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HOMELAND SECURITY CHIEF SAYS TERROR ALERT LEVEL WILL NOT BE RAISED

May 26, 2004 CNN reported: "Intelligence from multiple sources indicates that al Qaeda intends to attack the United States in the coming months, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft said Wednesday.

"This disturbing intelligence indicates al Qaeda's specific intention to hit the United States hard," Ashcroft said in a news conference. "Beyond this intelligence, al Qaeda's own public statements indicate that it is almost ready to attack the United States."

Ashcroft said that after the March 11 train bombings in Madrid, Spain, "an al Qaeda spokesman announced 90 percent of the arrangements for an attack on the United States were complete."

Ashcroft cited a number of upcoming events that could be potential targets, including the Group of Eight economic summit on Sea Island, Georgia, and the Democratic and Republican national conventions in Boston, Massachusetts, and New York, respectively.

He also warned that terrorists may not have a typical look and that "the face of al Qaeda may be changing."

Ashcroft said the group adapts quickly to new security measures and may be recruiting operatives in their late 20s or early 30s and "may travel with families to lower their profile."

"Our intelligence confirms al Qaeda is seeking recruits who can portray themselves as Europeans," he said..."

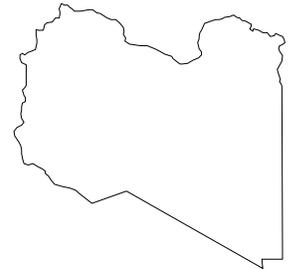
IRAN OPERATES 100 MILITARY CONTRACTS IN LIBYA

May 26, 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."



SPECIAL REPORT: BRITAIN AND THE EU CHRISTIANITY BEDEVILS TALKS ON EU TREATY

May 25, 2004 The Guardian reported: "The controversial question of Christianity returned to the EU yesterday when seven states, led by Italy, urged the union to recognise a "historical truth" and refer explicitly to the "Christian roots of Europe" in its new constitution.

Britain's foreign secretary, Jack Straw, and his fellow foreign ministers were forced to divert into a theological and cultural minefield at the meeting in Brussels called to tackle highly charged but technical issues, such as voting weights and budget procedures.

The preamble of the current draft treaty, drawn up by the former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's convention, refers only to the "cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe". Specifically mentioning Christianity or God was considered too controversial in the face of furious opposition from secular France and Protestant northerners such as Sweden and Denmark.

Opponents argued that it would be wrong to exclude Muslims and Jews, and would therefore be better to avoid any religious reference. The European parliament even rejected a proposal from Christian Democrat MEPs to mention the continent's "Judaean-Christian roots".

But the largely Catholic states of Italy Poland, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have made clear they want more. "This issue remains a priority for our governments as well as for millions of European citizens,"

they wrote to Ireland, the current holder of the EU presidency.

Spain had previously supported them, but changed its policy when the Socialists won the March general election. Spain's foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, said: "Spain is a Catholic country, but in the European constitution our government is rather secular, and in this sense we want to respect the text as it currently stands."

Poland would like a reference based on its own national constitution, which refers to "both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values from other sources".

The Vatican has made clear that it wants a reference to Christianity in the document. "If you are the prime minister of a Catholic country it would be very useful to have the Pope on your side, especially when you hold a referendum on the constitution," said one diplomat.

Mr Straw, aware of the feelings of British Muslims, told reporters that if there was a reference to one religious tradition, "we would have to make reference to others" This issue is not expected to be settled before the Brussels summit on June 17, when the constitution is due to be agreed..."

PATTEN: EU HANDLING OF TURKEY CRUCIAL TO AVERT ISLAM-WEST CLASH

May 25, 2004 The EUobserver reported: "External relations Commissioner Chris Patten yesterday (24 May) said that the EU's handling of the Turkish bid for EU membership is a crucial factor in avoiding a clash between the West and the Islamic world. Speaking at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Mr Patten argued that the correct treatment of Turkey by the EU would help avert the scenario of a "clash of civilizations" between the western and Islamic world - as famously predicted by the political scientist Samuel Huntington in 1993.

Mr Patten said, "We cannot help but be conscious of the symbolism, at this time, of reaching out a hand to a country whose population is overwhelmingly Muslim". Underlining the strategic importance of the upcoming Commission report on Turkey, which will be released next autumn, the Commissioner stated, "I look forward to the debate preceding the Commission's opinion on the matter in the autumn. In making it, we will be conscious that we potentially pave the way for a very different EU and that should be squarely and honestly confronted".

"We need to open the debate", Mr Patten urged, "recognising that the beginning of negotiations with Turkey, whatever the uncertainty of the outcome, would lead to a very different Turkey and very different relations between Europe and the Islamic world"..."

U.S. LOCATES WAY-STATION FOR IRAQI INSURGENCY

May 23, 2004 The Middle East Newsline reported: "The U.S. military has identified and located a major facility used for the smuggling of Al Qaida-inspired insurgents from Syria into Iraq.

U.S. officials said the facility was located about 80 kilometers east of the Syrian border and contained weapons as well as equipment for the production of forged identity cards and passports. They said the facility contained bedding for more than 300 people.

The facility was said to have processed thousands of insurgents smuggled across the Syrian border over the last year. Officials said Sunni operatives provided the foreign volunteers with new identities and clothes in Iraq.

"What was interesting is that the building seemed to be somewhat of a dormitory," Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of coalition operations, told a briefing on Saturday. "There were more than 300 sets of bedding gear in it and about 100 sets of prepackaged clothing. It's suspected that when foreign fighters come in from other countries they change their clothes into typical Iraqi clothing sets."