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EU FEARS FOOD PRICE RISES WILL LEAD TO 'SPIRAL OF PROTECTIONISM'

April 17, 2008 The EU Observer reported: "The European Union's trade chief has warned against governments being seduced by food export restrictions in the wake of rapid food price rises, saying such moves are the worst thing the developing world should do as they will only exacerbate scarcity.

EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson, addressing the trade committee of the European Parliament, said he fears "a reversion to the sort of mercantilist policies of the past," calling food export bans "less beggar-thy-neighbour than starve-thy-neighbour."

"By chasing an illusion of food security, these policies throttle domestic production, choke off supplies to others and risk leading to a spiral of protectionism and dwindling food production."

"Export taxes, quotas or bans do not make economic or development sense," said the commissioner. "In the case of basic agricultural commodities, they make even less sense," he added.

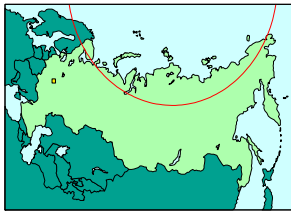
Riots caused by skyrocketing food prices have broken out in some 33 countries worldwide. In Haiti, the government fell as a result of a week of disturbances in which 40 people were killed.

In response, Argentina, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine and Vietnam have introduced export restrictions or outright bans on staple food items."..."

PUTIN TO BECOME UNITED RUSSIA CHIEF, CEMENTING HOLD ON POWER

April 16, 2008 The Christian Science Monitor reported: "Vladimir Putin put the finishing touches to his postretirement formula for retaining power in Russia Tuesday by scooping up the leadership of the country's dominant political party, a position he will hold in addition to being prime minister.

"I accept the invitation of the party. I am ready to take on myself the additional responsibility and head the party," Mr. Putin told delegates to the convention of the pro-Kremlin United Russia (UR) party, which controls 70 percent of the parliament's 450 seats. The 600 delegates, including many of Russia's top politicians, responded with a lengthy standing ovation.



Russia

Russian observers are deeply divided over the consequences of Putin's move, which will effectively leave Russia with two strong leaders after President-elect Dmitri Medvedev is inaugurated on May 7. Russia's historical experience with divided power has been an unhappy one, but many experts believe the close personal ties and complementary skills of Putin and Mr. Medvedev may produce a stable political synergy that will enable much-needed economic reforms and anticorruption measures.

Others warn, however, that any future strife between the two men, who represent very different generations and backgrounds, could split Russia's fractious bureaucracy and paralyze the work of government.

"This strengthens Putin's political weight as national leader," Sergei Markov, a United Russia Duma deputy, told journalists. "Dmitry Medvedev is leader of the state and of the Russian Federation, but the political leader of the country remains Putin."

Within a month, Putin will move from the Kremlin to Russia's White House, the gleaming eggshell-like building by the Moscow River that serves as the seat of government, to take up the job of prime minister."..."

"This is a completely new and very dangerous situation for Russia," says Alexander Dugin, head of the nationalist Eurasia Movement. "We have two strong politicians, but all of the legitimacy lies with Putin. He has real charisma, huge popular support, his record of substantial achievements as president, and now the leadership of the main political party in the country. He will not be just another prime minister."..."

POLICE ON HIGH ALERT AHEAD OF PASSOVER, ISRAEL 60 CELEBRATIONS

April 16, 2008 Ynetnews.net reported: "Police have raised their alert level throughout the country on Wednesday ahead of the Passover holiday and a series of events related to Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations.

The Security Establishment received nine specific warnings of terrorist organizations' intentions to carry out attacks, as well as dozens of general warnings. These will result in closures on the West Bank, due in part to the threats of retaliation against Israel for the recent assassination of senior Hizbullah commander Imad Mugniyah in Damascus.

Thousands of police officers, Border Guard officers and Civil Guard volunteers are being dispatched throughout the country, while Police Commissioner Dudi Cohen cancelled all the vacations and trainings toward the effort.

The deployment is centered around three main areas, from the Seam Line to the area surrounding Jerusalem and into major cities and population centers.

I urge the Israeli people to go out and celebrate. We're working hard so that Israeli citizens can do so with a strong sense of security," head of operations at the National Police Headquarters, Major General Yoram Ochayon, told ynet.

Ochayon added that the hotel occupancy in Jerusalem is nearing 100%, and that tens of thousands of visitors from Israel and abroad are touring the capital. "We are prepared around festivals, parks and nature attractions."

Once Passover is over, police will begin preparations for the Holocaust Remembrance Day events and ceremonies, which will be followed by the memorial day for the fallen IDF soldiers. Numerous events will take place on the eve of Independence Day – the major one being the Lighting up Israel's Skies project by the Ministerial Committee marking 60 years of independence, starting in the northern Carmel area and down to the southern town of Dimona."..."

SPY PHOTOS REVEAL 'SECRET LAUNCH SITE' FOR IRAN'S LONG-RANGE MISSILES

April 11, 2008 Times Online reported: "The secret site where Iran is suspected of developing long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets in Europe has been uncovered by new satellite photographs.

The imagery has pinpointed the facility from where the Iranians launched their Kavoshgar 1 "research rocket" on February 4, claiming that it was in connection with their space programme.

Analysis of the photographs taken by the Digital Globe QuickBird satellite four days after the launch has revealed a number of intriguing features that indicate to experts that it is the same site where Iran is focusing its efforts on developing a ballistic missile with a range of about 6,000km (4,000 miles).

A previously unknown missile location, the site, about 230km southeast of Tehran, and the link with Iran's long-range programme, was revealed by Jane's Intelligence Review after a study of the imagery by a former Iraq weapons inspector.

A close examination of the photographs has indicated that the Iranians are following the same path as North Korea, pursuing a space programme that enables Tehran to acquire expertise in long-range missile technology. Geoffrey Forden, a research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that there was a recently constructed building on the site, about 40 metres in length, which was similar in form and size to the Taepodong long-range missile assembly facility in North Korea.

Avital Johanan, the editor of *Jane's Proliferation*, said that the analysis of the Iranian site indicated that Tehran may be about five years away from developing a 6,000km ballistic missile. This would tie in with American intelligence estimates and underlines why President Bush wants the Polish and Czech components of the US missile defence system to be up and running by 2013.

The Czech Republic has now agreed to have a special radar system on its soil and the Polish Government is still negotiating with Washington over the American request to site ten interceptor missiles in Poland."..."

AHMADINEJAD BOASTS OVER IRAN'S MILITARY POWER

April 17, 2008 Middle East Times reported: "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Thursday proclaimed Iran as the "most powerful nation" on earth as the country's air force showed off its prowess at a time of mounting tension with the West.

"Iran is the most powerful and independent nation in the world," Ahmadinejad told a military parade outside Tehran marking the Islamic republic's annual Army Day, reaffirming one of his favoured slogans.

Ahmadinejad said all the branches of the armed forces would react forcefully in response to any attack against Iran's soil and boasted that no one would dare to launch a strike on the country. "The army, the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij (militia) will resist with force and coordination and respond strongly to the slightest aggression," he said.

"I am proud to announce today that the Iranian nation's power is of an extent that no major power can dare jeopardise the security and interests of the Iranian nation."



To mark the occasion, dozens of fighter jets and other aircraft flew over the parade ground in a bid to show the power of the air force, which has struggled for years under the effects of US sanctions.

Among them were US-made F4 and F-5 fighter jets whose construction goes back to the 1960s and 1970s when shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi went on a massive military spending spree. Also shown were several Saegheh fighter jets which Iran says is an entirely home-produced model but Western experts classify as a derivative of the F-5."....

Among the weapons on display at the military parade was Iran's longer range Shahab-3 missile, whose range includes Israel and even the fringes of Europe. The model shown had a "baby bottle" nose for extra-dynamic efficiency and was labelled "Ghadr-1" although it was clearly a Shahab-3.

A lorry carrying other missiles also carried the slogan "Death to Israel" while "Death to America" had been written on another vehicle."..."

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