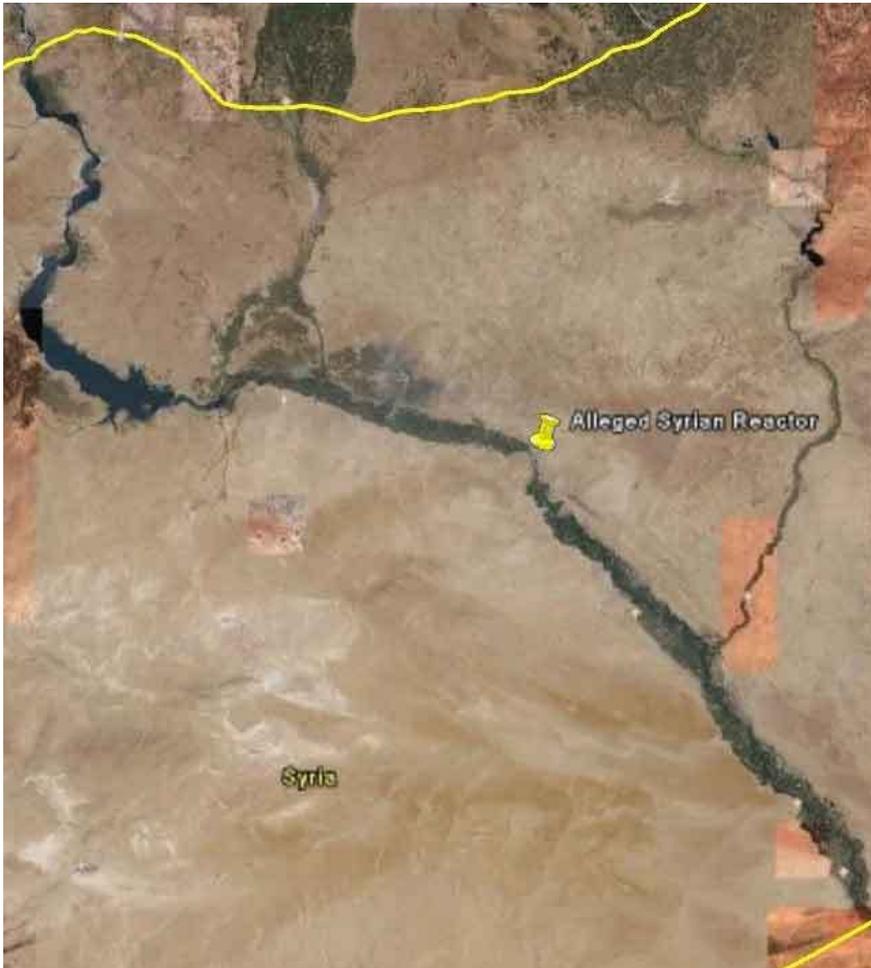
Putative is a lovely word to have available in such circumstances as these.

— Allen Thomson · Nov 1, 02:09 PM

<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/1689/syrian-and-nuclear-weapons-again#comment>

Stranger and stranger. A couple of comments.

First of all, look at the location of this facility from the big picture:



Notice anything odd about the location? If you zoom in, the river in this section bisects two bluffs. As a consequence, the adjacent land is not subject to flooding and the river likely flows faster and deeper than in the “green” low-lying agricultural areas that predominate to both the north and south all along the Euphrates. If one desired to build a reactor, would this particular section of river not be well suited? A reactor could be placed in close proximity to the river and a deep and narrow channel would provide easy pumping of cooling water.

However, as Yale noted above, pumps require electricity. I’m still trying to obtain hi resolution imagery that will not cost me \$400, but the reported “pump station” would require electrical power from somewhere. Perhaps someone with the requisite imagery could see if there are electrical lines and where they lead.

Finally, at this point I’m relatively convinced this is not a SCUD facility for a few reasons. First of all, Syria already has developed facilities for such missiles – facilities with underground bunkers, wide

paved roads, etc. If the shipment were Scuds, particularly a new variant, why not send them to an established, existing and more secure facility?

Secondly, the razed facility lacks the kind of wide, paved roads and large, paved parking areas that one commonly associates with missile-related facilities.

Additionally, the facility is , well, isolated. What purpose would an isolated scud facility serve that could not be served by Syria's existing and more well developed facilities?

Finally, the indications are that the US and Israel have been watching this facility for some time. One might postulate that in all that time the intelligence community might have imaged or otherwise noticed something scud-related, such as a MAZ parked outside or other Scud-related equipment. No indication of that so far.

Finally, what is this: *[continued on next page]*



I'll put forth some additional conjecture and suggest it might be a concrete mixing plant. Compare to [this](#) and [this](#) and [this](#).

[Andy](#) · Nov 1, 01:22 AM ·



[Pictures of concrete plants in above links]

Newsgroups: alt.war.nuclear
From: Allen Thomson <thoms...@flash.net>
Date: Sat, 03 Nov 2007 07:43:03 -0700
Local: Sat, Nov 3 2007 9:43 am
Subject: DigitalGlobe coverage of Syrian site

According to DigitalGlobe's somewhat quirky ordering tool, the only images they have for the Big Box site are the ones listed below. Apparently somebody put in an order for coverage late-July/early August.

Whether the fact that coverage stopped a week before the strike and didn't resume until the ISIS work became public is interesting, but may or may not be significant.

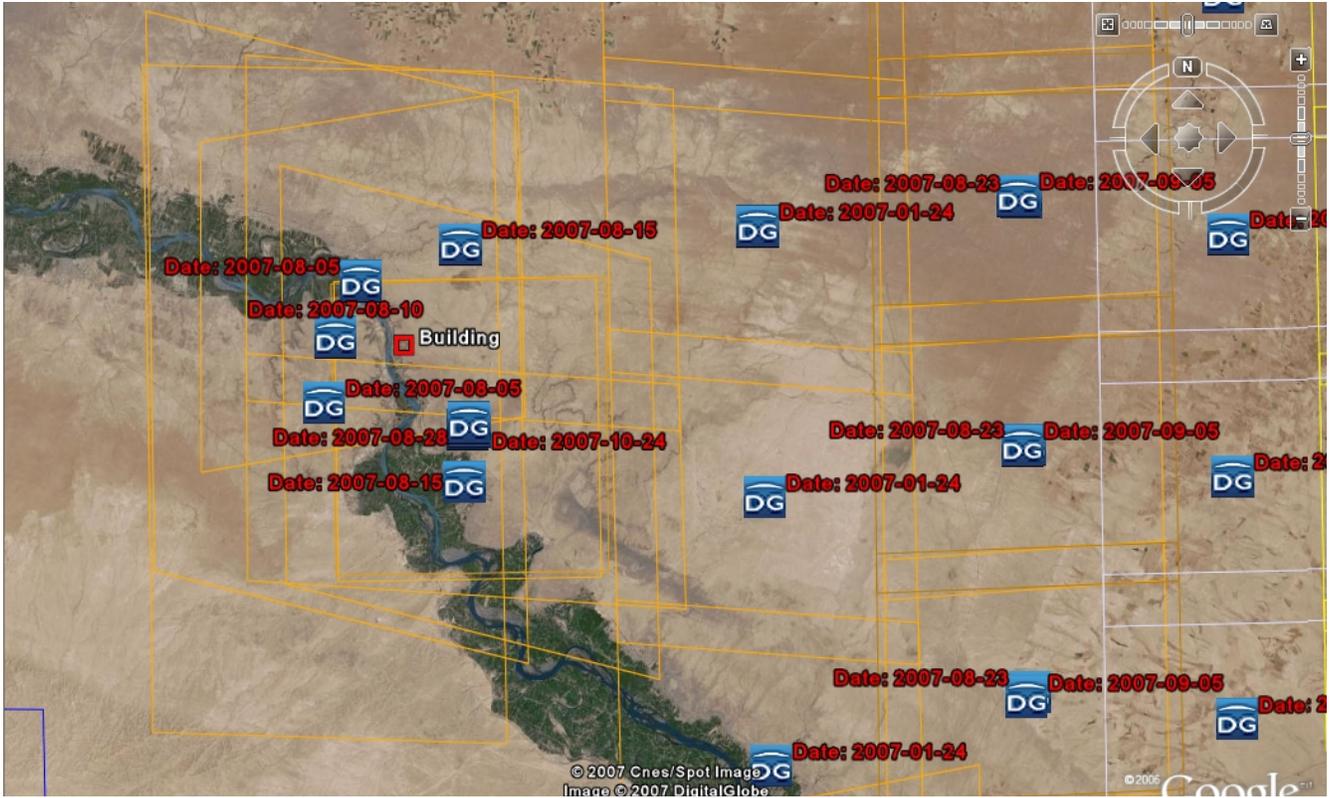
Date	Cloud	Off-nadir	Catalog #
2007-08-05	0%	29	10100100070A0D01
2007-08-05	0%	40	10100100070A0E01
2007-08-10	0%	40	10100100070E7C01
2007-08-15	0%	37	1010010007125B01
2007-08-18	0%	2	101001000714C801
2007-08-28	0%	38	10100100071CCB01
2007-10-24	11%	11	10100100074B1001



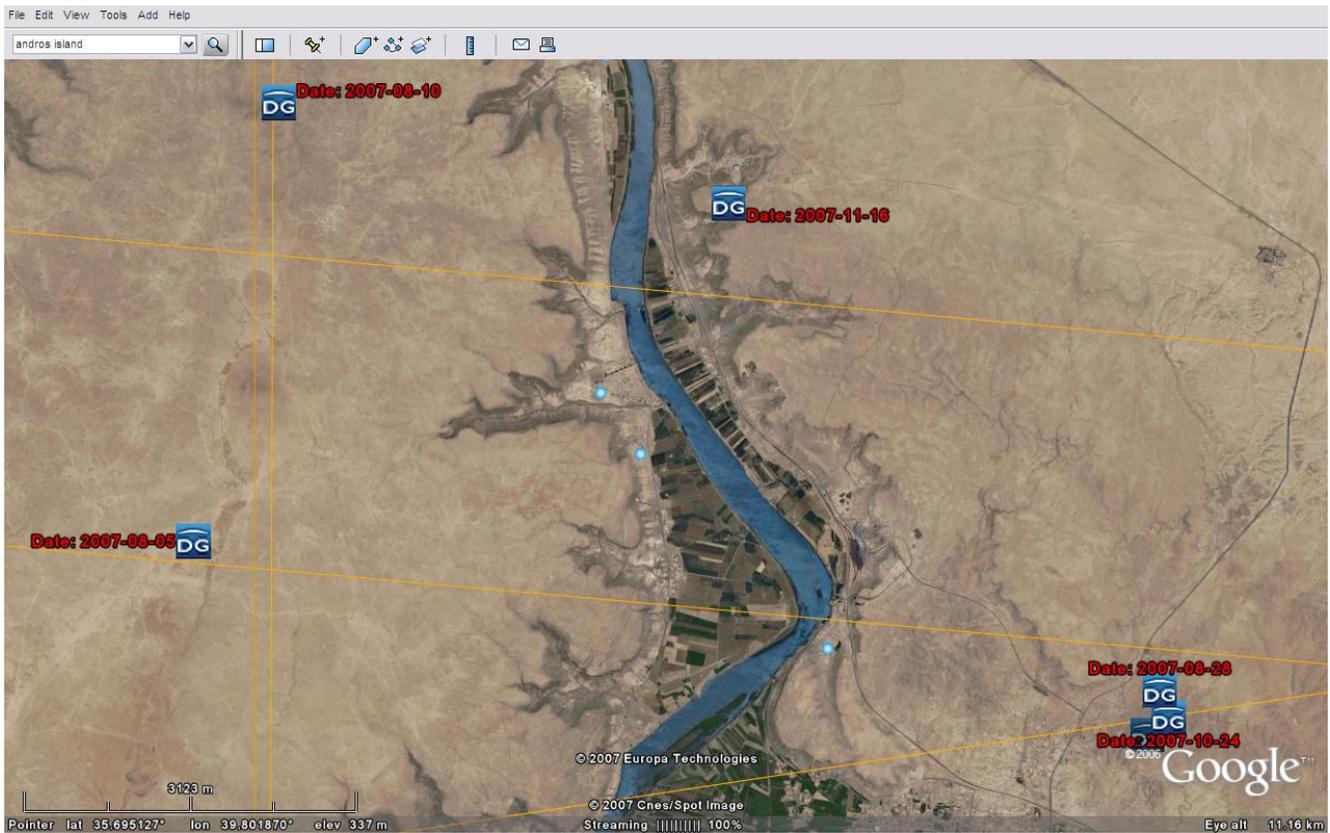
Google Earth image retrieved 2008-08-24 with DigitalGlobe image of 2007-08-18.



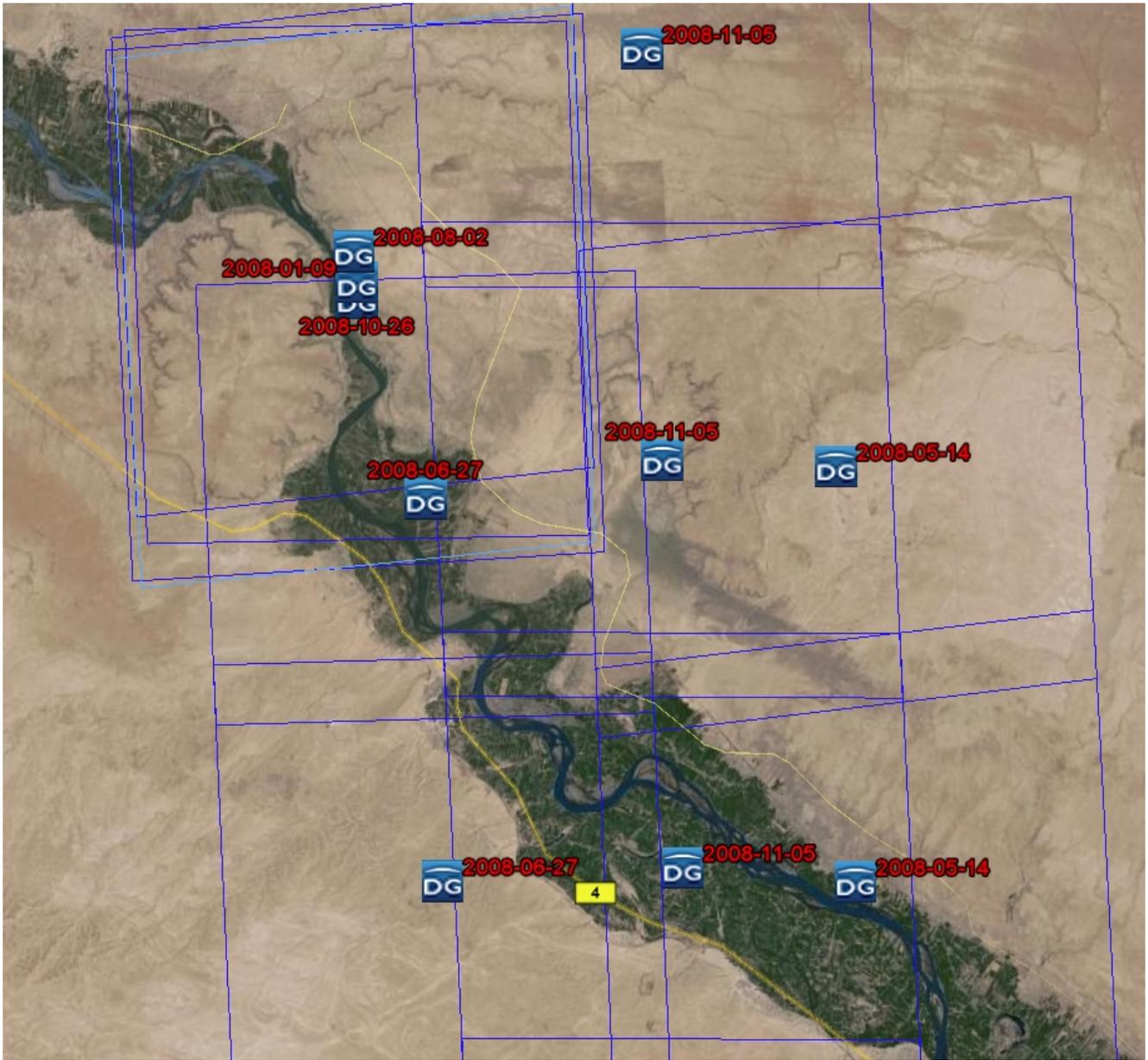
*DigitalGlobe coverage of Syria during 2007 as shown in Google Earth on 2007-11-04.
Note the region of special coverage at the suspect site.*



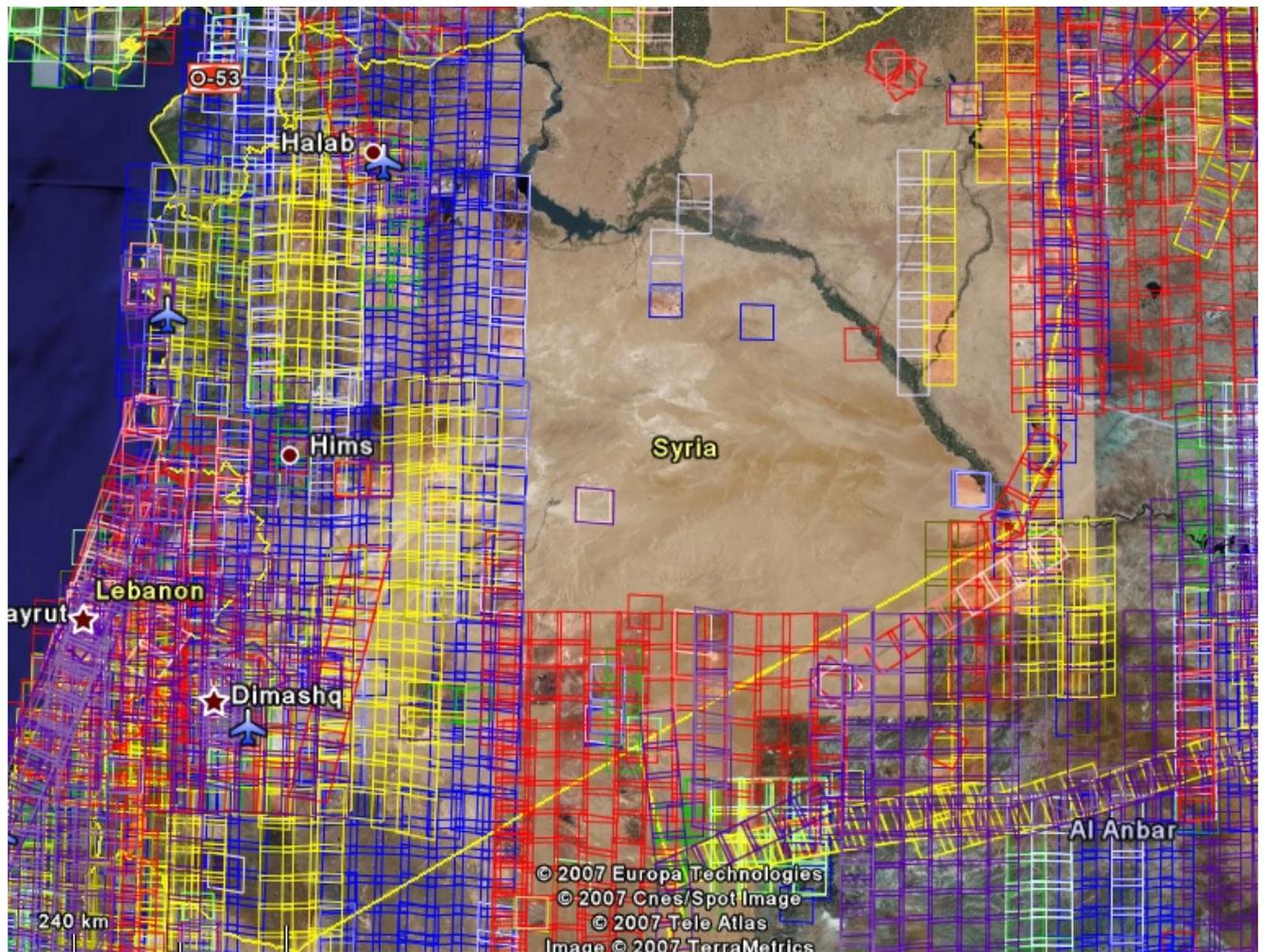
Detail of DigitalGlobe region of coverage.



Google Earth depiction of centerpoint of images obtained 2007-12-20. Note that the image of 16 November 2007 is centered at the site of the former building, but the centers of earlier images are displaced by several kilometers. The significance of the displacement, if any, is unknown.



Digital Globe coverage in 2008, retrieved via Google Earth 2008-12-02



*DigitalGlobe coverage of Syria 2002-2006
as shown in Google Earth on 2007-11-04*



SPOT(?) image of 2004-12-31 discovered in Google Earth historical imagery on 2009-06-15

Catalog ID: **10100100070A0E01** Acq Date: **Aug, 05 2007** Lat/Long: **35.67603° / 39.7762°**

Off Nadir Angle: **40°** Target Azimuth: **177°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **10100100070A0D01** Acq Date: **Aug, 05 2007** Lat/Long: **35.74533° / 39.80382°**

Off Nadir Angle: **29°** Target Azimuth: **36°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **10100100070E7C01** Acq Date: **Aug, 10 2007** Lat/Long: **35.7135° / 39.78518°**

Off Nadir Angle: **40°** Target Azimuth: **157°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **1010010007125B02** Acq Date: **Aug, 15 2007** Lat/Long: **35.62945° / 39.8739°**

Off Nadir Angle: **37°** Target Azimuth: **100°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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[Note that this image includes the town of At Tibnah but not the suspected strike site.]

Catalog ID: **101001000714C801** Acq Date: **Aug, 18 2007** Lat/Long: **35.65942° / 39.87653°**

Off Nadir Angle: **2°** Target Azimuth: **26°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **10100100071CCB01** Acq Date: **Aug, 28 2007** Lat/Long: **35.66337° / 39.87775°**

Off Nadir Angle: **38°** Target Azimuth: **152°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **10100100074B1001** Acq Date: **Oct, 24 2007** Lat/Long: **35.66077° / 39.8786°**

Off Nadir Angle: **11°** Target Azimuth: **265°** Cloud Cover: **11%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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Catalog ID: **10100100075D1301** Acq Date: **Nov, 16 2007** Lat/Long: **35.70485° / 39.83237°**

Off Nadir Angle: **5°** Target Azimuth: **86°** Cloud Cover: **48%** Environmental Quality: **99**



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SPOT/IMAGE Coverage

1. Ma recherche				2. Mes résultats			3. Mon panier		
	N°				Produit	Sat	K / J	Date	Nuage
▶	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	127/279	18-03-2007	0%	
▶	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	127/278	18-03-2007	0%	
▶	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	127/279	25-01-2007	0%	
▶	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	127/278	25-01-2007	0%	
▶	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	08-11-2006	0%	
▶	6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	127/279	17-08-2006	0%	
▶	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	127/278	17-08-2006	0%	
▶	8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	11-08-2006	0%	
▶	9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	126/278	21-06-2006	0%	
▶	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	21-06-2006	0%	
▶	11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	126/278	20-06-2006	0%	
▶	12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	20-06-2006	0%	
▶	13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	126/278	11-06-2006	0%	
▶	14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	11-06-2006	0%	
▶	15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	28-07-2005	0%	
▶	16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	02-07-2005	0%	
▶	17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	125/278	01-06-2005	7%	
▶	18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	125/278	01-06-2005	10%	
▶	19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	127/279	22-05-2005	2%	
▶	20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	126/278	22-05-2005	0%	
	N°	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Produit	Sat	K / J	Date	Nuage
▶	21	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	22-05-2005	9%	
▶	22	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	16-05-2005	2%	
▶	23	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	125/278	26-04-2005	8%	
▶	24	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	125/278	26-04-2005	13%	
▶	25	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	25-03-2005	0%	
▶	26	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	20-03-2005	0%	
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▶	28	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m C Spot5	126/278	31-03-2004	0%	
▶	29	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2,5 m NB Spot5	126/278	31-03-2004	0%	

Newsgroups: alt.war.nuclear
From: Allen Thomson <thoms...@flash.net>
Date: Tue, 27 Nov 2007 10:27:30 -0800 (PST)
Local: Tues, Nov 27 2007 12:27 pm
Subject: Re: Israeli Strike on Syria sourcebook update

> one thing that came out is that there is a considerable amount of
> SPOT-5 2.5 meter imagery of the site extending from March 2004 through
> March 2007.

"A considerable amount" being enumerated below. They all appear to be near-nadir shots with < 10% cloud cover. I'm slightly tempted to read something into the June 2006 coverage, but it's probably best not to.

18-03-2007
18-03-2007
25-01-2007
25-01-2007

08-11-2006
17-08-2006
17-08-2006
11-08-2006
21-06-2006
21-06-2006
20-06-2006
20-06-2006
11-06-2006
11-06-2006

28-07-2005
02-07-2005
01-06-2005
01-06-2005
22-05-2005
22-05-2005
16-05-2005
26-04-2005
26-04-2005
25-03-2005
20-03-2005
22-02-2005

31-03-2004
31-03-2004



▣ **SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

▣ **Image information**

Reference: 51262780611080810081A

Latitude of centre: 35.8767

Longitude of centre: 39.6327

Acquisition date: 08 NOV, 2006

Acquisition time: 08:10:08

Satellite: SPOT5

Mode: 2.5 m panchromatic (THR)

Viewing Angle: -6.31059

Cloud cover: 0%

Price: 5400 € *

(* according to Spot Image International Price List)

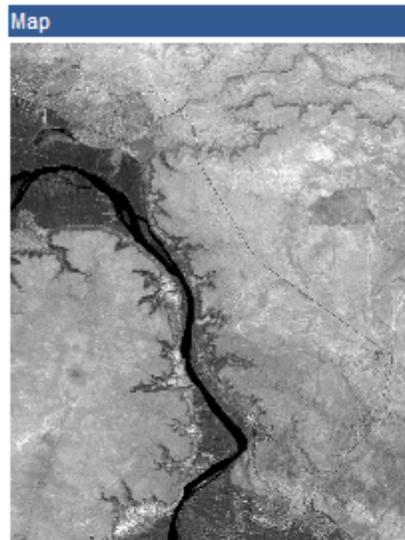
GeoEye Ikonos and IRS-1C Imagery

1m IKONOS (B&W / MS) Results										
	Footprint	Preview	Retrieve	Acquisition Date	Cloud Cover	Elevation/Tilt Angle	Data Owner	Scene ID	Source ID	RFQ
1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2007-11-23	8	75.4694	SIME	2000038460800THC	2007112308164480000011621755	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2007-06-25	2	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891502R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2007-06-25	5	62.2395	SIEA	2000000891501R08	2007062508160270000011108208	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000000178508R10	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2003-09-16	0	61.9128	SIME	2000021193308THC	2003091608223350000011612684	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Ikonos Browse Image
2003-09-16**

Full Metadata



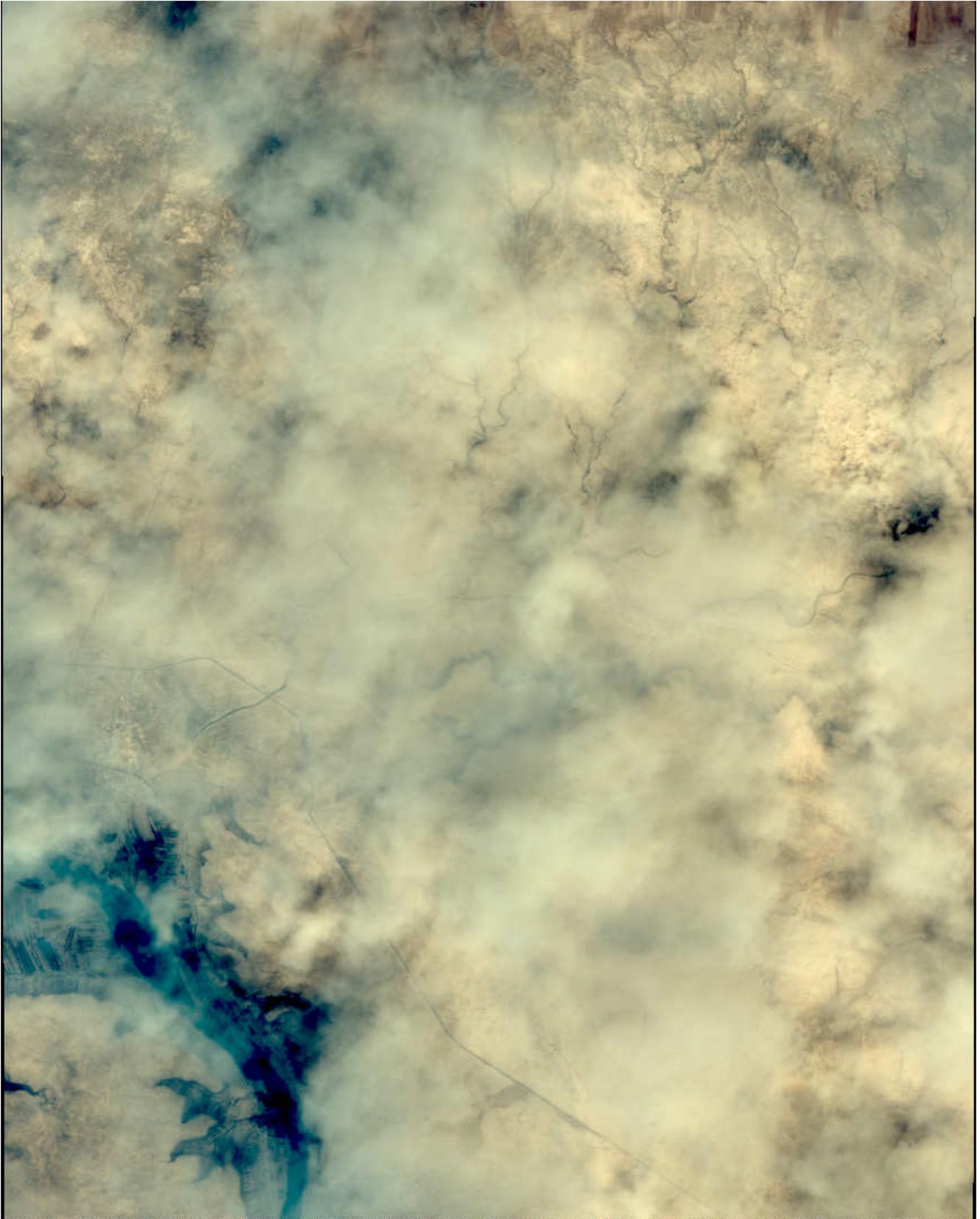
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Stereo Image ID 1 :	0
Stereo Image ID 2 :	0
Source ID :	2003091608223350000011612684
Spacecraft :	K2
Sensor :	KPMS
Data Owner :	SIME
Acquisition Date :	2003-09-16
Cloud Cover :	0
Cloud Cover UL :	0
Cloud Cover UR :	0
Cloud Cover LL :	0
Cloud Cover LR :	0
Elevation/Tilt Angle :	61.9128
Collection Azimuth :	188.4419
Sun Azimuth :	156.4105
Sun Elevation :	54.6693
UL Latitude :	35.7917
UL Longitude :	39.76
UR Latitude :	35.797
UR Longitude :	39.9001
LL Latitude :	35.639
LL Longitude :	39.76
LR Latitude :	35.6451
LR Longitude :	39.9001
GSD :	0.9927
Capture Station :	OOC
Process Station :	THC



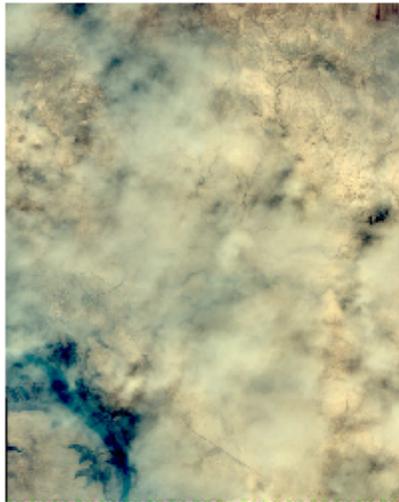
Ikonos Browse Image
2003-09-16

Full Metadata

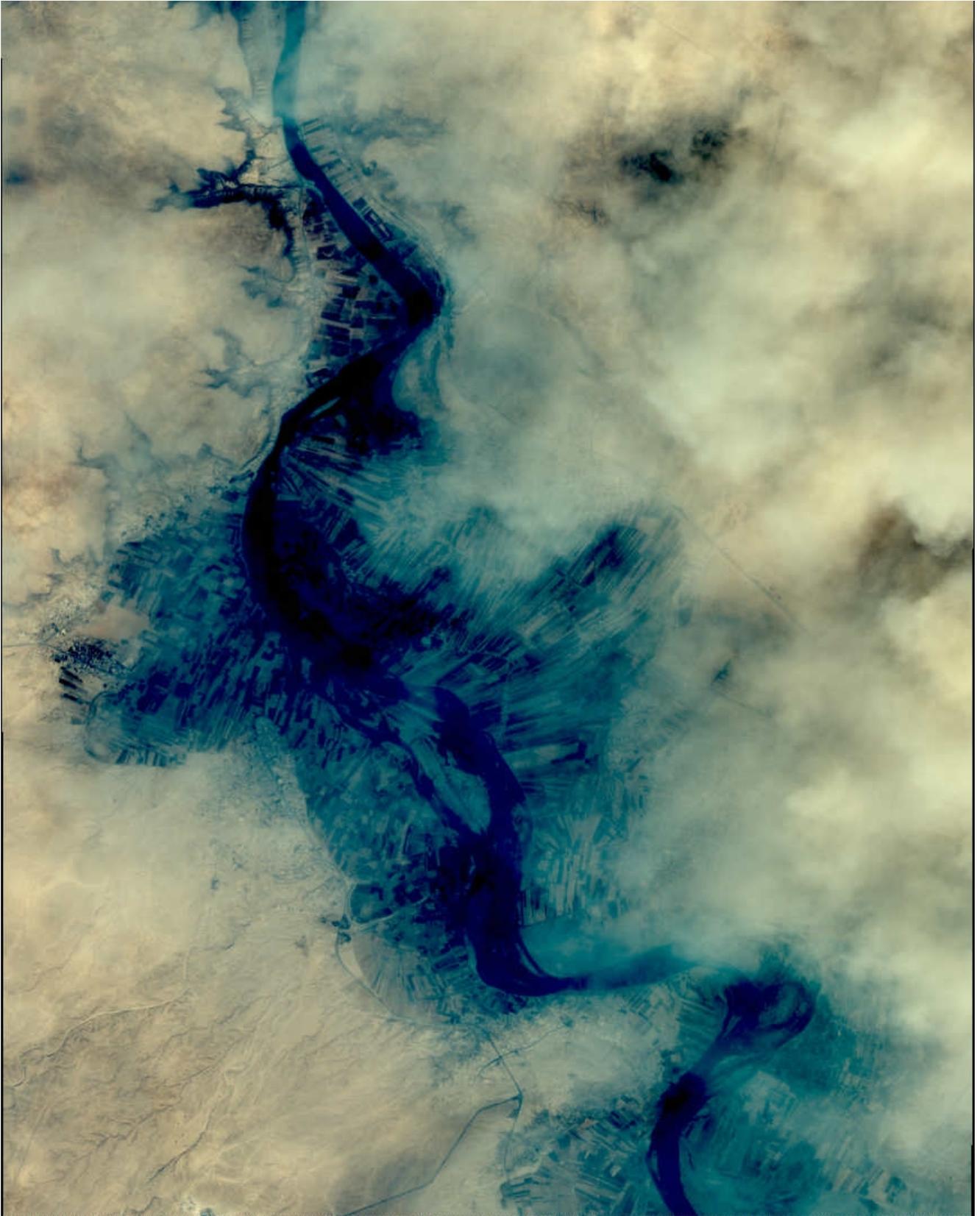
Map	Scene ID :	2000000178508R10
	Stereo Image ID 1 :	0
	Stereo Image ID 2 :	0
	Source ID :	2003091608223350000011612684
	Spacecraft :	K2
	Sensor :	KPMS
	Data Owner :	SIME
	Acquisition Date :	2003-09-16
	Cloud Cover :	0
	Cloud Cover UL :	0
	Cloud Cover UR :	0
	Cloud Cover LL :	0
	Cloud Cover LR :	0
	Elevation/Tilt Angle :	61.9128
	Collection Azimuth :	188.4419
	Sun Azimuth :	156.4105
	Sun Elevation :	54.6693
	UL Latitude :	35.7917
	UL Longitude :	39.76
	UR Latitude :	35.797
	UR Longitude :	39.9001
	LL Latitude :	35.639
	LL Longitude :	39.76
	LR Latitude :	35.6451
	LR Longitude :	39.9001
	GSD :	0.99274
	Capture Station :	OOC
	Process Station :	R10



Ikonos Browse Image
2007-06-25

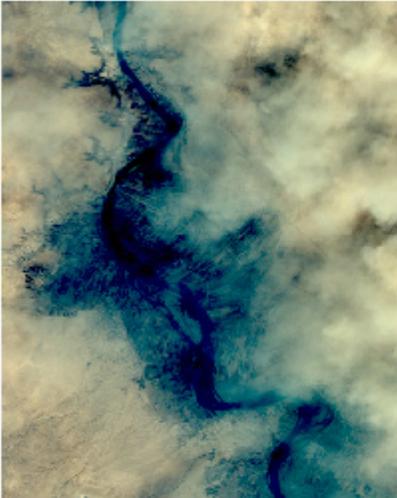
Full Metadata**Map**

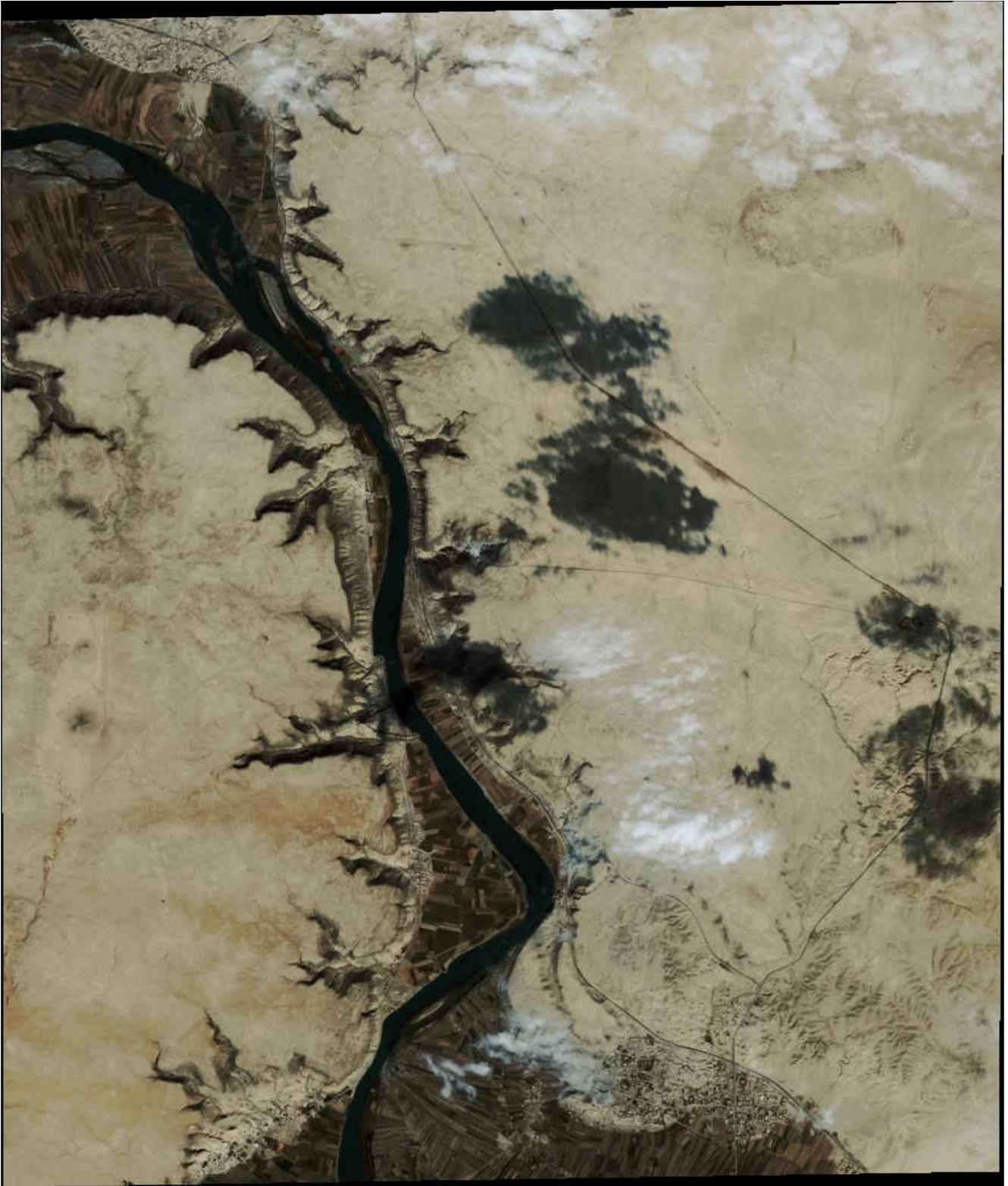
Scene ID :	2000000891501R08
Stereo Image ID 1 :	0
Stereo Image ID 2 :	0
Source ID :	2007062508160270000011108208
Spacecraft :	K2
Sensor :	KPMS
Data Owner :	SIEA
Acquisition Date :	2007-06-25
Cloud Cover :	5
Cloud Cover UL :	8
Cloud Cover UR :	4
Cloud Cover LL :	0
Cloud Cover LR :	8
Elevation/Tilt Angle :	62.2395
Collection Azimuth :	11.782
Sun Azimuth :	121.9912
Sun Elevation :	71.603
UL Latitude :	35.8552
UL Longitude :	39.7803
UR Latitude :	35.865
UR Longitude :	39.9221
LL Latitude :	35.7048
LL Longitude :	39.7807
LR Latitude :	35.7138
LR Longitude :	39.9219
GSD :	0.98867
Capture Station :	R08
Process Station :	R08



Ikonos Browse Image
2007-06-25

Full Metadata

Map	Scene ID :	2000000891502R08
	Stereo Image ID 1 :	0
	Stereo Image ID 2 :	0
	Source ID :	2007062508160270000011108208
	Spacecraft :	K2
	Sensor :	KPMS
	Data Owner :	SIEA
	Acquisition Date :	2007-06-25
	Cloud Cover :	2
	Cloud Cover UL :	0
	Cloud Cover UR :	6
	Cloud Cover LL :	0
	Cloud Cover LR :	3
	Elevation/Tilt Angle :	62.2395
	Collection Azimuth :	11.782
	Sun Azimuth :	121.9912
	Sun Elevation :	71.603
	UL Latitude :	35.7047
	UL Longitude :	39.7807
	UR Latitude :	35.7138
	UR Longitude :	39.9219
	LL Latitude :	35.554
	LL Longitude :	39.781
	LR Latitude :	35.5624
	LR Longitude :	39.9216
	GSD :	0.98867
	Capture Station :	R08
	Process Station :	R08



Ikonos Browse Image
2007-11-23

Full Metadata

Map		
	Scene ID :	2000038460800THC
	Stereo Image ID 1 :	0
	Stereo Image ID 2 :	0
	Source ID :	2007112308164480000011621755
	Spacecraft :	K2
	Sensor :	KPMS
	Data Owner :	SIME
	Acquisition Date :	2007-11-23
	Cloud Cover :	8
	Cloud Cover UL :	5
	Cloud Cover UR :	20
	Cloud Cover LL :	2
	Cloud Cover LR :	8
	Elevation/Tilt Angle :	75.4694
	Collection Azimuth :	16.4041
	Sun Azimuth :	165.7604
	Sun Elevation :	32.8784
	UL Latitude :	35.7659
	UL Longitude :	39.7721
	UR Latitude :	35.7681
UR Longitude :	39.901	
LL Latitude :	35.6406	
LL Longitude :	39.7723	
LR Latitude :	35.6423	
LR Longitude :	39.9006	
GSD :	0.86403	
Capture Station :	OOC	
Process Station :	THC	



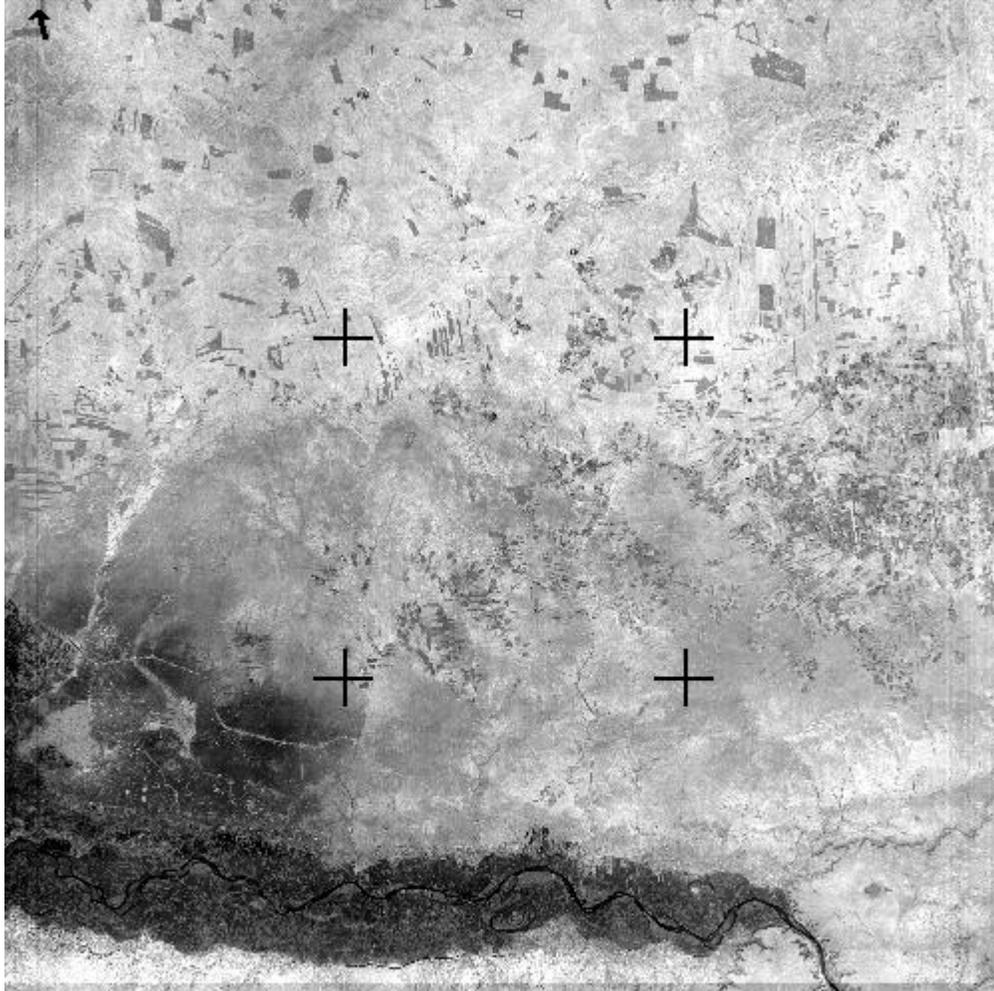
Full resolution Ikonos image of 2007-11-23.

Shadow heights suggest that the square at the site of the former building is low, perhaps the slab on which the new structure was to be built. Note that a construction crane located slightly to the east of the center of the slab is casting its shadow northward.

**Photo credit and special sourcebook thanks:
"GeoEye/Space Imaging Middle East IKONOS Satellite Image"**

IRS-IC 5-meter Imagery

5m IRS-1C/1D (B&W) Results												
	Footprint	Preview	Retrieve	Acquisition Date	Cloud Cover	Satellite	Sensor	WRS Path	WRS Row	Scene ID	Source ID	
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-11-07	0	1C	PAN	58	45	C0580452001311PB0NSG	ICPN01311NSGM00
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-11-07	0	1C	PAN	58	45	C0580452001311PD0NSG	ICPN01311NSGM00
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-10-19	0	1C	PAN	59	45	C0590452001292PC0NSG	ICPN01292NSGM00
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-10-08	15	1D	PAN	56	45	D0560452001281PB0NSG	IDPN01281NSGM00
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-09-20	0	1C	PAN	58	45	C0580452001263PB0NSG	ICPN01263NSGM00
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-06-02	15	1D	PAN	57	45	D0570452001153PC0NSG	IDPN01153NSGM00
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2001-04-29	10	1C	PAN	58	45	C0580452001119PB0NSG	ICPN01119NSGM00
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2000-09-25	0	1D	PAN	57	45	D0570452000269PC0DUB	IDPNA0257DUBL00
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagery	2000-09-03	0	1D	PAN	56	45	D0560452000247PB0DUB	IDPNA0244DUBL00
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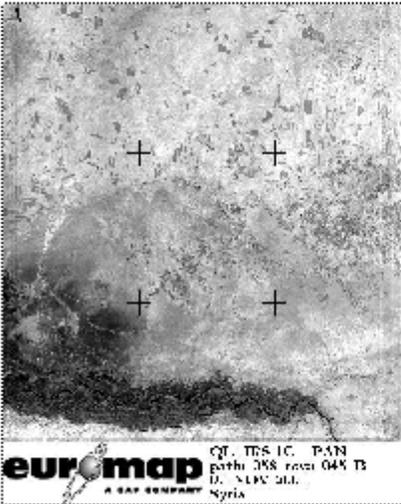


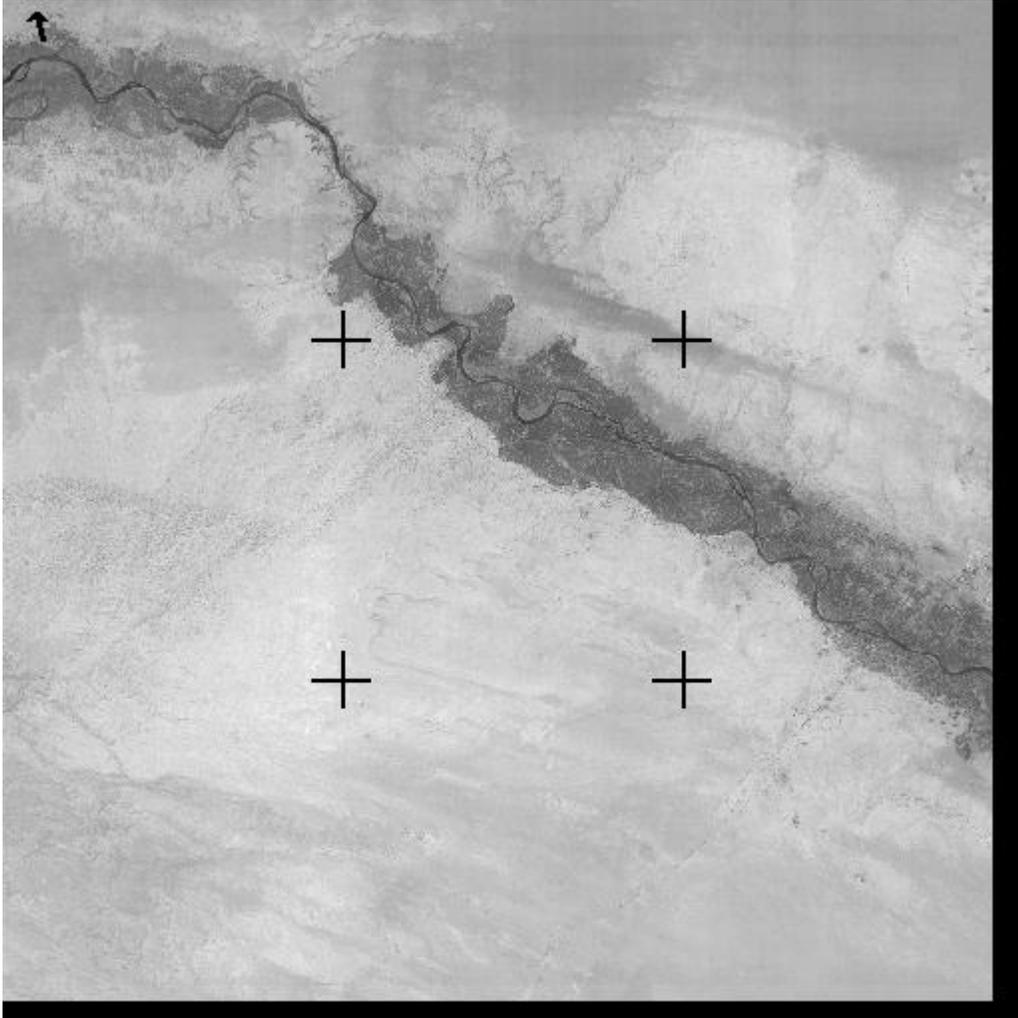
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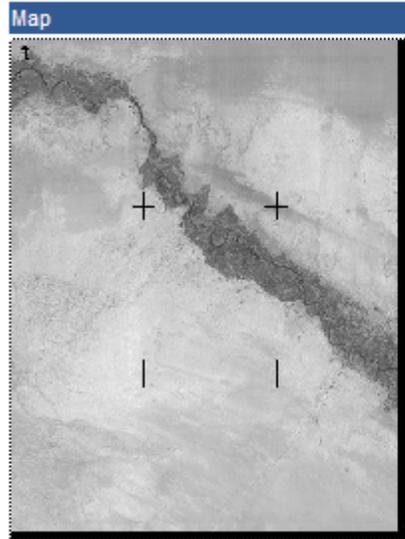
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IRS-1C Browse Image
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Full Metadata



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<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/12/world/middleeast/12syria.html>

Syria Rebuilds on Site Destroyed by Israeli Bombs

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

Published: January 12, 2008

The puzzling site in Syria that Israeli jets bombed in September grew more curious on Friday with the release of a satellite photograph showing new construction there that resembles the site's former main building.



DigitalGlobe

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/01/11/world/12syria-450.jpg>

New construction at a disputed Syrian site that Israeli and American analysts judged to be a partially built nuclear reactor.

http://www.isis-online.org/publications/Syria_11January2008.pdf

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JANUARY 11, 2008**

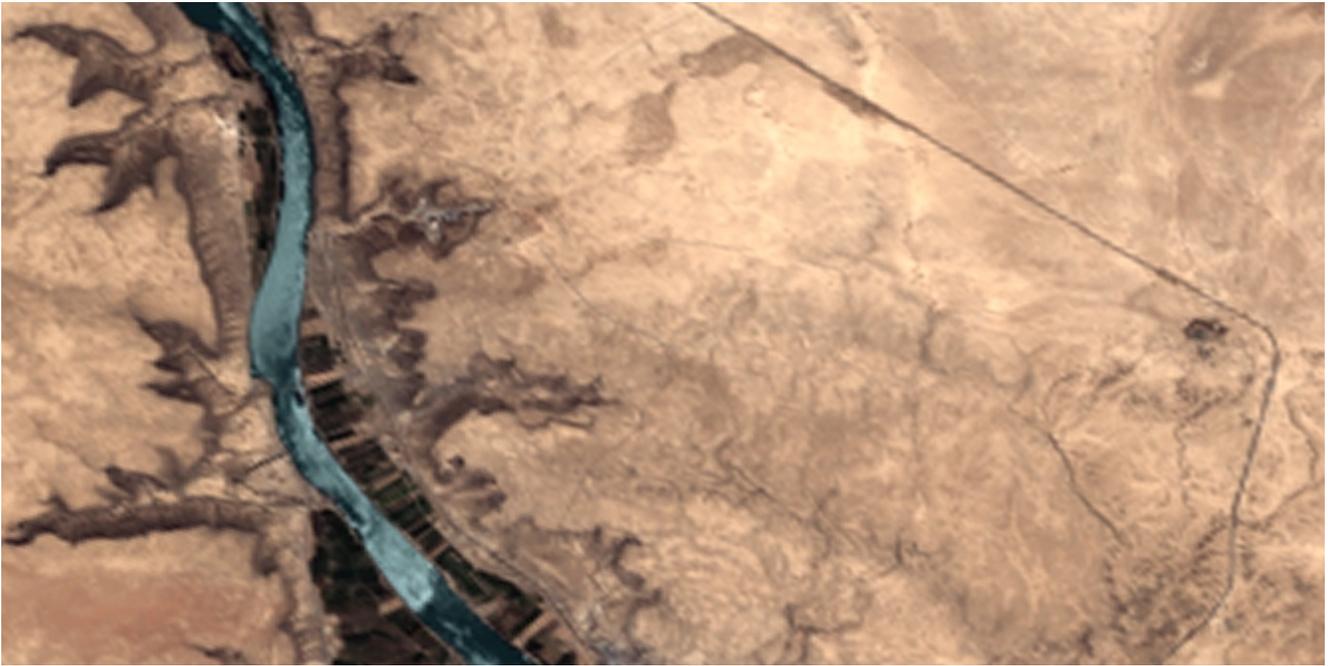


Satellite imagery taken January 9, 2008 obtained from DigitalGlobe shows new construction at the site in Syria bombed by Israel in early September 2007. The destroyed building was widely reported to be a nuclear reactor under construction. The new building has dimensions of approximately 60 meters by 60 meters, larger than the destroyed building, which had dimensions of about 47 meters by 47 meters. In addition, the roof on the new building is vaulted at the top instead of flat. The height of the new building was not determined.

The building's purpose cannot be discerned from the satellite imagery. There are trenches and what appear to be pipe sections, east of the building (away from the river). The trenches and pipes can be seen in the imagery for several kilometers. The trenches end at a site that may be a water treatment facility.

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei has sought permission from Syria to inspect the site, but so far Syria has denied the IAEA access to the site. If Syria allows the IAEA to inspect the site, the inspectors will have a more difficult time looking for evidence of reactor construction, because the new building covers whatever was left of the original building.

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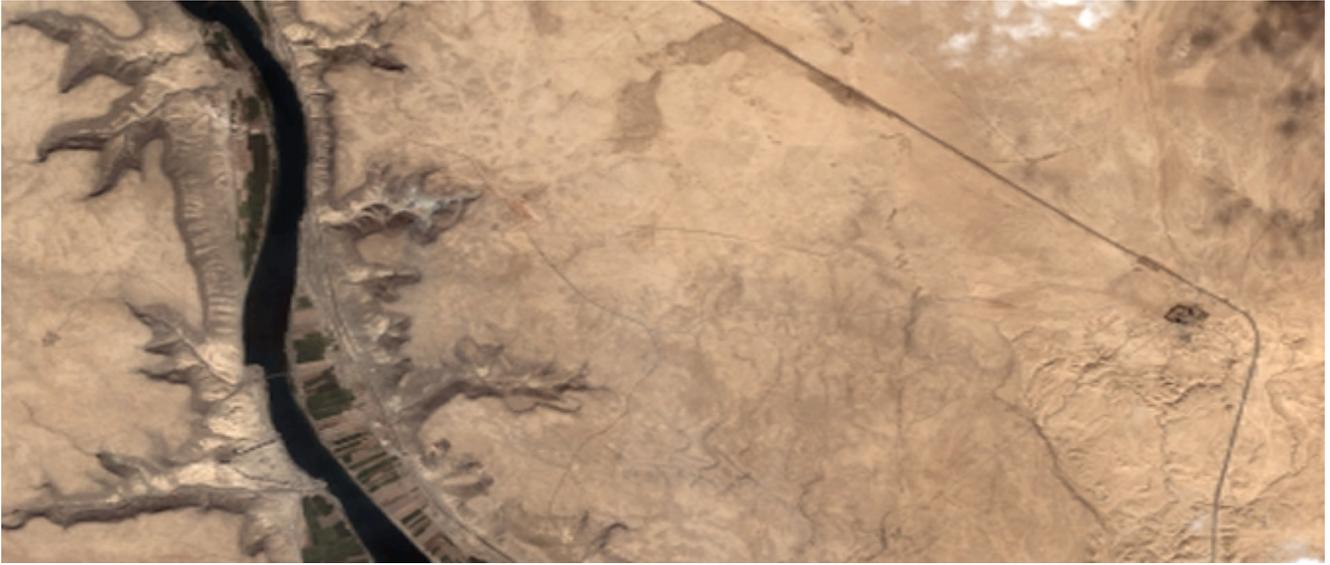
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DigitalGlobe

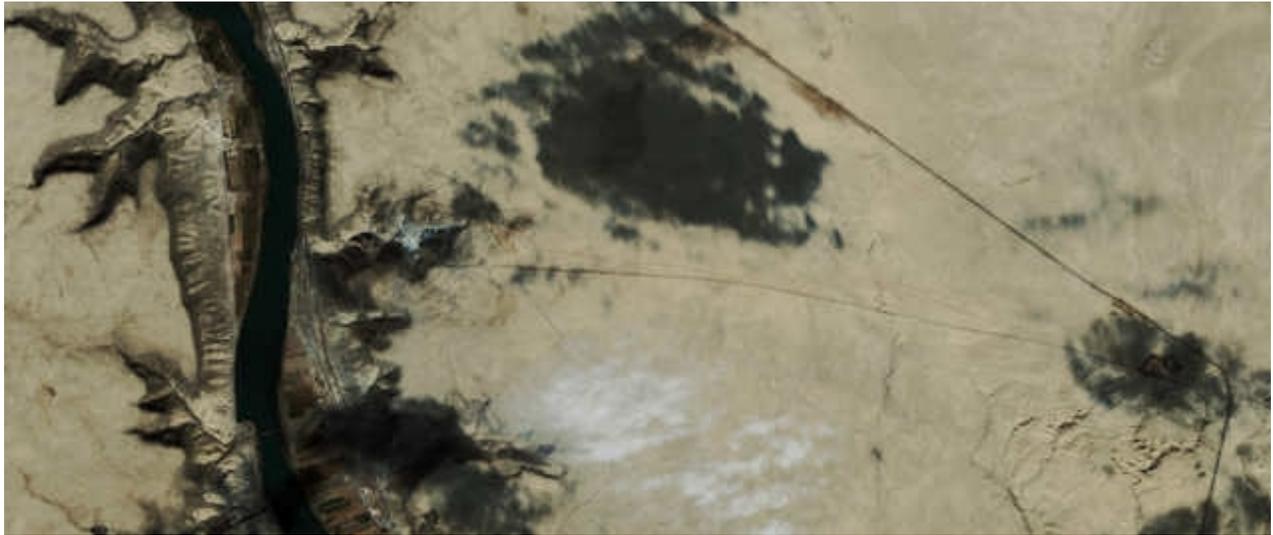
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GeoEye

Segment of IKONOS image, 2007-11-23

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Digital Globe

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ISIS REPORT

The Al Kibar Reactor: Extraordinary Camouflage, Troubling Implications

**David Albright and Paul Brannan
May 12, 2008**



[EXCERPTS]

This report focuses on the astonishing lengths to which Syrian engineers and architects went to hide the[...] commonly expected attributes *[of a nuclear reactor]* and conceal the building's true purpose. This case serves as a sobering reminder of the difficulty of identifying secret nuclear activities and how too often debate about the veracity of technical assessments is subordinated to political or ideological goals on both the right and left. It should also serve as a call to bolster national and international methods to better detect these facilities. The current domestic and international capabilities to detect nuclear facilities and activities are inadequate to prevent more surprises in the future.

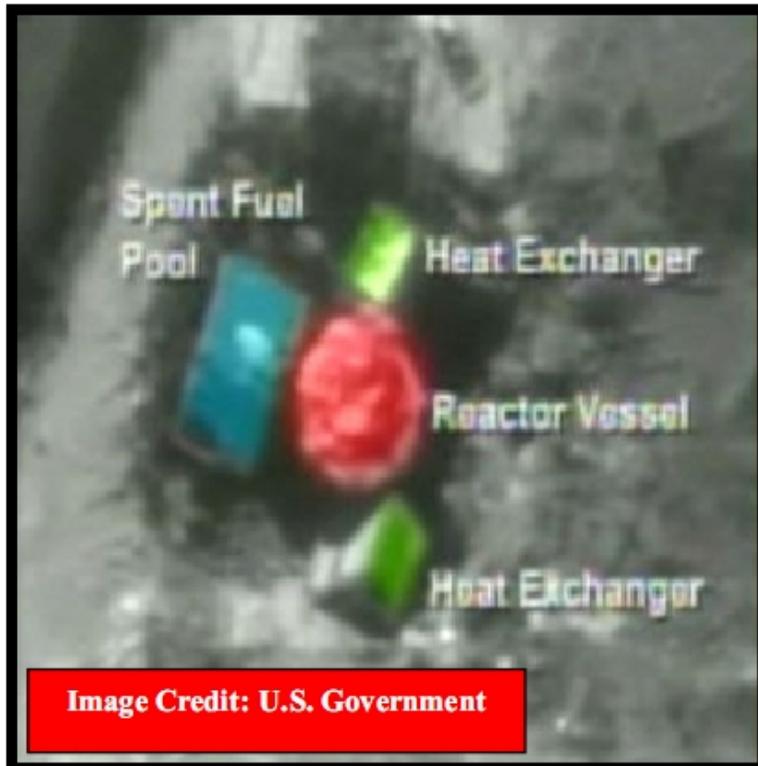


Figure 1. Syrian reactor site after Israeli air strike and after controlled demolition.

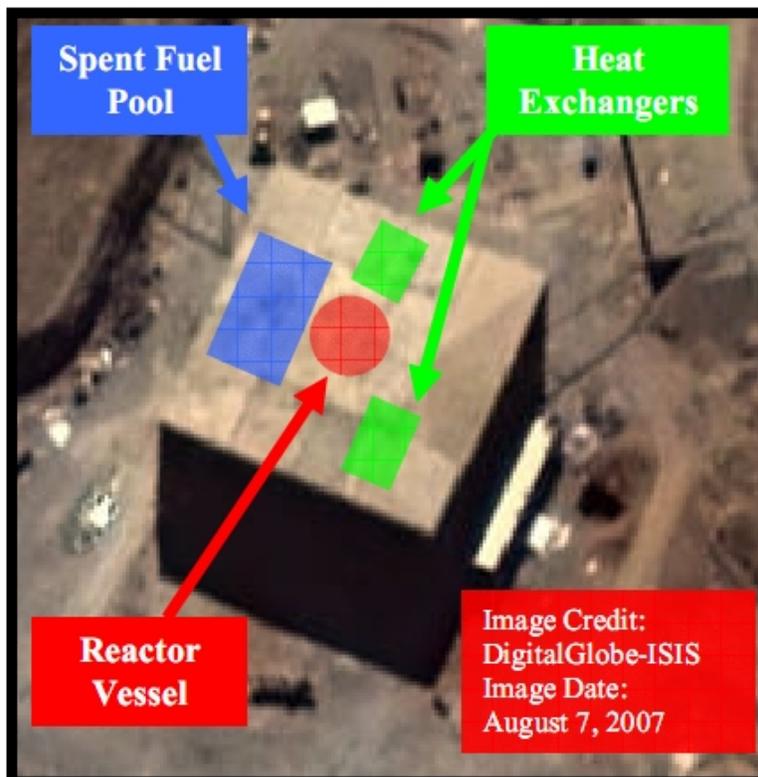


Figure 2. Approximate location of key reactor elements overlaid onto August 10, 2007 commercial image.

Creating a “Boxy” Non-Descript Building

By far the most dramatic feat of concealment of the building’s purpose was the effort to mask the design of the building using fake upper walls and roof. Figure 4 shows the original design of the reactor building, with columns used to suspend what appear to be flimsy camouflaging roofs. These columns were likely later used as the framework for the final fake outer walls and roof. This ground photo dates to before 2003, when GeoEye satellite imagery shows only the boxy structure. The U.S. intelligence community does not have satellite images prior to the completion of the construction of these fake walls and roof, according to US Government experts.

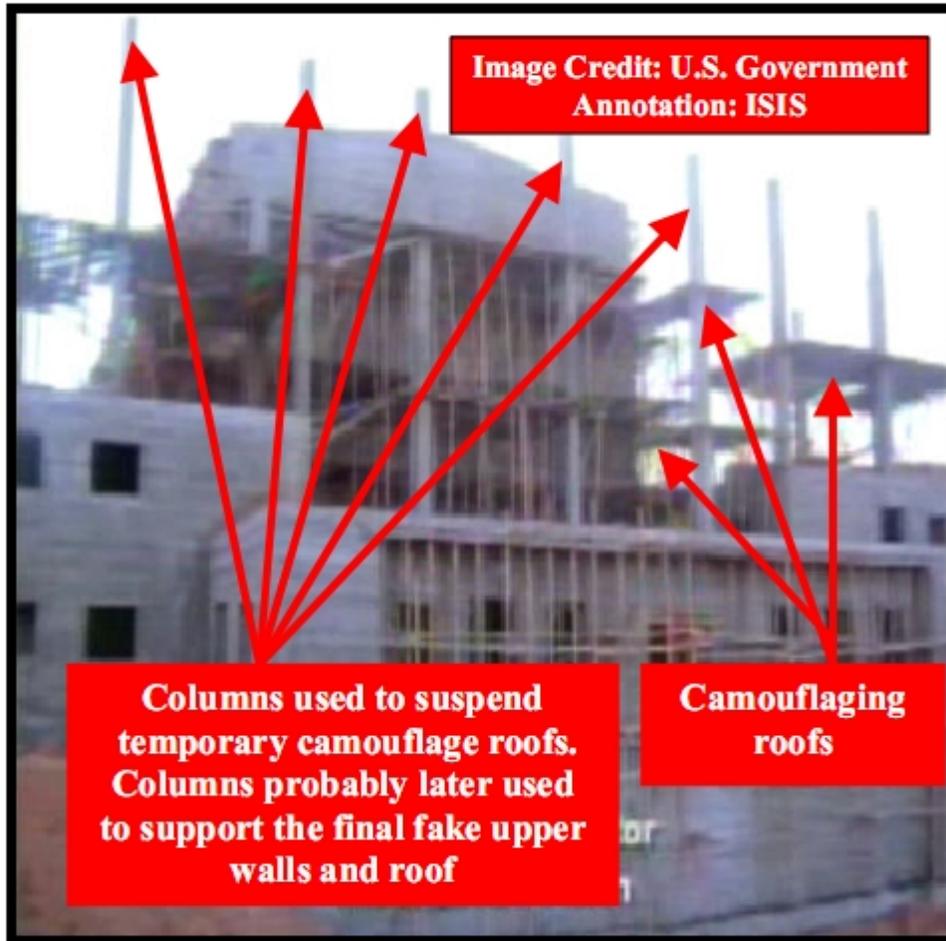


Figure 4. Ground photo of the Syrian reactor building taken before 2003.

Figures 5 and 6 show how the roof of the shorter sides (highlighted in green) was artificially raised up in order to bring these sides level with the top of the reactor building. Doing so alters the original design of the building, which is similar to that of Yongbyon, and transforms it into the box-like structure.

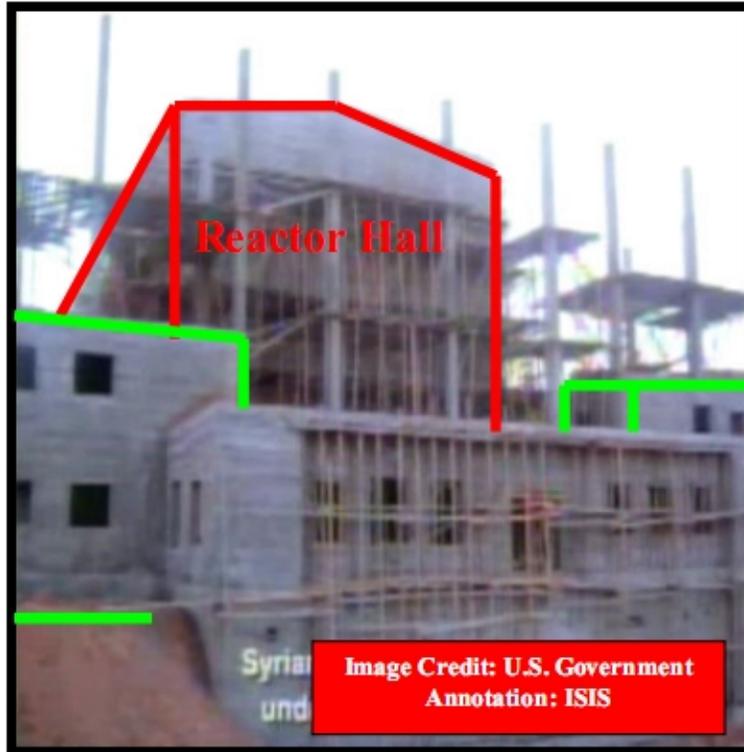


Figure 5. A ground photo of the Syrian reactor building taken before 2003.

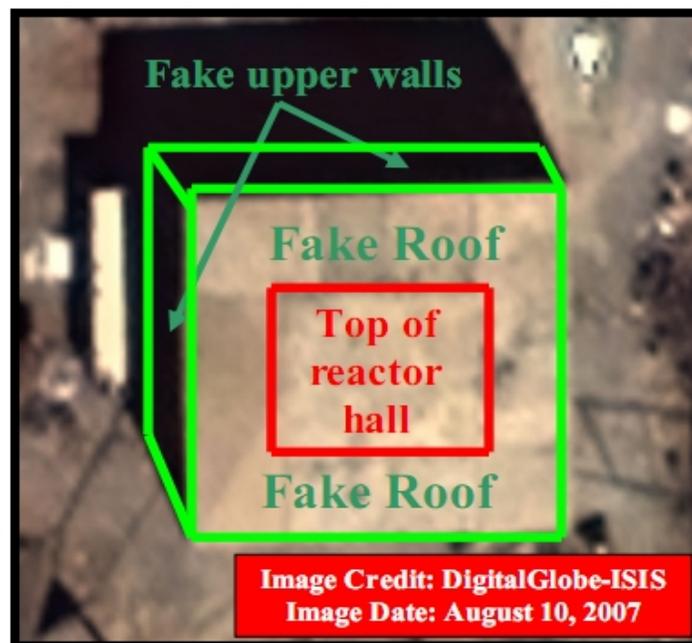


Figure 6. The Syrian reactor building seen in August 2007 in commercial satellite imagery after the fake walls and roof were constructed to make the box.

Building Extends Underground

A significant percentage of the Al Kibar reactor building was underground. After demolition of the reactor building on October 10, 2007 and removal of the heavy reactor structures, Syria filled in the resulting hole. Figure 11 shows that this hole was quite deep. According to U.S. government experts, the depth of the hole was several tens of meters. In contrast, the Yonybyon five megawatt-electric reactor was built essentially from the ground upwards.



Figure 11. Bulldozers taking dirt from an adjacent hill and pushing it over the edge of the hole and filling it up.



Figure 14. Syrian reactor building from the ground. Photo taken prior to 2003.

Isolated Site and Lack of Physical Protection

Isolated Site

The Al Kibar reactor was located in an isolated desert region of eastern Syria. The Euphrates River cuts through this desert, and in many places, villages and industries line the river banks. Syria however, situated the reactor at a point near the river that is likely about as sparse as could be found on the banks of the Euphrates in Eastern Syria. This unlikely location for a reactor helped ensure that Western intelligence agencies would pay little attention to the site, particularly if Syria minimized visible signatures that would attract outside scrutiny. A key signature to minimize was physical protection and the presence of the military. According to U.S. government experts, the Al Kibar reactor site had minimal visible physical protection.

Earthen Walls

Syria built the reactor at the bottom of a canyon, affording the site a considerable degree of natural isolation. To further increase the site's privacy, Syria created a series of earthen walls at key points around the reactor that would block the view of anyone traveling nearby (see figure 16). These walls were constructed by repeatedly dumping large mounds of dirt in a line and then pushing them from either side with a bulldozer to create a ridge. Some of these walls were created near ridgelines, a difficult feat to accomplish (see figure 17).

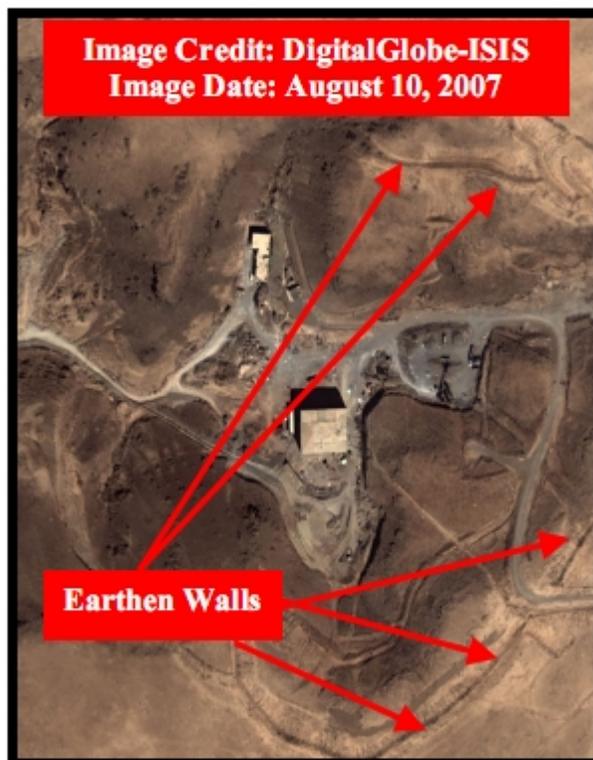


Figure 16. Syrian reactor site with earthen walls



Figure 17. Location of an earthen wall on top of ridgeline.

The construction of a special transport system is not necessary for this type of reactor. Large internal components do not need to be assembled elsewhere and shipped to the site. In about 2002, Syria assembled the steel reactor liner or vessel at or near the site under a tarp to hide it from overhead surveillance, according to U.S. government experts (see figure 22). It was placed inside the building before installing the roof, perhaps at night. The thin sheets of steel and water piping used in the vessel could have easily been transported to the site in trucks. Other components were probably likewise assembled at the site from easily transportable.



Figure 22. Syrian reactor vessel under tarps.

Air Ventilation System

A nuclear reactor requires an air ventilation system to carry away radioactive gases emitted from the reactor core. A gas-graphite reactor, which uses carbon dioxide gas for cooling, has an even greater need for a robust ventilation system. It must carry away any leaking radioactive carbon dioxide gas. Using a system of air intakes and filters, radioactive gaseous effluents are filtered and then dispersed into the atmosphere through the stack.

Typically, a stack, which is distinctive, is located near or at the reactor building. A ventilation stack is plainly visible towering over North Korea's five megawatt-electric reactor at Yongbyon.

According to U.S. government experts, the reactor's ventilation system was carefully hidden. The air intakes of the ventilation system are assessed to be along one wall of the building, according to these experts (see figure 23). They noted that two rectangular structures located against the wall have louvers at the top through which air can enter.

The building in August 2007 did not have a stack visible (see figure 24). U.S. government experts said that the stack may have been located near the spent fuel pond. Syrian demolition of the building on October 10, 2007 left visible heavy concrete structures. The explosion blew debris and other structures from these hard to destroy parts. One structure visible is what the intelligence community assessed could be the foundation and remaining part of the stack (see figure 25). According to U.S. government experts, a pipe or small stack could have been extended through the fake roof after the reactor started operating. Until that time, the top of the stack may not have been more than a hole or cover in the fake roof, according to U.S. government experts (see figure 24).

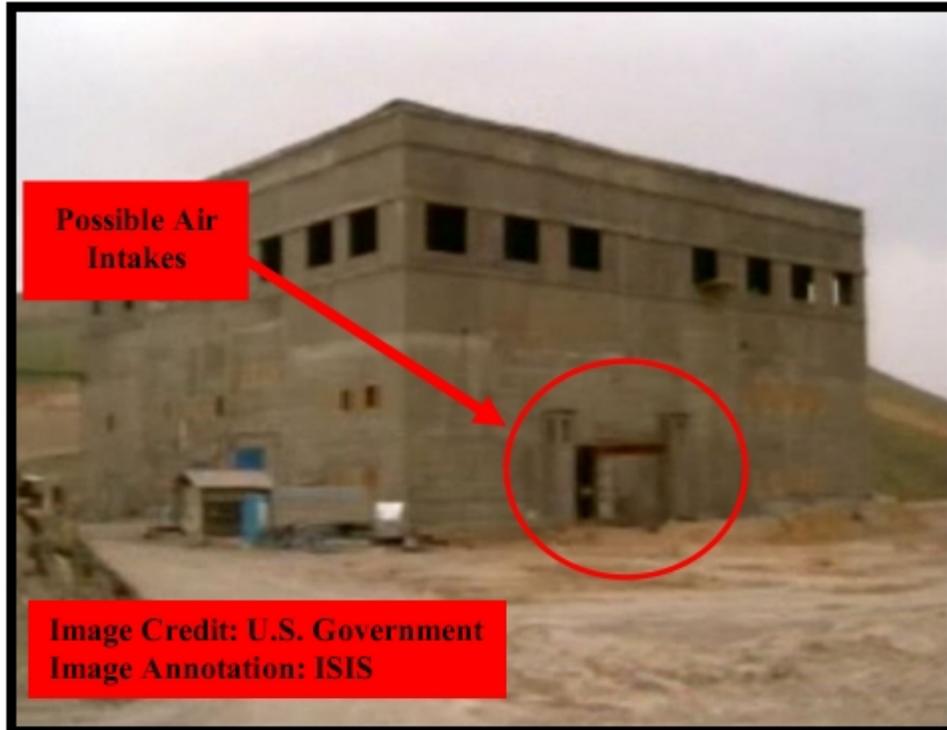


Figure 23. The air intakes for the Syrian reactor.



Figure 24. DigitalGlobe satellite imagery from August 10, 2007 of the reactor building. The small dark shaded area could be where the stack would have appeared once the reactor operated, according to U.S. officials.

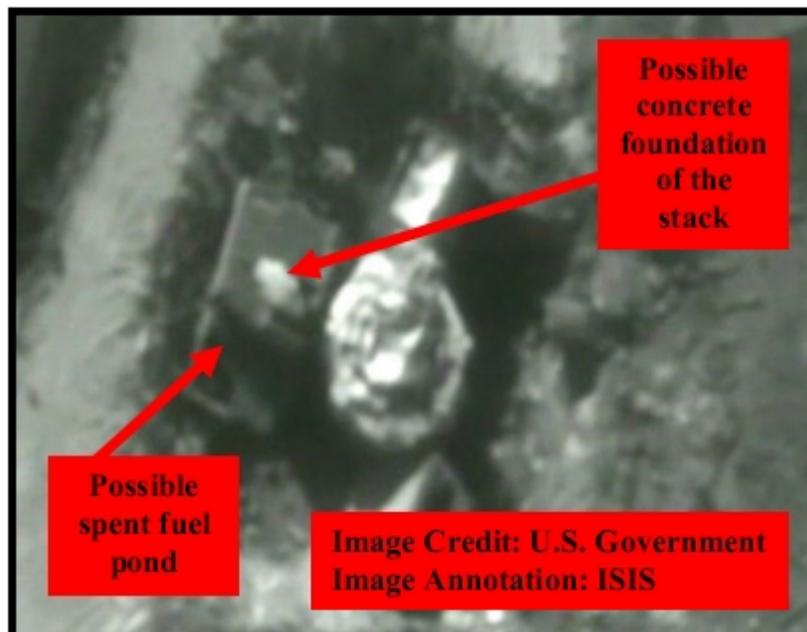


Figure 25. Post-demolition satellite imagery of the reactor building. The white object near the spent fuel pond may have been the remnants of the concrete foundation or other parts of the stack.

Electrical System for the Reactor

The Syrian reactor would have needed a supply of electricity. No obvious high power lines are visible in August 2007 commercial satellite imagery of the site and surrounding area, leading many to discount that the site could be a reactor site.

According to U.S. government experts, the reactor did not have a turbine to make electricity. Thus, electrical power must come from outside the site. According to these same experts, the power lines were hidden underground. Such a strategy was also used by Iraq in the 1980s to disguise electrical inputs into its secret uranium enrichment sites using electro-magnetic isotope separation (EMIS) technology.

In the case of this reactor, the U.S intelligence community assessed that the power lines originated at a water treatment plant that is connected to the local electrical grid (see figure 26). The power lines were likely placed in conduits running underground from the treatment plant to the reactor building (see figures 27 and 28).

[Sourcebook note: The “water treatment plant” is the facility discussed in Appendix C. It is not obvious where the water to be treated was to come from or go to.]



Figure 26. Image of water treatment facility after the reactor was destroyed.

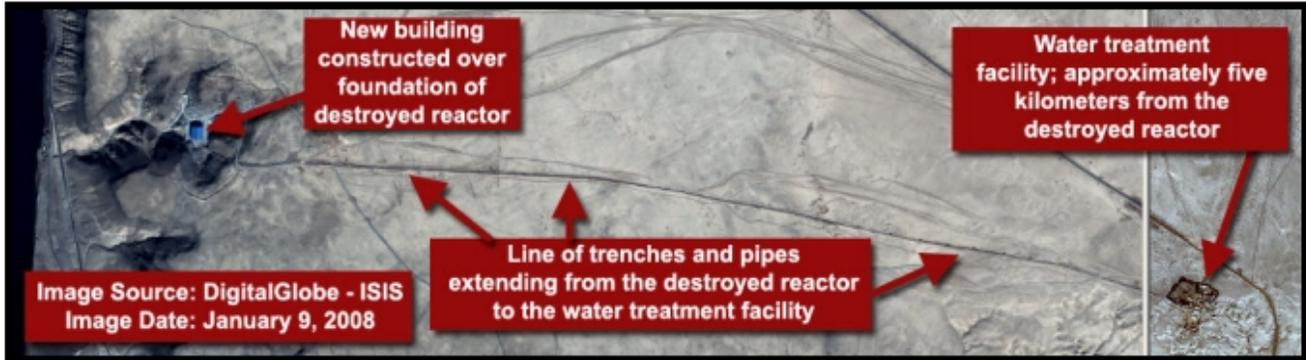


Figure 29. Wide image of new building and water treatment facility after the reactor was destroyed.

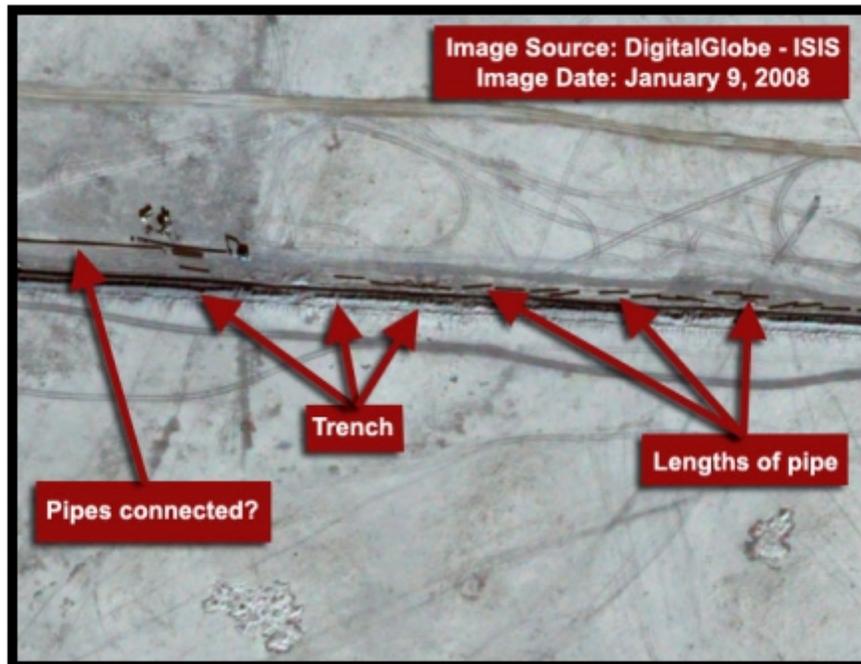


Figure 30. Close-up image of the same area seen in figure 28 between the Syrian reactor site and a water treatment facility after the reactor was destroyed. A trench, lengths of pipe and connected piping can be seen.

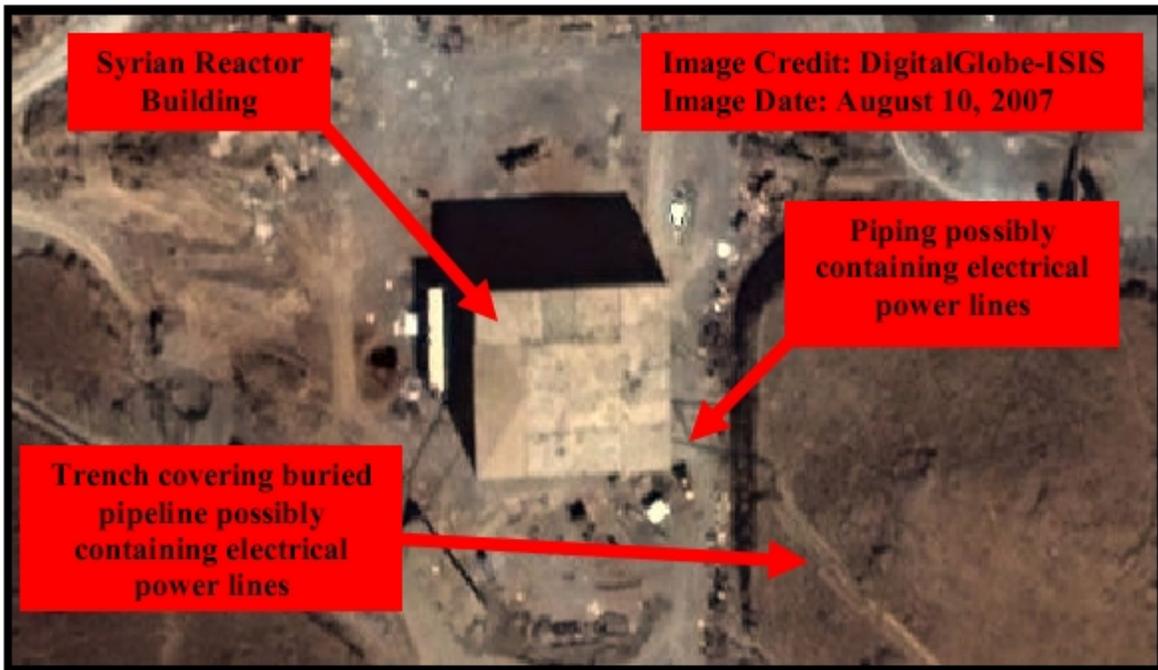


Figure 31. Pipeline possibly carrying electrical power lines entering eastern side of Syrian reactor building.

Water Intake and Discharge

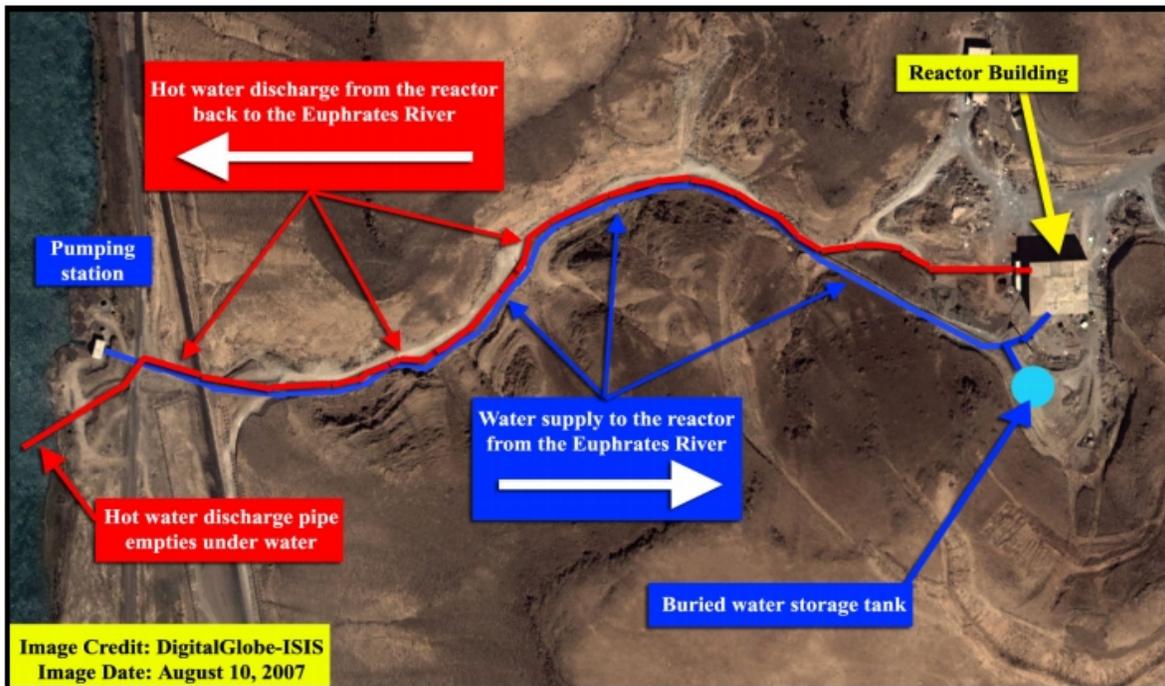


Figure 32. DigitalGlobe satellite image from August 10, 2007.



Figure 33. DigitalGlobe satellite imagery from August 10, 2007 of the reactor building. Cool water is pumped from the river and into a buried water storage tank and the reactor building's heat exchangers. The heat exchangers transfer the heat from the gas to the water from the river. The warm water is then discharged and piped back over to the river.



Figure 34. Buried hot water discharge pipe. According to U.S. government experts, this piping ends under water.

Summary and Lessons

In building the Al Kibar reactor, Syria used three basic methods to avoid detection: locating the reactor in a remote area, building portions of it underground, and camouflaging the design of the reactor building along with its ventilation, cooling, and electrical supply.

The Syrian strategy worked for years. According to U.S. government experts, U.S. intelligence had determined in 2005 that Syria and North Korea were involved in a project in the province Dayr az Zawr. However, the nature of the cooperation and the location of the site remained unknown. However, suspicions based on earlier obtained information, pointed to some type of nuclear activity taking place in this province.

The 2005 assessment led to an intensified imagery search, which resulted in the discovery of a large unidentified building near the town of Al Kibar. According to a U.S. government expert, it was “odd and in the middle of nowhere,” but analysts could not ascribe the building with a nuclear character, and U.S. intelligence labeled it an “enigma facility.” In the spring of 2007, the building was determined to be the covert nuclear reactor based on photos acquired by U.S. intelligence, reportedly from Israel, that showed the inside and outside of the building.

... U.S. government experts acknowledge that the IC lacks high-quality overhead imagery of the construction site before the building was turned into a non-descript boxy shape. If the United States or other countries had acquired pre-2003 satellite imagery of the site, particularly imagery showing the creation of a false roof, the Syrian construction site would have looked more suspicious and more like a North Korean reactor.

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/04/25/analysis_lawmakers_say_korea_deal_must_have_guarantees/



[Sourcebook question: Where are the shadows?]

http://www.southdowns.org/Offsite/USGSLandsat7_5_26_01.jpg



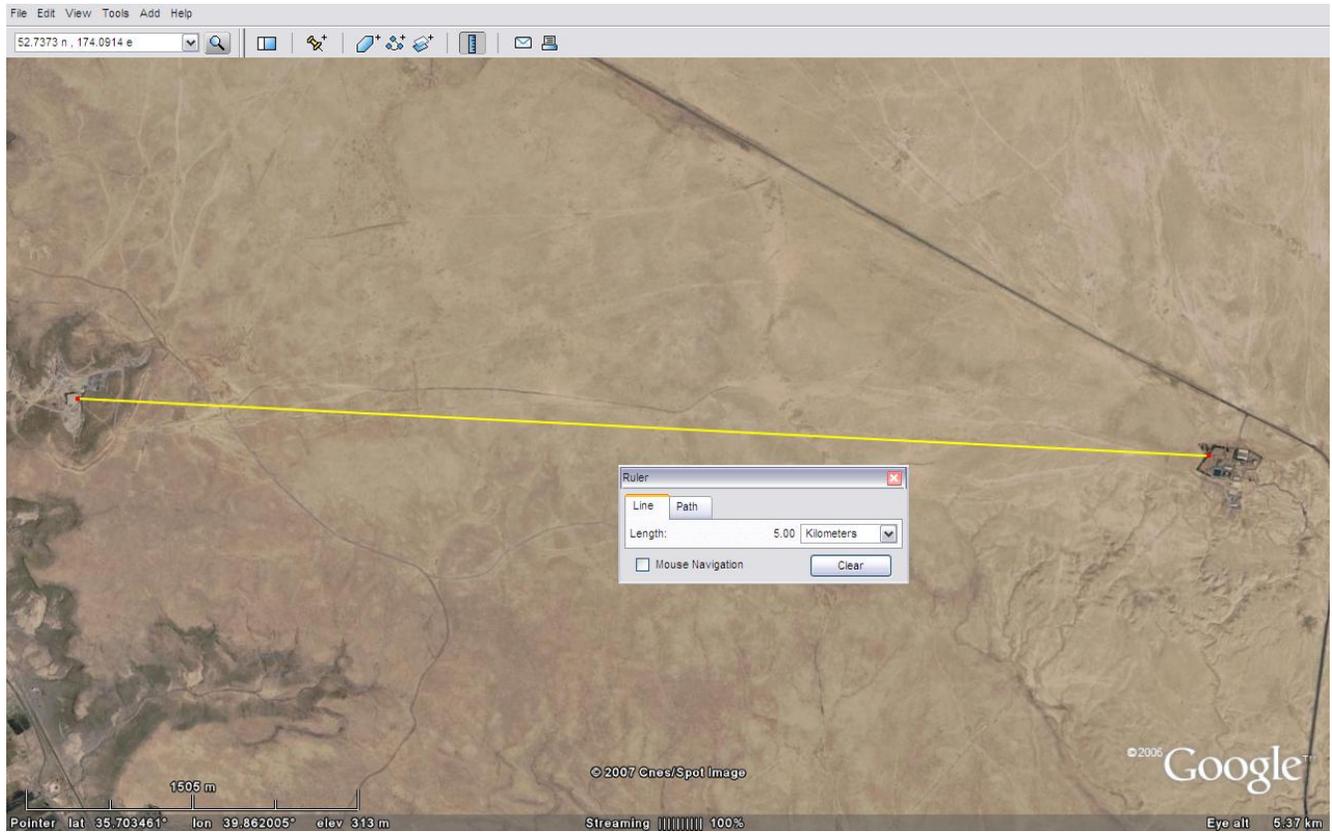
PARTIAL_METADATA_FILE
PRODUCT_CREATION_TIME = 2002-12-04T10:55:46Z
PRODUCT_FILE_SIZE = 680.3
STATION_ID = "EDC"
GROUND_STATION = "SGS"
GROUP = ORTHO_PRODUCT_METADATA
SPACECRAFT_ID = "Landsat7"
SENSOR_ID = "ETM+"
ACQUISITION_DATE = 2001-05-26
WRS_PATH = 172
WRS_ROW = 035
SCENE_CENTER_LAT = +36.0489158
SCENE_CENTER_LON = +39.6312068
SCENE_UL_CORNER_LAT = +37.0002331
SCENE_UL_CORNER_LON = +38.8517406
SCENE_UR_CORNER_LAT = +36.7054534
SCENE_UR_CORNER_LON = +40.8790351
SCENE_LL_CORNER_LAT = +35.3795004
SCENE_LL_CORNER_LON = +38.4038675
SCENE_LR_CORNER_LAT = +35.0924263
SCENE_LR_CORNER_LON = +40.3923392



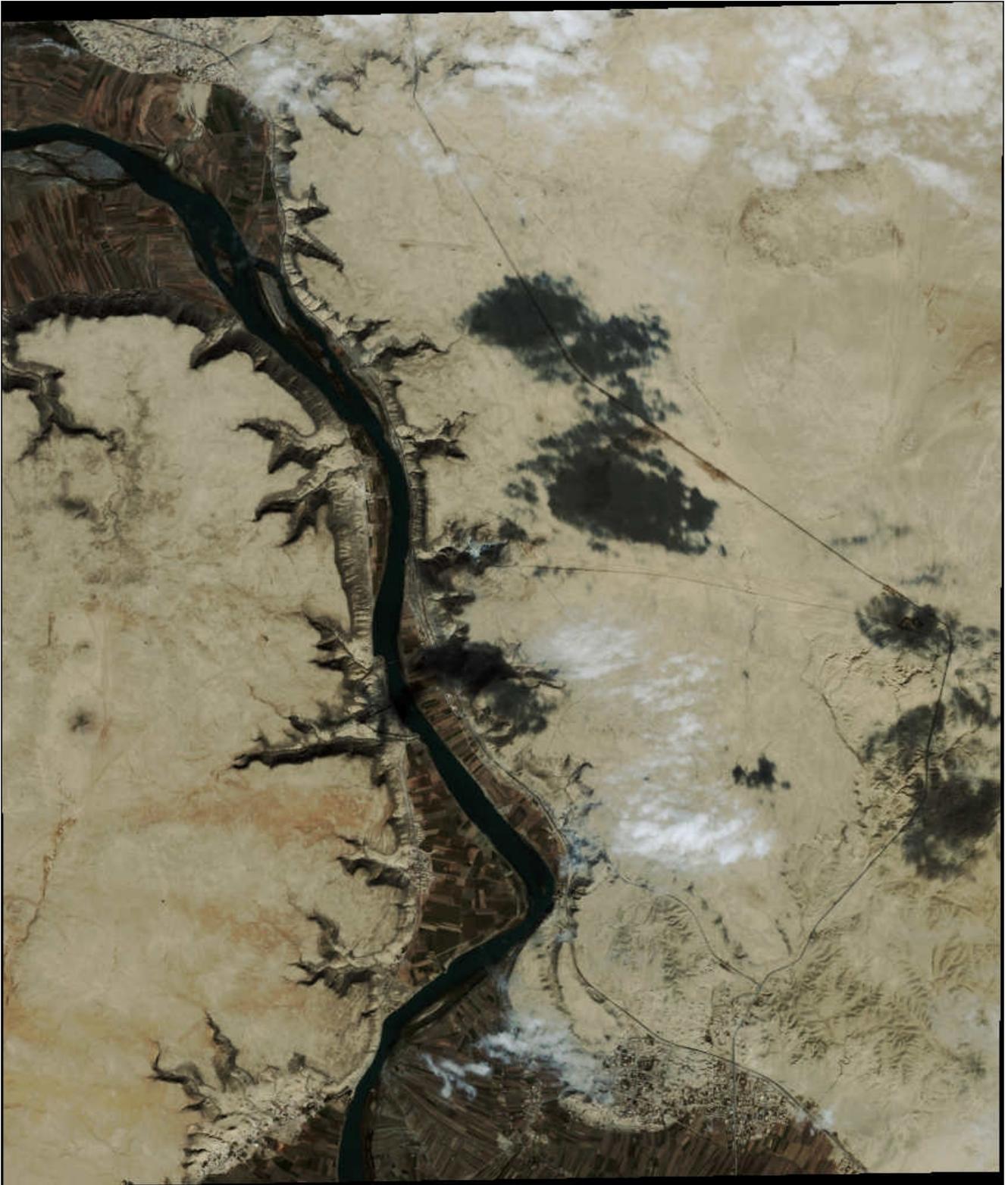
Credit: U.S. Geological Survey
Department of the Interior/USGS
<http://www.usgs.gov/>

Appendix C

**A Possibly Associated Facility
at
35.7006 N, 39.8998 E**



Five kilometers to the east of the former large building is another facility next to a road. In prestrike Google Earth photography available as of 2007-12-30, there are traces of another road, largely sand-covered, leading from the building site to the facility.



http://archive.spaceimaging.com/ikonos/2/kpms/2007/11/browse.23487.crss_sat.0.0.jpg

Image Credit: GeoEye

Post-strike Ikonos browse image of 2007-11-23 showing a distinct road connecting the building site to the road-side facility. This road appears to follow the general path of the one in the above image, but not to be completely coincident with it. Note that there is a suggestion of an object at the location of the former building.



Image Credit: GeoEye

Detail of road between strike site and second facility. The 2007-11-23 IKONOS browse image has been magnified, converted to grey scale, sharpened and cropped.



Ikonos browse image, 2003-09-16. Both facilities are present, but no obvious road connects them.

Catalog ID: **101001000714C801** Acq Date: **Aug, 18 2007** Lat/Long: **35.65942° / 39.87653°**

Off Nadir Angle: **2°** Target Azimuth: **26°** Cloud Cover: **0%** Environmental Quality: **99**



DIGITALGLOBE

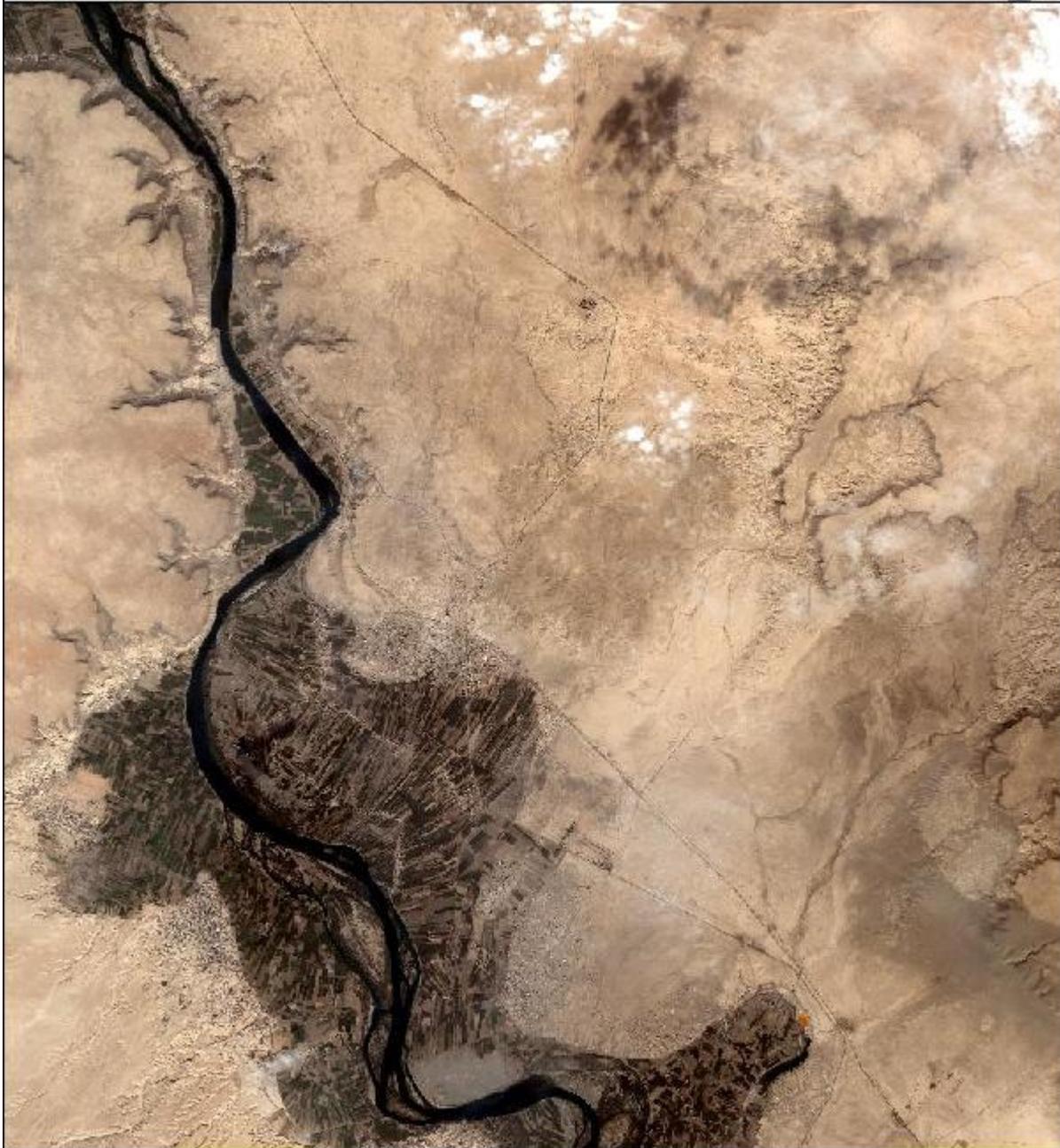
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Email: orders@digitalglobe.com
Or Click Here To Find Your DigitalGlobe Reseller

Prestrike DigitalGlobe browse image, 2007-08-18. No obvious road connects the facilities.

Catalog ID: **10100100074B1001** Acq Date: **Oct, 24 2007** Lat/Long: **35.66077° / 39.8786°**

Off Nadir Angle: **11°** Target Azimuth: **265°** Cloud Cover: **11%** Environmental Quality: **99**



DIGITALGLOBE

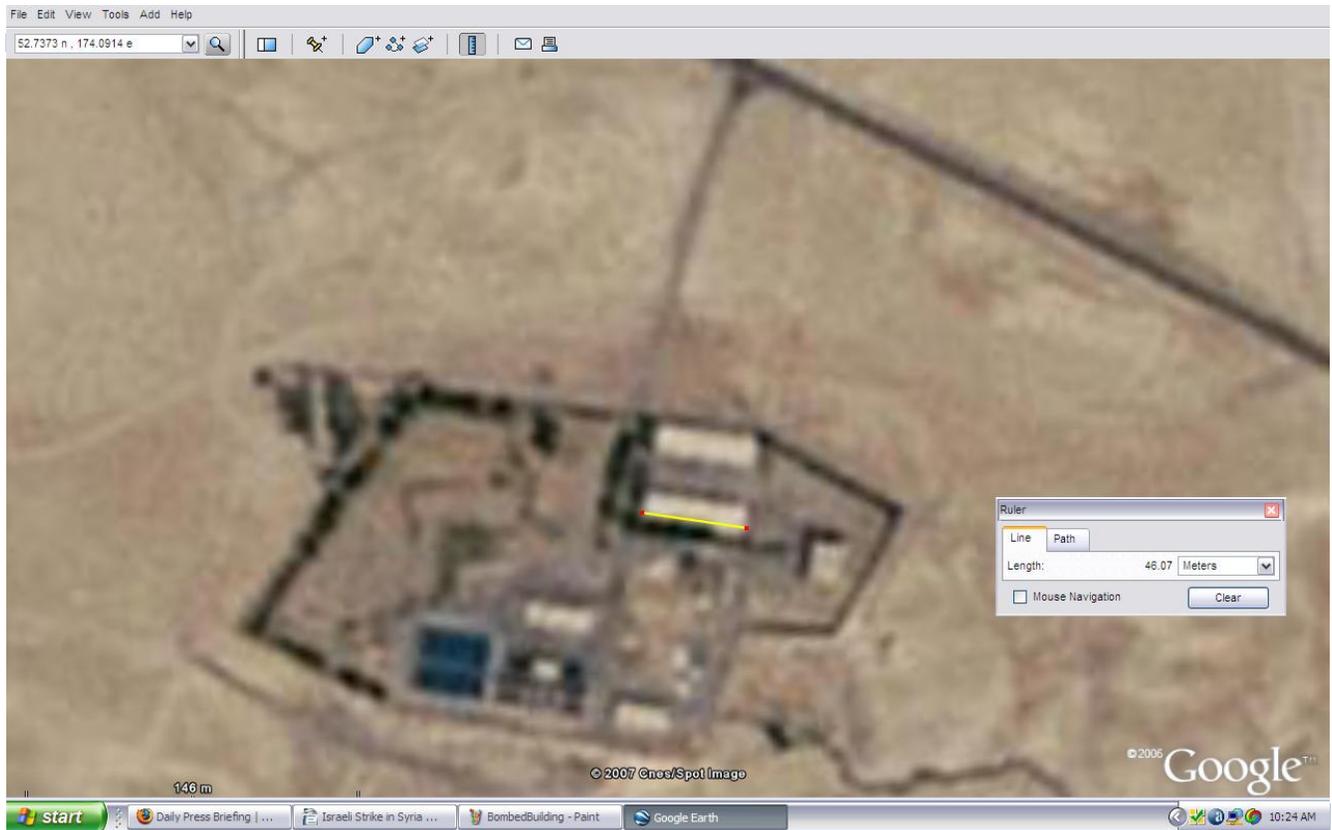
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Email: orders@digitalglobe.com
Or Click Here To Find Your DigitalGlobe Reseller

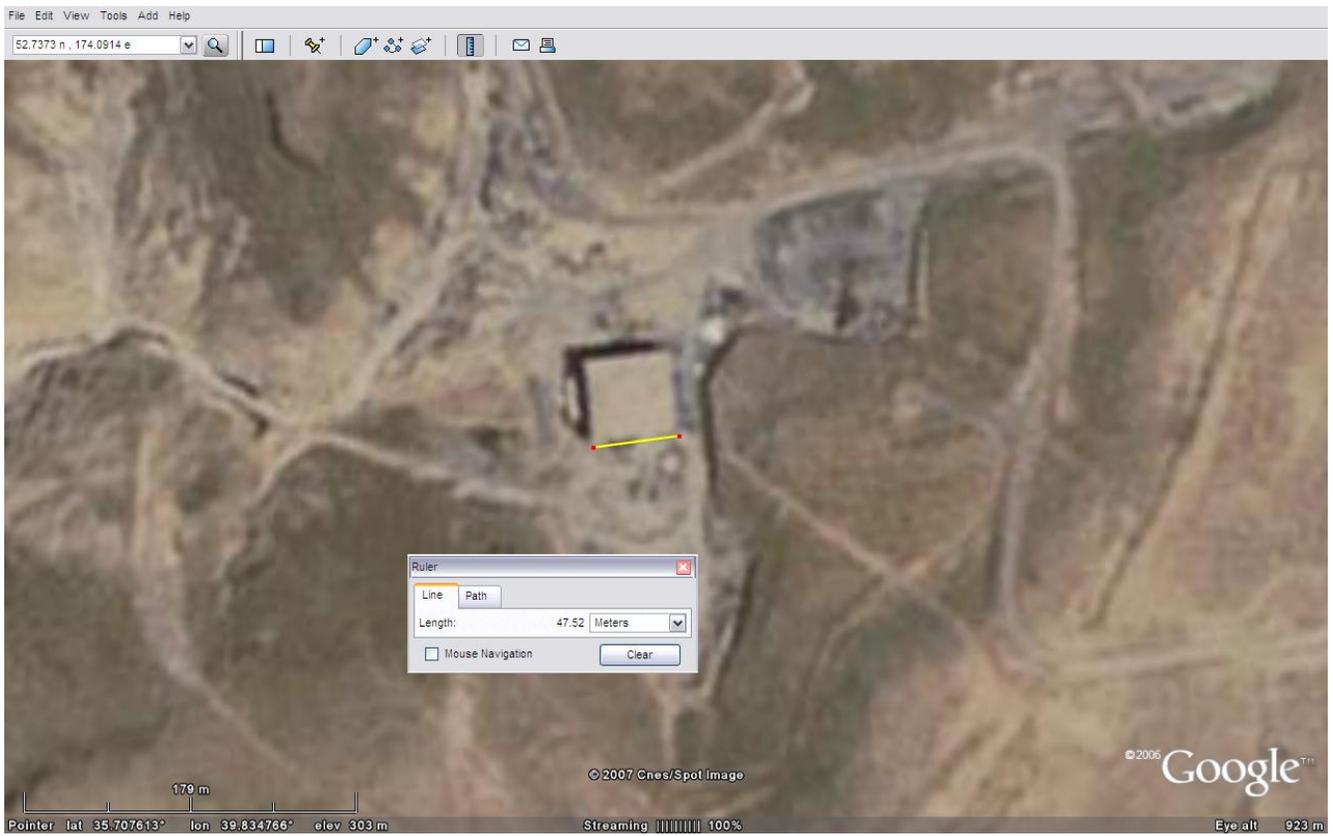
Post-strike DigitalGlobe browse image, 2007-10-24. No obvious road connects the facilities.



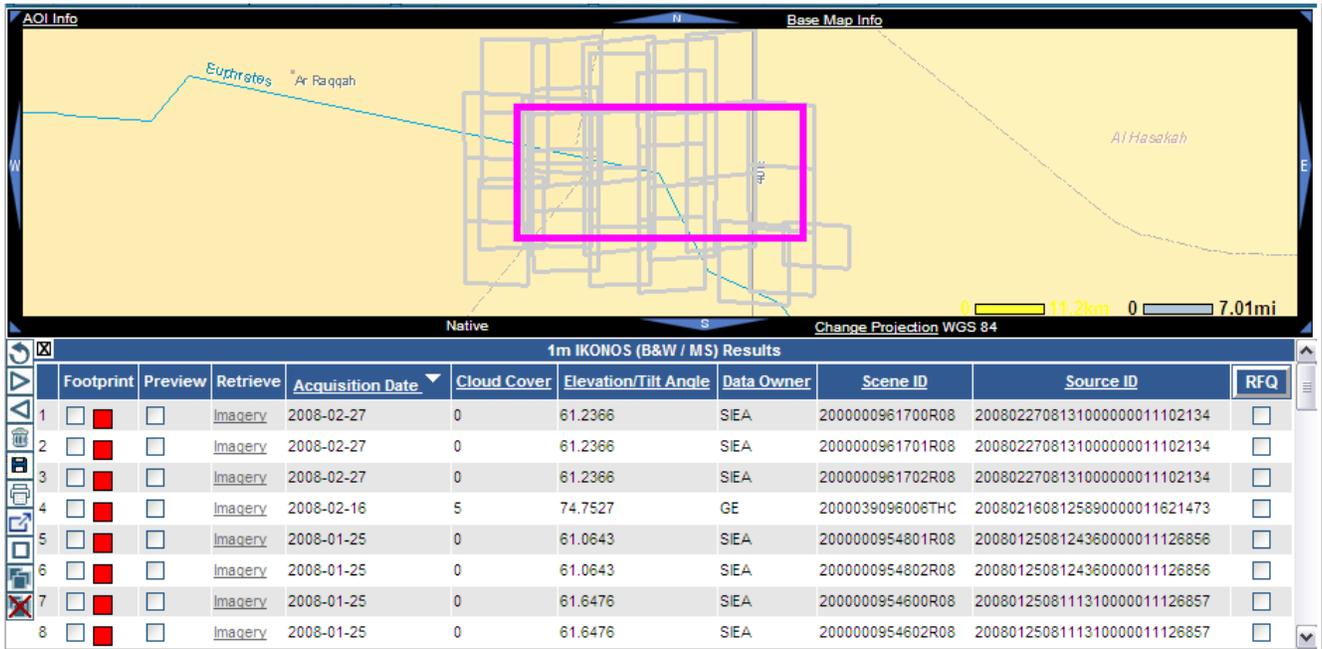
Comparison of the facility and the building site at the same scale from Google Earth.



Google Earth measurement of largest building(?) at facility showing it to be about 48 meters on a side. The blue square at the bottom appears to be a square pond about 30 meters on a side divided into six sections. Note that, unlike the site of the former building, the facility appears to have a security perimeter.

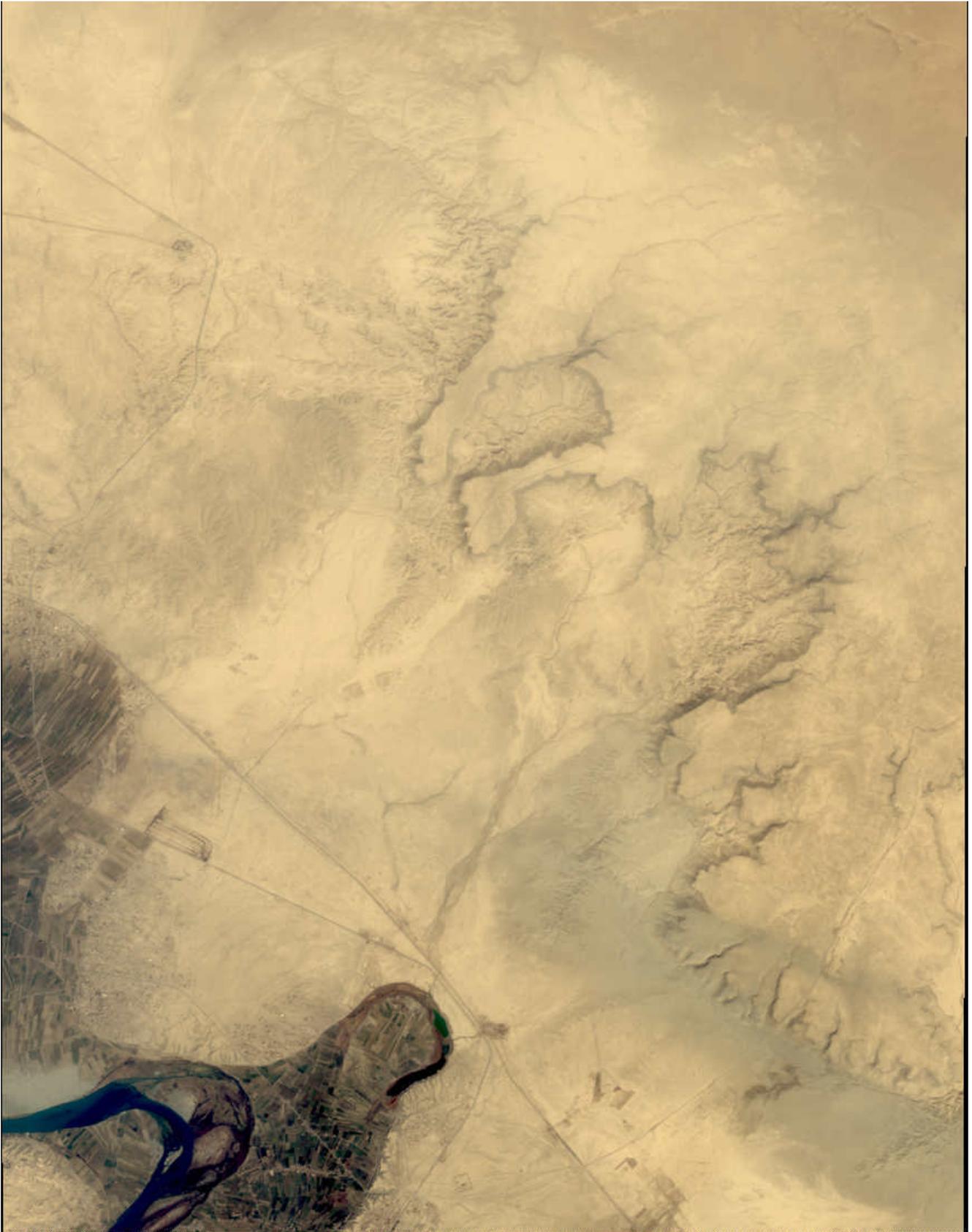


Google Earth measurement of former building showing it to be about 47-48 meters on a side.



Retrieved 2008-03-08

http://archive.spaceimaging.com/ikonos/2/kpms/2008/02/browse.9617.crss_sat.2.0.jpg
Scene ID:2000000961702R08 Source ID:200802270813100000011102134





DigitalGlobe image taken from Google Earth on 2008-04-27. The resolution is higher than images previously shown on Google Earth. Date is uncertain but is probably in August of 2007.

Appendix D

**Frames from 2008-04-24 Intelligence
Briefing Video**



Key Points

- Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons, was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.
- The reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 before it was loaded with nuclear fuel or operated.
- We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities, both before and after the reactor was destroyed. Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.

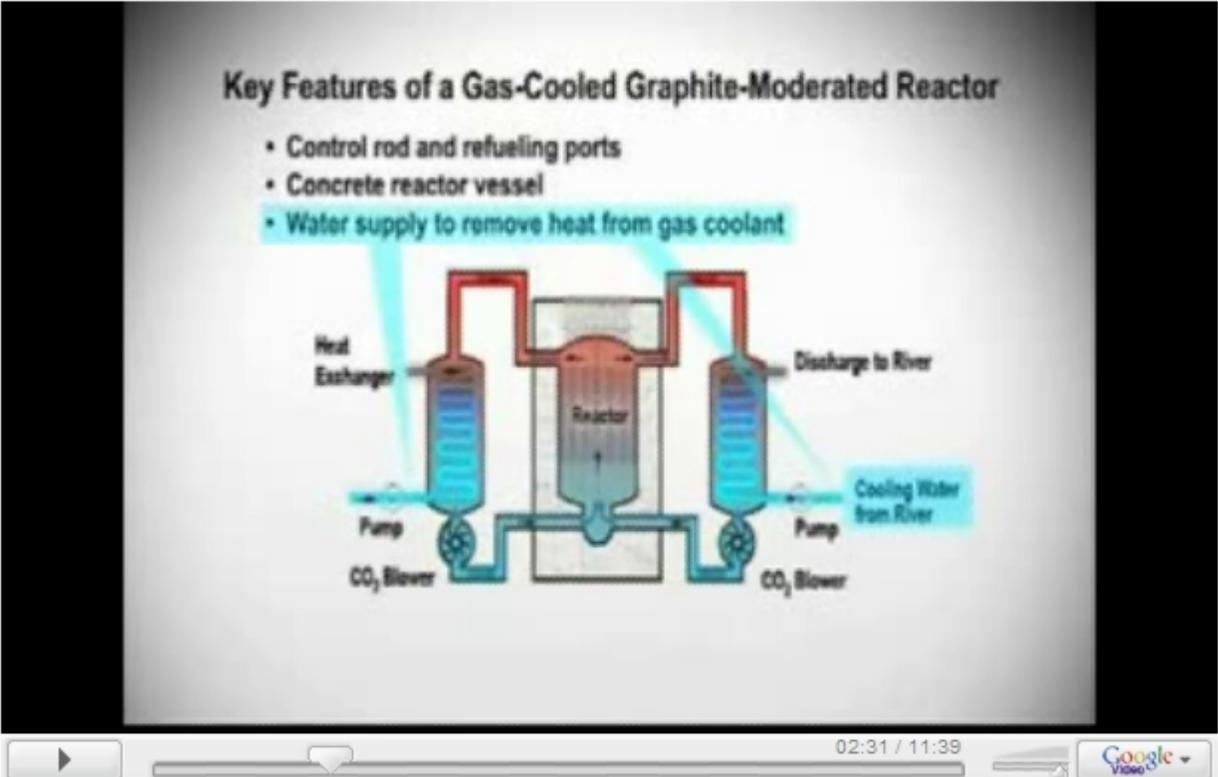


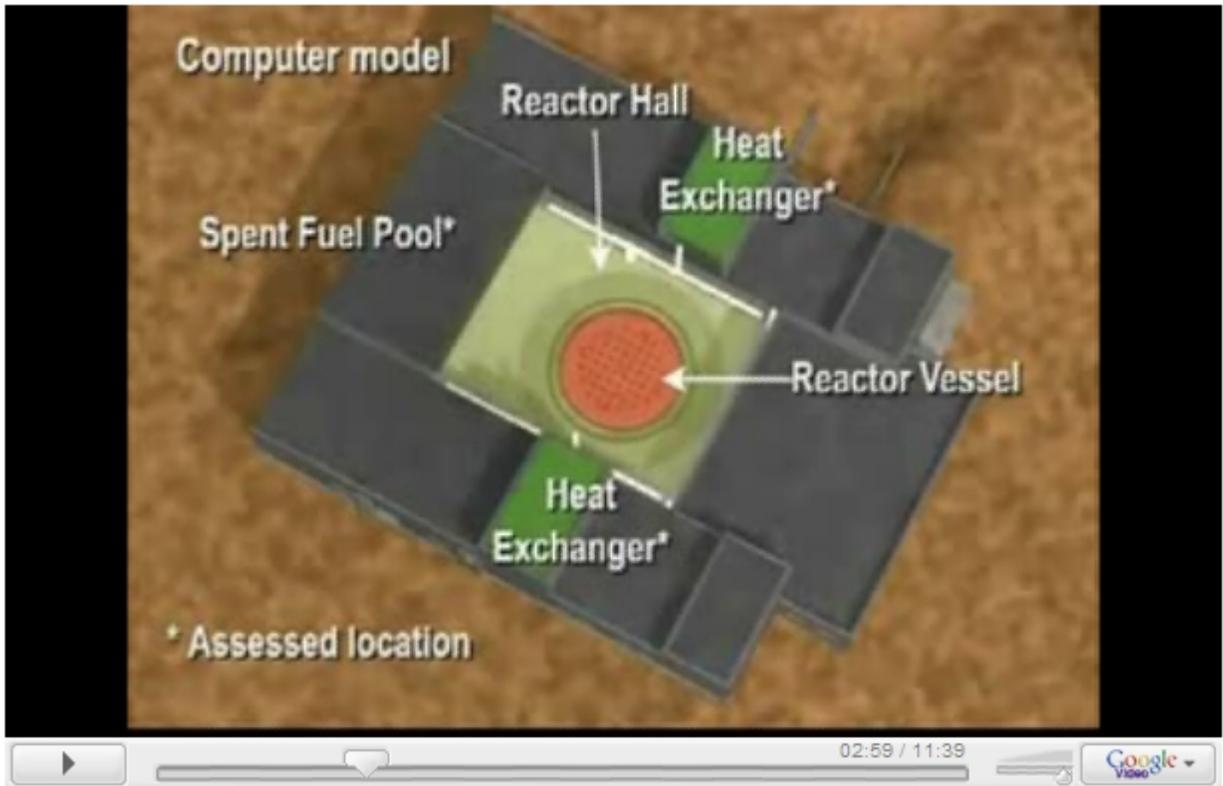
Key Points

- Features of the facility and its location indicate Syria attempted to maintain its secrecy.
- Syria moved quickly to cover up its covert nuclear activities by demolishing and burying the reactor building and by removing incriminating equipment. These actions probably were intended to forestall identification of reactor debris by international inspectors and are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear intentions.



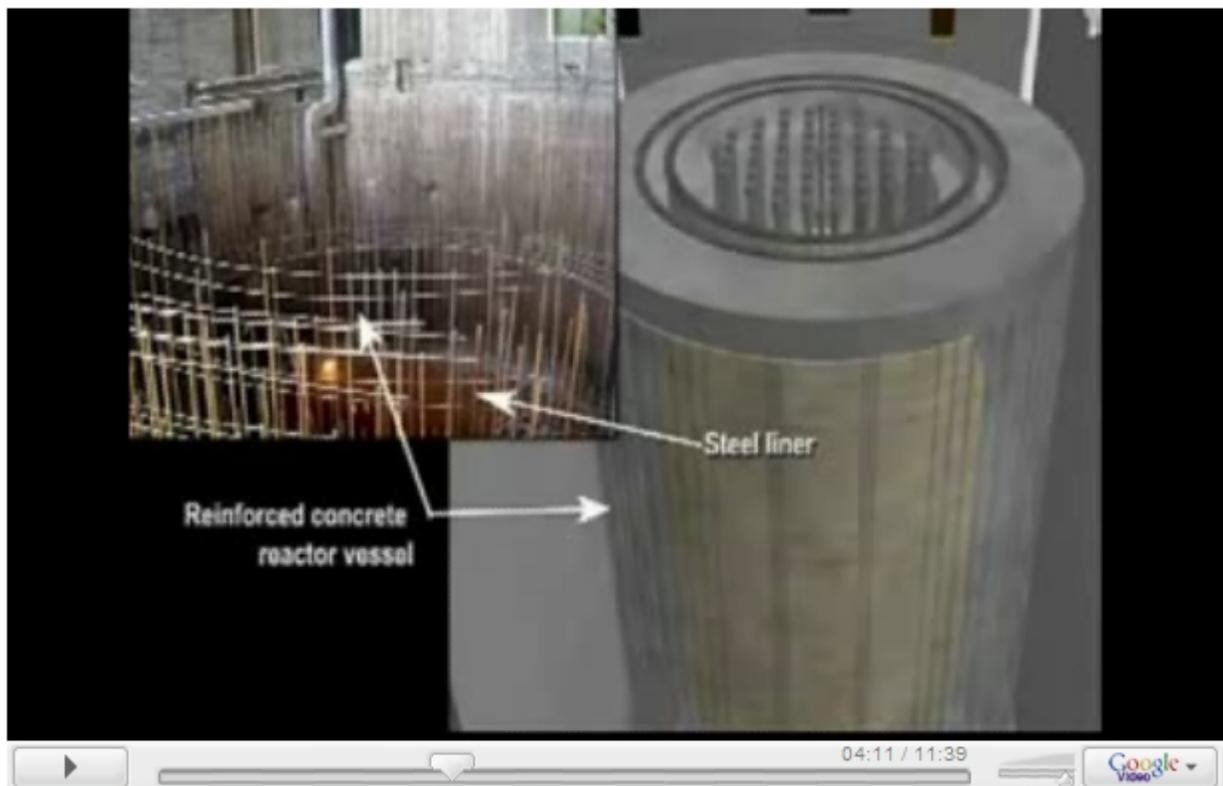






















Pumphouse and pipeline externally complete, early August 2007



Head of North Korean reactor fuel plant with head of Syrian Atomic Energy Commission in Syria

Same North Korean official at the Six-Party Talks

Syria/North Korea Nuclear Connections

- Senior North Koreans from the Yongbyon nuclear complex made multiple visits to Syria before construction of the Al Kibar reactor began in 2001.
- In 2002, North Korean officials were procuring equipment for an undisclosed site in Syria. North Korea that same year sought a gas-cooled reactor component we believe was intended for the Syrian site.
- A North Korean nuclear organization and Syrian officials involved in the covert nuclear program reportedly were involved in a cargo transfer from North Korea to probably Al Kibar in 2006.



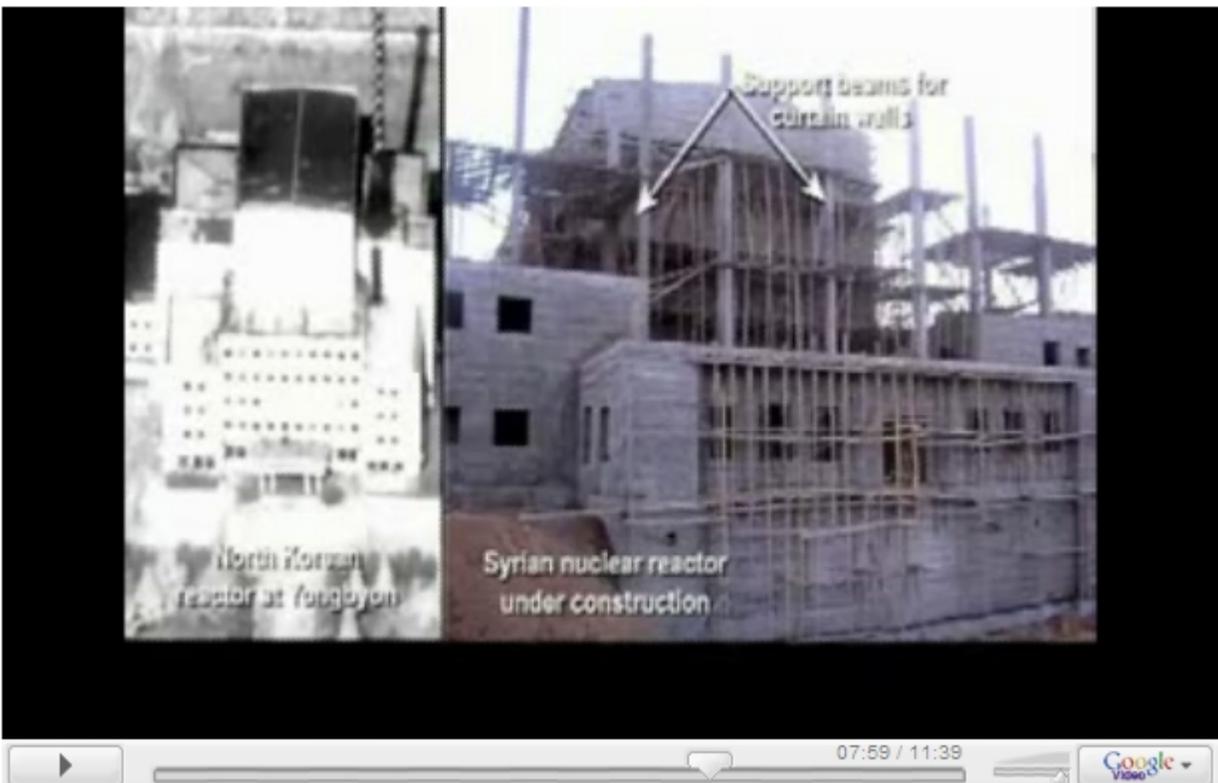
Syria/North Korea Nuclear Connections

- North Korean nuclear officials were located in the region of the reactor both early and late in 2007. Our information shows that North Korean advisors also probably assisted with damage assessment efforts after the reactor was destroyed.
- A high-level North Korean delegation traveled to Syria shortly after the reactor was destroyed, and met with officials associated with Syria's covert nuclear program.





Reactor building after 6 September bombing and before 10 October demolition



Reactor building before completion of curtain wall, perhaps mid-2002



View of Syrian building after roof and curtain walls were added.





Earthen wall



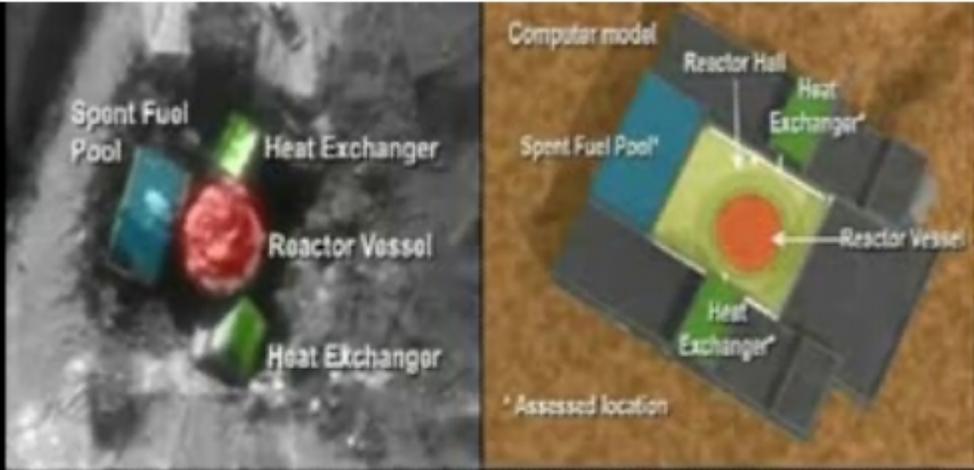
Trailer truck under tarpaulin-covered structure

Tarpaulins





Before (top) and after (bottom) 2007-10-10 explosive demolition of the building



**Internal Structure of Destroyed Building
Matches Reactor Computer Model**

▶ 09:40 / 11:39 Google Video



▶ 09:49 / 11:39 Google Video



Late October 2007. Comparison with DigitalGlobe imagery of 24 October suggests this image was taken between 10 October and 24 October.



New building under construction, late November – early December 2007



New building externally complete

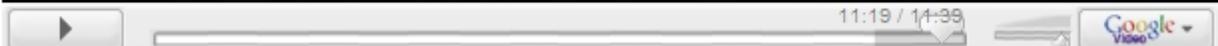
Key Points:

- Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons, was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.
- The reactor was destroyed in early September 2007 before it was loaded with nuclear fuel or operated.
- We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities, both before and after the reactor was destroyed. Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.

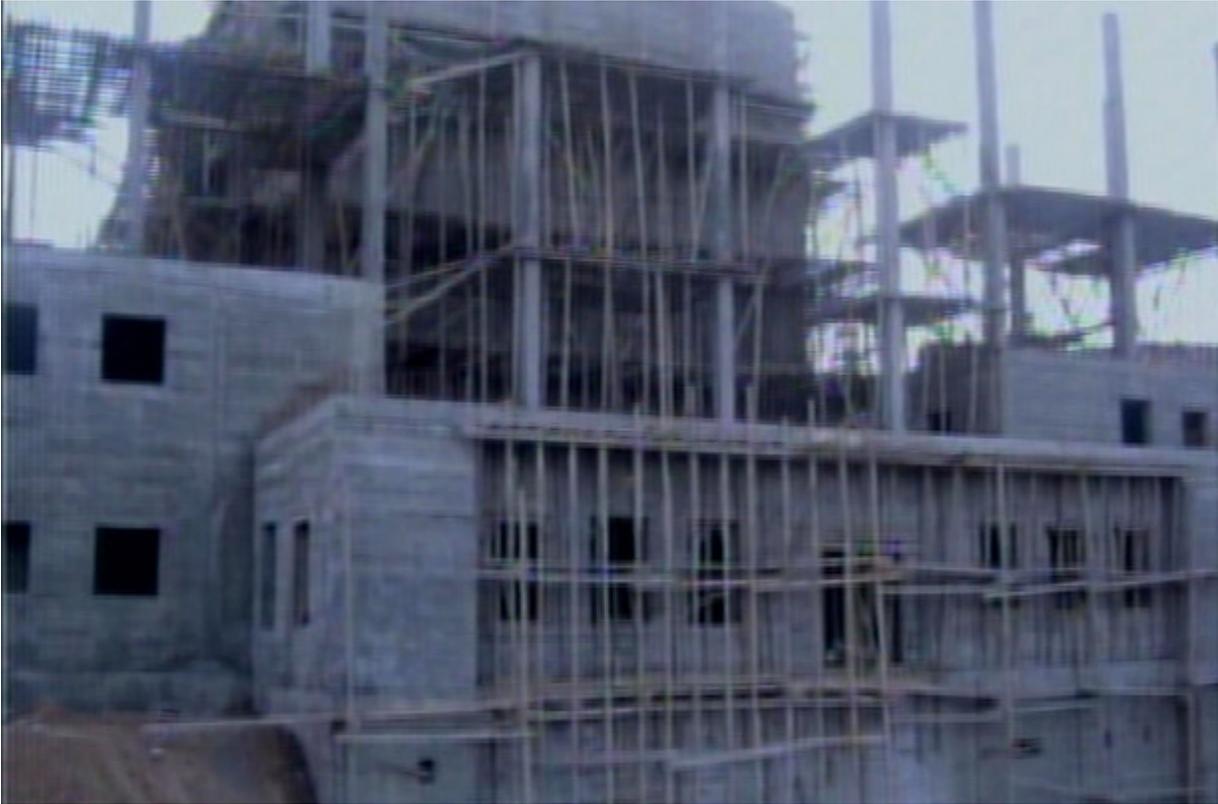


Key Points:

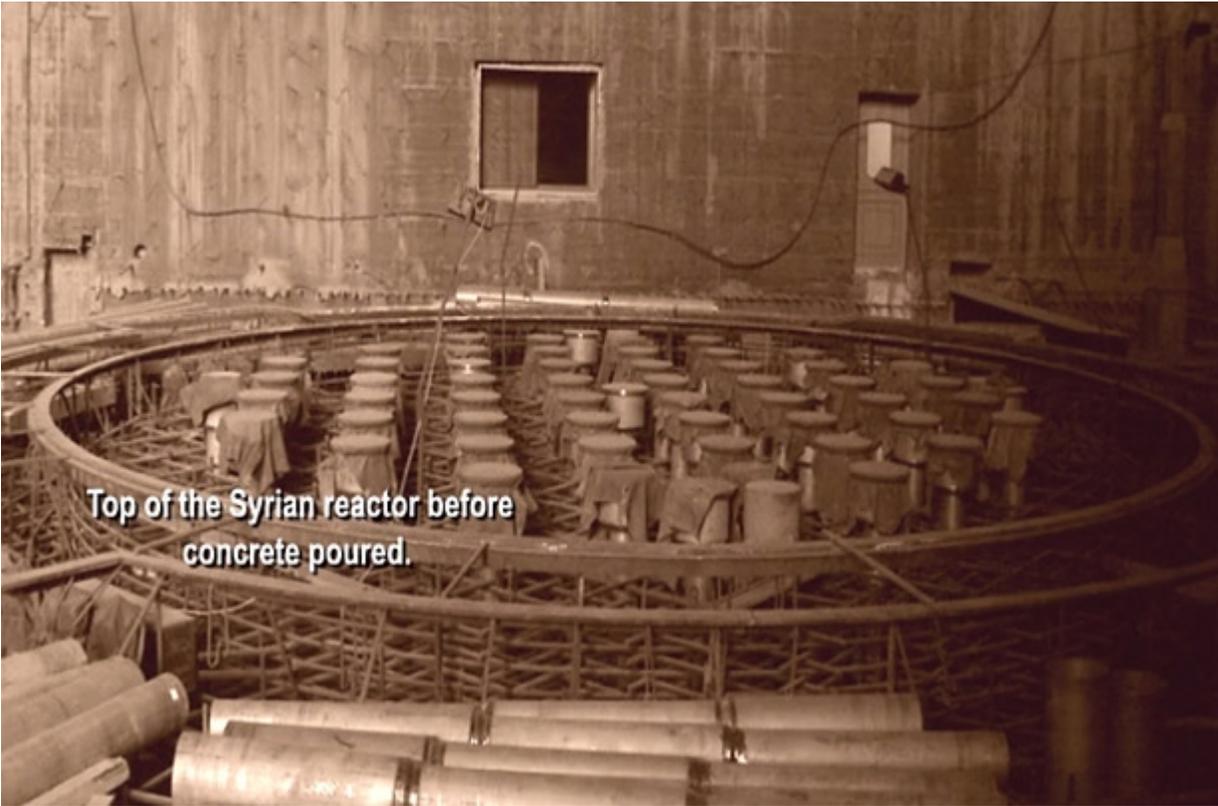
- Features of the facility and its location indicate Syria attempted to maintain its secrecy.
- Syria moved quickly to cover up its covert nuclear activities by demolishing and burying the reactor building and by removing incriminating equipment. These actions probably were intended to forestall identification of reactor debris by international inspectors and are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear intentions.



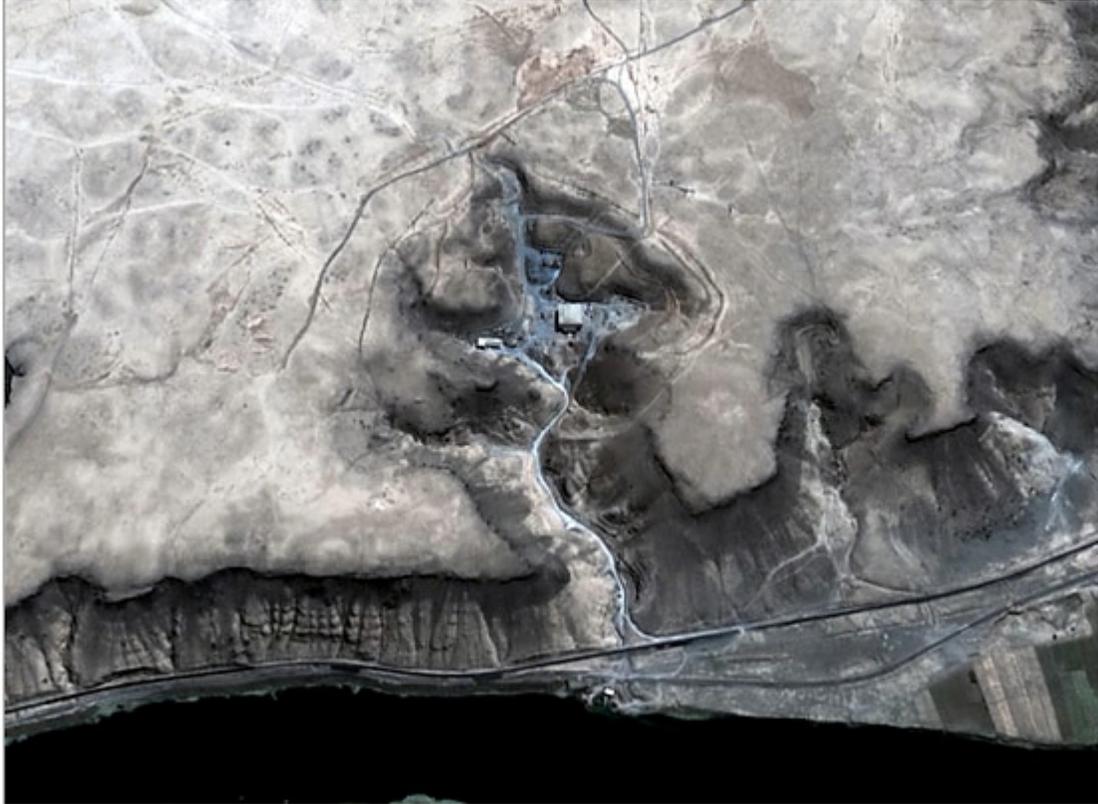
http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580402,00.html



http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580403,00.html



http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580404,00.html



http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580405,00.html

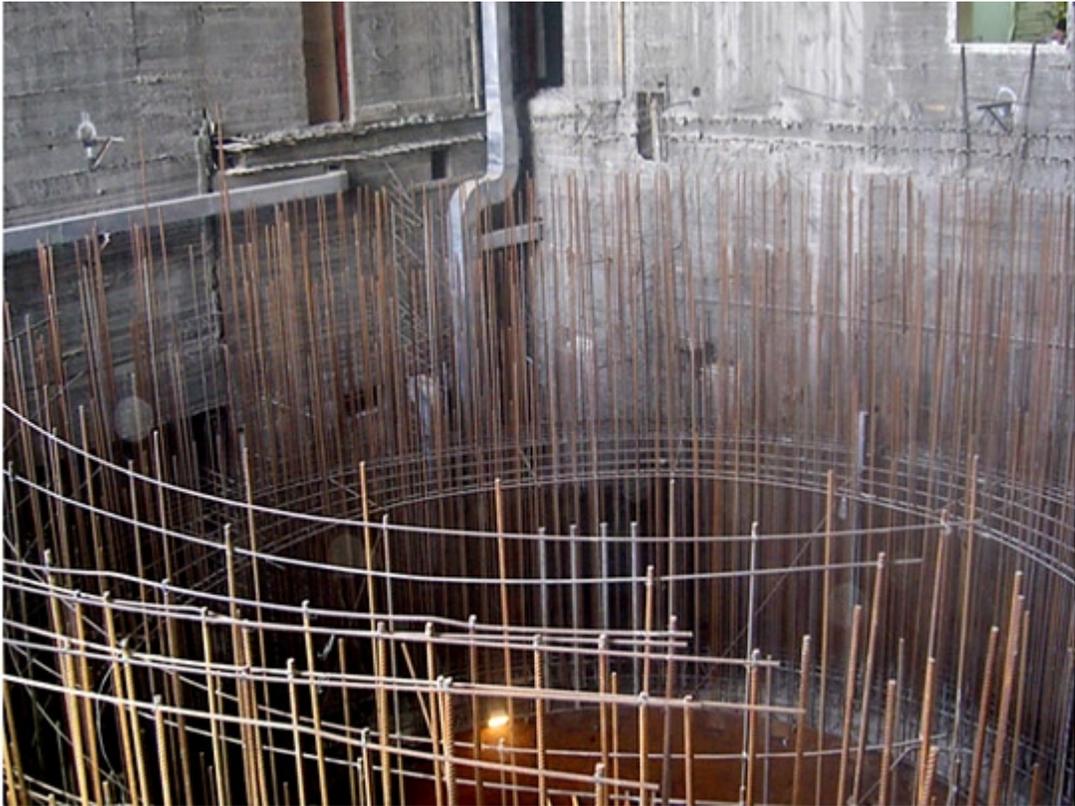


Head of North Korean reactor fuel plant with head of Syrian Atomic Energy Commission in Syria



Same North Korean official at the Six-Party Talks

http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580407,00.html



http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580411,00.html



http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1735096_1580412,00.html



Dismantling of the New al Kibar Building and Presumed Water Treatment Facility 2013-2016



2013-01-13



2013-07-10



2016-04-23



2016-08-15



2016-09-30



2012-09-28



2013-10-29



2016-08-15

Appendix E

Three Additional Sites

[Sourcebook note: Possibly beginning as early as February 2008 and confirmed by May 2008, there were reports of three sites in addition to “Al Kibar” that the US urged, successfully, that the IAEA request to inspect. In December 2008, a report in Intelligence Online provided general information on the location of the sites. This appendix attempts to use that information to identify candidate facilities corresponding to the three additional sites.]

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1202657414564&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Report: Syria has built 3 facilities at site of IAF strike

By JPOST.COM STAFF

Feb 10, 2008 20:24

Three more installations near the location bombed by IAF planes in Syria have been built, Channel 2 reported on Sunday evening [2008-02-10].

It was unclear what purpose the facilities were to serve but satellite images taken by DigitalGlobe, a private company in Longmont, Colorado, clearly showed three new compounds circling an installation which was built in place of the old one, destroyed by Israel in September 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/28/AR2008052803061.html>

Search Is Urged for Syrian Nuclear Sites

U.S. Presses U.N. on 3 Alleged Facilities

By Joby Warrick and Robin Wright

Thursday, May 29, 2008; A14

The Bush administration is pressing U.N. inspectors to broaden their search for possible secret nuclear facilities in Syria, hinting that Damascus's nuclear program might be bigger than the single alleged reactor destroyed by Israeli warplanes last year.

At least three sites have been identified by U.S. officials and passed along to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is negotiating with Syria for permission to conduct inspections in the country, according to U.S. government officials and Western diplomats. U.S. officials want to know if the suspect sites may have been support facilities for the alleged Al Kibar reactor destroyed in an Israeli air raid Sept. 6, the sources said.

http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/file_download/142/gov2008-60.pdf

[Accessed 2008-11-19T19:30Z]

14. Satellite imagery and other information available to the Agency concerning installations at the three other locations in Syria referred to above suggest that those locations may be of relevance to the activities at the Dair Alzour site. As indicated above, the Agency requested access to the three locations on 2 May 2008. Analysis of satellite imagery taken of these locations indicates that landscaping activities and the removal of large containers took place shortly after the Agency's request for access.

[Extracted from Google News article excerpts on 2008-12-05]

Syria's Secret Nuclear Sites

Intelligence Online, France

Dec 3, 2008

However, the [IAEA] inspectors were barred access to three other sites used for the storage and re-processing of plutonium in Syria. The first reportedly lies in the Homs region close to the Oronte river...

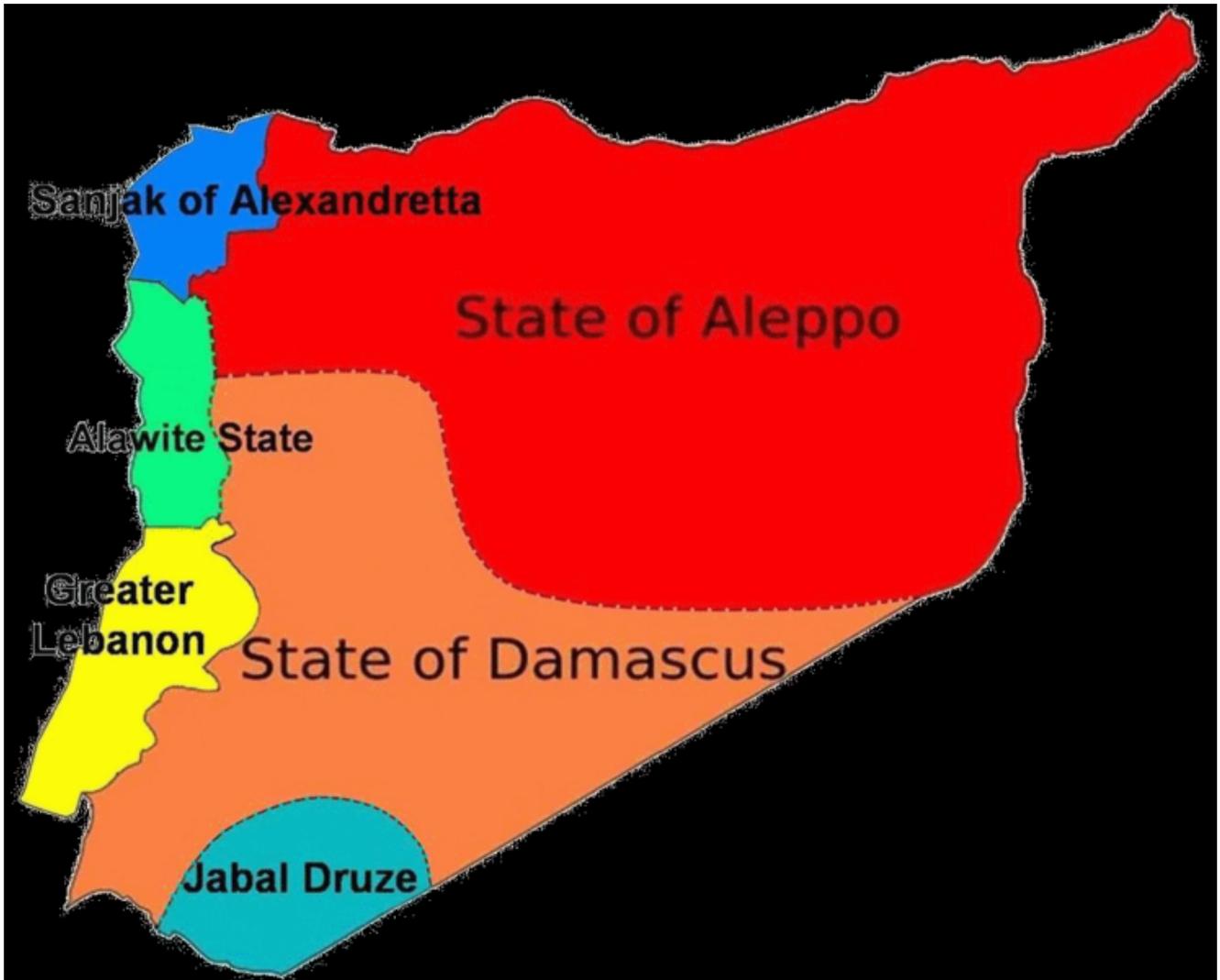
The two other sites that interest the IAEA are in the hinterland, in the Alaouite-dominated region some 75 km from the border with Turkey...

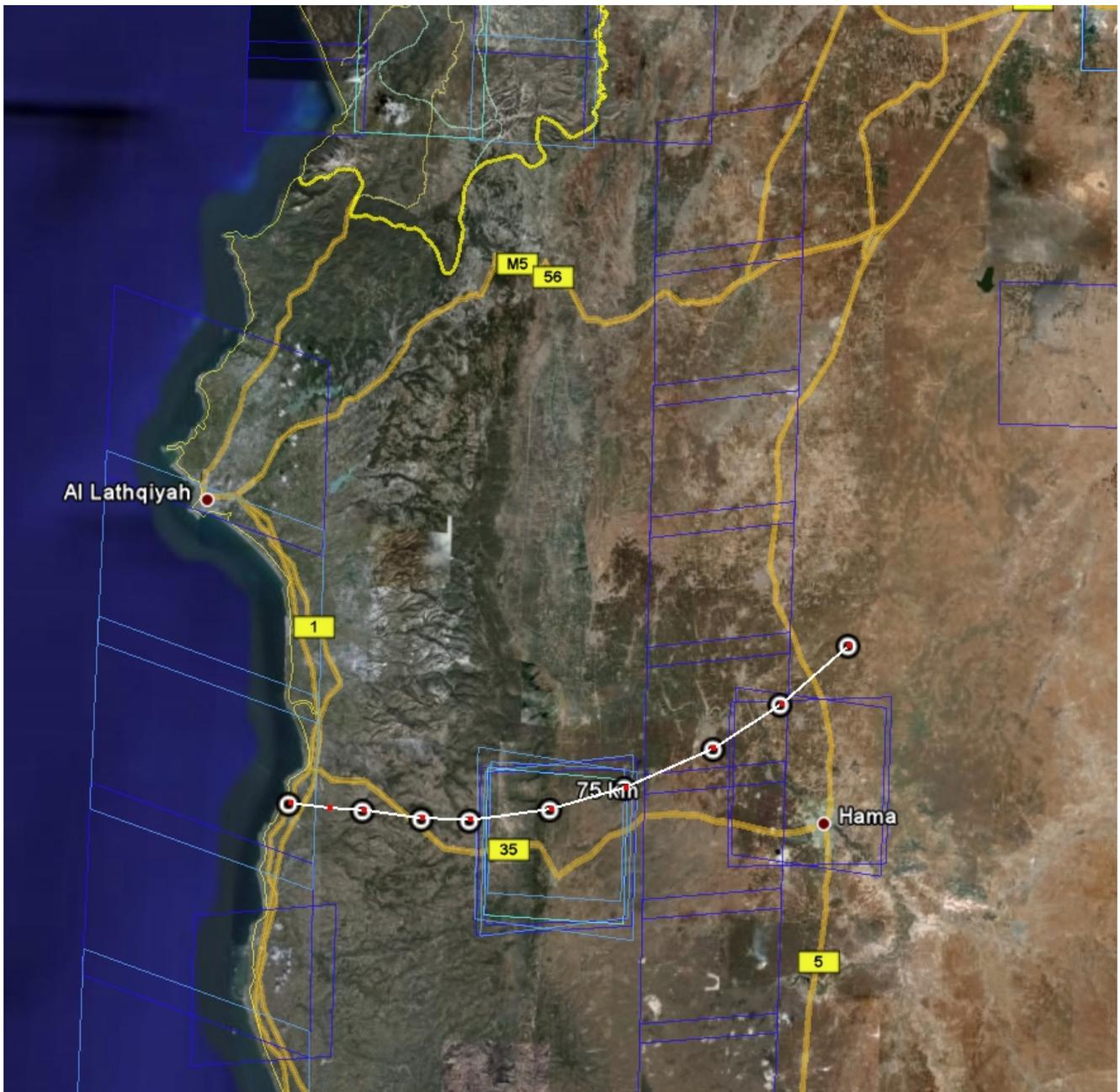
[The French, and presumably original, version reads as follows:]

L'AIEA s'est en revanche vue refuser l'accès à trois autres sites de stockage et de retraitement du plutonium en Syrie. Le premier est situé dans la région de Homs, non loin des rives de l'Oronte...

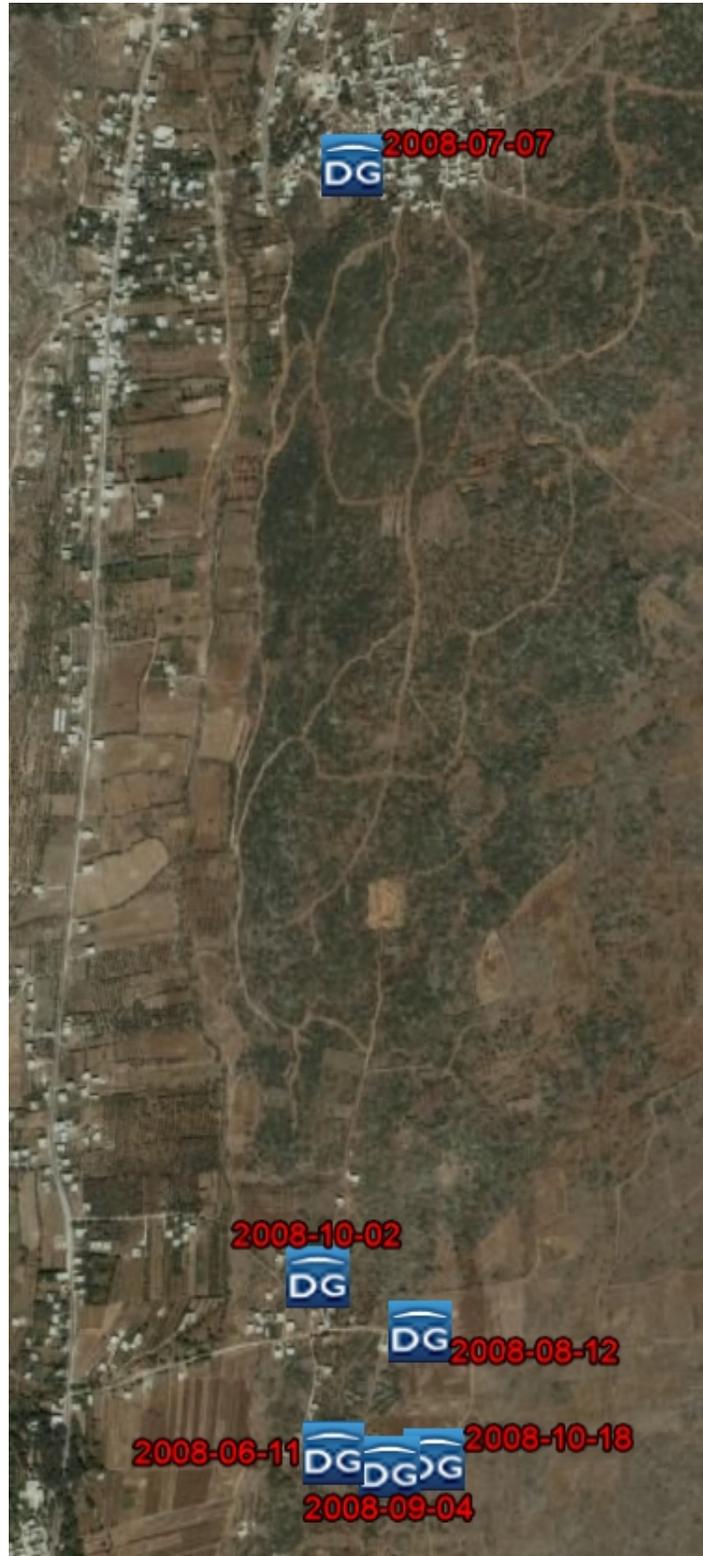
Les deux autres sites qui intéressent l'AIEA se trouvent dans l'arrière-pays alaouite, à 75 kilomètres de la frontière avec la Turquie...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mandate_of_Syria.png

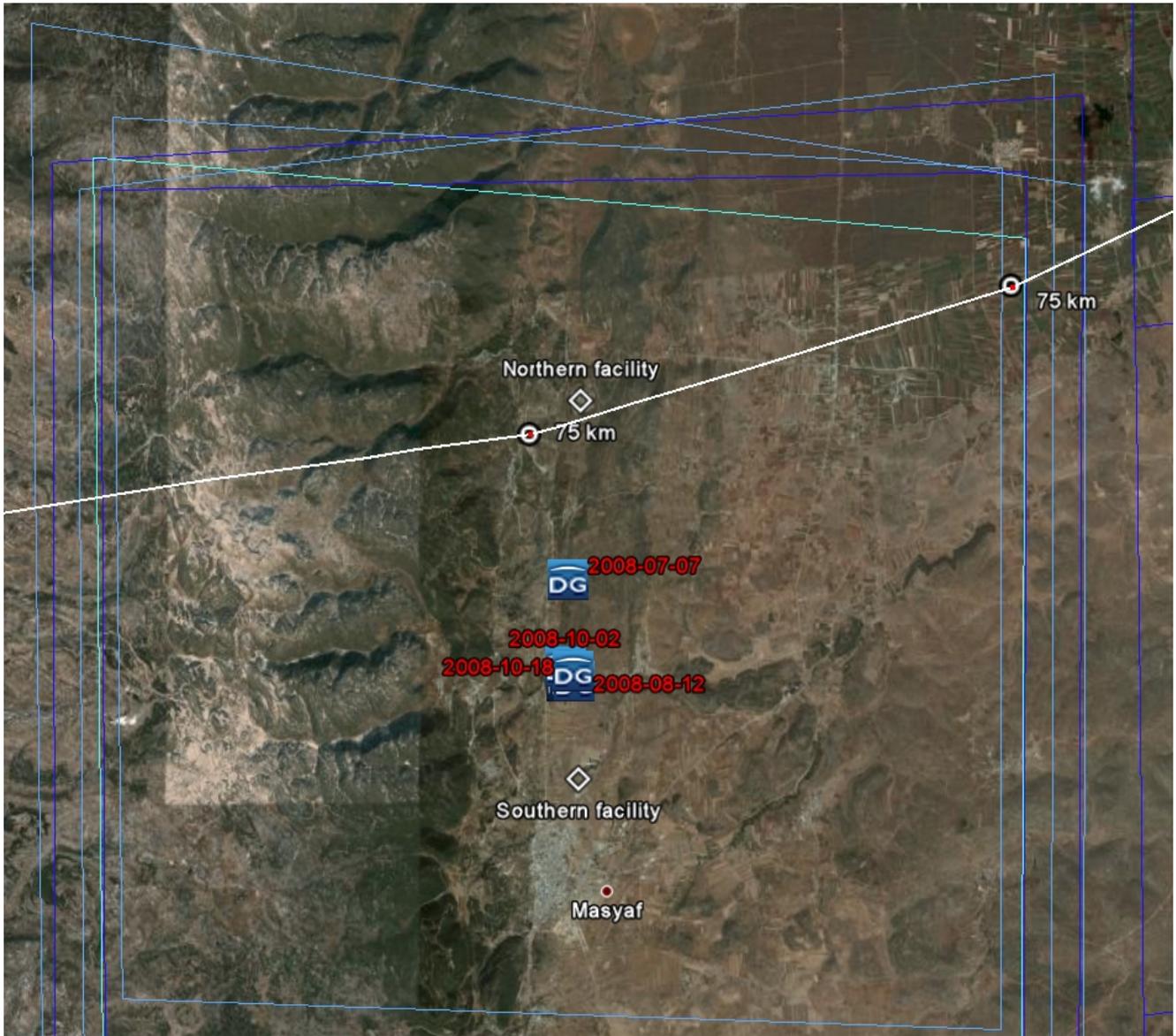




*Google Earth Image of Alawite territory accessed 2008-12-06 showing
75 km distance from the Turkish border.
DigitalGlobe coverage during 2008 shown by blue parallelograms.
(Date of the base image is 2007-09-15.)
Note area of repeated coverage west of Hama.*



Detail showing centerpoints of DigitalGlobe imagery. Note that all images were taken after the IAEA requested access to the three additional sites on May 2, 2008.



[Sourcebook note: Examination of the line running through Alawite territory 75 kilometers from the Turkish border disclosed a substantial facility north of Masjaf. Another, smaller facility of generally similar appearance is located directly south. Both are within all of the indicated DigitalGlobe images]



Northern candidate facility, 35.155 N, 36.347 E on September 15, 2007



Southern candidate facility, 35.083 N, 36.347 E on September 15, 2007



[Sourcebook note: Examination of the course of the Orontes in the vicinity of Homs revealed no obvious candidate facilities. However, a facility for separating uranium and other impurities from phosphoric acid that occasionally has been mentioned in connection with possible Syrian nuclear activities is located on Lake Homs, a reservoir on the Orontes.]

As of 1996 preparations for a semi-industrial pilot plant for the removal of uranium from endogenously produced triple super phosphate continued at Homs, Syria under a UNDP-financed IAEA-project. The UN Development Program (UNDP) assisted Syria in a five-year [1996-2001] project worth US\$2.3 million to improve nationally produced phosphoric acid. The IAEA was involved in this project, which set up techniques both for the removal and the recovery of uranium from the acid.

This project, completed 13 September 2001, aimed at designing, constructing, and making operational a pilot plant for the purification of phosphoric acid, and of preparing a feasibility study for a full scale commercial installation to make Triple Super Phosphate fertilizer with reduced uranium content. The Syrian Government showed great commitment to this project through cost sharing. A tripartite contract for the design, manufacture, installation, and commissioning of the pilot plant was signed in July 1997 between the Agency, the equipment supplier, and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Atomic Energy Agency of Syria was responsible for the building selection and construction.

[deletia]

Regardless of what acid is used to produce the wet process phosphoric acid, a considerable amount of dissolved and suspended impurities such as silica, aluminum, magnesium, vanadium, fluorine, chlorine, calcium, arsenic, lead, iron and other organic and inorganic impurities are contained in the acid. The resulting wet process phosphoric acid contaminated by the aforesaid impurities has relatively limited uses, primarily in the fertilizer industry where such impurities are not only not harmful, but can be considered a desirable source of trace elements.

The pilot plant, owned and operated by the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria, was to engage in Uranium recovery from phosphates using the D2EHPA-TOPO process. It was commissioned in February 1999. Extensive training in various forms, e.g., on-the-job training in the country, fellowships scientific visits, built up the necessary confidence and experience of the local staff in all the relevant aspects in the process of purification of phosphoric acid. The project resulted in the improved capability of Syrian staff to partially purify phosphoric acid, and Syrian counterparts were able to obtain the capability to provide their Government with the information required to assess the technical feasibility and the potential economic benefits of producing purified phosphoric acid in Syria. Kilborn Inc. of Canada carried out a pre-feasibility study that concluded that the industrialization of the process was not advisable due to financial considerations.

Nuclear Chronology
1963-2003

[EXCERPTS]

1986-1992

With assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS) acquires a micro-plant facility, spare parts and chemicals to enable the recovery of yellowcake uranium on an experimental basis from the phosphoric acid produced at the commercial Syrian General Fertilizer Company Plant at Homs. The Homs plant produces phosphoric acid from phosphatic rock mined in the Charkia and Knifes deposits which contain about 60 to 100 parts per million of uranium.

The AECS plans for this project to be the first step in Syria's nuclear program; subsequent steps are to include a pilot plant, an industrial scale plant and then possibly operations such as refining, conversion, enrichment, and fuel fabrication. The IAEA technical cooperation project includes staff training in the operation of the micro-plant and uranium recovery process.

The AECS also requests assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to construct an industrial-scale pilot plant to recover uranium. Canada's Kilborn Inc. carries out a pre-feasibility study to determine whether the basic technology for extracting uranium from phosphoric acid produced at the Homs plant is feasible for an industrial-scale plant. The study concludes that the industrialization of the process is not advisable due to financial considerations.

—"MEAB-Turnkey: SAEC plant in Homs, Syria," Metallextraktion AB, <<http://www.meab-mx.se>>; "Uranium Recovery From Phosphoric Acid: SYR/3/003," International Atomic Energy Agency, <<http://www-tc.iaea.org>>, completed 30/12/1992; "SYR/3/003 – Report on Pre-feasibility Study on the Recovery of Uranium from Phosphoric Acid," International Atomic Energy Agency, Technical Cooperation Report, 12 November 1992; "Technical Cooperation Report for 2001," GC(46)/INF/4, International Atomic Energy Agency, 2001, p. 39, <<http://www.iaea.or.at>>.

1996

Syria signs a contract with the IAEA and an unnamed county that will supply equipment to improve Syria's technical capabilities in removing uranium from triple super phosphate produced in the fertilizer plant at Homs. [The project is completed in 2001.]

—"Technical Cooperation Report for 2001," GC(46)/INF/4, International Atomic Energy Agency, 2001, p. 39, <<http://www.iaea.or.at>>.

1996

The Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS) carries out a preliminary investigation to determine whether it is possible to apply the solvent extraction method to recover uranium from phosphoric acid produced at the Homs plant. Tri-superphosphates are produced at Homs at the rate of 165,000t per year. The investigation concludes that it is technically feasible to recover uranium by this method.

—Khorfan, S. Kouksi, Y. Dahdouh, and A. Shlweit, "Preliminary investigation on the extraction of uranium from Syrian phosphoric acid," International Conference on Uranium Extraction, Chinese Nuclear Society, 1996, via INIS.

2001

Syria is in the process of constructing a radioactive waste processing facility, to manage the waste resulting from the production and application of radioisotopes. Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS) has established a separate, Radioactive Waste Management Division to oversee the collection, treatment and storage of radioactive waste.

—Mohammad Ghafar, "Radioactive waste management facility in Syria," International Conference on Management of Radioactive Waste from Non-Power Applications, IAEA, Report No. IAEA-CN-87/79, 1 July 2001, via ETDEWEB, <<http://www.etde.org>>.

2001

During a meeting of the Standing Russian-Syrian Commission for Trade and Economic, Research and Technical Cooperation, Russian and Syrian officials discuss construction of a \$500 million tri-superphosphate factory near the city of Palmyra. This is part of a larger agreement to develop a plant to produce nitric fertilizers in Deyr ez-Zor and a phosphate fertilizer plant in Homs.

—"Russian, Syrian Officials to Discuss Economic Cooperation," Pravda.ru, 15 May 2001, <<http://english.pravda.ru>>.

May 2001

Bechtel Corp. and Makad International plan to construct a 500,000-ton/year triple superphosphate plant near Palmyra, but delay constructions due to financial constraints. The phosphates for the plant would come from Khunafis Mines.

—Thomas R. Yager, "The Mineral Industries of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria," U.S. Geological Survey, 2001, <<http://minerals.usgs.gov>>.

New fertilizer, superphosphate and phosphoric acid factory in Homs – 22/02/2009

Syriasteps on

Sunday 22 February, 2009

The Syrian Investment Agency recently approved the establishment of a fertilizer, ordinary super phosphate and phosphoric acid factory by "Ahmad Kanaan bin Muhammad and Co" as a shareholding company and will be regulated under Investment Law No 8 of 1997 and therefore will benefit from the exemptions and facilitation provided by the law.

The total capital and working capital of the project is set at 6,619,690,000 SYP of which 5, 5540,661,000 SYP is in foreign currency.

According to company sources, 250 thousand tons annually, 125 tons of ordinary super phosphate and 125 of phosphoric acid, will be produced by the company.

Located in the Syrian governorate of Homs, the project is expected to create 150 job opportunities on three shifts and will be ready to operate in three years.

SYRIA - The Fertiliser Sector.

Publication: APS Review Downstream Trends

Date: Monday, March 13 2000

Demand for fertilisers in Syria has been growing rapidly in recent years. This trend will continue and the country may become a large importer of fertilisers if the government fails to get two projects off the ground.

Syria used to be self-sufficient in fertilisers but now its imports are costing the state about \$120 million/year. The cost of three to four years of imports is equivalent to building a new fertiliser plant.

Running this sector are state-owned companies: the General Establishment for Chemical Industries (GECI), which produces phosphate fertilisers; and the General Fertiliser Company (GFC) which produces nitrogenous fertilisers.

With import substitution being one of the regime's main economic goals, the ministry of industry in 1998 invited the private sector to launch new projects in this sector. Private investment in the fertiliser industry is covered by Law 10 of 1991. Required were two projects: a plant to produce 500,000 t/y of triple superphosphate (TPS) to be located near Palmyra, prepared by GECI; a complex to produce 1,000 t/d of ammonia and 1,750 t/d of urea to be built in the east near the Euphrates River, prepared by GCF.

For the \$400m TPS project, GECI in 1998/99 negotiated with two competing bidders: Dharamsi Mararji Chemical Co. (DMCC) of India and a consortium of SNC Lavalin of Canada, Tecnicas Reunidas of Spain and Simon Carves of the UK. A final government decision on the winner is yet to be taken as both bidders offered good options pertaining to the project's technical aspects and financing.

Usually it takes a long time for the government to decide on such matters. The Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), among the possible financiers, has expressed concern over the repeated delays in getting this off the ground and the fact that an international project consultant for it has not been appointed.

Bids for the project were first made in 1992. The project was revived in early 1997. As the response was not encouraging, private participation was invited in 1998. The project was originally planned to be built by Bechtel and Makad International, an Oregon-based firm headed by Syrian-born American Elie Mouakad.

The TSP plant is to use phosphate feedstock from the Khunaifis mines, about 50 km south of Palmyra and 160 km south-west of Homs. GECI had reached an initial agreement on the project with Makad in February 1993, after the company agreed to build the plant for \$250m. Makad had a deal with Raytheon Design and Constructors of the US to provide technology for the phosphate processing and for phosphoric acid and TSP production. It had set up a consortium with Bechtel for the plant. Work on basic design and engineering began in early 1994 and was completed in late 1997. But the Bechtel-Makad partnership dropped out in early 1998.

On Feb. 1, 1998, 'Al Baath' newspaper reported that India and Syria were holding talks about plans by Indian companies to invest \$675m in projects to boost phosphate and fertiliser production, as well as to enlarge Syrian ports. One of the Indian companies involved was Aswal, whose Managing Director Anil Bhalla visited Damascus in February 1998.

Syria has substantial reserves of phosphate, a key feedstock for the fertiliser industry. The state company in charge of phosphate extraction is the General Establishment for Phosphate and Mines (GEPM). The government in 1998 announced a plan to boost the output of phosphate from about 2.6m t/y in 1997 to 4m t/y by 2000. It is not clear whether the plan has been executed. Apart from use for the local fertiliser industry, about 80% of the country's phosphate output is exported, mainly to Europe.

For GFC's nitrogenous fertiliser complex, an international tender in February 1998 was issued and companies were invited to submit integrated bids for the construction and operation of the ammonia and urea plants on BOOT basis. Companies were also invited to bid on the basis that the complex would be a joint venture with GFC. Initial plans called for the complex to be near the north-eastern town of Hasaka, to use almost 1 MCM/day of gas from the Omar field and 490 t/y of Euphrates water. Bids for the project were submitted by the June 16, 1998, deadline. But since then the government has not taken a final decision.

IAEA-TC Project Datasheet

Project Number	SYR/3/003
Project Title	Uranium Recovery from Phosphoric Acid
Objectives	TO RECOVER URANIUM FROM PHOSPHORIC ACID.
Field(s)	(3F) Processing of Nuclear Materials (Historical subject. As of 2004 use 3B)
1st Year of Approval	1986
Project Status	Completed 1992-12-30
Programme Management Officer	Kofi, Laala Anum; Europe Section
Institutes involved	Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS) Location: Damascus
Achievements	<p>Syria's nuclear power programme has been shelved for financial and contractual reasons. The possibility was considered of developing a domestic uranium supply as one component of the overall programme. A commercial fertilizer operation at Homs produces phosphoric acid from phosphatic rock mined from the Charkia and Knifes deposits which contain about 60 to 100 parts per million of uranium. Through this project, the Agency provided the Atomic Energy Commission of Syria (AECS) with a micro-plant facility, spare parts and chemicals to enable yellow cake uranium to be recovered on an experimental basis from the phosphoric acid produced at Homs plant. This was to be the first step in the nuclear power programme cycle; subsequent steps would include a pilot plant, an industrial scale plant and then possibly operations such as refining, conversion, enrichment and fuel fabrication. Five expert missions were organized to train and advise the counterpart staff on the operation of the micro-plant. A Canadian company was later awarded a sub-contract for pre-feasibility evaluation of the micro-plant results with a view to a pilot plant and eventually to an industrial scale plant for uranium recovery from phosphoric acid produced at the Homs plant. Three counterpart staff members were trained during the pre-feasibility studies; two others received fellowship training in Indonesia on the uranium recovery process. The results of the pre-feasibility studies indicate that while the basic technology for extracting uranium from the phosphoric acid produced at the Homs plant is workable, the industrialization of the process is not at present advisable in view of the depressed world market price of uranium. The AECS has submitted a request to the UNDP for assistance in the construction of a pilot plant as the next stage in the uranium recovery process. The counterparts are continuing with detailed investigations on solvent extraction methods for uranium recovery at the AECS.</p>



*Detail of separation facility, 34.6515 N, 36.6254 E on July 24, 2003 .
Note the presence of an adjacent building of similar size (30 meters square in plan)
not shown in the ground-level photograph below.*



Closer view of separation facility

http://www.meab-mx.se/en/service_turnkey_syrien.htm

MEAB - Turnkey: SAEC plant in Homs, Syria



[Sourcebook note: This picture appears to have been taken before 2003 from the roof of a nearby building approximately at 34.65110 N, 36.62687 E.]

Client

Syria, SAEC plant in Homs, Syria

Problem

Purification of Green Phosphoric Acid (H_3PO_4)

Solution

The project was divided into two phases:

Phase 1

By reacting apatite with sulfuric acid, phosphoric acid and gypsum will result. Most phosphoric acid is produced in this way and normally used as raw material (green acid) to produce fertilizer. A small amount, however is further refined to phosphoric acid of food grade quality.

The green phosphoric acid from a phosphoric acid plant (PAP) contains 25-30% H_3PO_4 . The acid is heavily entrained with impurity cations, among which arsenic, cadmium and uranium are the most poisonous. Also anions, like chloride, fluoride and sulfate must be considered. Selective extraction of phosphoric acid as an adduct complex with TBP and according to the block diagram below has been used to produce acid of food grade. The purification operation starts with addition of chemicals to precipitate arsenic and sulfate in a pre-treatment step. The acid is then cooled and left for an appropriate ageing time. A flocculent is added and the solid content is allowed to flock (precipitate) in a clarifier.

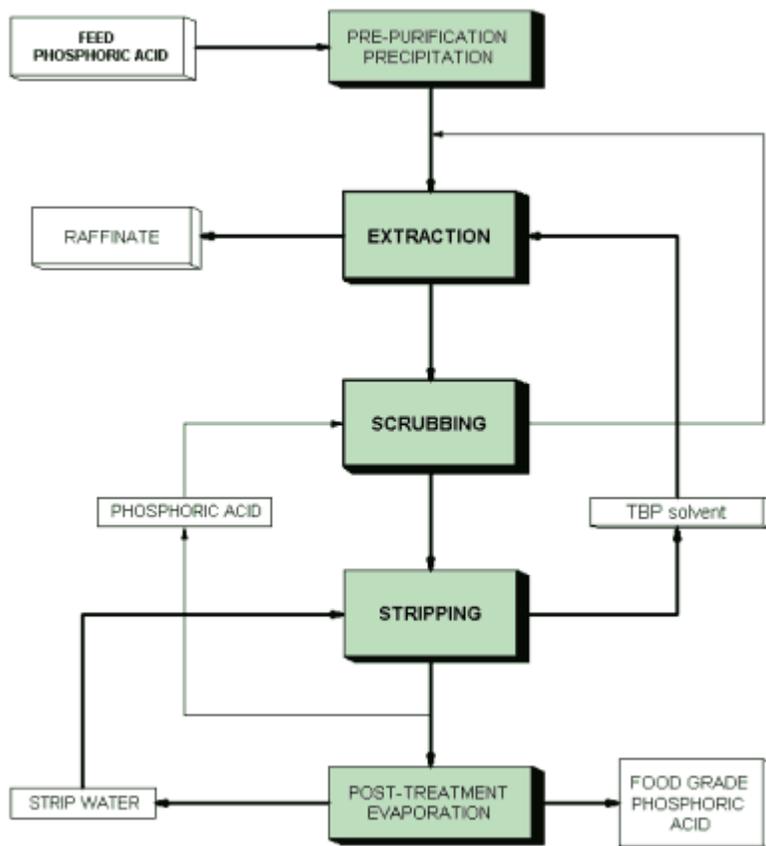
Phase 2

The clear phosphoric acid is fed to the solvent extraction operation, where about 60% of the acid is extracted counter-currently to an organic solvent containing TBP in kerosene. The resulting raffinate

with most of the contaminating substances left in the raffinate, together with the slurry from the clarifier, is returned to the phosphoric acid plant. In this way, the impurities in the green acid will be returned to the fertilizer production without creating additional environmental problems.

After extraction the organic solvent, loaded with phosphoric acid, is scrubbed with a phosphoric acid solution in equilibrium with the organic solvent. In this way, co-extracted contamination is removed. The scrub liquor is recycled to extraction.

After adjusting the temperature to about 40 °C, the organic solvent is treated with clean water to strip out the phosphoric acid. From this acid, containing about 30% H₃PO₄, water is evaporated. The resulting concentrated (85%) phosphoric acid is of good quality, corresponding to the quality of food grade phosphoric acid.



Contact

Dr. Hans Reinhardt, +46 31 685414

hans.reinhardt@meab-mx.se

Appendix F

**Members of Congress
briefed
September-October 2007**

Sourcebook note: According to the Background Briefing with Senior U.S. Officials on Syria's Covert Nuclear Reactor and North Korea's Involvement given on April 24, 2008,

“We had briefed 22 members of Congress in positions of leadership and chairs and ranking members of key committees last September and October.”

This Appendix attempts to identify those Members based on explicit indications that particular people were briefed or, more frequently, the positions they held during September and October. It is assumed that, besides the majority and minority leaders of the Senate and House, the leadership of the Armed Services, Foreign Relations and Intelligence Committees would have been briefed ex officio. Explicit indications that particular members were briefed agree, with two possible exceptions, with this assumption.

In addition, it is speculated that the leadership of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities of the Senate Armed Services Committee and of the Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats of the House Armed Services Committee were briefed. This speculation is based on the responsibilities of the Subcommittees and indications that a member, Senator Clinton, was aware of the details of the strike by late September 2007. Since Senator Clinton did not hold a leadership position at the time, it is possible that she acquired the information informally, rather than in an Administration briefing to the Subcommittee. Similarly, Congressman Robert Wexler, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee appears to have acquired knowledge of the strike although he was not a member of the Committee leadership.

In the following list,

+ indicates positive indication of knowledge of details of the strike.

(p) indicates leadership position in committee or subcommittee.

(s) indicates association by name with details of strike .

Senate

Majority leader	(Harry Reid)	(p)
Minority leader	(Mitch McConnell)	(p)

Armed Services

Majority Leader	(Carl Levin)	+(p)
Minority leader	(John McCain)	+(p,s)

Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities(?)

Majority Leader	(Jack Reed)	(p)
Minority leader	(Elizabeth Dole)	(p)
Member	(Hilary Clinton)	+(s)

Foreign Relations

Majority Leader	(Joe Biden)	+(p)
Minority leader	(Dick Lugar)	+(p)

Intelligence

Majority Leader	(John D Rockefeller IV)	+(p)
Minority leader	(Kit Bond)	+(p)

House

Speaker (Nancy Pelosi) (p)
Minority Leader (John Boehner) (p)

Armed Services

Majority Leader (Ike Skelton) +(p)
Minority Leader (Duncan Hunter) +(p)

Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats(?)

Majority Leader (Adam Smith) (p)
Minority Leader (Mac Thornberry) (p)

Foreign Affairs

Chairman (Tom Lantos) +(p,s)
Minority Leader (Ileana Ros-Lehtinen) +(p,s)
Member (Robert Wexler) +(s)

Intelligence

Majority Leader (Sylvestre Reyes) +(p)
Minority Leader (Peter Hoekstra) +(p,s)

Appendix G

Report of a successor facility, 2015-01

Assad's Secret Evidence Points to Syrian Push for Nuclear Weapons

01/09/2015 09:20 PM

By Erich Follath

[EXCERPTED MATERIAL]

For years, it was thought that Israel had destroyed Syria's nuclear weapons capability with its 2007 raid on the Kibar complex. Not so. New intelligence suggests that Bashar al-Assad is still trying to build the bomb. And he may be getting help from North Korea and Iran.

[deletia]

Now, secret information obtained by SPIEGEL indicates that the world is once again being misled by Assad. Syria's dictator has not given up his dream of an atomic weapon and has apparently built a new nuclear facility at a secret location. It is an extremely unsettling piece of news.

Suspicious Uranium Particles

Back in 2007, it proved impossible to completely quell rumors about the mysterious building complex in the desert and its possible military purpose. In contrast to Israel and Pakistan, Syria is a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and is thus committed to using nuclear power only for peaceful purposes. And the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna demanded access to the site. In June 2008, Assad finally gave in to the IAEA's pressure and experts under the leadership of Olli Heinonen, a native of Finland, were allowed to inspect the destroyed Kibar facility.

It quickly became apparent that Damascus had done everything it could to destroy all traces of what had been going on there. But the atomic detectives from the IAEA were nevertheless able to find suspicious uranium particles -- a discovery that the Syrian government sought to explain away as a potential act of sabotage. Though the IAEA noted that its investigation did not turn up definitive proof, the organization requested access to three other facilities due to ongoing suspicions. The IAEA suspected that the trio of nuclear sites may be connected to Kibar, particularly the suspected enrichment facility Marj as-Sultan, located 15 kilometers north of Damascus. The Syrians refused, angered by what they called "unfounded defamation."

[deletia]

Continued Pursuit of the Bomb

The factory had been on the verge of completion and many observers believed at the time that there could be a secret cache of fuel, at least enough for a year, standing by. According to IAEA research, Syria possesses up to 50 tons of natural uranium, enough material for three to five bombs once the enrichment procedure is completed.

The Institute for Science and International Security in Washington D.C. likewise has strong indications for the existence of such stockpiles and expressed its concern in September 2013. "This large stock of natural uranium metal poses nuclear proliferation risks," the institute wrote. "It could be obtained by organizations such as Hezbollah or al-Qaida or undeclared nuclear programs of states such as Iran."

According to findings of Western intelligence agencies, however, the situation is much more explosive than previously assumed. Based on documents that SPIEGEL has in its possession, the agencies are convinced that Assad is continuing in his efforts to build the bomb.

Analysts say that the Syrian atomic weapon program has continued in a secret, underground location. According to information they have obtained, approximately 8,000 fuel rods are stored there. Furthermore, a new reactor or an enrichment facility has very likely been built at the site -- a development of incalculable geopolitical consequences.

Some of the uranium was apparently hidden for an extended period at Marj as-Sultan near Damascus, a site that the IAEA likewise views with suspicion. Satellite images from December 2012 and February 2013 show suspicious activity at Marj as-Sultan. The facility, located not far from a Syrian army base, had become the focal point of heavy fighting with rebels. Government troops had to quickly move everything of value. They did so, as intelligence officials have been able to reconstruct, with the help of Hezbollah, the radical Shiite "Party of God" based in Lebanon. The well-armed militia, which is largely financed by Iran, is fighting alongside Assad's troops.

Intercepted Conversations

Intelligence agency findings indicate that the material was moved to a well-hidden underground location just west of the city of Qusayr, not even two kilometers from the border with Lebanon. They managed the move just in time. Marj as-Sultan ultimately did fall to the rebels, but has since been retaken by government troops.

Since then, experts have been keeping a close eye on the site outside of Qusayr, one which they had largely ignored before, believing it to be a conventional Hezbollah weapons depot. Analysts compared earlier satellite images and carefully noted even the slightest of changes. Soon, it became clear to them that they had happened upon an extremely disconcerting discovery.

According to intelligence agency analysis, construction of the facility began back in 2009. The work, their findings suggest, was disguised from the very beginning, with excavated sand being disposed of at various sites, apparently to make it more difficult for observers from above to tell how deeply they were digging. Furthermore, the entrances to the facility were guarded by the military, which turned out to be a necessary precaution. In the spring of 2013, the region around Qusayr saw heavy fighting. But the area surrounding the project in the mines was held, despite heavy losses suffered by elite Hezbollah units stationed there.

The most recent satellite images show six structures: a guard house and five sheds, three of which conceal entrances to the facility below. The site also has special access to the power grid, connected to the nearby city of Blosah. A particularly suspicious detail is the deep well which connects the facility with Zaita Lake, four kilometers away. Such a connection is unnecessary for a conventional weapons cache, but it is essential for a nuclear facility.

[Sourcebook note: The facility is at 34.514 N, 36.408 E]





This satellite image shows the Qusayr site's link to the power grid, one of many details of the site which have intelligence officials worried that it could be a facility for the construction of a nuclear weapon.



For years, it was thought that Israel had destroyed Syria's nuclear weapons capability with its 2007 raid on the Kibar complex. Not so. New intelligence suggests that Bashar al-Assad is still trying to build the bomb. And he is getting plenty of help. Here, a satellite image of the suspected site near Qusayr.



This image purports to show the site where a well has been dug. The well connects the facility with Zaita Lake, four kilometers away. Such a connection is unnecessary for a conventional weapons cache, but it is essential for a nuclear facility.

But the clearest proof that it is a nuclear facility comes from radio traffic recently intercepted by a network of spies. A voice identified as belonging to a high-ranking Hezbollah functionary can be heard referring to the "atomic factory" and mentions Qusayr. The Hezbollah man is clearly familiar with the site. And he frequently provides telephone updates to a particularly important man: Ibrahim Othman, the head of the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission.

The Hezbollah functionary mostly uses a codename for the facility: "Zamzam," a word that almost all Muslims know. According to tradition, Zamzam is the well God created in the desert for Abraham's wife and their son Ishmael. The well can be found in Mecca and is one of the sites visited by pilgrims making the Hajj. Those who don't revere Zamzam are not considered to be true Muslims.

North Korean Expert in Syria?

Work performed at the site by members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard is also mentioned in the intercepted conversations. The Revolutionary Guard is a paramilitary organization under the direct control of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It controls a large part of the Iranian economy and also plays a significant role in Iran's own nuclear activities. Not all of its missions abroad are cleared with the government of moderate President Hassan Rohani. The Revolutionary Guard is a state within a state.

Experts are also convinced that North Korea is involved in Zamzam as well. Already during the construction of the Kibar facility, Ibrahim Othman worked closely together with Chou Ji Bu, an engineer who built the nuclear reactor Yongbyon in North Korea.

Chou was long thought to have disappeared. Some thought that he had fallen victim to a purge back home. Now, though, Western intelligence experts believe that he went underground in Damascus. According to the theory, Othman never lost contact with his shady acquaintance. And experts believe that the new nuclear facility could never have been built without North Korean know-how. The workmanship exhibited by the fuel rods likewise hints at North Korean involvement.

[deletia]

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4613817,00.html>

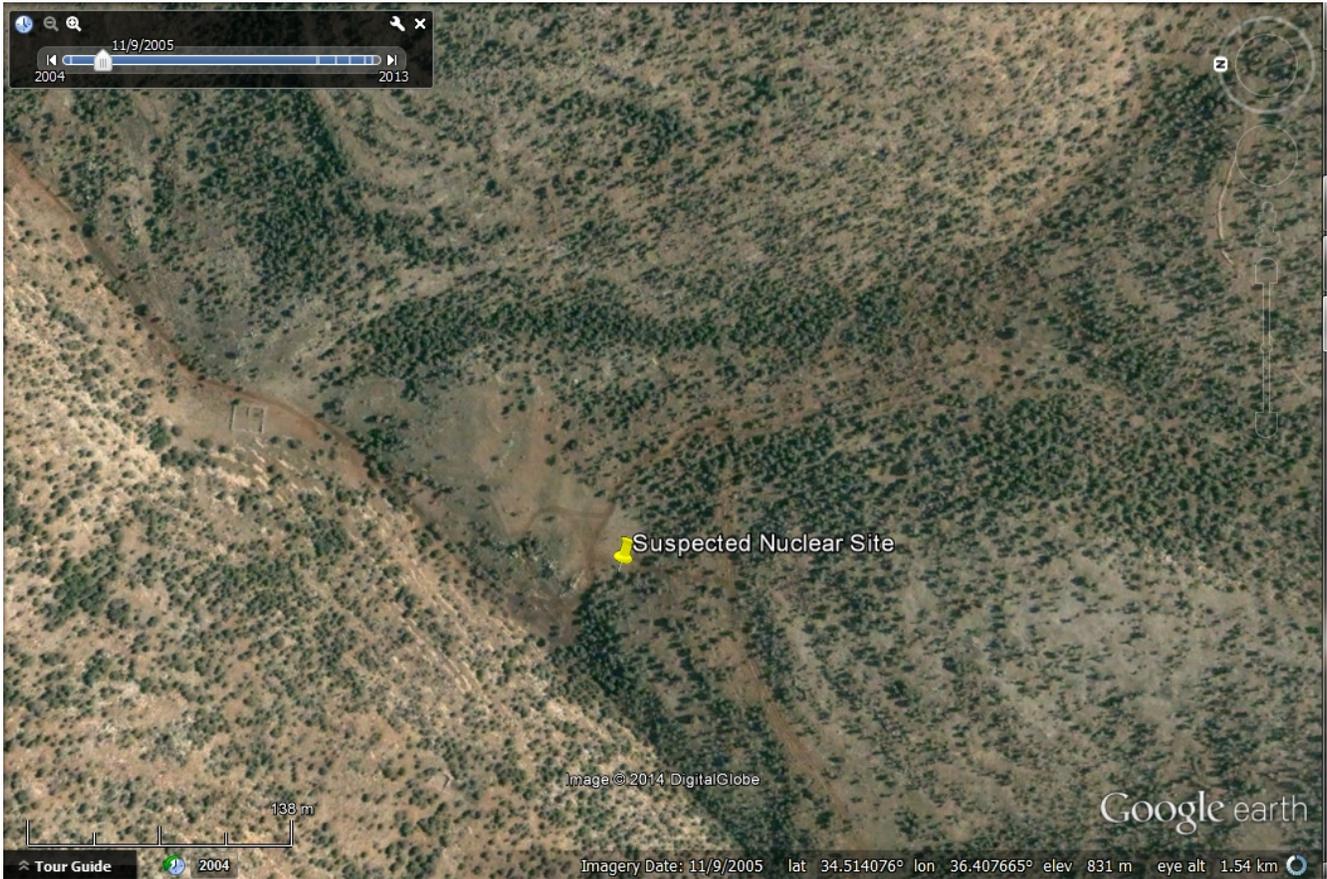
Iran's foreign minister denies helping Syria with nuclear facility

Roi Kais

Published: 01.11.15, 13:08

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denied a report in German newspaper Der Spiegel that Syrian President Bashar Assad is building a nuclear facility near the Lebanese border in cooperation with Iranian experts. "The claim is meant to sow fear and lay the groundwork for to enact misguided policy towards Syria," he said at a press conference.

Imagery of Suspected Nuclear Site, 2005-2014



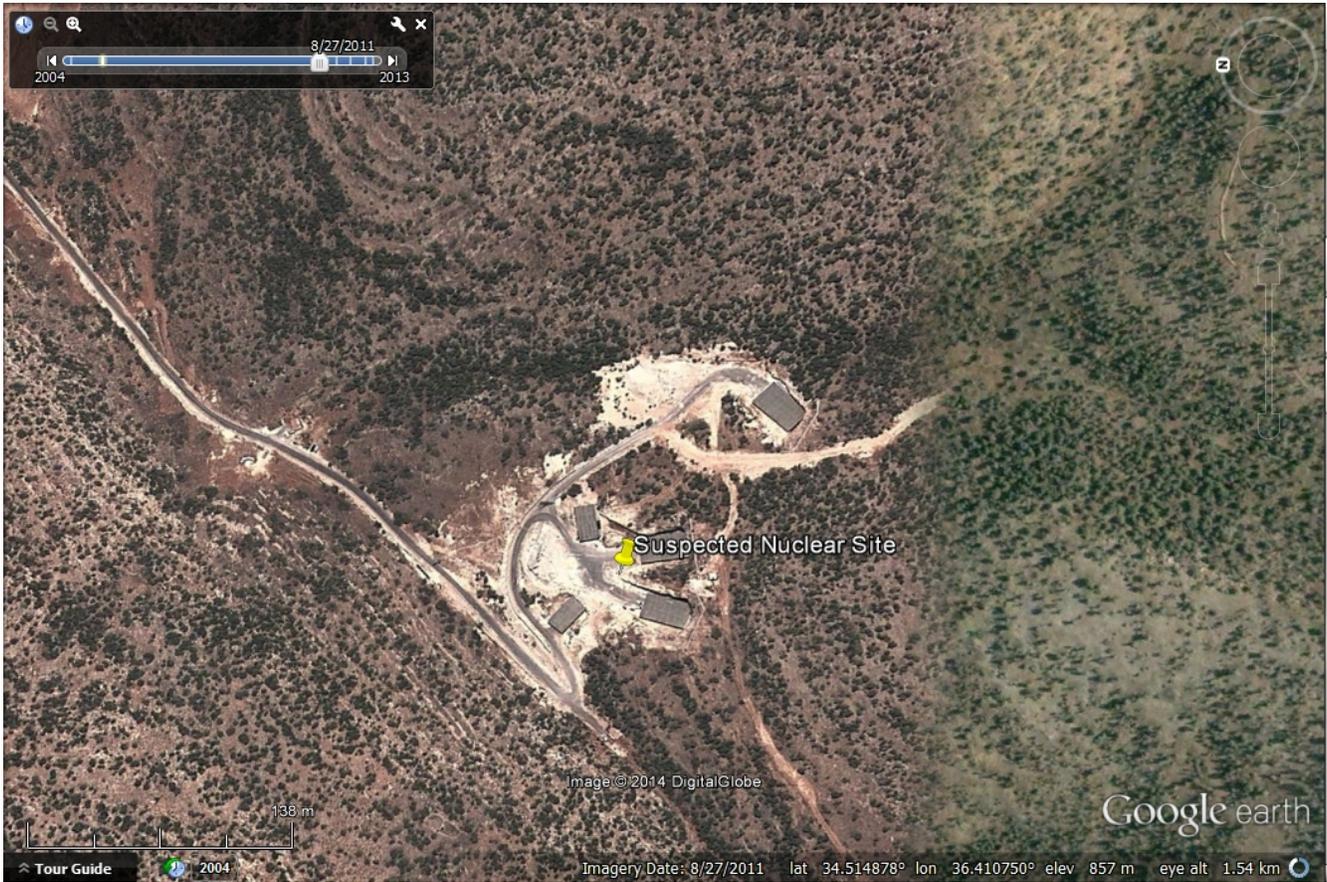
2005-11-09
Only faint trails present



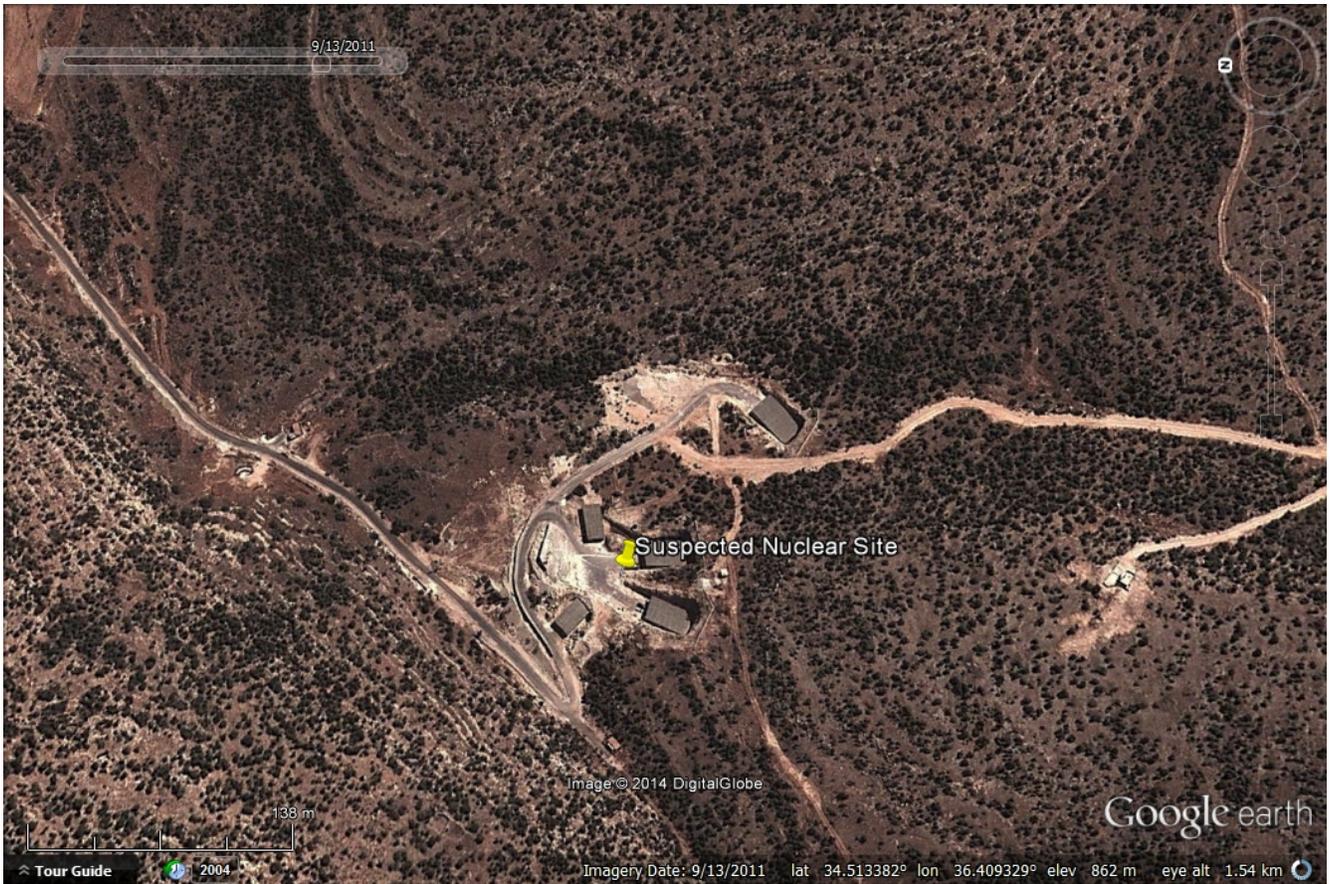
**DigitalGlobe QB02 browse image of 2008-06-29 (North is up)
No indication of construction**



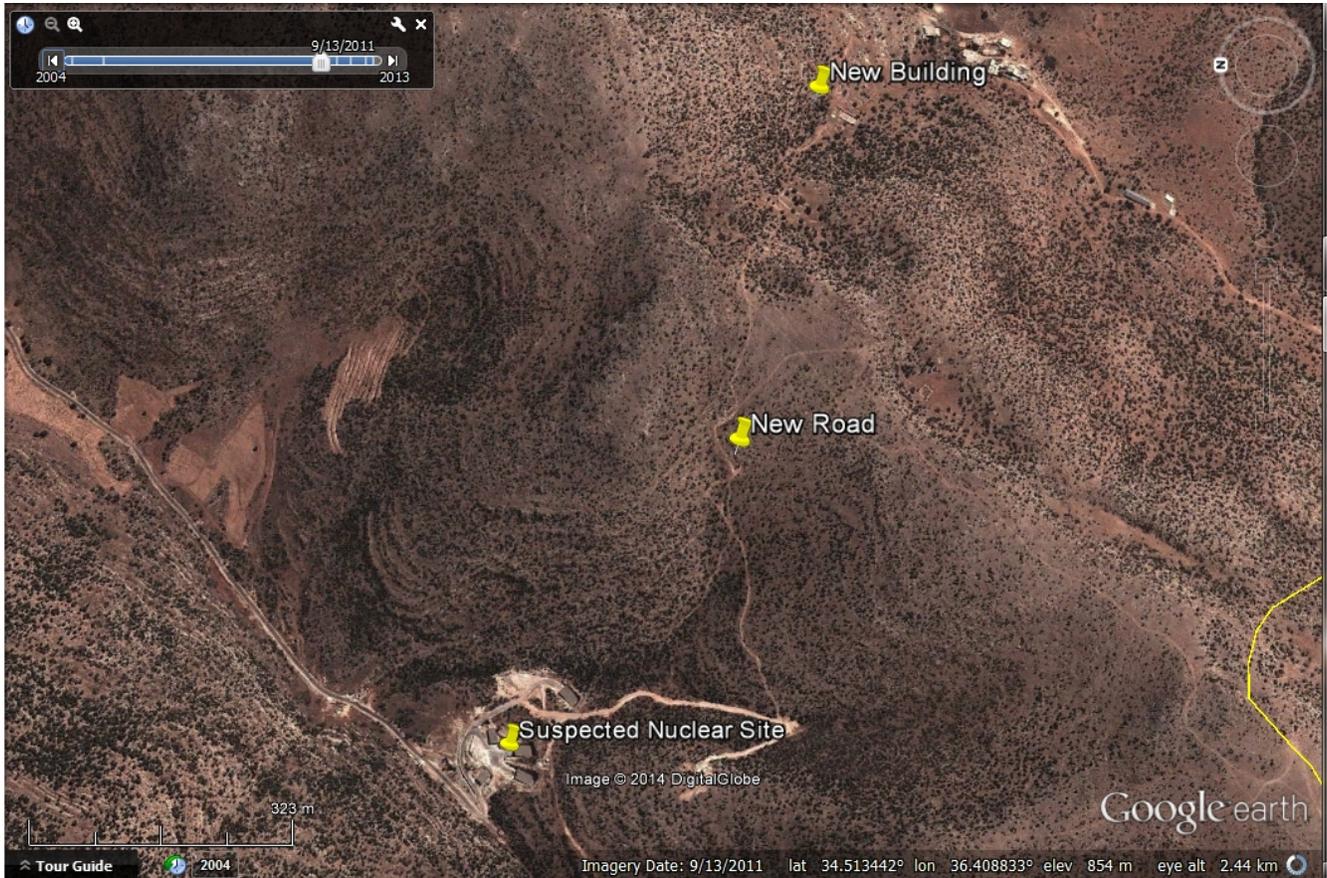
**DigitalGlobe QB02 browse image of 2009-09-12 (North is up)
Facility and road are visible in upper left corner**



2011-08-27
Buildings present, road to hill-top partially complete

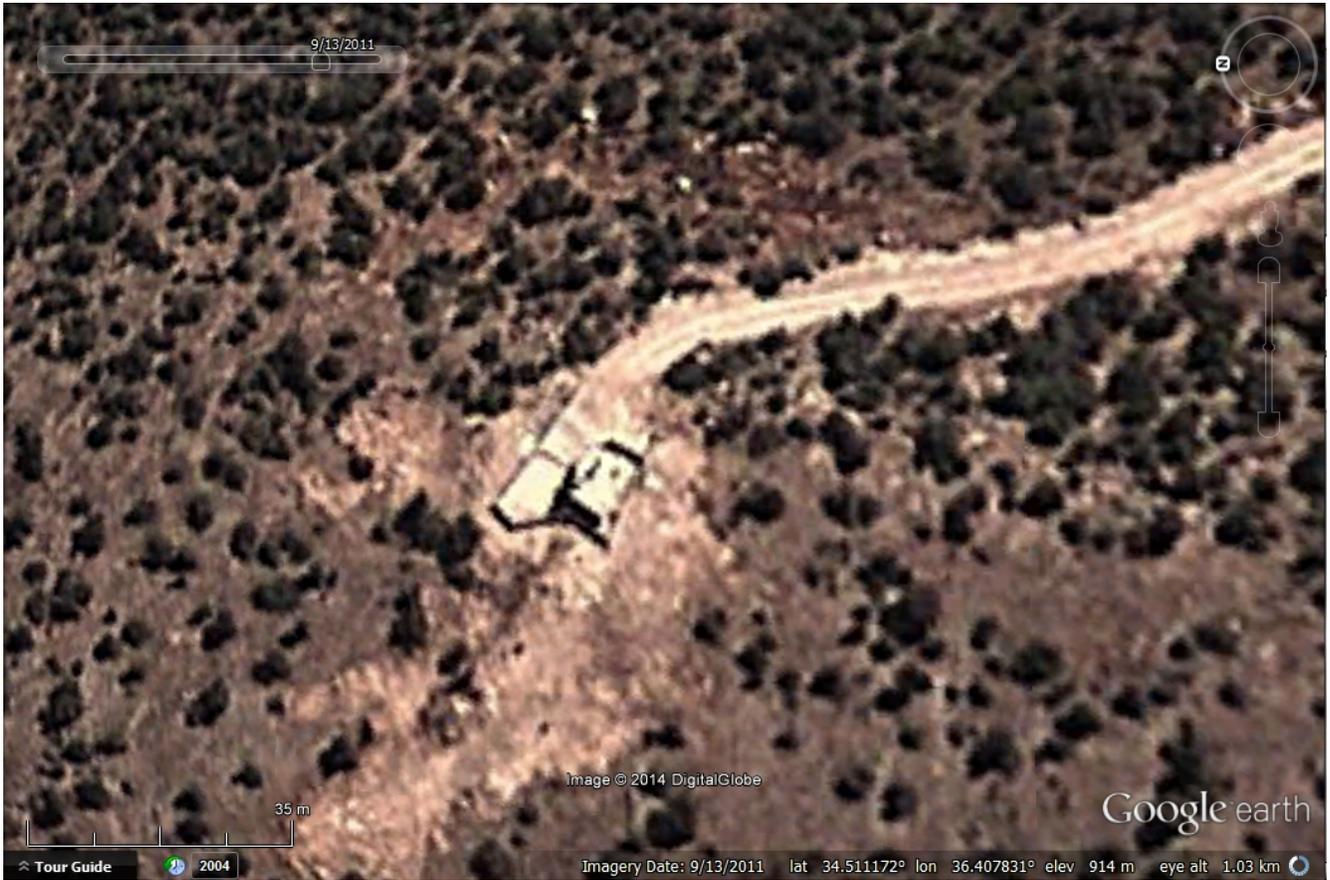


2011-09-13
Hill-top structures present, new road running to the west

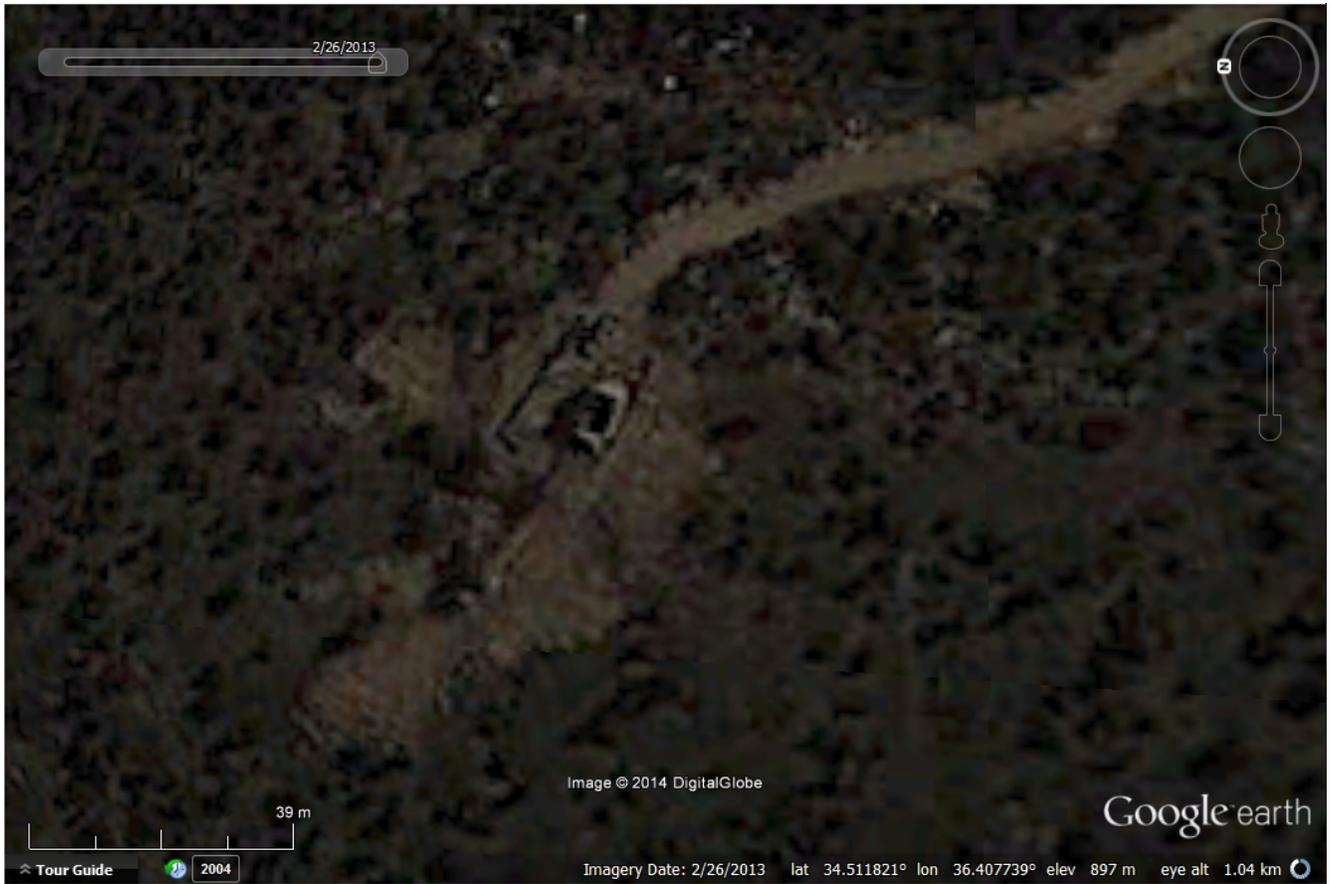


2011-09-13

Overview showing site, hill-top structures, new road, new building near end of new road some 800 meters west of hill-top



Close-up of hill-top structure 2011-09-13



Close-up of hill-top structure 2013-02-26



Topography of area

