

Roundup: Syria-N.Korea-Israel Nuclear Material - Sunday Times, Observer, more....

Contributed by Sunday Times, Observer, more...
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This is a round up of the latest in the Syrian-North Korean suspected Nuclear Materials Delivery at the port of Tartus - disguised as a Cement Shipment, on September 3 that Israel reportedly struck on September 6th, 2007 near Dayr as-Zuwr.

John Bolton on the Israeli strike on Syria

Great analysis as usual from the former ambassador to the U.N on the airstrike that Israel executed on a supposed nuclear weapons storage facility.

{youtube}VQSxKhBJ0ZQ{/youtube}

Col. Bill Cowan's take on the recent Syria/Israel issues

Col. Bill Cowan has a different take on this recent Israeli airstrike. Coming from him, it has to make you think.

{youtube}lvkVOI_B2Ik{/youtube}

Israel Thwarted Syria's Plan To Attack

Secret information that Syria was in the midst of establishing a nuclear facility with North Korean help, was received by Israel months ago. Aside from Meir Dagan head of the Mossad, Prime Minister Olmert and cabinet and senior IDF commanders, no one else was informed. The information was later transferred to leading US Administration officials who first doubted the information. Later however it became clear that Syria was intent on surprising Israel with a devastating attack. Israel acted and thwarted the "Syrian surprise," the details were reported in the world media.09/17/07

{youtube}4uy95ecx2bY{/youtube}

The Path To A Syrian Iranian Military Alliance - A Regional War In The Making

A new military alliance between Iran and Syria is in the making. At a time when tensions are high, such an alliance can be perceived as the first signs that a regional war is in the making.09/18/07

{youtube}OKW9M9OPDM0{/youtube}

Israelis 'blew apart Syrian nuclear cache'
 Secret raid on Korean shipment
 From The Sunday Times September 16, 2007
 Uzi Mahnaimi in Tel Aviv, Sarah Baxter in Washington and Michael Sheridan

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.

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 F15s 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.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2461421.ece

Was Israeli raid a dry run for attack on Iran?

Mystery surrounds last week's air foray into Syrian territory. The Observer's Foreign Affairs Editor attempts to unravel the truth behind Operation Orchard and allegations of nuclear subterfuge

Peter Beaumont
Sunday September 16, 2007
The Observer

The head of Israel's airforce, Major-General Eliezer Shkedi, was visiting a base in the coastal city of Herzliya last week. For the 50-year-old general, also the head of Israel's Iran Command, which would fight a war with Tehran if ordered, it was a morale-boosting affair, a meet-and-greet with pilots and navigators who had flown during last summer's month-long war against Lebanon. The journalists who had turned out in large numbers were there for another reason: to question Shkedi about a mysterious air raid that happened this month, codenamed 'Orchard', carried out deep in Syrian territory by his pilots.

Shkedi ignored all questions. It set a pattern for the days to follow as he and Israel's politicians and officials maintained a steely silence, even when the questions came from the visiting French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner. Those journalists who thought of reporting the story were discouraged by the threat of Israel's military censor.

But the rumours were in circulation, not just in Israel but in Washington and elsewhere. In the days that followed, the sketchy details of the raid were accompanied by contradictory claims even as US and British officials admitted knowledge of the raid. The New York Times described the target of the raid as a nuclear site being run in collaboration with North Korean technicians. Others reported that the jets had hit either a Hizbollah convoy, a missile facility or a terrorist camp.

Amid the confusion there were troubling details that chimed uncomfortably with the known facts. Two detachable tanks from an Israeli fighter were found just over the Turkish border. According to Turkish military sources, they belonged to a Raam F15I - the newest generation of Israeli long-range bomber, which has a combat range of over 2,000km when equipped with the drop tanks. This would enable them to reach targets in Iran, leading to speculation that it was an 'operation rehearsal' for a raid on Tehran's nuclear facilities.

Finally, however, at the week's end, the first few tangible details were beginning to emerge about Operation Orchard from a source involved in the Israeli operation.

They were sketchy, but one thing was absolutely clear. 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. Flying among the Israeli fighters at great height, The Observer can reveal, was an ELINT - an electronic intelligence gathering aircraft.

What was becoming clear by this weekend amid much scepticism, largely from sources connected with the administration of President George Bush, was the nature of the allegation, if not the facts.

In a series of piecemeal leaks from US officials that gave the impression of being co-ordinated, a narrative was laid out that combined nuclear skulduggery and the surviving members of the 'axis of evil': Iran, North Korea and Syria.

It also combined a series of neoconservative foreign policy concerns: that North Korea was not being properly monitored in the deal struck for its nuclear disarmament and was off-loading its material to Iran and Syria, both of which in turn were helping to rearm Hizbollah.

Underlying all the accusations was a suggestion that recalled the bogus intelligence claims that led to the war against Iraq: that the three countries might be collaborating to supply an unconventional weapon to Hizbollah.

It is not only the raid that is odd but also, ironically, the deliberate air of mystery surrounding it, given Israel's past history of bragging about similar raids, including an attack on an Iraqi reactor. It was a secrecy so tight, in fact, that even as the Israeli aircrew climbed into the cockpits of their planes they were not told the nature of the target they were being ordered to attack.

According to an intelligence expert quoted in the Washington Post who spoke to aircrew involved in the raid, the target of

the attack, revealed only to the pilots while they were in the air, was a northern Syrian facility that was labelled as an agricultural research centre on the Euphrates river, close to the Turkish border.

According to this version of events, a North Korean ship, officially carrying a cargo of cement, docked three days before the raid in the Syrian port of Tartus. That ship was also alleged to be carrying nuclear equipment.

It is an angle that has been pushed hardest by the neoconservative hawk and former US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton. But others have entered the fray, among them the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who, without mentioning Syria by name, suggested to Fox television that the raid was linked to stopping unconventional weapons proliferation.

Most explicit of all was Andrew Semmel, acting deputy assistant Secretary of State for nuclear non-proliferation policy, who, speaking in Rome yesterday, insisted 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. '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.'

But despite the heavy inference, no official so far has offered an outright accusation. Instead they have hedged their claims in ifs and buts, assiduously avoiding the term 'weapons of mass destruction'.

There has also been deep scepticism about the claims from other officials and former officials familiar with both Syria and North Korea. They have pointed out that an almost bankrupt Syria has neither the economic nor the industrial base to support the kind of nuclear programme described, adding that Syria has long rejected going down the nuclear route.

Others have pointed out that North Korea and Syria in any case have also had a long history of close links - making meaningless the claim that the North Koreans are in Syria.

The scepticism was reflected by Bruce Reidel, a former intelligence official at the Brookings Institution's Saban Centre, quoted in the Post. 'It was a substantial Israeli operation, but I can't get a good fix on whether the target was a nuclear thing,' adding that there was 'a great deal of scepticism that there's any nuclear angle here' and instead the facility could have been related to chemical or biological weapons.

The opaqueness surrounding the nature of what may have been hit in Operation Orchard has been compounded by claims that US knowledge over the alleged 'agricultural site' has come not from its own intelligence and satellite imaging, but from material supplied to Washington from Tel Aviv over the last six months, material that has been restricted to just a few senior officials under the instructions of national security adviser Stephen Hadley, leaving many in the intelligence community uncertain of its veracity.

Whatever the truth of the allegations against Syria - and Israel has a long history of employing complex deceptions in its operations - the message being delivered from Tel Aviv is clear: if Syria's ally, Iran, comes close to acquiring a nuclear weapon, and the world fails to prevent it, either through diplomatic or military means, then Israel will stop it on its own.

So Operation Orchard can be seen as a dry run, a raid using the same heavily modified long-range aircraft, procured specifically from the US with Iran's nuclear sites in mind. It reminds both Iran and Syria of the supremacy of its aircraft and appears to be designed to deter Syria from getting involved in the event of a raid on Iran - a reminder, if it were required, that if Israel's ground forces were humiliated in the second Lebanese war its airforce remains potent, powerful and unchallenged.

And, critically, the raid on Syria has come as speculation about a war against Iran has begun to re-emerge after a relatively quiet summer.

With the US keen to push for a third UN Security Council resolution authorising a further tranche of sanctions against Iran, both London and Washington have increased the heat by alleging that they are already fighting 'a proxy war' with Tehran in Iraq.

Perhaps more worrying are the well-sourced claims from conservative thinktanks in the US that there have been 'instructions' by the office of Vice-President Dick Cheney to roll out support for a war against Iran.

In the end there is no mystery. Only a frightening reminder. In a world of proxy threats and proxy actions, the threat of military action against Iran has far from disappeared from the agenda.

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,,2170188,00.html>

Lessons from Israeli air raid spread far beyond Syria

Jonathan Manthorpe

Vancouver Sun

Wednesday, September 19, 2007

The repercussions of an Israeli air force attack on a rudimentary Syrian nuclear development program on Sept. 6 are reverberating around the Middle East and as far away as Asia.

The attack appears to have implications for the vulnerability to air attack of Iran's nuclear program, which the United States and the European Union believe is aimed at building weapons, not just energy generation as Tehran claims.

The attack is also probably responsible for China's postponing of six-nation talks that were scheduled to discuss the next moves in the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons production facilities.

Few details about the Israeli attack are known for certain, but a general picture of the operation has emerged from anonymous briefings given by serving and retired intelligence and military officials.

The Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad has for years been amassing medium-range missiles and chemical weapons and is an established conduit for arms supplied by Iran for the Hezbollah militia in southern Lebanon and the Hamas fighters in the Palestinian territory.

But early this year Israel's intelligence service Mossad became convinced Syria had started a nuclear development project with the aid of North Korea. There is also some suspicion that North Korea may be hiding some of its nuclear weapons-making equipment in Syria while Pyongyang negotiates for economic aid in return for ostensibly giving up its nuclear program.

The regime of Kim Jong-il has categorically denied the allegations. "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," said a statement published by the government news agency.

Mossad came to believe the Syrians were developing the nuclear program in what was purported to be an agricultural research centre in northeastern Syria near the border with Turkey. The Israelis think the Syrians are using the plant to extract uranium from phosphates.

What seems to have determined the timing of the attack was the arrival at the Syrian port of Tartus on Sept. 3 of a ship from North Korea with a cargo claimed to be cement. The Israelis believe the cargo was nuclear-related equipment, though exactly what has not been spelled out.

There are snippets of dramatic detail circulating about the operation itself, including claims that secrecy for "Operation Orchard" was so tight the pilots of the F-15 fighter-bombers of Israel's 69th Squadron were not given details of the objective until they were airborne.

But a significant aspect of the operation is that the aircraft were able to avoid or electronically jam Syria's newly installed Russian-made Pantsyr-S1E air defence system. Syria took delivery in August of 10 batteries of what is billed as a highly sophisticated system with each battery linking radar to two 30-mm anti-aircraft guns and 12 surface-to-air missiles capable of engaging aircraft up to 20 kilometres away.

The significance of Israel's avoidance of this system is that Iran is upgrading its air defences with the same type of Pantsyr batteries. The implication is that Iran's nuclear development program may be more vulnerable to air attack by Israel or the United States than has been evident.

Israel, which has its own stock of nuclear weapons, has always made it clear it will not abide other Middle East states, especially antagonistic countries, being similarly armed. Remarks by Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Israel should be "wiped off the map" make it probable that Tel Aviv will attempt to destroy his nuclear program given the opportunity.

Ahmadinejad appears to have immediately appreciated the implications of the Israeli warplanes eluding Syria's Pantsyr batteries. There are reports his nephew Ali Akbar Mehrdian was sent to Syria soon after the attack to assess the situation.

China also seems to have quickly understood that the allegations that North Korea was involved in the Syrian program could unravel the months of painstaking work involved in getting Kim Jong-il to agree to give up his nuclear weapons. Beijing feared that American officials would not be able to restrain themselves from lobbing accusations at the North Koreans and the safest remedy was to cancel the meeting.

Sun International Affairs Columnist

jmanthorpe@png.canwest.com

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<http://www.canada.com/components/print.aspx?id=f0b9fb92-c8c6-4a95-8a58-f4644c52d568>

The secretive Syrian-N. Korean alliance

Alex Kogan, Jerusalem Post correspondent , THE JERUSALEM POST Sep. 18, 2007

Global media speculation centering on a North Korean-flagged freighter that docked in the Syrian port of Tartus three days before the alleged September 6 IAF strike on Syrian territory has focused the world's attention on the mysterious port. In fact, published sources demonstrate the centrality of Tartus to a prolonged history of secretive military cooperation between the two countries.

Two Web sites list the Al-Hamad freighter as having docked at Tartus on September 3, flying North Korean colors. A third Web site, run by the Egyptian Transportation Ministry, says the Al-Hamad docked in the Nile Delta one month earlier and later passed by the northern Lebanese port of Tripoli.

The Al-Hamad is believed to be a 42-year-old, 1,700-ton general-purpose freighter. Its cargo on the fateful voyage was listed as cement. The origin of the freighter, according to one report, has been removed from Web sites that track shipping movements.

According to Russian sources, the London-based Al Mashad Al Siasi publication and the AXIS Global Research and Analysis Web site, Tartus is one of the bases where Syrian Scud missile launchers (Transporter-Elevator-Launcher vehicles) are stationed. Most of the launchers were brought to the port from North Korea or built using North Korean blueprints and parts.

The process reportedly began in 1991. That March, using the \$2 billion that it received from America for participation in the First Gulf War, Syria contracted for the delivery of more than 150 Scud-C missiles and 20 launchers from North Korea, for an estimated \$500 million. Western intelligence officials said the sale received prior approval from Saudi Arabia, Steve Emerson of The Wall Street Journal reported that summer. The equipment was to be shipped to the Syrian ports of Tartus and Latakia aboard foreign vessels.

The first such delivery took place in May 1991, according to reported comments by David Ivri, the former director-general of Israel's Defense Ministry. Carried aboard a Yugoslavian freighter, the missiles were delivered to Tartus, as reported by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and by Bill Gertz in the Washington Times.

The North Korean ship Mupo reportedly returned home without delivering its cargo of missiles and assembly equipment for Syria - but the cargo did get there in the end. The Mupo was said by US defense officials to be carrying eight launchers and additional missiles, part of the Syrian order for 150 Scud-C's, the Washington Times reported. The ship followed a circuitous route in an effort to avoid Israeli interception, and its cargo was transferred to another freighter at Gibraltar.

In June 1991, the Washington Times reported, a large shipment of North Korean Scud-C missiles arrived in Cyprus and was transferred to smaller vessels for transshipment to Latakia and Tartus.

Next, in March 1992, 24 Scud-C missiles, along with missile-production and assembly equipment, were delivered to Tartus aboard the North Korean freighter Tae Hung Ho. The manufacturing equipment was destined for missile factories in the Syrian cities of Hama and Aleppo, the Nuclear Threat Initiative Web site reported.

Later, according to the same Web site and other sources, Tartus became a secondary conduit for military cargoes, as most subsequent shipments were made by air, sometimes through Iran.

By 1996, according to the AXIS Global Research and Analysis Web site, the Tartus base had several dozen mid-range Scud-B missiles, able to strike up to 300 kilometers away.

In 2000, several reports suggested (including from the Wisconsin Project On Nuclear Arms Control and the Nuclear

Threat Initiative Web site) that the North Korean firm Chon-gchon-gang had delivered 50 Scud-D (No-Dong) missiles to Syria via Tartus, and some of them were installed at the local base. Other sources said Syria had also acquired seven new launchers. At the end of September 2000 and in the middle of 2001, some of these missiles were modernized and test-fired in the Aleppo area.

Syria's acquisition of Scud-D missiles was seen as significant because it would allow Damascus to strike targets throughout Israel from launchers positioned deep inside its territory and less easily detected by Israel.

According to Russian sources, the Wisconsin Project and Munich Focus (in November 2005), the Scud-D may have had problems with its guidance system, later reportedly addressed.

Reports on the Middle East Intelligence Bulletin and Nuclear Threat Initiative Web sites also noted that Syria had begun assembling Scud-C missiles at a factory built by North Korea. These reports indicated that Syria was capable of producing some but not all of the components needed to construct the projectiles. Several of the 26 launchers were reportedly adapted for Scuds with chemical warheads. It is unknown how many of them are stationed in Tartus.

In June 2002, US and Israeli officials said Syria was mass producing a longer-range version of its Scud C missile, with possible assistance from North Korea and Iran, Jane's Defence Weekly reported. Unconfirmed reports suggested that North Korean scientists were working at several Scud launch sites, including at the Tartus base.

On May 19, 2004, US officials confirmed that a train crash in North Korea had caused the death of approximately a dozen Syrian technicians. The Syrians were accompanying a train car full of missiles and missile components being moved from a facility near the Chinese border to a North Korean port. From there, they were to have been shipped to Tartus or Latakia; the cargo was destroyed in the subsequent explosion. The officials said there was no evidence of chemical or biological weapons in the shipment.

Then the Russians reportedly entered the picture. Several Western experts (in particular the AXIS Global Research and Analysis Web site) reported that in November 2004, two ships from the Russian Black Sea Fleet, acting in the framework of a joint exercise with NATO on the "prevention of WMD distribution," arrived for a "routine check" at Tartus.

They were allegedly carrying parts and blueprints needed for the Syrian Scud upgrade program. From there, some of the parts were supposedly transported to the Aleppo production site and some, with the help of Russian technicians, were mounted on Scuds at the Tartus missile base. Some Russian sources claimed these were new guidance systems.

On March 9, 2005, yet another Russian Black Sea Fleet landing vessel, the Azov, left for Syria, carrying machinery for "rebuilding of the moorage" at the Tartus technical base and "new equipment to replace obsolete items at the base's storage facilities." When the ship arrived at the Syrian port, several meetings "between local authorities and officers of the Russian Navy" took place, Russian media reported.

Less than two months later, Damascus conducted various missile-firings: The Syrians launched one Scud-B missile with a range of 300 kilometers, and two Scud-D missiles with a range of 700 kilometers.

The missiles were reportedly designed to deliver airburst chemical weapons. Some Syrian opposition sources have said that additional equipment for the missile program arrived on board the Azov. So too, reportedly, did a group of Russian specialists to oversee test launches of new Scuds.

This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1189411431848&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

 Report: Eight IAF warplanes hit Syria
 Tue., September 18, 2007
 By Haaretz Correspondents and Agencies

Syria had been planning a "devastating surprise" for Israel, according to an Israeli source quoted in London-based paper The Times on Sunday. The report also claimed that Israeli ground forces were involved in the Israel Air Force air raid against a Syrian installation, which foreign sources described as a nuclear facility.

According to the British weekly, the Israeli source said that planning for the strike 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.

Dagan apparently feared such a device could eventually be installed on Scud-C missiles in Syria's arsenal.

"This was supposed to be a devastating Syrian surprise for Israel," The Times quoted an Israeli source as saying. "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."

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported Sunday that a senior North Korean official denied a Washington Post report that Pyongyang was transferring nuclear know-how to Syria. The report in the Washington Post suggested intelligence, including satellite images, revealed a facility in Syria which may be used to build nuclear warheads.

"They often say things that are groundless," Yonhap quoted deputy chief of the North Korean mission to the United Nations Kim Myong-gil as saying in response to the Post report. The North Korean official did not elaborate.

Another British newspaper, The Observer, reported yesterday that Israel's air strike, involved as many as eight aircraft.

According to the Times report, an IAF commando team that had arrived on the ground days earlier directed laser beams at the target for the jets.

Syria's ambassador to Washington denied foreign media reports over the weekend that an Israel Air Force strike on his country 11 days ago targeted a nuclear project being undertaken with the cooperation of North Korea.

According to the foreign press reports, the target of the IAF raid was a Syrian nuclear installation constructed in the northeastern corner of the country, with North Korean assistance.

In an interview to Newsweek, Imad Moustapha called the reports "absolutely, totally, fundamentally ridiculous and untrue."

"There are no nuclear North Korean-Syrian facilities whatsoever in Syria," Moustapha said.

In an article Saturday, The Washington Post argued that the IAF strike aimed at a shipment that had arrived in Syria aboard a North Korean vessel three days earlier, and may have included equipment and materials related to nuclear technology.

North Korea is widely thought to sell conventional weapons to Syria though analysts say its armaments trade in general has been hit hard by tough sanctions since the reclusive state nearly a year ago tested its first nuclear device.

Pyongyang agreed earlier this year to start dismantling its nuclear facilities, and source of weapons-grade plutonium, in return for massive aid. More recently, the United States has held out the possibility of normalizing ties if the ostracized North Korea completely scraps its nuclear weapons program.

On Friday, the lead U.S. negotiator with North Korea declined to confirm the Syria reports but said they underscored the need for Pyongyang to give up its nuclear programs.

The United States is keeping close watch on Syria and North Korea, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said yesterday, commenting on the possible nuclear cooperation between the two countries.

"I think it would be a real problem," he said when asked how the Bush administration would view such an effort.

Meanwhile, senior Israeli officials remained tight lipped about the whole affair.

During yesterday's briefing to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee by Military Intelligence Chief Amos Yadlin, the general was cautioned by the committee chair, MK Tzahi Hanegbi, not to discuss the reports of the IAF strike in Syria.

In his briefing, Yadlin told the committee that Israel has restored its deterrence capabilities since the Second Lebanon War last summer.

The MI chief also said that Israel's deterrent power would have an effect on the entire region, including Syria and Iran.

However, Yadlin also warned that Iran's plans for acquiring nuclear weapons and for elevating its strategic status to that of a regional power, remain unchanged.

"Iran apparently has no basic intention to change the objective of its nuclear project, [and] has begun to speak overtly on the matter," Yadlin told the committee.

"Iran has a few messages to the world, and the first is that it has crossed the threshold and knows how to make nuclear devices. The second message is that the West won't be able to halt its project with sanctions. The third is that the price

of confrontation with Iran is very high and that it has means of deterrence - both militaristic and terror-based," Yadlin said.

He added that the sanctions imposed on Iran "are mainly economic sanctions and are not having much of an effect."

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/904114.html>

 U.S. confirms Syria-N. Korea nuke link
 Monday, September 17, 2007

WASHINGTON — The United States has determined that Syria has been seeking nuclear weapons from North Korea.

"We do know that there are a number of foreign technicians that have been in Syria," Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Semmel said. "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."

One North Korean-flagged ship, Al Hamad, arrived in the Syrian port of Tartous on Sept. 3. Three days later, the Israel Air Force attacked an unspecified target in northeastern Syria along the Euphrates River near the border with Turkey, Middle East Newswire reported.

Semmel, responsible for nuclear non-proliferation at the State Department, said Syria has been placed on the U.S. nuclear watch list. In a briefing in Rome, Semmel said Damascus was suspected of contacting a range of nuclear suppliers.

Officials said North Korea has provided nuclear material and guidance to Syria. They said Pyongyang has helped establish underground facilities that could be used to produce weapons-grade uranium for the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"There are indicators that they do have something going on there," Semmel, who did not rule out the involvement of the so-called nuclear smuggling network once led by Abdul Qadeer Khan, said on Sept. 13.

Officials said North Korean ships arrived in Syria in mid-2007 with cargo suspected to have included weapons of mass destruction components. They said both Israel and the United States have been tracking these shipments, which in some cases were registered as cement.

[On Sunday, Iran said Russia was ready to ship enriched uranium fuel for the Bushehr nuclear energy reactor. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said the nuclear fuel for Bushehr was inspected and sealed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.]

"There are North Korean people there," Semmel said. "There's no question about that. Just as there are a lot of North Koreans in Iraq and Iran."

Israel has not denied an air force operation in Syria. But officials have refused to provide any details.

For its part, Syria has insisted that Israeli fighter-jets did not stage an attack. On Monday, Syrian sources told the London-based A-Sharq Al Awsat daily that the Israeli operation was meant to test Syrian air defense systems.

But Western intelligence sources said the Israeli strike, termed Operation Orchard, consisted of eight aircraft, at least two of them F-15I fighter-jets, four F-16Is and a G-550 electronic intelligence aircraft. They said the operation was coordinated with the United States.

"We are watching very closely," Semmel, who did not confirm U.S. involvement, said. "Obviously, the Israelis were watching very closely."

The State Department confirmed Semmel's remarks, but refused to comment. On Sunday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the United States was watching North Korea and Syria "very carefully."

"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," Gates said in a television interview. "I think it would be a real problem."

Former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, said Syria has long sought nuclear and other WMD

capabilities. Bolton said Syria might have agreed to provide uranium enrichment facilities to Iran and North Korea, both of whom have been under international pressure to end their nuclear weapons programs. On Monday, North Korea delayed talks scheduled for Sept. 19 for an end to the nation's nuclear weapons program.

"Syria is very aggressive in pursuing WMD capability," Bolton told the Israeli daily, Jerusalem Post. "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."

http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2007/ea_nkorea_09_17.asp

 Israeli air strike 'took out Syria's secret nuclear site'
 Last updated at 23:41pm on 17th September 2007

Israel destroyed a fledgling Syrian nuclear weapons system in a recent air raid it has been claimed.

The suggestion fuelled speculation that the air strike on a remote area of northern Syria wiped out a secret nuclear programme established with North Korean equipment.

John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told Israeli television: "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."

He added: "I think this is a clear message not only to Syria. I think it's a clear message to Iran as well that its continued efforts to acquire nuclear weapons are not going to go unanswered."

Israel imposed a rare news blackout after the raid.

But Syria claimed Israeli warplanes were forced to drop their munitions and fuel harmlessly in the desert after coming under anti-aircraft fire.

Syria has also protested to Israel about the breach of its airspace and threatened to retaliate.

In a marked escalation of the crisis last night, Iran reportedly threatened to rally to Syria's defence if its Arab ally is attacked by either by Israel or the U.S.

Israeli radio claimed a Persian-language website had suggested Iran has 600 Shihab-3 missiles that it will launch at Israel on the first day Iran or Syria is attacked.

With a possible range of up to 1,260 miles, the Shihab-3 could reach all of Israel, including its nuclear reactor in the south.

The website also said that Iran would launch up to 15 missiles at U.S. targets inside Iraq if either Iran or Syria is attacked.

The air raid came amid heightened tensions over Iran's nuclear ambitions and fears that another country in the Middle East may be aligning itself with North Korea over an atomic programme.

Syria continues to host Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other deadly terror groups in its capital Damascus.

It has also been accused of allowing Iran to ship huge amounts of military hardware across its territory to the Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israel has always made clear it will respond if attacked, perhaps with its own, far superior nuclear capability.

The news blackout means Israeli newspapers have been forced to recycle speculation from around the world.

One of the most common claims is that the target of the attack was a shipment of nuclear weapons from North Korea bound for use by Syria or possibly to be passed on to Hezbollah.

The Israeli daily newspaper Maariv quoted 'foreign reports' of a raid by combined air and ground forces more than 200 miles inside Syrian territory.

It suggested "the operation carried out was one of the most dangerous and brilliant in the history of the Israeli defence forces".

Andrew Semmel, the US deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear nonproliferation, said Syria was on the country's nuclear 'watch list'.

"There are indicators that they do have something going on there," he added.

"We do know 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."

The few tight-lipped comments coming from Israeli leaders seemed, however, to suggest that any danger was past - at least for now.

The raid is said to have involved a group of up to eight Israeli F-15 warplanes, which penetrated Syrian airspace before dawn on September 6.

Two jettisoned fuel tanks were later discovered in Turkish territory.

It was the first Israeli raid into Syria since October 2003, when Israeli jets attacked a terrorist training camp on the outskirts of Damascus.

If it is confirmed that the air strike was to destroy a nuclear site in Syria, it will evoke memories of Israel's 1981 raid on an Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osiraq.

The facility was crippled in a surprise attack aimed at preventing Saddam Hussein from acquiring the means to make nuclear weapons.

• The U.S. and Iran were urged last night to cool their warlike rhetoric.

The UN's chief nuclear negotiator, Mohamed ElBaradei, also condemned as 'hype' a French warning that the world should prepare for war over Tehran's nuclear programme.

In a pointed dig at the U.S., he told the international community to remember the debacle in Iraq before considering any similar action against Iran.

"There are rules on how to use force and I would hope that everybody would have gotten the lesson after the Iraq situation, where 700,000 innocent civilians have lost their lives on the suspicion that a country has nuclear weapons," he said.

Rising tension between Washington and Tehran comes as the U.S. pressures Britain to beef up military patrols along Iran's border with Iraq.

At Washington's request last week Britain moved 350 soldiers to police the border east of Basra.

Senior Iranian officials believe the U.S. is too bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan to launch another war.

The withdrawal of UK forces from the centre of Basra earlier this month has also been portrayed by Iran as a "shameful defeat for the British occupiers".

French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner said at the weekend that a nuclear Iran would be a "danger for the whole world".

He added: "We have to prepare for the worst."

"And the worst is war."

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=482390&in_page_id=1770&ct=5

This is the original Washington Post Article that detailed Uranium phosphate concerns.

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

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/14/AR2007091402207.html>

Washington Post report: Israel allegedly attacked nuclear installation in Syria
By Barak Ravid, Mon., September 17, 2007

The target of an Israel Air Force raid 10 days ago in Syria was a nuclear installation that was constructed in the northeastern corner of the country, with North Korean assistance, according to foreign media reports. Yesterday, The Washington Post published an article saying the strike was aimed at a shipment that had arrived in Syria aboard a North Korean vessel three days earlier, and may have included equipment and materials related to nuclear technology.

The Washington Post quoted an American expert on Middle East affairs who had talked with Israelis involved in the attack. According to the unnamed American source, the North Korean vessel arrived on September 3 at the port of Tartus and unloaded a shipment registered as "cement."

Even though the nature of the shipment is still unclear, the expert noted in the report that "the emerging consensus in Israel was that it delivered nuclear equipment." He also said that the target of the attack was "a northern Syrian facility that was labeled an agricultural research center on the Euphrates River, close to the Turkish border."

According to The Washington Post's report, "Israel has kept a close eye on the facility, believing that Syria was using it to extract uranium from phosphates."

The report also states that a great deal of secrecy shrouded the attack. The pilots in the attacking force were briefed about the nature of the target only after they were airborne, while the fighters providing cover for the strike aircraft were never told what the nature of the target was.

Last Thursday, The Washington Post reported that since March 2007, American intelligence has gathered information on the cooperation between Syria and North Korea in efforts to build a facility where materials for building a nuclear weapon could be produced.

The intelligence, including satellite photographs taken last month, mostly originated in Israel and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley shared it with very few U.S. officials.

That same day Fox News reported that U.S. intelligence had obtained evidence indicating that North Korea was assisting Syria in developing a military nuclear program. U.S. intelligence also reportedly assigned the code-name ORCHARD to the case, which was primarily based on Israeli intelligence sources and American aerial photographs.

According to the report, North Korea had sold Syria equipment for enriching uranium and had seconded engineers and scientists for work in Syria.

A day earlier, The New York Times quoted a senior Bush administration official as saying that Israeli aircraft had recently photographed Syrian installations that may be related to nuclear activities there.

Meanwhile, the German weekly Der Spiegel reported yesterday that a German naval vessel patrolling the coast of Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission identified two F-15 fighters penetrating Syria's airspace on its radar 10 days ago.

A Western military source, quoted in the report, claimed that the aircraft were on their way to attack a Syrian arms shipment to Hezbollah, but were surprised at the speed with which Syrian air defenses became aware of their presence.

For the first time, on Friday, a senior U.S. official, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Nonproliferation at the State Department, Dr. Andrew Semmel, said in an interview to the Associated Press that the U.S. is concerned about the Syrian-North Korean nuclear cooperation.

In addition to pointing out the fact that North Korean technicians were operating in Syria, he said that they were working on a nuclear project.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/903968.html>

'Ground forces were operating in Syria'
JPost.com Staff , THE JERUSALEM POST Sep. 16, 2007

Unconfirmed details of Israel's alleged foray into Syrian airspace 10 days ago continued to circulate Sunday in foreign media with a latest report by The Sunday Times.

According to the report, at a rendezvous point on the ground, a Shaldag air force commando team waited to direct their

laser beams at the target for the approaching IAF planes. The team had arrived a day earlier, taking up position near a large underground depot. Soon the bunkers were in flames.

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

Dagan feared such a device could later be mounted on North-Korean-made Scud-C missiles, the report said.

"This was supposed to be a devastating Syrian surprise for Israel," said an Israeli source to the Times. "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."

According to an IAF 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 hour and a half, making it easy for air force officials to spot the facility, the Times reported.

According to the report, early in the summer, Defense Minister Ehud Barak had given the order to double IDF presence in the 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 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 that point, Barak feared events could get out of control. A decision was then taken to reduce the number of IDF troops on the Golan Heights, signaling to Damascus the tension was over. Syria relaxed its guard shortly before the strike, the report said.

Only three Israeli cabinet ministers are said to have been in the know, according to the report: Olmert, Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. 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 F15s would not mistakenly attack their US counterparts, the report said.

Meanwhile, the British Observer claimed that as many as eight F-15 and F-16 fighter jets participated in the operation.

The planes, said the report, were equipped with 'Maverick' heavy missiles and 500 pound bombs. Escorting the pilots high above them was an ELINT (electronic intelligence) gathering aircraft, the report claimed.

The Observer estimated that the IAF was holding a rehearsal ahead of a future operation.

The operation "can be seen as a dry run, a raid using the same heavily modified long-range aircraft, procured specifically from the US with Iran's nuclear sites in mind," the report said.

Meanwhile, US intimations of Syrian nuclear cooperation with North Korea might be a prelude to an attack on Syria, a state-run newspaper said.

The comment published in an editorial in one of the largest state-owned dailies, al-Thawra, came two days after a senior US nuclear official said the North Koreans were in Syria and that Damascus may have had contacts with "secret suppliers" to obtain nuclear equipment.

Al-Thawra predicted that more accusations could well be on their way. "The magnitude of these false accusations might be a prelude to a new aggression against Syria," al-Thawra daily said.

The newspaper called the suggestions of atomic cooperation "a flagrant lie" and said Syria has repeatedly asked the international community to disarm Israel of its nuclear weapons and called for a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction.

This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1189411409098&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

NUKES IN SYRIA?
By PETER BROOKES

September 18, 2007 -- WITH Congress' hearings on Iraq grabbing the nation's attention last week, hardly anyone took notice of the news that Israel may have conducted a military air strike on a suspected nuclear facility in northern Syria.

Yes, that's right: a possible Syrian nuclear facility.

Originally, it was believed the early-September raid by Israeli fighters was against an Iranian weapons shipment crossing Syria en route to Lebanon, where Hezbollah is rearming at a feverish pace since its 2006 war with Israel.

But speculation on the nature of the Israeli mission into Syria has spread like wildfire - thanks to official and unofficial chatter about the strike's real target.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates refused to comment on the Sunday morning news shows. But late last week a senior State Department official involved in nuclear-nonproliferation issues told The Associated Press: "There are indicators that they [Syria] do have something going on there [at the facility that was struck by the Israelis]. We do know that there are a number of foreign technicians that have been in Syria."

The official added: "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."

Iran and Syria are allies, so Tehran naturally comes to mind as the source of any nuclear material for Damascus. But some believe that Syria's super-secret supplier may instead be North Korea. Most sources are linking the Israeli raid to the arrival of a North Korean ship that docked recently in the Syrian port of Tartus. (North Korean ships are notoriously up to no good: smuggling illegal weapons, spies, drugs or other contraband.)

Naturally, all the suspects deny everything. Yet Syria's been relatively unmiffed by the Israeli raid, further suggesting that something dubious is up.

Damascus is known to have spent considerable time, effort and money on acquiring ballistic missiles as well as chemical and (maybe) biological weapons. So it's certainly possible that the Syrian regime has begun some kind of clandestine nuclear-weapons program, too. (It has a small, publicly acknowledged, Chinese-supplied nuclear research reactor.)

Syria is a military munchkin, still smarting from the loss of the Golan Heights in the Six-Day War in 1967 and its humiliating 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon. It's struggling economically and has seen its stature in the Arab world sink precipitously due to its chummy ties with Iran (which aims to dominate the region at the Arabs' expense).

Meanwhile, Damascus can certainly see the progress Iran is making in its nuclear-weapons program, all while thumbing its nose at the international community. Perhaps President Bashar al-Assad asked, Why not us, too? Nukes would give him the clout and prestige he so desperately covets.

What about North Korea's involvement?

It's certainly possible. Just last October, Pyongyang exploded its first nuclear device, proving its ability to produce sufficient fissile material and successfully engineer a low-yield nuclear explosion.

With its economy a basket case, North Korea is always looking for an influx of cold, hard cash; its No. 1 export is the sale of ballistic missiles abroad. Pyongyang could have decided to add a profitable line in trading in nuclear material and know-how.

(Of course, others say Syria's nuclear supplier could be the remnants of Pakistani nuclear proliferator A.Q. Khan's network. His ring supposedly approached Damascus years ago, but Syria declined, thinking it was a hoax.)

Another proposition is that North Korea is trying to stash its nuclear stuff in Syria before it has to come clean as part of denuclearization talks now under way with its neighbors and the United States. That might explain why Damascus has been mum on the Israeli strike: The loss was North Korea's, not Syria's.

It's also possible the shipment was from North Korea to Iran. (The two rogue regimes have ties.) Perhaps Pyongyang decided it would stand a better chance of making the delivery via Syria, instead of running a gauntlet of U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf.

Clearly, there are still a lot of ifs on this one. But if Israeli intelligence is correct and the strike was on a Syrian nuclear facility involving North Korea, we may have a whole new set of problems on our hands - and policy adjustments to make.

Peter Brookes is the author of "A Devil's Triangle: Terrorism, WMD and Rogue States."

http://www.nypost.com/php/pfriendly/print.php?url=http://www.nypost.com/seven/09182007/postopinion/opedcolumnists/nukes_in_syria_.htm

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

Roundup of Reports on Israeli Strike inside North-Eastern Syria

By Amihai Zippor

(IHC News, 18 September 2007) Details of the Israeli strike on Syrian territory on 06 September 2007 have not been released by Israel but by foreign media sources who are speculating about them. It is unclear where that information originated and no one should rely totally on it at this point.

The following is a roundup of the relevant information, which no Israeli official has been willing to confirm or deny due to the secrecy around the operation:

Reports began to surface from Syria on Friday, 07 September 2007, that Israeli jets violated its air space and were shot at by Syria's air defense system.

"This new Israeli hostile operation was carried out in coordination between Washington and Tel Aviv," the Syrian Tishrin newspaper accused on Saturday, 10 September 2007. In a separate interview with the Italian newspaper Le Repubblica, Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Shara warned, "Damascus will retaliate" but did not reveal any new information on what actually transpired.

That same day footage of jettisoned IAF fuel tanks, which landed on Turkish territory, was broadcast on Turkish television. It is common for pilots to release extra fuel tanks in order to maneuver better but both Turkey and Syria used the images to support the violation, still refusing to present more details of what occurred.

On Sunday, 09 September, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert expressed his "appreciation of the Security Force's courageous and unusual operations that are aimed at impeding the activities of terror groups." Without mentioning any details he noted, "These are operations whose nature [Israel] cannot always reveal to the public, naturally."

On Monday, 10 September 2007, Turkey demanded an explanation from Israel over the jettisoned IAF fuel tanks. "This is an unacceptable development," Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said during the joint news conference with his Syrian counterpart.

CNN reported on Tuesday morning, 11 September 2007 that the Israeli strike targeted an Iranian arms shipment, possibly headed to Hizbullah in Lebanon. It said the Israeli bombs left "a great hole in the ground." Meanwhile, though the Israelis were still observing a blackout on the matter The New York Times said US officials confirmed an Israeli strike on Syrian territory.

A Syrian letter to the UN criticizing the Israeli violations of its territory called the Israeli Air Force (IAF) flyover "outrageous aggression" and threatened that "the continuing silence of the international community vis-à-vis Israel's illegal act will place the region as well as the peace and security of both countries in the face of uncontrollable tragedies." The UN has yet to respond.

Also on Tuesday, the Chinese News Agency Xinhua reported a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman saying the Israeli violation of Syrian air space was "a very dangerous provocation little short of wantonly violating the sovereignty of Syria and seriously harassing the regional peace and security" of the Middle East. It added, "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."

On Wednesday, 12 September 2007 the prospect that North Korea was involved in the matter was raised by The New York Times who quoted a US defense official as saying "The Israelis think North Korea is selling to Iran and Syria what little they have left." It added the IDF had been monitoring the Syrian target for months.

Reacting to reports of an IAF strike on some type of installation inside Syria, the country's UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari labeled the Israeli moves "nonsense" saying Syria shot at Israeli jets as they were violating Syrian airspace. However, the Israeli Arab newspaper, Assennara, said Israeli jets "bombed a Syrian-Iranian missile base in northern Syria that was financed by Iran..." The report added, "It appears that the base was completely destroyed."

When asked about reports of a Syrian nuclear program and its connection with the Israeli strike, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told the FOX network's Sean Hannity Show on Thursday, 14 September 2007, "We have to have policies that prevent the world's most dangerous people from having the world's most dangerous weapons." She did not elaborate.

Andrew Semmel, acting US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for nuclear nonproliferation policy, said Syria may have been trying to obtain nuclear equipment, which resulted in the Israeli strike. "There are indicators that they do have something going on there...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." Answering a question about North Korean involvement 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."

Imad Moustapha, Syria's Ambassador to the US, told Newsweek Magazine on Saturday, 15 September 2007,

"The Israelis didn't bomb anything. When they were detected by our defense systems and we started firing at them, they dumped fuel and turned around." Denying Syria has any military ties to North Korea, he added "I leave these kinds of things to the military experts. I am not one."

Also on Saturday, The Washington Post claimed Israel had been monitoring the target for some time using its spy satellite Ofek 7 and discovered it may be a facility for enriching uranium, material needed for producing nuclear weapons. According to the paper Israeli commandos landed the day before the strike to mark the targets, which were destroyed by eight F151 fighter jets. It said the strike came three days after a shipment labeled "cement" arrived from Pyongyang via the ocean. Though a North Korea ship had visited Syria just days earlier Haaretz reported the ship's details had been changed once the story broke.

The British paper The Observer reported on Sunday, 16 September 2007 that the Israeli air strike was carried out by the IAF's most advanced jets, F-15s and F-16s equipped with Maverick missiles and 500lb bombs. It also said the Turkish military assisted the IDF, flying with Israeli aircraft.

Also on Sunday, Ynetnews.com quoted international law expert and Hebrew University Professor Dr. Robbie Sabel as saying "Syria is party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and as such, is barred from receiving any aid that may be used in the manufacturing of nuclear weapons." As a result, if the shipment included nuclear material Sabel noted "it is in blatant violation of the treaty and if that is what has transpired, then Syria may be sanctioned to prevent any further development of weapons, as was done with Iraq and as may be done with Iran."

At the same time The London Sunday Times reported a North Korean/Syrian collaboration over fitting a nuclear device on a Scud C missile was the reason for the Israeli strike. "This was supposed to be a devastating Syrian surprise for Israel," an Israeli official was quoted as saying. "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." The paper said plans for the strike began in the spring after clear evidence was presented to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

On Monday, 17 September 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a group of Russian reporters, "We are willing to make peace with Syria unconditionally and without demands. I have a lot of respect for [Syrian President Bashar Assad] and the Syrian policy." Additionally, the Kuwaiti newspaper A-Siasa said Assad is "furious" with the leaks of information coming from Syria and "decided to establish a committee that will investigate how classified information on the infiltration of Israeli planes was leaked to Arab media."

Also on Monday, Meretz faction whip Zehava Gal-On demanded Olmert release details of the operation to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee but the far-Left wing party's leader, Yossi Beilin responded negatively to such a move, saying "I don't see any reason for criticism on the matter, nor do I see room for disclosure."

Source: Original text contributed by the author, IHC reporter.

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 Israel's Syria Raid: A Message for Iran
 Israel sends Iran a signal with a stealth raid into Syria.
 By Dan Ephron and Mark Hosenball
 Newsweek

Sept. 24, 2007 issue - Few things motivate Arab spokesmen more than the chance to condemn Israel. Yet they were subdued when Israeli warplanes flew deep into Syrian airspace earlier this month. The Arab League called the incursion "unacceptable," but most Mideast governments kept quiet. Their lack of support for Damascus has much to do with Syria's close relationship to Iran, whose rising power they fear. But some Israeli officials and analysts are reading it optimistically, perhaps dangerously so. "You can learn something from it as to how the Arab world might react to an Israeli or American attack against strategic targets in Iran," says Yossi Alpher, a former Israeli intelligence official.

Whatever the Israeli planes were doing in Syria, Iran's nuclear program—which Tehran says is peaceful—couldn't help but loom over their mission. "It's a tacit reminder to Europe and to Washington that if they don't take a tougher action against Iran, Israel may have to do it alone," says Avner Cohen, a nuclear expert and a senior fellow at the United States Institute for Peace. Details of the Israeli operation remain hazy. Syria's ambassador to the United States told NEWSWEEK the Israeli warplanes dropped munitions in the open desert near Dayr az Zawr before fleeing; he promised his country would retaliate in a manner and at a time of its choosing. "Israel will not be permitted to do whatever it does without paying a price," says Imad Moustapha. But the unparalleled censorship Israel clamped on the operation has fueled speculation that the target could have been a missile factory or nuclear technology from North

Korea. (Some U.S. intelligence sources say the latter claim is shaky.) The story of the Israeli operation appears to have begun with aerial photographs shot from a spy plane or satellite. A former U.S. official, who asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, told NEWSWEEK that Israel showed the images of a site in northern Syria to a very small group of officials in Washington last month, suggesting it was part of a nuclear project underway with North Korean involvement. Bush administration neocons have long contended that Damascus was trying to buy nuclear material and that Pyongyang, alleged to have been selling missiles to Syria and Iran since the 1990s, could be a potential supplier. When North Korea issued an unusually loud condemnation of Israel last week, hard-liners like former U.N. ambassador John Bolton read it as possible evidence of Pyongyang's involvement in the matter.

But current and former U.S. intelligence officials, willing to speak only if they were not named, say they've seen no credible evidence yet of nuclear ties between North Korea and Syria, whether before or since the Israeli operation. David Albright, a former weapons inspector in Iraq, says allegations raised by Bolton prompted the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect Syria's small nuclear research reactor and other sites in 2003. He says the agency found the claims to be "unsubstantiated." Even Bolton, who served as the State Department's under secretary for arms control and international security, acknowledged to NEWSWEEK that while in government, he never saw proof North Korea was sharing nuclear technology with Syria.

For Israel, the possibility of a nuclear-armed adversary might have been enough to warrant the operation. Officially in a state of war with Syria—and Iran—Israel has vowed to let neither country obtain nukes (though Israel itself is believed to have built at least 200 nuclear bombs in its secret Dimona plant). Earlier this year, according to a well-placed Israeli source, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert asked President Bush for assurances that if economic and political sanctions failed to get Iran to shut down its nuclear facilities, Bush would order the U.S. military to destroy them before he leaves office. Bush has yet to provide the assurances, according to the source, who refused to be quoted because he is not authorized to speak for the government. The source says the Israeli government believes the Iranians will reach the point of no return in their nuclear-enrichment program sometime next year.

U.S. intelligence agencies, by contrast, believe Iran is still two to eight years away from mastering the technology to build a bomb. Some officials warn that attacking Iran would mire U.S. forces in another messy war and might prove ineffective, since the Iranian facilities are believed to be scattered across the country and buried deep underground. Still, from Israel's perspective, there might never be a more supportive White House. "It makes sense that if Israel has to do it alone, it would want to do it on Bush's watch and not wait to see what the political attitude of the next administration will be," says Alpher. That Arab states, and the world, will look away next time might be too much to assume.

With Jeffrey Bartholet in Washington

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