



PROPHETIC TIMES

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BUSH REBUFFS SAUDI MEDIATION REQUEST

March 3, 2004 The Middle East Newline reported: "President George Bush has rebuffed a Saudi request to help unite the rival factions of the Saudi royal family. U.S. government sources said the request came from a Saudi envoy close to Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz. The envoy asked for Bush to invite the defense minister, his chief rival, Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, and Prince Salman to the United States for a meeting on U.S.-Saudi ties.

The aim, the sources said, was for Bush to appeal to the Saudi leadership to cooperate and draft a plan for succession to the aging leadership. The sources said Prince Sultan initiated the effort to resume his close ties with Washington and win U.S. favor for one of his grandchildren to be chosen for the throne.

Sultan, father of Saudi ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar, turned to the United States to help avoid what the sources have feared would be a bloody succession battle. So far, they said, relations between Abdullah and his half-brothers are so poor that they are hardly on speaking terms..."

COMMISSION DEFENDS INCLUSION OF BIOMETRICS IN EU PASSPORT

March 2, 2004 The EUObserver reported: Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Antonio Vitorino today (2 March) defended proposals to include biometric data in EU passports, as concerns were voiced over the protection of personal data and the costs involved. The Commission last month proposed the inclusion of digital facial images and possibly fingerprints on EU passports and also suggested the creation of a register containing the fingerprints and other "relevant data" of EU passport applicants.

The EU also intends to introduce biometric data on visas and residence permits for non-EU citizens. Mr Vitorino said that the inclusion of biometric data on EU passports will improve the accuracy of identification and make travel documents more secure against counterfeiting. "Biometrics like any other technology is not dangerous in itself", he said on Tuesday morning in the European Parliament during a public hearing on biometrics. "Of course I recognise that it is the use you make of technology that might endanger fundamental rights".

Various speakers raised concerns about the protection of personal data and who would have access to this information. "The current proposals on the use of biometrics could be a step towards systematic and centralised storage of sensitive personal data, which would be like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut", said Danish Liberal MEP Ole Sorensen, who is drafting a report on this issue.

Mr Vitorino stressed that the EU is responding to the standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and not US demands. However the US-imposed deadline of October 2004 is looming, after which EU citizens would require a visa to travel to the US if they do not have biometric data on their passport. This deadline is expected to be missed by various large countries such as Japan, the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain..."

IRAN OPERATES 100 MILITARY CONTRACTS IN LIBYA

March 2, 2004 The Middle East Newline reported: The United States has found an extensive Iranian military presence in Libya. Western intelligence sources said a British-U.S. team that inspected Libyan facilities in late 2003 found evidence of nearly 100 military-related Iranian contracts in Libya. The sources said they include the development of missiles as well as conventional and nonconventional weapons.

"Iran has used Libya as a laboratory for Teheran's defense industry," an intelligence source said. "The United States found evidence of Iranian involvement in virtually every major Libyan weapons program."

Many of the Iranian projects in Libya focused on medium- and intermediate-range missile development, the sources said. They said a British-U.S. team that inspected Libyan facilities in October and December 2003 found an Iranian-built plant for the production of fuel for Libyan liquid-fuel missiles based on the Scud.

EU IMPOSES TRADE SANCTIONS AGAINST US OVER COMPANY TAX BREAKS

March 1, 2004 The Voice of America reported: "The European Union has imposed trade sanctions on the United States over tax breaks the U.S. companies get when they export their products. The dispute could cost American exporters hundreds of millions of dollars.

American exports to Europe ranging from jewelry and steel to farm products will be hit with a five percent punitive tariff that will increase by one percent each month until Congress acts to end the tax breaks.

The World Trade Organization has ruled that the tax breaks for American exporters amounts to an illegal subsidy under international trade rules. Legislation to end the tax breaks is before the U.S. Congress, but has not been enacted.



European Commission spokeswoman Arancha Gonzalez says the United States has imposed similar tariffs on EU exports before, but the European Union has never before levied punitive tariff on U.S. companies. "This is the first time that the European Union is imposing counter measures, trade sanctions as you would like to call them, on U.S. goods," she said.

The dispute over the U.S. export tax breaks is just one of several transatlantic trade rows. One of the biggest disputes between the European Union and the United States now pending before the WTO is over the EU ban on genetically modified food. Officials on both sides have sought to downplay their differences. As one U.S. official put it, "It is like a marriage. Things get worked out."

AS EU EXPANSION NEARS, APPREHENSION RISES

March 3, 2004 The International Herald Tribune reported: "When the European Union expands eastward this spring, bridging the divide caused by the 20th century's hot and cold wars, it will be transformed from a posh club of like-minded nations to a street bazaar of countries differing in wealth, stature and outlook.

Gone forever will be the tight configuration huddled around France and Germany, with Britain often playing the odd man out, and Italy and Spain clamoring from the wings. In its place will stand an uneasy amalgam of Western countries that are rich and want to stay that way and Eastern countries that were retarded by Communism and now seek a share in the wealth.

The admission on May 1 of 10 new countries - 8 of them once in the Soviet shadow - is already changing the European political dynamic. The neophyte governments of the new states are aggressively pro-American while the rulers of France and Germany fret about American hegemony.

Scarred by their postwar existence behind the Iron Curtain, most of the new members bring a different mentality and different habits. They are apt to be suspicious of distant bureaucracy in Brussels, as they were of Moscow, but eager to receive EU handouts. They tend to be idealistic, wanting to spread freedom and oppose totalitarianism, but also cynical about politicians and accustomed to corruption in everyday life.

The prospect of enlargement is not arousing enthusiasm on either side. Many Westerners worry that opening the door will siphon off wealth and jobs, exacerbating their own economic doldrums, tensions over immigration and pressure from rightist parties.

"We're not in a very good mood right now," said Olivier Duhamel, a professor at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in Paris. "We're worried about unemployment, immigration and the French identity, and when you put all that together, you fear enlargement. The only people talking about Europe these days are those talking against it."

Among Eastern nations, the expansion was viewed - initially at least - as something that would make Europe, and themselves, whole again. "When we say Europe in Eastern Europe," said Andrei Plesu, the former Romanian foreign minister, "we usually think about something in the past, something we lost and have to regain. It's something in an old faded photograph, the world between the two World Wars, a nostalgia, a longing. In the West, Europe is a project. In the East, it's a memory."

But after years of slightly humiliating negotiations, and new fears of being swamped by the powerful West, the once paradisaical vision of "rejoining Europe" has lost its sheen.

"Yes, it's historic," said Bronislaw Geremek, a Polish historian, former foreign minister and onetime leader of the Solidarity movement. "For the first time Europe is thinking about its future, trying to fix its borders and face America and find a place in the global game. But no one is enjoying it, on either side. There's a feeling of frustration and disappointment that's astonishing..."

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