**AN IRANIAN NUCLEAR TEST IN NORTH KOREA?**

AN OPEN-SOURCE DOSSIER

Compiled by

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*updated and revised*

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**Introduction**

This is an evolving dossier of sources available online surrounding the rumor of Iranian involvement in a suspected North Korean nuclear test in April/May 2010.

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*Comment:* Die Welt*, the newspaper which served as the platform for the original assertions of an Iranian nuclear test in North Korea, is staunchly pro-Israel even in the context of the general approval of Israeli policy that is the German press. Die Welt has made some big assertions in the past about North Korean involvement in the Middle East, in particular a largely unexamined piece on North Korean aid to the Syrian rocketry in Homs in January, citing “intelligence sources.” Die Welt, located in Berlin, does not have an English language edition.*

*Hans Ruehle is* former Director of the Planning Staff in the German Ministry of Defense*. The author previously published a piece recently on the subject of Israeli air attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities that met with some specific approval of American hawkish commentators.[[1]](#footnote-1) He continues to be quite active in monthly statements and op-eds about the dangers of the Iranian nuclear program.*

**Document 1**

**Hans Rühle, “Iran soll Atombombe in Nordkorea getestet haben,” *Die Welt am Sonntag*, 4 March 2012** <<http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article13901079/Iran-soll-Atombombe-in-Nordkorea-getestet-haben.html>>. [Translation by Adam Cathcart.]

For years the international community has suspected that, alongside the country’s civil nuclear program, Iran has activated a military nuclear program. As the number of signs grew that Iran in fact had such a program, Tehran remained adamant with its statements, namely that the country was simply striving to use nuclear power peacefully.

And always, [we] are given a few Western arms control experts who assure us of this belief.  Against a rich array of indices, the Iranians strive [to appear] not guilty.   After all, when a country has undertaken a nuclear test, its military outlook clearly changes. And definitively, Iran has not undertaken such a test.

 **Report of the Renowned Magazine “Nature”**

But what if Iran were prepared to do a nuclear test?  And if it were done not on Iranian territory, but instead without looking back at world opinion, done where nuclear tests always took place, where people stood ready with nuclear expertise and technology in exchange for hard currency – in North Korea?

This debate was triggered by a report this past month in the renowned magazine “Nature,” put forward via the understanding of the nuclear physicist Lars-Erik de Geer who research radioactive isotopes in the atmosphere for the Swedish Defence Research Agency. De Geer assembled and analyzed data from various CTBTO monitoring stations in South Korea, Japan, and Russia.

The organization itself had not undertaken its own similar evaluation. De Geer, however, found that North Korea undertood two secret nuclear weapons tests in 2010. Almost immediately there were rebuttals from other nuclear researchers. The basis of the data of the Swede, however, is seemingly solid, because he can lean against the rich amount of data interpreting Soviet nuclear tests during the Cold War.

*Comment: In essence, Rühle goes on to briefly summarize the Nature research and emphasize the presence of the isotope Uran, spins into a long peroration of historical precedents for extraterritorial nuclear tests (British nuclear tests in American Nevada, Israeli tests off the South African coast, and Sino-Pakistani cooperation), recounts the Kennedy administration's desire to bomb Chinese nuclear sites in 1963 , describes with some fervor the Ayatollah's excitement about reviving the Shah's nuclear program in the mid-1980s (when Rühle was presumably keeping up with the issue in "real time" in Bonn), and concludes with the speculation that if the Iranian test in North Korea was in fact carried out, the revelation would be a "world-historical event" which would transform completely the international arms-control and geo-political scenes, not to mention the American election.*

Sample of Ruehle’s impact:

Jon Swaine, "[**Obama: I will not hesitate in using force to block Iran’s nuclear threat from Iran,**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/9122351/Obama-I-will-not-hesitate-in-using-force-to-block-Irans-nuclear-threat-from-Iran.html)" *Telegraph* (UK), 4 March 2012. (Cites the Welt article as essentially authoritative, but as a footnote to a longer article.)

Omri Ceren, "[**German Paper: North Korea Tested Nuclear Warhead for Iran**](http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2012/03/04/north-korea-nuclear-warhead-test-for-iran/)," *Commentary,*4 March 2012. (Ceren’s essay on this issue describes Iran's "academic apologists/semantic tricks/[coordinated campaign](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=1398) to downplay the Iranian threat/hegemonic intentions/talking points/self-styled experts." Ceren cites the blogger "John Galt," below, as his source.

"Tyler Durden", "[**North Korea Has Allegedly Tested Nuclear Warheads for Iran**](http://www.zerohedge.com/news/north-korea-has-allegedly-tested-nuclear-warheads-iran)," *Zero Hedge*, 4 March 2012.  (The author of *Zero Hedge* is a widely read pseudonym with influence and focus on hedge funds on Wall Street, [as explained in New York Magazine](http://nymag.com/guides/money/2009/59457/).  "Durden" also cites "John Galt" for the story, but not before writing pre-media-ordained war with Iran and subsequent "global deflationary collapse.")

"John Galt", "[**North Korea 'Allegedly' Tested Nuclear Warhead for Iran**,](http://johngaltfla.com/wordpress/2012/03/03/3-3-12-breaking-news-2300-et-north-korea-tested-nuclear-warhead-for-iran/)" *Shenandoah: Terminus of Orbis Terrarium Ut Not Teneo Is,*3 March 2012. (The entry on this blog uses the Google translation to extrapolate forward that Israel will attack Iran in early May.)

See also:

ROK Drop: <http://rokdrop.com/2012/03/19/iran-reportedly-sent-north-korea-55-million-to-conduct-dirty-bomb-test/>

Marmot’s Hole <http://www.rjkoehler.com/2012/03/19/north-korea-secretly-tested-iranian-nuclear-devices-in-2010/>

**Document 2**

**YAAKOV LAPPIN AND BENJAMIN WEINTHAL IN BERLIN, “Former German official: Iran tested bomb in N. Korea ; Israeli expert does not discount report that Iran was involved in North Korean atomic detonations,” *Jerusalem Post* 03/05/2012**

**http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=260534**

A senior German defense figure said in a report this week that Iran may be significantly further ahead in its nuclear weapons program than public intelligence assessments have so far suggested.

Hans Ruhle, who directed the planning department of the German Defense Ministry from 1982 to 1988, argued that Iran may have been involved in the detonation of an experimental uranium nuclear bomb in North Korea in 2010.

The article, which appeared on the website of the German daily Die Welt, said that many intelligence agencies believe that at least one of the two nuclear tests that occurred in North Korea in 2010 was an Iranian atomic weapon.

Some agencies believe that North Korea used its nuclear weapons expertise to test a weapon of mass destruction on behalf of Iran, Ruhle wrote.

Ruhle, who is widely respected among defense and security officials in Germany, said that “Iran’s military was capable in 2010 of testing a nuclear warhead in North Korea. It is, therefore, not surprising that some intelligence agencies are now of the view that North Korea, in fact, in 2010 conducted at least one nuclear test for Iran.”

Iran expert Ephraim Kam of Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Securities Studies said the claim was in the realm of the possible.

“There is cooperation between Iran and North Korea on missiles, but that can also spill over into the nuclear field,” Kam, who served in the Research Division of the IDF’s Military Intelligence, told The Jerusalem Post.

“I wouldn’t say it’s impossible,” he added.

If the report is true, Kam continued, the main question is whether the Iranians were observers, or whether they took an active part in the nuclear experiment.

“If they carried out the test on their own, this is a very different story,” Kam said.

In his article, Ruhle said intelligence agencies have observed close work between North Korean and Iranian nuclear experts.

Ruhle’s report followed an article published in last month’s edition of the scientific journal Nature that said that North Korea likely conducted two secret nuclear weapons tests in 2010. The article was written by Swedish nuclear physicist Lars-Erik de Geer, who works for the Swedish Defense Research Agency in Stockholm.

In December 2010, Western media outlets cited South Korean media reports on a deep tunnel that was being dug by the North Koreans, possibly for a nuclear experiment. Other reports from the same period mentioned an Iranian team of nuclear scientists who had visited North Korea to carry out a joint nuclear test.

Iran expert Prof. Raymond Tanter, who is an adjunct scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told the Post that claims in the Die Welt report that Iran had already begun working on its nuclear weapons program in the first half of the 1980s were reinforced by independent evidence.

[…]

*Comment: What or who is DEBKAFile, and why do some news organizations treat it as a credible source? A quick search shows it not to be very reliable or politically objective; it is highly hawkish, and highly prone to publish and generate alarmist rumors (including a bomb scare in Manhattan). Supposedly the website has been right in predicting things in the past; however, it seems to be a husband-and-wife team essentially operating out of an apartment somewhere in the greater New York City area. This makes it rather dubious, but the “source” has a wide reach among conservative media; thus the inclusion here.*

**Document 3**

**North Korea tested Iranian warhead or “dirty bomb” in 2010 for $55m**

**DEBKAfile Exclusive Report March 5, 2012**

[**http://www.debka.com/article/21794/**](http://www.debka.com/article/21794/)**[[2]](#footnote-2)**

German and Japanese intelligence sources Monday, March 5, confirmed – and qualified - to DEBKAfile reports in the German Der Spiegel and Welt am Sonntag that Western intelligence had known for 11 months that at least one of North Korea’s covert nuclear tests in 2010 was carried out on an Iranian radioactive bomb or nuclear warhead.

Those sources report five facts are known for sure:

1. North Korea carried out two covert underground nuclear explosions in mid-April and around May 11 of 2010 equivalent to 50- 200 tonnes of TNT.

2. Two highly lethal heavy hydrogen isotopes, deuterium and tritium, typical of a nuclear fission explosion and producing long-term contamination of the atmosphere, were detected and analyzed by Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBOTO) monitoring stations in South Korea, Japan and Russia.

3. The presence of tritium in one of the tests led several intelligence agencies watching North Korea’s nuclear program and its longstanding links with Iran and Syria to examine the possibility that Pyongyang had tested the internal mechanism of a nuclear warhead on Iran’s behalf. This strongly indicated to German and Japanese intelligence that Iran had already developed the nuclear warhead’s outer shell and attained its weaponization.

4. Another possibility examined was that North Korea had tested an Iranian “dirty bomb” – i.e. a conventionally detonated device containing nuclear substances. Tritium would boost its range, force and lethality.

This was one of the conclusions of atmospheric scientist Larsk-Erik De Geer of the Swedish Defense Research Agency in Stockholm, who spent a year studying the data collected by various CTBOTO stations tracking the North Korean explosions.

On February 3, De Greer published some of his findings and conclusions in Nature Magazine. His paper will appear in the April/May issue of the Science and Global Security Journal.

5. The Japanese and German sources found confirmation of their suspicions that North Korea had abetted Iran’s nuclear aspirations in three events:

a) Shortly after the April explosion, a large group of Iranian nuclear scientists and technicians arrived in Pyongyang. They apparently came to take part in setting up the second test in May.

b) In late April, Tehran shipped to Pyongyang a large quantity of uranium enriched to 20+ percent – apparently for use in the May test.

c) Straight after the May test, the Central Bank of Iran transferred $55 million to the account of the North Korean Atomic Energy Commission. The size of the sum suggests that it covered the fee to North Korea not just of one but the two tests – the first a pilot and the second, a full-stage test.

It is not by chance that this incriminating disclosure about Iran’s nuclear achievements sees the light Monday, just hours before US Barack Obama receives Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in the White house for an argument over an expeditious military action to stop Iran going all the way to a nuclear weapon.

The disclosure invalidates the main point the US President made in his speech Sunday to the pro-Israeli lobby AIPAC convention in Washington that there was still time for diplomatic pressure and sanctions to bring Iran’s leaders to a decision to halt their nuclear momentum before military action was called for, whether by the US or Israel.

It now appears that Western intelligence has known about the North Korean tests for Iran for eleven months. Therefore, it is too late for him to try and persuade the Israeli prime minister that there is still time to spare for cutting short a nuclear Iran.

It was announced in Washington Monday that no joint American-Israeli communiqué would be issued at the end of their talks, meaning they will have agreed to disagree: Obama, to stand by his opposition to military action against Iran; Netanyahu, to decide what Israel must do in the interests of its security.

There is no doubt he would have preferred an American initiative for - or partnership in - an operation for curtailing the Iranian nuclear threat. But that is not part of Obama’s policy.

*Comment: If only as confirmation of how misinformation spreads (in this case, as a concoction of the Ruehle op-ed and the DEBKAFile), the following article is a good example:*

**Document 4**

**CPV Vivekanand, “Israel readying ground for action,” *Gulf Today* (owned by Khaleej Times)**

**March 07, 2012**

**http://gulftoday.ae/portal/45871325-efd5-4972-a7d5-6ccf206d4da9.aspx**

An Israeli “intelligence” report that at least one of North Korea’s covert nuclear tests in 2010 was carried out on an Iranian radioactive bomb or nuclear warhead has been picked by two German publications, which say they have confirmed and qualified.

The report said that Western intelligence had known of the test for 11 months. According to the report, some of the facts of the affair are known. These include confirmations that North Korea carried out two covert underground nuclear explosions in mid-April and around May 11 of 2010 equivalent to 50 to 200 tonnes of TNT.

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation monitoring stations in South Korea, Japan and Russia had detected two “highly lethal” heavy hydrogen isotopes, deuterium and tritium, typical of a nuclear fission explosion and producing long-term contamination of the atmosphere.

Intelligence agencies watching North Korea’s nuclear programme and its possible links with Iran and Syria were reportedly alerted by the presence of tritium in one of the tests into examining the possibility that Pyongyang had tested the internal mechanism of a nuclear warhead on Iran’s behalf.

“This strongly indicated to German and Japanese intelligence that Iran had already developed the nuclear warhead’s outer shell and attained its weaponisation,” said the report.

Experts also suspected that North Korea had tested an Iranian “dirty bomb,” which is described as a conventionally detonated device containing nuclear substances. Tritium would boost its range, force and lethality, say experts.

This conclusion was attributed to atmospheric scientist Larsk-Erik De Geer of the Swedish Defence Research Agency in Stockholm, who is said to have spent a year studying the data collected by various monitoring stations tracking the North Korean tests.

De Greer published some of his findings and conclusions in Nature Magazine in March and his research paper is scheduled to appear in the April/May issue of the Science and Global Security Journal.

Further evidence reportedly unearthed by German and Japanese intelligence include the visit to North Korea after the first explosion that could have been aimed at setting up the second test in May.

In late April, Iran is believed to have shipped to North Korea a large quantity of uranium enriched to 20+ per cent – apparently for use in the May test.

After the May test, the Central Bank of Iran transferred $55 million to the account of the North Korean Atomic Energy Commission.

“The size of the sum suggests that it covered the fee to North Korea not just of one but the two tests – the first a pilot and the second, a full-stage test,” said the report.

If accurate, the report indicates that Western intelligence has known about the North Korean tests for Iran for 11 months. Therefore, argues the Israeli “intelligence” report, it is too late for US President Barack Obama to try and persuade Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that there is still time for diplomatic means and sanctions to work and dissuade Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

[…]

The reported North Korean nuclear test allegedly on behalf of Iran raises another question: if Pyongyang could accept Iranian money for conducting the test, what prevents it from “selling” a whole nuclear weapon to Iran?

Another question is: How “much longer” is Israel is willing to “wait” before military action against Iran?

Some suggest that it would not come before the US presidential elections in November, but others say, given the alleged Iranian-North Korean link, it could come much earlier. Well, the ground appears to be being built for it.

*For other articles with similar logic, see also:*

Amichai Farkas, “Iran: The North Korea connection,” Stand for Israel (organization blog), March 7, 2012 http://blog.standforisrael.org/articles/iran-the-north-korea-connection

David P. Goldman (SPENGLER), “Did Iran Test a Nuclear Bomb in North Korea in 2010?” March 4, 2012, http://pjmedia.com/spengler/2012/03/04/did-iran-test-a-nuclear-bomb-in-north-korea-in-2010/?singlepage=true

*Up to this point, no one has shown any propensity to see the actual research cited by Ruehle; the German article has thus been accepted more or less as truth.*

**Document 5**

**Actual Science**

**Revisiting the February debate**

*(The lone voice in the wilderness: Actual analysis of the data provided in Geer's research, data which ought to be, but is not, at the core of the above claims of recent North Korean-Iranian nuclear collaboration.)*

**Tom Z. Collina**, "[**Possible North Korean Nuke Test Shows Power of CTBT Monitoring System**](http://armscontrolnow.org/2012/02/03/possible-north-korean-nuke-test-shows-power-of-ctbt-monitoring-system/)," *Arms Control Now: The Blog of the Arms Control Association*, 3 February, 2012*.*

A new study in the March 2012 issue of Science & Global Security suggests that North Korea carried out a small nuclear explosive test in May 2010. If true, this would be the third nuclear test by North Korea and its first that was not announced.

The study argues that because there was no seismic reading to indicate a nuclear explosion at that time, the explosive yield of any such event would have been less than 50 tons (or .05 kilotons). The fact that a test this small could have been detected at all is a promising sign for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) verification system.

[…]

De Geer’s conclusions about the radionuclide data and further North Korean nuclear testing are not shared by other nuclear test monitoring experts.

Frank von Hippel, a physicist at Princeton University, told Geoff Brumfiel at [Nature](http://www.nature.com/news/isotopes-hint-at-north-korean-nuclear-test-1.9972) that De Geer’s analysis provides convincing evidence of some kind of nuclear fission explosion.

But, Brumfiel reports, von Hippel does not agree that it involved two weapons tests or a fusion boost. “I hope that other experts will analyze it and see whether they can put forward alternative, simpler explanations,” he said.

Dr. Ola Dahlman, a retired geophysicist also questioned the absence of any seismic vibrations to support the radioisotope data.

The data analyzed in the De Geer study were produced by the CTBTO’s network of sensors, but the organization itself has never officially analyzed all these data.

[…]

**Document 6**

**Jeffrey Lewis, “Two DPRK Nuclear Tests in 2010,” *Arms Control Wonk,* 6 Feb. 2012,** [**http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/4971/did-the-dprk-conduct-2-nuclear-tests-in-2010**](http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/4971/did-the-dprk-conduct-2-nuclear-tests-in-2010)

By now, you have undoubtedly seen press reports claiming that North Korea may have conducted a pair of clandestine nuclear tests in April and May 2010.  The reports are based on a forthcoming paper by a well-known Swedish radiochemist, Lars-Erik De Geer.

I don’t buy it. At least not yet.

Look, I would be the first person to jump at the possibility that the CTBTO’s IMS detected a well-hidden nuclear test. I am one of the few cranks out there who believes the DPRK may explore [boosted fission weapons](http://38north.org/2010/06/can-north-korea-build-the-h-bomb/), which De Geer believes accounts for the pair of alleged tests.  But, as I [told](http://www.nature.com/news/isotopes-hint-at-north-korean-nuclear-test-1.9972) Nature’s Geoff Brumfiel, the paper  ”doesn’t feel right to me.” (*Science & Global Security* has made available an advance copy to me; the issue will be published in March.)

What follows is my best accounting of what I see as some methodological problems with a very interesting, but ultimately unpersuasive paper.

Let’s get a bunch of stuff out of the way first. De Geer is a well-respected Swedish radiochemist with strong ties to the CTBTO.  He’s also a pretty nice guy and has been generous in sharing a bunch of radiochemistry on the Chinese atmospheric nuclear testing program with me.  He’s not a bad sort, even if there are a lot of people in Vienna wondering why he just published this paper without workshopping it a bit at the VIC.

The paper was also peer-reviewed.  Although I believe some of the problems I will outline ought to have been raised in peer review, it seems plausible that one or more peer-reviewers were so focused on the very difficult radiochemistry calculations that they didn’t step back and think about the paper in context.  I don’t know anything about radiochemistry, so it’s easy for me to think about the paper in context.  That’s all I have.

**Questionable Methodology**

My concerns about the paper are simple to explain.  The paper relies on radionuclide monitoring to detect a nuclear explosion, but the general view among experts has been that radionuclide monitoring is imprecise enough that it should only be used to screen events. So, for example, if there is a seismic event, then the presence of xenon or other fission products might help persuade states to seek a special inspection.  But it doesn’t work the other way around. That is why, for example, the South Korean government [cited the lack of seismic activity](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iApZGH3OH7xhou2DZ0mSAfxsIU-A) as a reason to dismiss the xenon measurements when they were [initially reported](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/10/116_74808.html) in 2010.

**[…]**

**See also:**

**New Study Points to Unknown Nuclear Tests by North Korea in 2010**

**By CHOE SANG-HUN | February 12, 2012,** http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/new-study-points-to-unknown-nuclear-tests-by-north-korea-in-2010/?ref=nuclearprogram

*Comment: For sheer audacity of fabrication and transparency of intent, this op-ed published on the Fox News website seems to win the prize.*

**Document 7**

**“Reza Kahlili,” “Is Iran About to Test a Nuclear Bomb In North Korea?” *Fox News.com*, December 30, 2010, http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2010/12/30/iran-test-nuclear-bomb-north-korea/***[[3]](#footnote-3)*

On December 24, a research report from the South Korean Foreign Ministry Institute indicated that North Korea would carry out another nuclear bomb test after the beginning of the year. -- South Korean media reported earlier this month that the North was digging a tunnel in preparation for such a nuclear test.

At the same time, reports from inside Iran indicate that a team of Iranian nuclear scientists have been sent to North Korea and that the two governments have agreed on a joint nuclear test in North Korea with a substantial financial reward for the Kim Jong-Il government.

It is no secret that Iran and North Korea are collaborating in a ballistic missile program. The North Koreans provided Iran with the technology and know-how to build the Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile, which is a copy of the Nodong-1 missile. The Shahb- 3 missile has a range of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) covering all of the U.S. military bases in the Middle East and the entire country of Israel.

Most alarming, recent WikiLeaks releases reveal that Iran obtained a cache of advanced missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads (based on a Russian design) from North Korea. Now, for the first time, Iran has the capability to target every capital in Western Europe.

Not only are these two governments continuing to collaborate on the missile projects, they are also conspiring on Iran’s nuclear bomb development. This relationship has not only led to sharing data on previous nuclear tests by North Korea, but played a part in Iran’s capability to build the more advanced P2 centrifuges that produce 2.5 times more enriched uranium than the first generation P1 model.

The recent revelations about North Korea’s uranium enrichment plant also raise the possibility that North Korea is enriching uranium on Iran's behalf. Iran has always maintained that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes; that it is their right to produce nuclear fuel for their nuclear power plants.

In order to avoid a possible military reaction by the West, Iran is working covertly with North Korea until such a time they are capable of weaponizing their ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. […]

The upcoming nuclear bomb test in North Korea is yet another indication that time is running out.

Soon we will wake up to the shocking realization that Iran has nuclear bombs and that both Iran and North Korea have nuclear warhead delivery systems.

It is a shame that we failed to stop North Korea from developing its nuclear capability, but it is not too late to stop Iran!

Maybe the North Korean leaders are not suicidal. Maybe they are only looking to intimidate South Korea, the U.S. and other allies in the region. Maybe they are trying to gain stature and stronger negotiating powers. However, the Iranian leaders have long talked about the destruction of Israel and its master -- America.

It is not only irresponsible and cowardly for our politicians to allow such a messianic regime, which supports worldwide terrorism, to acquire nuclear bombs; it holds dire consequences for the rest of the world.

Nuclear bombs in the hands of jihadists should be the final red line that the free world will not back away from!

See also

**North Korean technicians in Iran to build nuclear weapons 05/16/2011**

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/North-Korean-technicians-in-Iran-to-build-nuclear-weapons-21568.html>

*Comment: As an antidote to the above, Professor Juan Cole of the University of Michigan provides a cleansing tocsin:*

**Document 8**

**JUAN COLE, “The N. Korea/ Iran Nuclear Connection Fraud, “*Informed Comment,* March 6, 2012**

http://www.juancole.com/2012/03/the-n-korea-iran-nuclear-connection-fraud.html

The wingnuts are all in a tizzy about some German news article alleging that North Korea carried out a nuclear test for Iran.

As with the Niger uranium story that helped underpin the Iraq war, it is all hype and there is nothing to it.

Adam Cathcart has carefully traced the story to its origins.

The speculation was indulged in, in an opinion piece by a former German defense ministry official, Hans Rühle. He was active in the 1980s.

But, you say, maybe his information comes from German Defense Ministry sources?

No. It is speculation based on speculation in a journal article in the February issue of Nature magazine.

And to where do the footnotes go?

An unpublished paper by Swedish researchers, which will come out in April, and the exact text of which is unavailable.

So, to conclude:

The entire story is based on speculation and innuendo.

It is third hand.

We can’t even see the exact source.

There is no particular reason to think that the Swedish researchers know more about this subject than the 16 US intelligence agencies who have assessed with confidence that Iran has no nuclear weapons program, or than the International Atomic Energy Agency. We don’t even know exactly what the Swedes said.

Beware wingnuts citing articles in languages they do not know.

I’m not alleging that Ruhle or his sources are engaging in fraud, just that it is fraudulent to misrepresent their speculations as fact. However, Ruehle has a history of making wild accusations on Iran that have not been borne out.

**Document 9**

**ADAM CATHCART.**

**SinoNK.com, March 5, 2012**

**"Did North Korea really test a nuclear weapon for the Iranians?"**

The assertion, as this type tends to be, is delivered at an exquisite moment of ferment: We are at the outset of the first discernable thaw in US-DPRK relations since the NY Philharmonic-to-Pyongyang episode in 2008, and squarely also in the cauldron of a domestic political debate about the Iranian nuclear issue, a debate whose main exponents, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, each delivered extensive related commentary this weekend.

What could make things more interesting than a story tying these things together, hastening the imperative to deal harshly with both Iran and the DPRK, and initiate the now-familiar round of self-flagellation for having been strung along by the false promises of these two militantly veiled counter-hegemons?

A number of blogs (cited below, including *Commentary*) are already asserting that North Korea performed a nuclear test for the Iranians.  What are their sources?  They rely upon Google translations of [this (tellingly short) March 4 article in one of Vienna's better newspaper](http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/aktuell/441206_Nordkorea-testete-Uran-Sprengkoepfe-fuer-den-Iran.html)s. Although their translations are disjointed testimony to the rampancy of monolingualism among would-be "foreign affairs" bloggers, the translations do mention an article in *Die Welt am Sonntag*. Unfortunately, that *Welt* article, presumably containing actual facts, may as well be in Persian, because no one bothers to seek it out or provide a link.

Fortunately, the UK's *Daily Telegraph* Washington, D.C. correspondent [Jon Swaine](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/jon-swaine/) provides the link to the *Welt* story (the origin of this meme? not yet!) in his story covering Obama's speech about Iranian nuclear weapons.  Appended to the *Telegraph*'s report -- the first apparently legitimized appearance of this notion in the English-language print press-- is [this little bombshell](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/9122351/Obama-I-will-not-hesitate-in-using-force-to-block-Irans-nuclear-threat-from-Iran.html):

**•**North Korea may have exploded an Iranian nuclear bomb in 2010 in a secret test, a German defence expert has claimed.

[**In an article published in the newspaper Welt am Sonntag**](http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article13901079/Iran-soll-Atombombe-in-Nordkorea-getestet-haben.html), Hans Ruhle, a former German defence ministry official, cited evidence of two small nuclear tests in April and May 2010, and argued that one of them was for a “foreign entity, in this case Iran”.

The claim contradicts analysis from both Israeli and American intelligence that says Iran is not developing nuclear weapons, and, if true, could shift the balance of power in the Middle East.

But what is the logic upon which this new article is based?  And who is Ruhle?  And what information does he have? (Even in the "information age," we still need actual information, don't we?  Someday Google Translate is going to start a [unprintable] war.)

What's more, Swaine omitted the very umlaut in the German official's last name: it's Rühle, not Ruhle.  If the *Telegraph* got his last name wrong (even if it's paper policy to stick it to the Germans by omitting their diacritical marks), what's to say the correspondent didn't read Rühle's article wrong?  To put it another way, using some old-school Los Angeles courtroom language: If the gloves don't fit, you must acquit!  If the umlaut's out, you got to shout!

Back to the analysis.

Hans Rühleplaces his assertion in the form of a characteristically long German-language editorial in *Die Welt am Sonntag*, which is the Sunday edition of the Berlin newspaper *Die Welt.*

But it isn't "breaking news."  You can buy *Die Welt am Sonntag* (The World on Sunday) on Saturday early afternoon on the Berlin street corner, which is something I do a few times a year, usually when feeling flush with post-Cold War triumphalism on the Kurfürstendamm. And it isn't "news" or an investigative report; *it's an op-ed*.

Dr. Rühle is not a current employee of the Bundeswehr, but is a retired defense analyst who was a relatively high official for the (West) German government in the mid-1980s.  While Rühle presumably has access to German intelligence reports (nothing to sniff at, particularly as regards East Asia), the allegations in his op-ed clearly derive from his reading of an article, specifically [this February 3 article from the journal *Nature*](http://www.nature.com/news/isotopes-hint-at-north-korean-nuclear-test-1.9972#map)*.*



Courtesy Nature Magazine

The *Nature* article, which takes a more hypothetical approach, cites research in progress by Lars-Erik De Geer of the [Swedish Defence Research Agency in Stockholm](http://www.foi.se/FOI/Templates/NewsPage____7807.aspx). The *Nature* article bases speculative elements upon De Geer's 29-page article (doubtless laden with requisite technical data and caveats) which is currently hung up in the publication queue and is slated to arrive with the April/May edition of the thrice-annual journal [*Science and Global Security*](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/08929882.asp)*.*

While Geer has clearly written is going to be one of the most-anticipated publications of an academic article in years, it seems an article that sparks a wave of this magnitude should be available for scrutiny a bit sooner, so I have contacted colleagues at FOI (the abbreviation for the Research Agency) in Stockholm to see about getting an advance copy.

Before getting into the extensive Rühle arguments made in *Welt am Sonntag,*however, let's just pivot and review how this whole process has worked thus far, because it could be instructive to simplify things:

American bloggers, already primed to blast off at the suggestion of a twitch of Iranian atomic activity, cite Google translations of Austrian newspapers which quote sentence fragments from editorials in German newspapers based upon month-old North American science magazine summaries of forthcoming journal articles by well-credentialed Swedish defense experts.

I sincerely hope this is not good enough for Evan Feigenbaum, John Bolton, and anyone else who may be advising Mitt Romney on foreign policy, much less the Obama team, and it really should not be sufficient grounds prompting we in the observation gallery to shout at the top of our lungs that Kim Jong Un and the KPA have gotten fully into bed with the Revolutionary Guard while North Hamgyong province smoulders.

Take the most offensive elements out of the above reductive equation, equation, however, and what you have is a retired German defense specialist who is rather intrigued by the FOI research, and this is something thus worth examining. So rather than just passing this down the chain (playing "telephone," as it were) perhaps we should see what he has to say.

1. Of Ruehle, World Security Network writes: “Dr. Hans Rühle, born 1939 in Stuttgart, was Head of the Social Science Institute of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. From 1982 to 1988 he was Head of the Planning Staff of the German Ministry of Defence. Thereafter, he served as coordinator of the newly created Federal Security Academy. From 1990 to 1995 he was General Manager of the NATO Multirole Combat Aircraft Development and Production Management Agency (NAMMA). He publishes frequently on transatlantic security affairs, notably on nuclear proliferation.” “Dr. Hans Ruehle,” *World Security Network*, <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/_dsp/dsp_authorBio3.cfm?authID=2951>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Debka also wrote ("North Korea's coming power struggle and the Mid-East nuclear race " [no date available], which can apparently be purchased.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Self-description: “Reza Kahlili is a pseudonym for an ex-CIA spy who requires anonymity for safety reason. *A Time to Betray*, his book about his double life as a CIA agent in Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2010.” See also Reza Kahlili, “China Is Helping to Arm Iran and Sidestep Sanctions Thanks to an Assist From North Korea, *FoxNews.Com*, December 14, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)