



PROPHETIC TIMES

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EBOLA 'COULD BE SPREAD BY BIRDS'

Dec 8, 2002 BBC News reports: "There are fears that birds could spread the deadly Ebola virus. The shell of the human pathogen is similar to viruses that attack birds, suggesting it could have jumped from birds to humans. If this is the case, Ebola could be being carried long distances on the wing, with obvious health implications.

The theory has not been proven, but researchers say it should be borne in mind by health agencies. The warning comes from US researchers who have studied the biochemical structure of Ebola. David Sanders of Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, said biochemical analysis revealed the protein shell of Ebola was close to that of certain bird retroviruses.

A genetic similarity between Ebola and several bird viruses has already been noted. Taken together, it suggests Ebola was once a bird virus and could now be being spread by birds.

'We knew these viruses were inwardly similar, and now we see their outer similarity as well,' he said. 'While bird transmission of Ebola is by no means certain, the resemblance among all these viruses should encourage health officials to be on guard for it....'



TROOPS TO HEAD FOR GULF IN WEEKS

Dec 18, 2002 The London Daily Telegraph reports: "Britain signaled yesterday that it is preparing to send a large expeditionary force to the Gulf. It will join United States troops confronting Saddam Hussein in a final attempt to persuade the Iraqi president to surrender his weapons of mass destruction.



Tanks and advance parties of more than 20,000 British troops will begin moving to the Middle East within weeks, defense officials said yesterday.

The announcement came as American aircraft flying over Iraq began broadcasting a message to Iraqi troops calling on them to overthrow Saddam and promising the reward of an Afghan-style international aid package.

Defense chiefs have warned the Prime Minister that the British contribution must be credible, even if it is intended mainly to coerce Saddam into giving up his weapons. Senior defense officials said the objective was to put some 'real meat' behind the United Nations resolution on weapons inspections.

The operation - codenamed 'Force on Mind' - involves stepping up preparations, chartering the ships needed to take British tanks to the Gulf and warning units and reservists to be ready to move... "

AL QAIDA COULD AVOID MIDEAST AND STRIKE U.S.

Dec 17, 2002 The Middle East Newsline reports: "Al Qaida and its satellite groups might avoid striking Persian Gulf oil facilities and instead target unprotected U.S. energy infrastructure.

A report by the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations said Iraq could exploit U.S. vulnerabilities and launch an attack that will even exceed the Al Qaida suicide missions in New York and Washington on Sept. 11, 2001. A task force headed by former Sen. Gary Hart asserted that the United States is said to remain unprepared to stop a major terrorist attack and urged Washington to tap the expertise of its allies in Europe and the Middle East.

'An adversary intent on disrupting America's reliance on energy need not target oil fields in the Middle East,' the report said. 'The infrastructure for providing energy to end users is concentrated, sophisticated, and largely unprotected. Sixty percent of the Northeast's refined oil products are piped from refineries in Texas and Louisiana.'

The report said the United States has not trained enough personnel to respond to a weapons of mass destruction attack. The challenge of a biological attack is detection while that of a chemical attack is determining which antidotes to administer... "

CHINA SHIPS NORTH KOREA INGREDIENT FOR NUCLEAR ARMS

Dec 17, 2002 The Washington Times reports: "North Korea has purchased a large shipment of chemicals from China that can be used to make nuclear-weapons fuel, U.S. intelligence officials say. North Korean procurement agents succeeded in buying 20 tons of tributyl phosphate, known as TBP, a key chemical used to extract material for nuclear bombs from spent nuclear fuel, said officials familiar with intelligence reports of the transfer.

The officials said the chemical also can be used in commercial processes, such as making plastics, ink and paint. U.S. intelligence agencies, however, believe North Korea will use the TBP for its plutonium-based nuclear-weapons program, based on sensitive intelligence information, the officials said.

The chemical is used in a process known as plutonium-uranium extraction, or purex, which produces plutonium from spent reactor fuel. North Korea announced last week that it planned to restart its plutonium reactors at Yongbyon.

The fact that North Korea is importing tributyl phosphate right now is rather ominous,' said Gary Milhollin, director of the private Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control. 'It's evidence that North Korea plans to extract more plutonium.'

The chemical also can be used to prepare uranium for the weapons process, Mr. Milhollin said in an interview.

North Korea has a large supply of spent reactor fuel that is under international surveillance. The reprocessing of the spent fuel means Pyongyang could produce more bombs 'in fairly short order, a matter of months,' he said..."

HI-TECH ARMS 'WOULD FINISH WAR IN A WEEK'

Dec 16, 2002 The Independent.co.uk reports: "The American weaponry likely to be deployed in any military strike against Iraq is so advanced and hi-tech that some was not even ready to be used in the operation in Afghanistan just a year ago.

With an armory including satellite imagery that can distinguish a tank from a bus, even through thick cloud, to microwave bombs that can destroy electrical and computer systems without hurting civilians, military planners preparing for war are confident that any strike would be completed in little more than a week.

'The first Gulf War was fought like the Second World War, with air dominance – pounding their defenses, softening up the forces and then going in,' said Daniel Gouré, a military analyst with the Washington-based Lexington Institute think tank. 'This will be speedier, more precise – an effects-based operation. It will be much more surgical, both in the use of explosive force and in the overall operation.'

While the present emphasis is on securing the evidence America would need to go to war – the UN wants a list of Iraqi scientists linked to arms programs by the end of the month and is stepping up the pace of inspection, swooping on 11 sites yesterday – analysts agree that America's military dominance will ensure any assault on Iraq is brief..."

EU TO DEPLOY TROOPS AFTER DEAL WITH NATO

Dec 16, 2002 The Financial Times reports: "The European Union will for the first time deploy its own soldiers, in the Balkan republic of Macedonia, possibly by February, following a landmark agreement at the weekend between NATO and the EU.

The deal was clinched at the EU's Copenhagen summit after immense French and German pressure on Abdullah Gul, Turkish prime minister, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of Turkey's governing Justice and Development party.

Turkey, a NATO member, had blocked the 'Berlin Plus' accord that would allow the Europeans access to NATO's planning and military assets for missions independent of the US-led military alliance. Berlin Plus was designed to prevent the Europeans from duplicating NATO resources that could eventually be used to create an EU security and defense arm.

EU leaders agreed three years ago to establish a 60,000-strong rapid-reaction force by mid-2003, capable of deployment within 60 days, of remaining on the ground for up to a year, and of carrying out tasks including humanitarian missions and armed peacekeeping.

Diplomats said this plan, known as the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) gained a big political and psychological boost with last weekend's accord, to be signed in Brussels on Monday by NATO and the EU's political and security committee..."



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