

Upcoming repeat of the 1967 Hollybush Summit promises to address nuclear concerns

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By Frank Paladino

GLASSBORO, New Jersey (Reuters) – The crowd has gotten a bit bigger, but the overall theme remains the same. Beginning in late November, world leaders from around the globe will descend on Glassboro to discuss pressing issues involving nuclear disarmament. A sequel to the original Hollybush Summit between President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1967, Hollybush II will bring together several countries and international organizations in an attempt to reach certain key agreements on the issue of nuclear weapons. The relatively unknown borough of Glassboro has been busy preparing for the event, and the town along with Rowan University has recently been the recipient of increased media coverage. With an event of this magnitude taking place in a suburban town in Southern New Jersey, security has been a huge concern. The local police have been working hard with state and national officials to ensure the safety of the participants.

The biggest difference between Hollybush II and the original summit is the number of participants. A far cry from the bipolar environment of the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union were the two lone superpowers, today's world contains scores of pivotal players that must be included. Whether they are countries or organizations, many more actors have a larger say in 2008 than they did in 1967. The Soviet Union's boycott of the United Nations during the Cold War reduced the body to little more than an extension of US foreign policy. The word "multilateralism" was not a part of many diplomats' vocabularies, and most countries submitted to the will of one of the two superpowers. Some did this voluntarily, and some did it because they had little choice. The end result, in either case, was the accumulation of power into two opposing camps that seldom went very far to gather support.

The end of the Cold War combined with the ongoing phenomenon of globalization, however, has dramatically altered the international community. Hollybush II will include dozens of participants, all with an important role to play. Quite obviously, all members of the nuclear club will be present; this includes the United States, Great



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Britain, Russia, France, China, India, and Pakistan. Other countries involved include Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons; North Korea, which recently gave up its own; Iran, which still continues to enrich plutonium despite sanctions imposed by the United Nations; South Africa, which voluntarily dismantled its nuclear warheads; and the two major suppliers of raw uranium—Canada and Australia. International organizations that will be represented are the United Nations (UN), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and several regional bodies such as the Organization of African States. These various organizations will represent the voices of those countries not explicitly represented at the conference, and all parties hope to hammer out consent on nuclear disarmament.

Several key issues are on the agenda. They include: the current status of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and ways to improve/strengthen it, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Iran's continued defiance of the international community and ongoing enrichment of plutonium, North Korea's recent semi-voluntary disarmament, and America's pending deal to supply India with nuclear fuel for its civilian reactors. Other issues are bound to surface during the course of the negotiations, but officials hope to use this rare opportunity to resolve the major outstanding issues involved. Judging by the mood in Washington and elsewhere, many of those involved would simply be satisfied with reviewing the NPT and nothing more.

Still, Hollybush II represents a large step forward in nuclear disarmament talks—for several reasons. First, the mere presence of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad signals a diplomatic victory in itself. Continued international sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, along with the repetitive promises of American cooperation on other issues, have apparently convinced the belligerent Iranian head of state that diplomacy might be his best option. Growing dissent at home regarding Iran's perceived right



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to nuclear power has weakened Ahmadinejad's regime. What began as issue of national pride has turned into political dead weight—Iran's nuclear program makes little practical sense. It has poured approximately \$10 billion into its nuclear industry yet has no functioning nuclear power plants to even utilize the fuel for electricity. The closest Iran has come to a working nuclear industry is the Russian-built Bushehr reactor, which is scheduled to come online in 2009.

The Bushehr reactor represents another reason why Hollybush II is so important: Russia's involvement. Buoyed by record oil and natural gas prices, Russia has once again established itself as a powerhouse of the Eastern Hemisphere. Recently elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has by and large continued the policies of his predecessor, Vladimir Putin; however Medvedev is slightly more agreeable to international cooperation. This is important because Russia's veto in the Security Council has prevented harsher sanctions on Iran, and its continued belligerence towards the West is a huge impediment to progress.

On America's domestic front, this will be President Bush's last attempt at establishing a positive legacy. Marred by the war in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, and the current status of the economy, President Bush would love to leave office on a high note. The looming presidential election should make for an interesting dynamic, as well. With polling close to a 50-50 split, it is impossible to predict who will emerge victorious on Election Day. Republican nominee John McCain, if he wins, would most likely support the objectives of the Bush administration at Hollybush II. The Democratic candidate Barack Obama, however, would most likely orchestrate an altogether different strategy for the upcoming summit. Unlike President Bush, who is adamantly against sacrificing any part of America's right to possess and develop nuclear weapons, Senator Obama would be more likely to push for renewed disarmament pledges from the nuclear club members. Should the junior

Senator from Illinois emerge victorious, it will be interesting to see how closely he adheres to any agreements reached by the Bush administration this winter.

However, the result of the American presidential election should matter little. Hollybush II is a golden opportunity to secure the NPT, strengthen its pillars, and reinforce the rules regarding nuclear proliferation. Iran should not be let off the hook, and Russia must be convinced of the dangers involved in a nuclear Iran. In addition, the proposed deal between America and India to supply India with nuclear fuel for its power plants should be reviewed. Hollybush II will prove an excellent opportunity for the international community to come together and establish some benchmarks. However, as always, it will come down to the political will of those involved to compromise when necessary and reach a sustainable agreement. □

Hollybush II makes progress but ends on sour note

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By Frank Paladino

GLASSBORO, New Jersey (Reuters) – Rarely does real life so closely resemble a soap opera as the recent Hollybush II summit in Glassboro. What began as a conference full of potential for progress ended with a shouting match—and saw the delegation from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Iranian government walk out in defiance. Despite the protests of various other governments, the United Nations (UN), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), President Ahmadinejad refused to remain at the summit, citing America’s stubbornness as the chief cause. The walk out of Iran was a huge blow to the otherwise positive results of the conference as well as to the Bush administration. America’s continued challenges of Iran backfired, leaving President Bush’s team scrambling to salvage what they could out of the broken negotiations.

Hollybush II was not without a good deal of success, however. Besides reaffirming the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), all of the participants agreed to reinforce parts of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by establishing guidelines for sanctions and penalties for breaking treaty obligations. These codified punishments, it is hoped, will act as a stronger deterrent than the treaty has in the past, discouraging other countries from obtaining nuclear weapons. The conference also agreed to strengthen the third pillar of the NPT: the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Under the guidance of the UN, the IAEA will establish the Peaceful Nuclear Initiative (PNI) in the hopes of preventing another situation like that in Iran from

occurring. Under the PNI, countries will be able to apply to receive assistance in the form of information, technology, and even grants to help them establish a peaceful nuclear power industry. In exchange for this assistance, countries will have to submit to constant monitoring by the IAEA and maintain complete transparency in regards to their nuclear programs.

According to the president of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, it is hoped that the PNI will enable perhaps dozens of countries to establish their own nuclear power industries. When asked by local reporters how he felt about the conference Mr. ElBaradei replied, “We are very excited about the prospect of the Peaceful Nuclear Initiative and what it represents. The PNI will be open to all countries that are willing to take the necessary steps and responsibilities.” The PNI will also allow countries without the oil wealth of an Iran to achieve a functioning nuclear power industry, and do it under the auspices of the international community.

More progress came on the issue of America’s proposed deal to supply India with nuclear fuel for its civilian reactors. Controversial from the start, the deal would bring India in out of the political cold after detonating its first nuclear warhead illegally in 1974. The problem is that this would send the wrong signal to other would-be nuclear powers: get the bomb first, and then try to negotiate. This is exactly the type of mindset that the IAEA and the UN wish to avoid. At Hollybush II the United States and India, at the behest of the other delegates, agreed to postpone indefinitely their agreement. Conscious of the political costs but eager to establish some sort of strategic alliance with India, President Bush reluctantly agreed to cancel the deal. Most analysts have agreed that this was a huge concession on the part of the Bush administration in the hopes of securing support for renewed international pressure on Iran.

This is the point at which the negotiations broke down, finally succumbing to the tensions between Iran and the United States. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, defiant from the start of the conference and perhaps feeling a bit targeted, suddenly stopped the negotiations to accuse the Bush Administration of “aggression and intimidation”. Acting as chairman of the summit, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon attempted to maintain order, but the Iranian delegation was already convinced of the futility of negotiations with America and walked out of the conference. President Bush immediately tried to harness Iran’s defiant behavior into stronger support for further sanctions, and may have been



successful. China and Russia, both previously very reluctant to approve any harsh measures on Iran, agreed to review □ the current UN Security Council sanctions next month. This is a victory for President Bush in itself, guaranteeing at least a good chance of renewed pressure on Iran.

Tomorrow will see the inauguration of John McCain as President of the United States; his recent win in the election was not good news for Iran. President-Elect McCain has made clear that he views a nuclear Iran as a clear threat to the relative stability of the Middle East, and will take the necessary steps to prevent that threat from materializing. When pressed, he would not rule out the use of preemptive force; however he said he would not use nuclear weapons against Iran in such a scenario. Due to a recent rise in anti-Iranian feeling following the events of the conference, President-Elect McCain will have a much easier path to pressuring Iran on the nuclear issue than his predecessor; this will also leave the incoming administration with more options regarding Iran. A careful observer might also see this as an opportunity for America to take the high road. Initiating compromise by postponing new sanctions or reducing existing ones, perhaps, could force Iran's hand and procure even more support for international pressure.

The main problem that most of the world has with Iran's actions over the last few years is the secrecy under which it operates its nuclear program. Many countries involved (including the United States) maintain that they have no problem with Iran pursuing peaceful nuclear technology; however what they want is more transparency. Iran still refuses to let IAEA inspectors into its plant at Natanz, and its heavy water reactor at Arak is largely useless for producing electricity (nuclear power plants require only lowly enriched plutonium, while warheads and weapons utilize the more finely enriched variety for which a heavy water reactor is useful). The catch is that Iran is clearly enriching nuclear fuel—and all that has to be done to make the jump from electricity to weapons is to run the material through the centrifuge machine a few more times.

After his return to Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued his defiant streak, stating that “The world needs Iran much more than Iran needs the world.” Unfortunately for the United States and the rest of the world, he may be right. Iranian energy in the form of oil is coveted by almost every country in the world, and Iran's relatively young and educated population makes it a very attractive market. Iran is also one of the most stable and powerful countries in the Middle East: a sea of calm in a region of religious and political unrest. A breakdown of political order in Iran could trigger a wider conflict and



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promote greater instability in the Middle East. Iran, however, is not invincible; the windfall from oil profits and record prices has artificially inflated the economy a great deal.

The next step for diplomacy has to be an international outreach to Iran, supported by both Russia and China. Without the added weight of these two countries, international pressure will result in the same empty promises and closed doors. With a little ingenuity and a great deal of motivation the United States, under a new president, has the power to bring about the desired results. The only remaining question is whether or not John McCain is willing to do something the Bush administration has had trouble doing from its inception: compromise. □

