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NORTH KOREA SAYS U.S. LEADING REGION TOWARD WAR

April 24, 2003 *The Associated Press* reports: "North Korea accused the United States of leading the region toward war Thursday in an apparent attempt by the communist nation to increase pressure on negotiators holding a second day of talks on its nuclear programs.

There was no indication whether any progress had come from the first day of meetings in China on Wednesday, the first high-level U.S.-North Korean contact in six months. The U.S. Embassy would say only that the three sides spent the day 'participating and expressing their views.'

But North Korea continued to try to ratchet up the pressure and is believed to want economic aid in exchange for concessions. Its leaders are outraged over U.S. moves to cut off oil shipments because of its suspected nuclear weapons program, and fears it is next on Washington's list for military action.

'The situation on the Korean Peninsula is so tense that a war may break out any moment due to the U.S. moves,' the North's KCNA news agency. It said relations with the United States had hit 'rock bottom' because President Bush named North Korea as part of an 'axis of evil,' along with Iran and Iraq.

KCNA said the war in Iraq had shown the only way for a country to protect itself was to have a strong military deterrent. Officials from Seoul and Washington say the swift U.S.-led victory in Iraq prompted North Korea to agree to the nuclear talks..."

CHINA SEALS OFF MAJOR BEIJING HOSPITAL

April 24, 2003 *BBC News* reports: "China has sealed off a major hospital in the capital, Beijing, as it announced four more deaths from the SARS virus.

The move came a day after the World Health Organization (WHO) added Beijing, Toronto and China's Shanxi province to the list of places it is advising travelers to avoid. The WHO has also sounded an alert about the situation in China's second city, Shanghai.

WHO expert, Dr Wolfgang Peiser, who is visiting the city, said on Thursday he believed there were tens of SARS cases there, rather than the two confirmed cases officially reported.

Hong Kong has also announced four more deaths and 30 new cases of SARS, taking the territory's death toll to 109.

World economists have meanwhile warned that the virus would have a major impact on growth rates in East Asia.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said the tourism and retail sectors were already suffering..."

BRUSSELS REJECTS GISCARD'S BLUEPRINT FOR EU

April 24, 2003 *The London Daily Telegraph* reports: "The attempt to draw up a new European Union constitution suffered a serious setback yesterday when Brussels rejected the blueprint drawn up by the former French president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

The European Commission said plans by Giscard's 105-member Convention on the Future of Europe failed to give any clear answer to the question of 'who does what?' Using language that in diplomatic terms was scathing, a commission statement said it was 'disappointed' with the way the convention's proposals had been presented. It added that they were 'unlikely to foster the development of a consensus on these difficult institutional issues'.

M Giscard's proposals, due to be presented to EU leaders in June, threaten to dilute the commission's power and its attack sets the stage for a brutal struggle before agreement is reached.

At present the plans include the appointment of a powerful EU president, with a deputy and executive office, to replace the current rotating presidency which shifts between member states every six months.

They also foresee the slimming-down of the commission, reducing its current 20 members to 13, and creation of a seven-

member 'bureau' within the Council of Ministers to co-ordinate the EU's work.

'Increasing the number of presidents and vice-presidents, setting up a bureau, can only bring confusion. Duplication of bureaucracies goes against common sense and against indications coming from all sides,' the commission added..."

EU MONETARY POLICY UNDERMINED BY MEMBER STATES

April 24, 2003 *The EU Observer* reports: "EU decisions over the Stability and Growth Pact as well as guidelines to make the EU more competitive, are being interpreted differently by EU states, thereby undermining the idea of a common European monetary policy.



In a meeting held yesterday between the members of the European Parliament and National Parliamentarians from EU countries, EU states were criticized that decisions taken on a European level are being interpreted differently on a national level.

'There are a whole series of national economic policies, not a European one' Austrian Conservative MEP Othmar Karas said. 'The National Parliaments and the EU States apply the decisions regardless of what we decide here.'

Disappointment was also expressed with the lack of achievement over the Lisbon targets, which aim to make the EU the most competitive economy by the end of this decade..."

REPORT: U.S. HAS PLANS TO BOMB NORTH KOREA NUKE PLANT

April 23, 2003 *Reuters* reports: "The Pentagon has drawn up plans to bomb a North Korea nuclear plant if it reprocesses spent nuclear fuel rods, according to an Australian newspaper report on Tuesday that was quickly downplayed by Australian officials.

Citing 'well-informed Canberra sources close to U.S. thinking,' The Australian's foreign editor Greg Sheridan said the U.S. has produced a blueprint to bomb Yongbyon if the plant went ahead with reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods to make atom bombs.

He said the plan also involved a U.S. strike against North Korean heavy artillery in the hills above the border with South Korea, threatening the capital Seoul and about 17,000 U.S. troops stationed nearby.

But Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer shrugged off the report, which came on the eve of a meeting in Beijing between the United States, China and North Korea aimed at ending a six-month stand-off over Pyongyang's suspected arms programs.

Western intelligence agencies believe no reprocessing has yet taken place but Pyongyang has a history of raising the stakes ahead of major talks as an attention-grabbing negotiating tactic.

'It's one of these stories which probably is perfectly true...but there again, the Americans would have contingency plans for any range of different military option,' Downer told an Australian radio station..."

SYRIA TIGHTENS GRIP ON LEBANON'S GOVERNMENT

April 21, 2003 *The Middle East Newsline* reports: "Syria, under increasing threat from the United States, has tightened its grip on neighboring Lebanon.

Lebanese analysts said the new government of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri is the most pro-Syrian Cabinet ever. They said Hariri was ordered by Damascus to disband his previous council of ministers and appoint Christians who are completely subservient to the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Syria is said to have fewer than 20,000 troops in Lebanon. But the Assad regime has brought thousands of Syrian agents to monitor every facet of official Lebanese life, including government, media, universities and professional syndicates.

The sources said Syria had been pressured by Lebanese President Emile Lahoud to dismiss Hariri and replace him with former Prime Minister Omar Karamah, a pro-Syrian politician from Tripoli. But Assad refused, citing Hariri's support in Saudi Arabia..."

Compiled by L. Jim Tuck, Pastor

ljtuc@msn.com

UC GIA, Oakland, San Jose, Stockton, & Santa Rosa, California