

Monday Roundup Syria-N.Korea: Israeli Official Muzzled on Syria Attack

Contributed by WashPost-NYSun-WSJ-NYPost
Monday, 17 September 2007
Last Updated Monday, 17 September 2007

JERUSALEM -- Israel's chief of military intelligence was ordered Sunday 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.

By AMY TEIBEL, The Associated Press
Sunday, September 16, 2007; 8:52 PM

© 2007 The Associated Press

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/16/AR2007091601391_pf.html

Syria Placed on Nuclear 'Watch List'

By NICOLE WINFIELD

Associated Press

September 14, 2007 updated 9/15/07 6:01 am EDT

ROME - A senior American nuclear official said today that North Koreans were in Syria and that 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 identify the suppliers, but said North Koreans were in the country and that he could not exclude that the network run by the disgraced Pakistan nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan may have been involved.

He said it was not known if the contacts had produced any results. "Whether anything transpired remains to be seen," he said.

Syria has never commented publicly on its nuclear program. It has a small research nuclear reactor, as do several other countries in the region, including Egypt. While Israel and America have expressed concerns in the past, Damascus has not been known to make a serious push to develop a nuclear energy or weapons program.

Proliferation experts have said that Syria's weak economy would make it hard-pressed to afford nuclear technology, and that Damascus — which is believed to have some chemical weapons stocks — may have taken the position that it does not also need nuclear weapons.

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

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

North Korea, which has a longstanding alliance with Syria, condemned the Israeli air incursion. Israeli experts say North Korea and Iran both have been major suppliers of Syria's missile stock.

Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal told the Saudi newspaper Asharq al-Awsat on Thursday that the accusations of North Korean nuclear help were a "new American spin to cover up" for Israel.

Mr. Semmel, who is in Italy for a meeting tomorrow on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, said Syria was certainly on the American "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.

http://www.nysun.com/article/62692?page_no=2

 North Korea and Syria
 September 14, 2007; Page A12

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://online.wsj.com/article/SB118972618748027071.html>

SYRIA'S NUCLEAR THREATS

By ANDY SOLTIS

September 13, 2007 -- Israel "completely destroyed" a long-range-missile base in Syria, and Israeli leaders also suspect Syria and Iran are building nuclear arms with the help of North Korea, it was reported yesterday.

The Israelis have refused comment about the mysterious raid last week but new details emerged about the attack that has prompted Syria to call up army reserves and consider military retaliation, according to reports.

An Israeli-Arab newspaper, a-Sinara, said the Israeli air force blasted a joint Iranian-Syrian missile base in northern Syria.

The base, financed by Iran, appeared to be "completely destroyed," the newspaper said.

U.S. officials confirmed the airstrike, reportedly carried out by five Israeli jets. But one official said reports of the target were "confused."

CNN said Tuesday the target was a large amount of weapons en route from Iran to the Hezbollah terror group in Lebanon.

Israeli fought a bitter war with Hezbollah last year and blames Iran for supplying the guerrillas with arms and ammunition transferred through Syria.

It was reported yesterday that Israel has also conducted reconnaissance flights over Syria to find nuclear facilities.

The facilities were allegedly supplied with atomic material that North Korea developed before it agreed under U.S. pressure to shut down its nuclear program.

U.S. officials reportedly share the Israeli concern. "The suspicion is that North Korea is outsourcing uranium enrichment to Damascus," an American diplomatic source told Reuters.

North Korea yesterday denounced the Israeli raid as a "dangerous provocation," but the next step is expected from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The Kuwaiti-based newspaper Al-Jareeda said Assad's brother-in-law met recently with Hezbollah and Hamas officials to draw up retaliation plans and is leading the pressure on Assad.

The Syrian army has begun calling up reservists in response to Israel, the newspaper said.

Syria has issued diplomatic protests over the airstrike at the United Nations but indicated it would go beyond words.

"The Syrian response has not come," the nation's U.N. envoy, Bashar al-Jaafari, told BBC Arabic.

Meanwhile, Israeli President Shimon Peres called the episode "spilt milk" - but gave no details of what happened. CNN quoted sources as saying Israeli officials are "very happy" with the airstrike. With Post Wire Services

andy.soltis@nypost.com

http://www.nypost.com/seven/09132007/news/worldnews/syrias_nuclear_threats.htm

http://www.nypost.com/php/pfriendly/print.php?url=http://www.nypost.com/seven/09132007/news/worldnews/syrias_nuclear_threats.htm

IAF reportedly hit NKorean nuke facility
David Horovitz , THE JERUSALEM POST Sep. 16, 2007

Amid reports in the American media that the alleged Israeli raid into Syria 10 days ago targeted a North Korean-Syrian nuclear facility, John Bolton, the former US ambassador to the UN, told The Jerusalem Post over the weekend that "simple logic" suggested North Korea and Iran could have outsourced nuclear development "to a country that is not under suspicion" - namely Syria. Tellingly, he added: "Why would North Korea protest an Israeli strike on Syria?"

Bolton suggested that Syria, which he said has long sought a range of weapons of mass destruction, might have agreed to provide "facilities for uranium enrichment" on its territory for two allied countries which are being closely watched for nuclear development.

Bolton spoke as American newspapers reported that the alleged IAF raid, over which Israel has maintained official silence, was aimed at a facility in northern Syria close to the Turkish border, and that the strike may have been linked to the recent arrival of a shipment from North Korea, labeled as cement, but believed by Israel to contain nuclear equipment.

According to The Washington Post, Israel had been keeping a watchful eye on the facility, which is officially characterized by the Syrians as an agricultural research center. The offending shipment arrived at the Syrian port of Tartus on September 3, three days before the reported IAF raid.

The IAF strike took place "under such strict operational security that the pilots flying air cover for the attack aircraft did not know details of the mission," The Washington Post said Saturday, quoting a top US expert who it said had interviewed Israeli participants. "The pilots who conducted the attack were briefed only after they were in the air," the paper quoted him as saying.

The Syrian ambassador to the US, Imad Moustapha, warned at the weekend that Israel would "pay a price" for the raid. Interviewed in Newsweek, Moustapha dismissed as "ridiculous and untrue" the notion of Syrian-North Korean nuclear cooperation. "There are no nuclear North Korean-Syrian facilities whatsoever in Syria," Moustapha said.

On Friday, Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation policy, told the Associated Press 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.

Asked why Syria would take the risk of hosting part of a North Korean nuclear program, Bolton spoke of "Iranian compensation" and noted that "Syria is very aggressive in pursuing WMD capability." He said such a partnership would indeed be risky for Syria, but such risks might be considered worthwhile "when you're as aligned as seriously as Syria is with Iran."

"It's a diversion game - to carry on even when you are supposed to have halted, as in the case of North Korea. And I'd be surprised if Syria would do anything with North Korea without Iranian acquiescence," said Bolton.

Bolton noted that North Korea had cooperated in the past with both Syria and Iran, on ballistic missile development. For instance, he said, in the late 1990s, after an international outcry, he said, North Korea halted test launches of such missiles, but Iran continued testing and shared the results.

Bolton said he was also struck by the "hesitant way" in which Damascus had complained to the United Nations Security Council. "They have not pushed as hard as I know they know how to do in New York for condemnation. They have still not explained the nature of the attack. If it had been an attack on a Syrian military facility or civilians, they would have no problem explaining."

Bolton said it was still possible that Israel had been targeting an Iranian arms shipment being transported through Syria to Hizbullah, as some initial reports suggested. But he noted that Hizbullah had already heavily rearmed, and thought it unlikely that Israel would therefore resort to the "serious proposition" of an air strike in Syria to stop another such shipment.

Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations Bashar Ja'afari, meanwhile, said Saturday that nothing in Syria was bombed by the IAF, and nothing was damaged. Reports of such an attack were "ridiculous and not true," Army Radio reported Ja'afari as saying. Ja'afari added that "Syria does not have North Korean nuclear facilities."

On Thursday, The Washington Post reported that the US had been gathering evidence, mainly from Israel, over the past six months that North Korea has been cooperating with Syria on a nuclear facility. This evidence - codenamed "Orchard" - was said to include "dramatic satellite imagery that led some US officials to believe that the facility could be used to produce material for nuclear weapons."

In talks in Beijing in March 2003, The Washington Post further reported, "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."

In his comments on Friday, the State Department's Semmel 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," Semmel went on. "We're watching very closely. Obviously, the Israelis were watching very closely."

Asked if the suppliers could have been North Koreans, Semmel 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.

AP contributed to this report.•

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1189411406670&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FPrinter>

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.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/14/AR2007091402207_pf.html

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

By Glenn Kessler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, September 13, 2007; 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."

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/12/AR2007091202430_pf.html

From the CRNews Archives:-----

Deterrent ability recovered after strike on Syria; Nuclear rumors may be prelude to US attack -----

----- Report: Syria's 'massive' buildup focuses on missiles, chemical warheads ----- NYTimes: Bush Administration Official - Israel strikes deep into Syria to destroy N.Korean Nukes -----

----- Sources tell CNN's Christiane Amanpour Israel launched a military airstrike against Syria ----- Israeli Overflights Deep into Syria - The Questions Remain! -----

IsraeliAF Overflies Syria to Test Newly Delivered Russian Pantsyr SAMs? -----

----- Mystery Shrouds Israeli Jetfighters' Mission in Syria -----
