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Leaders Gather for Nuclear Talks as New Threat Is Seen

By **DAVID E. SANGER** and **WILLIAM J. BROAD**

WASHINGTON — Three months ago, American intelligence officials examining satellite photographs of Pakistani nuclear facilities saw the first wisps of steam from the cooling towers of a new nuclear reactor. It was one of three plants being constructed to make fuel for a second generation of nuclear arms.

The message of those photos was clear: While **Pakistan** struggles to make sure its weapons and nuclear labs are not vulnerable to attack by **Al Qaeda**, the country is getting ready to greatly expand its production of weapons-grade fuel.

The Pakistanis insist that they have no choice. **A nuclear deal** that **India** signed with the United States during the Bush administration ended a long moratorium on providing India with the fuel and technology for desperately needed nuclear power plants.

Now, as critics of the arrangement point out, the agreement frees up older facilities that India can devote to making its own new generation of weapons, escalating one arms race even as **President Obama** and **President Dmitri A. Medvedev** of Russia sign accords to shrink arsenals built during the cold war.

Mr. Obama **met with the leaders of India and Pakistan on Sunday**, a day ahead of a two-day Washington gathering with 47 nations devoted to the question of how to keep nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists. In remarks to reporters about the summit meeting, Mr. Obama called the possibility of a terrorist organization obtaining a nuclear weapon “the single biggest threat to U.S. security, both short-term, medium-term and long-term.”

The summit meeting is the largest gathering of world leaders called by an American president since **Franklin D. Roosevelt** organized the 1945 meeting in San Francisco that created the **United Nations**. (He died two weeks before the session opened.) But for all its symbolism and ceremony, this meeting has quite limited goals: seeking ways to better secure existing supplies of bomb-usable plutonium and highly enriched uranium. The problem that India and Pakistan represent, though, is deliberately not on the agenda.

“President Obama is focusing high-level attention on the threat that already exists out there, and that’s tremendously important,” said **Sam Nunn**, the former Democratic senator from Georgia who has devoted himself to safeguarding global stockpiles of weapons material — enough, by some estimates, to build more than 100,000 atom bombs. “But the fact is that new production adds greatly to the problem.”

Nowhere is that truer than Pakistan, where two **Taliban** insurgencies and Al Qaeda coexist with the world’s fastest-growing nuclear arsenal. According to a senior American official, Mr. Obama used his private meeting Sunday afternoon with **Yousaf Raza Gilani**, Pakistan’s newly empowered prime minister, to “express disappointment” that Pakistan is blocking the opening of negotiations on a treaty that would halt production of new nuclear material around the world.

Experts say accelerated production in Pakistan translates into much increased risk.

“The challenges are getting greater — the increasing extremism, the increasing instability, the increasing material,” said Rolf Mowatt-Larssen of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, who as a **C.I.A.** officer and then head of the Energy Department’s intelligence unit ran much of the effort to understand Al Qaeda’s nuclear ambitions.

“That’s going to complicate efforts to make sure nothing leaks,” he said. “The trends mean the Pakistani authorities have a greater challenge.”

Few subjects are more delicate in Washington. In an interview last Monday, Mr. Obama avoided a question about his progress in building on a five-year, \$100 million Bush administration program to safeguard Pakistan’s arms and materials.

“I feel confident that Pakistan has secured its **nuclear weapons**,” Mr. Obama said. “I am

concerned about nuclear security all around the world, not just in Pakistan but everywhere.” He added, “One of my biggest concerns has to do with the loose nuclear materials that are still floating out there.”

Taking up the Pakistan-India arms race at the summit meeting, administration officials say, would be “too politically divisive.”

“We’re focusing on protecting existing nuclear material, because we think that’s what everyone can agree on,” one senior administration official said in an interview on Friday. To press countries to cut off production of new weapons-grade material, he said, “would take us into questions of proliferation, nuclear-free zones and nuclear disarmament on which there is no agreement.”

Mr. Obama said he expected “some very specific commitments” from world leaders.

“Our expectation is not that there’s just some vague, gauzy statement about us not wanting to see loose nuclear materials,” he said. “We anticipate a communiqué that spells out very clearly, here’s how we’re going to achieve locking down all the nuclear materials over the next four years, with very specific steps in order to assure that.”

Those efforts began at the end of the cold war, 20 years ago. Today officials are more sanguine about the former Soviet stockpiles and the focus is now wider. Last month, American experts removed weapons-grade material from earthquake-damaged Chile.

The summit meeting will aim to generate the political will so that other nations and Mr. Obama’s own administration can create a surge of financial and technical support that will bring his four-year plan to fruition.

“It’s doable but hard,” said Matthew Bunn, a nuclear expert at Harvard. “It’s not easy to overcome secrecy, complacency, sovereignty and bureaucracy.”

Mr. Obama plans to open the summit meeting with a discussion of the scope of the terrorist threat. The big challenge, Mr. Mowatt-Larssen said, is to get world leaders to understand “that it’s a low-probability, but not a no-probability, event that requires urgent action.”

For instance, in late 2007, [four gunmen attacked](#) a South African site that held enough highly

enriched uranium for a dozen atomic bombs. The attackers breached a 10,000-volt security fence, knocked out detection systems and broke into the emergency control room before coming under assault. They escaped.

During the presidential campaign, Mr. Obama promised to “increase funding by \$1 billion a year to ensure that within four years, the essential ingredients of nuclear weapons are removed from all the world’s most vulnerable sites and effective, lasting security measures are instituted for all remaining sites.”

In Mr. Obama’s first year, though, financing for better nuclear controls fell by \$25 million, about 2 percent.

“The Obama administration got off to an unimpressive start,” Mr. Bunn wrote in his most recent update of “[Securing the Bomb](#),” a survey to be published Monday by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit advocacy group that Mr. Nunn helped found in Washington. But he added that its proposed budget for the 2011 fiscal year calls for a 31 percent increase.

The next phase in Mr. Obama’s arms-control plan is to get countries to agree to a treaty that would end the production of new bomb fuel. Pakistan has led the opposition, and it is building two new reactors for making weapons-grade plutonium, and one plant for salvaging plutonium from old reactor fuel.

Last month, the [Institute for Science and International Security](#), a private group in Washington, reported that the first reactor was emitting steam. That suggests, said Paul Brannan, a senior institute analyst, that the “reactor is at least at some state of initial operation.”

Asked about the production, Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani, said, “Pakistan looks forward to working with the international community to find the balance between our national security and our contributions to international nonproliferation efforts.”

In private, Pakistani officials insist that the new plants are needed because India has the power to mount a lightning invasion with conventional forces.

India, too, is making new weapons-grade plutonium, in plants [exempted under the agreement](#) with the Bush administration from inspection by the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#). (Neither Pakistan nor India has signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.)

The Obama administration has endorsed the Bush-era agreement. Last month, the White House took the next step, approving an accord that allows India to build two new reprocessing plants. While that fuel is for civilian use, critics say it frees older plants to make weapons fuel.

“The Indian relationship is a very important one,” said Mr. Nunn, who influenced Mr. Obama’s decision to endorse a goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons. But he said that during the Bush years, “I would have insisted that we negotiate to stop their production of weapons fuel. Sometimes in Washington, we have a hard time distinguishing between the important and the vital.”