



PROPHETIC TIMES

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EGYPT, IRAN PREPARE FOR RECONCILIATION

December 11, 2003 Middle East Newslite reported: 'After nearly a quarter of a century, Egypt and Iran are preparing to reconcile.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Khatami have met in Geneva in the first such summit in 24 years. The summit, which took place on Wednesday on the sidelines of the World Summit on the Information Society, was said to have discussed bilateral relations, Iraq as well as the Middle East.

Egypt and Iran severed diplomatic relations in 1980 when Cairo provided asylum to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Three years later, Iran named a street in Teheran after the assassin of President Anwar Sadat.

'Cooperation between these two great Islamic countries is important for the region and the Islamic world,' Iranian Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi said.'

FRANCE AND GERMANY UNITED AHEAD OF EU SUMMIT

December 10, 2003 EUObserver reported: 'Two days before the EU summit on the Constitution, France and Germany have called upon member states to put EU interests above national ones. French President Jacques Chirac and the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, meeting in Paris on Tuesday (9 December) made it clear to Poland and Spain, who are opposing the introduction of a new voting system, that they will not accept "just any agreement" on the Constitution.

The two leaders also called upon member states not to place national interests above the European cause. Mr Schröder emphasized that if the summit broke up without agreement, France and Germany would press ahead with closer European integration on their own. The meeting in Paris has put increased pressure on UK Prime Minister Tony Blair.

According to the Telegraph, Mr Blair has arranged to meet Chancellor Schröder and President Chirac on Friday before the summit to try to narrow their differences. Although he is said to be keen for a deal, Mr Blair will fight hard for the important issues for the UK - such as the right to a veto on tax policy and on foreign policy.'

EU DEAL REACHED ON CLOSER TIES WITH SYRIA

December 10, 2003 EUObserver reported: 'A deal has been reached with Syria which looks set to further distance the EU's foreign policy towards "rogue states" from that of the United States. The European Commission today announced that it has struck a deal with Syria on developing political and trade ties, extending Brussels' policy of constructive engagement with countries dubbed "rogue states" by the US government.

"We managed yesterday, in Damascus, to reach an understanding with the Syrian side on all remaining issues in the negotiations for a Euro-Mediterranean association agreement", said a spokesperson for the European Commission. The EU has backed a policy of engagement with Iran, Libya and Syria to address human rights, non-proliferation and terrorism issues.

Washington by contrast has taken a much harder line, with sanctions against Syria said to be under consideration by President George W. Bush, after the US Senate approved diplomatic and economic measures last month.

"We will have a much better platform as the agreement is in place to promote political and economic development in Syria", said the Commission spokesperson. The deal includes a clause on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and rules which will facilitate trade ties. Syria is the last in the 12-country Euro-Mediterranean region to sign a deal. Member states are expected to approve the deal at the end of this month or early next year.'

RESEARCHERS GROW SPERM FROM STEM CELLS

December 10, 2003 WorldNetDaily.com reported: 'Scientists have moved a step closer to creating life in a petri dish' without the use of a man. Researchers at Harvard Medical School say they've succeeded in turning mouse embryonic stem cells into primitive sperm cells, and then used the sperm cells to fertilize eggs.

According to the British journal *Nature*, George Daley and his colleagues took tail-less precursors of sperm cells, cultured them for a week in a dish of retinoic acid (which caused them to multiply), and ejected them into unfertilized eggs. The eggs developed into embryos. The technique is being touted as a new tool to help the emerging branch of gene therapy enable fathers in the future to sire children free of genetic flaws.

The scientists did not take their experiment as far as allowing the embryos to develop into live-born mice, but are now studying whether such a feat is possible. Dr. John Gearhart, a Johns Hopkins University stem-cell researcher, cautioned that it is not clear whether the fertilized mouse eggs would have developed into normal embryos, reports the Associated Press. The study involved embryonic germ cells, which appear in early embryos and mature into either sperm or egg cells.

Daley said research will allow scientists to study closely the development of germ cells, considered the "master" material being explored as the replacement-organ tissue of the future. "Germ cells are in some sense the immortal cells of our species. They're really endowed and given the responsibility for perpetuating the species," Daley said.'

DIRTY BOMB WARHEADS DISAPPEAR

December 7, 2003 The Washington Post reported: 'In the ethnic conflicts that surrounded the collapse of the Soviet Union, fighters in several countries seized upon an unlikely new weapon: a small, thin rocket known as the Alazan. Originally built for weather experiments, the Alazan rockets were packed with explosives and lobbed into cities. Military records show that at least 38 Alazan warheads were modified to carry radioactive material, effectively creating the world's first surface-to-surface dirty bomb. The radioactive warheads are not known to have been used. But now, according to experts and officials, they have disappeared.

The last known repository was here, in a tiny separatist enclave known as Transdniestria, which broke away from Moldova 12 years ago. The Transdniestria Moldovan Republic is a sliver of land no bigger than Rhode Island located along Moldova's eastern border with Ukraine. Its government is recognized by no other nation. But its weapons stocks have attracted the attention of black-market arms dealers worldwide.

When the Soviet army withdrew from this corner of Eastern Europe, the weapons were deposited into an arsenal of stupefying proportions. In fortified bunkers are stored 50,000 tons of aging artillery shells, mines and rockets, enough to fill 2,500 boxcars.

Conventional arms originating in Transdniestria have been turning up for years in conflict zones from the Caucasus to Central Africa, evidence of what U.S. officials describe as an invisible pipeline for smuggled goods that runs through Tiraspol to the Black Sea and beyond. Now, governments and terrorism experts fear the same pipeline is carrying nonconventional weapons such as the radioactive Alazan, and that terrorists are starting to tap in.

Why the Alazan warheads were made is unknown. The urgent question -- where are they now? -- is a matter of grave concern to terrorism and nonproliferation experts who know the damage such devices could do. A dirty bomb is not a nuclear device but a weapon that uses conventional explosives to disperse radioactive materials, which could cause widespread disruption and expose people to dangerous radiation. Unlike other kinds of dirty bombs, this one would come with its own delivery system, and an 8-mile range. A number of terrorist groups, including al Qaeda, have sought to build or buy one.

While it has no nuclear bombs of its own, Transdniestria is regarded by experts as a prime shopping ground for outlaw groups looking for weapons of every type. It is the embodiment of the gray zone, where failed states, porous borders and weak law enforcement allow the buying and selling of instruments of terror...'

IRAQI COUNCIL EXPELS IRANIANS

December 10, 2003 Middle East Newsline reported: 'Iraq has decided to expel Iranian opposition forces. The Iraqi Governing Council decided unanimously to expel an estimated 4,000 members of the Mujahadeen Khalq. Since June, the Mujahadeen, a holdover from the former regime of Saddam Hussein, has been confined to a base in eastern Iraq.

Under the decision, the Mujahadeen would be expelled by the end of 2003. Iraqi officials said Mujahadeen combatants would decide their next destination but assessed that many would return to Iran, which has offered amnesty.

"The Governing Council unanimously decided to expel from Iraq by the end of the year the People's Mujahadeen because of the dark history of this terrorist organization," the IGC said.

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