



PROPHETIC TIMES

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IRAN COULD TEST ICBMs AS EARLY AS 2005

May 19, 2004 Middle East Newslines reported: "The U.S. intelligence community has determined that Iran could begin testing components of intercontinental ballistic missiles as early as 2005.

U.S. officials said Iran has achieved sufficient progress in its Shihab-class intermediate-range missile program to enable testing of ICBM components starting from next year. The officials said Iran has succeeded in overcoming major obstacles in extending the range of its ballistic missile program.

Iran has maintained or even exceeded its targets in 2003 for the extended-range Shihab-3 program. Officials said the successful test of the Shihab-3 in June 2003 could enable Teheran to quickly advance toward the development of a ballistic missile with a range of 1,700 kilometers. This would mark the start of Iran's research and development program into space-launched vehicles.

"During 2003, Iran continued R&D in its longer-range ballistic missile programs, and publicly reiterated its intention to develop space launch vehicles -- and SLVs contain most of the key building blocks for an ICBM," CIA director George Tenet told the Senate Intelligence Committee on Feb. 24. "Iran could begin flight-testing these systems in the mid- to latter-part of the decade."

EXPLOSION FOILS N. KOREAN MISSILES TO SYRIA

May 18, 2004 Middle East Newslines reported: "A North Korean missile shipment to Syria was halted when a train collision in that Asian country destroyed the missile cargo and killed about a dozen Syrian technicians.

U.S. officials confirmed a report that a train explosion on April 22 killed about a dozen Syrian technicians near the Ryongchon province in North Korea. The officials said the technicians were accompanying a train car full of missile components and other equipment from a facility near the Chinese border to a North Korea port.

"The way it was supposed work was that the train car full of missiles and components would have arrived at the port and some would have been shipped to Syria while others would have been transported by air," an official said.

Officials said the North Korean shipment to Syria was not meant to have contained chemical or biological weapons. They said foreign rescue crews summoned to the train explosion did not report any chemical contamination."

EU FOREIGN MINISTERS FAIL TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES ABOUT CONSTITUTION

May 18, 2004 The Voice of America reported: "Two days of urgent talks by E.U. foreign ministers in Brussels have failed to bridge the major gaps blocking agreement on a constitution for the 25-nation group.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw clashed with his counterparts from France and Germany, in particular, as they argued over issues such as voting procedures and human rights.

The British government faces strong skepticism in parliament over the new E.U. constitution, and has promised to put the document to a public referendum. Officials say to get the constitution approved they must secure veto power for all members on any new E.U. rules related to taxation, foreign and defense policy, and social security.

Britain also asked for an amendment in the document's Charter of Fundamental Rights. It wants to ensure that the charter does not end up creating new social and employment rights under European Union law.

With agreement still elusive, France urged Ireland, which holds the E.U. rotating presidency, to issue a final draft. Ireland has called another meeting of the foreign ministers for the beginning of next week. The goal is to settle on a constitution by the next E.U. summit in mid-June.

The E.U. members failed to make their last deadline for agreement in December, and they are under pressure to agree by their new self-imposed deadline next month. Experts say the organization needs the document in order to be able to operate efficiently, having just increased its membership from 15 to 25 at the beginning of this month.

If Britain or any other country fails to ratify the constitution, it is to be set aside. Some in Britain are concerned that if that happens due to a British 'No' vote, other members will draft a new document that would, in effect, give Britain second-class status in the organization.

Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen says he remains confident an agreement can be reached. But the British foreign secretary says the wording must be right, and he warns that next month's summit could come and go without its key constitutional centerpiece."

FRIEDMAN: 'STRONG POSSIBILITY' OF EURO ZONE COLLAPSE

May 17, 2004 The EUobserver reported: "Milton Friedman, the Nobel-Prize winning US economist and one of the most influential economists of the 20th Century believes there is a "strong possibility" that the 12 member euro zone could collapse "in the next few years". In an exclusive interview with the EUobserver, Professor Friedman argues, "there is a strong possibility that the euro zone could collapse in the next few years because differences are accumulating between countries ... I'm not saying it is a certainty, just that it is a strong possibility". He suggests that the euro could be replaced with the old national currencies.

His main concern with the workings of the euro zone is that it is difficult to have an economic union between countries that have substantially different economies, cultures and languages. He believes that these problems are set to mount with the entry of the ten new member states. Although he concedes that "actually I think that the euro has been doing quite well so far", he says that "there are problems facing it especially when you consider that you have the ten new countries in the EU".

The new countries are legally obliged to join the single currency and four of them (Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovenia) have indicated that they intend to join it as soon as possible. Professor Friedman believes that "there are certainly different problems for different countries" but advises, "if they are going to join, the sooner the better".

Professor Friedman, who played a pivotal role in shaping the US economy in the latter half of the 20th century, is not optimistic about the EU's chances of fulfilling its self-imposed economic goals known as the Lisbon Agenda.

He said, "No I do not think that the EU can catch up with the US by 2010. It is a nice dream, a good hope and I wish them well, the world would benefit". "But I think the chances of achieving it are very slim. The rest of the world is not going to stand still. India is not going to stand still, China is not going to stand still and the US is not going to stand still".

Furthermore, he believes that the EU - and even the US - will eventually be caught up by the rapidly growing economy of China. "It is almost certain that, at the current rate of growth, China will overtake both the EU and the US. But this is quite a long time down the road"..."

CHINA WARNS TAIWAN AGAINST ANY MOVE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

May 17, 2004 The Voice of America reported: "China is warning Taiwan it will crush any move toward independence thoroughly and at any cost. The warning comes as Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian prepares to deliver his inaugural speech this week. Beijing officials will be listening carefully to Chen Shui-bian's inaugural speech on Thursday for any hint the re-elected leader might give about pushing the island toward formal independence.

China considers Taiwan a part of its territory and has always vowed to retake it by force if necessary. The island has been self-governed since 1949, when the Nationalists fled there following the Communist takeover of the mainland.

In a statement, Chinese officials repeated earlier threats that they would not hesitate to crush any steps toward independence at the island "thoroughly at any cost." The Chinese statement gave Taiwan a chance to restart negotiations on easing tensions and strengthening ties if Taipei accepts the so-called one-China principle.

Analysts say the statement was meant to warn President Chen. The Taiwanese leader has been testing Beijing's patience by calling for a new constitution by 2008, which China regards as a step toward formal independence and one that has raised the possibility of cross-straits war.

President Chen, whose base of support lies among pro-independence voters, is expected to use his speech to outline his plan for a new constitution and other measures. International relations professor Chen-yuan Tung at National Taiwan University says at this point, domestic political pressure may prevent Mr. Chen from altering his speech..."

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