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NETANYAHU: GOLAN PULLOUT WOULD PUT IRAN ON ISRAEL'S DOORSTEP

May 22, 2008 Ha'aretz.com reported: "Opposition leader and Likud chairman Benjamin Netanyahu warned Thursday that a withdrawal from the Golan Heights would put Israel on Iran's front lines. Netanyahu convened the Likud for a special party session in Tel Aviv, in light of Syria's declaration that Israel has committed to pull out of the Golan Heights and return to the 1967 borders as part of its renewed negotiations for peace.

"Giving of the Golan Heights will turn the Golan into Iran's front lines which will threaten the whole state of Israel," Netanyahu told party members. "If the words of Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem are correct, Mr. Olmert has committed to pull back from the Golan up to the shores of Lake Galilee, even before negotiations have begun. Indeed, this would mean unprecedented anarchy of politics and defense," he added.

"This irresponsibility can be added to the failed conduct of the Second Lebanon War, the failure to prevent Hezbollah's new and heightened rearmament, the failure to prevent Qassam fire on southern Israel. We must not let the Kadima government continue its chain of failures," he said.

On Wednesday night, hours after news of the renewed indirect negotiations broke, the Syrian foreign minister said Israel had committed to return to its 1967 borders as part of peace negotiations.

Syrian Information Minister Muhsin Bilal then told Al Jazeera television on Thursday that Damascus had received guarantees from Israel via Turkey for a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and rejected conditions put forth for concluding a peace deal.

In his address to Likud members, Netanyahu accused Olmert of using the renewed negotiations with Syria as a pretext for diverting attention from the criminal investigation in which is currently mired.

He called on party members and all government factions to demand fresh elections to replace Olmert."..."

FIRST HUMAN CASE OF BIRD FLU REPORTED IN BANGLADESH

May 22, 2008 The Voice of America reported: "The first human case of bird flu has been reported in Bangladesh. Mahmudur Rahman, an official with the country's health ministry Thursday said a child has been diagnosed with the deadly virus. The child has received treatment, and officials say his condition has improved.

Bird flu was first detected in Bangladesh in 2007. In recent months, authorities have slaughtered more than a million chickens, after the virus was found in at least 47 of the country's 64 districts. Bangladesh's poultry industry is one of the world's largest. The bird flu outbreak has led to the closure of more than 40 percent of the nation's poultry farms, leaving more than half a million people unemployed.

Bird flu was also detected in neighboring India's West Bengal state earlier this year. No human cases have been detected there so far."..."



ISRAEL: RUSSIA MAY BE SELLING SYRIA ARMS

May 21, 2008 The Jerusalem Post reported: "Fearing that Damascus is acquiring advanced military platforms, Israel is closely following meetings being held in Moscow this week between a high-level Syrian military delegation and Russian Defense Ministry officials.

Senior government officials in Jerusalem said they have been aware for several days of the Syrians' upcoming visit to the Russian capital but that it was not yet clear which military platforms Damascus was requesting.

According to reports in the Russian media, the delegation, led by Syrian Air Force commander Gen. Akhmad al-Ratyb, will be in Moscow for five days and meet with Russian Defense Ministry and Air Force officials, as well as visit several military bases and units.

According to the reports, the talks will focus on arms sales - including submarines, anti-aircraft missiles, the latest model MiG fighter jets and advanced surface-to-surface ballistic missiles.

Israel is particularly concerned with a Syrian request for long-range S-300 surface-to-air missiles that could threaten IAF jets flying on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights.

The S-300 is one of the best multi-target anti-aircraft-missile systems in the world and reportedly can track 100 targets simultaneously while engaging 12 at the same time. Syria recently received 36 Pantsir S1E air-defense systems from Russia. Iran is believed to have already procured several S-300 systems to protect its nuclear facilities.

Israeli defense officials expressed grave concern over the possibility that Syria would obtain these new military platforms. Damascus, the officials said, had dramatically increased defense spending recently. In the past three years, Syria has spent more than \$3 billion on weapons, up from less than \$100 million in 2002.

Officials said that Israel was working diplomatically with Moscow to prevent the sales, but that for the right amount of money, Russia

would likely approve the sales in any case.

According to the reports, Syria is also discussing a purchase of MiG 29SMT fighter jets. Currently, the Syrian Air Force is extremely weak, so advanced long-range MiGs would give it a significant boost.

Israel is also extremely concerned about a possible sale of the Iskander surface-to-surface missile system. The Iskander, Israeli weapons experts said Tuesday, was the heir to the Scud and was far superior to the ballistic missiles currently in Syria's arsenal. The Iskander is propelled by solid fuel and has a range of 300 kilometers, with accuracy of about 20 meters."..."

GORDON BROWN BACKS ANIMAL-HUMAN HYBRIDS

May 18, 2008 The London Daily Telegraph reported: "The Prime Minister said that stem cell research was an "inherently moral endeavour" and a "profound opportunity" to save and transform millions of lives.

"Britain is at the forefront of this research and responsible for much of the worldwide progress," he wrote in The Observer newspaper.

The premier supports scientists who want to insert the nuclei of human cells into animal eggs, creating hybrid embryos which are allowed to grow for a few days. Stem cells can then be harvested and used to create brain, skin, heart and other tissue for treating diseases - before the embryos are destroyed.

MPs have a free vote this week on whether hybrid embryos should be legal as part of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. Mr Brown said he had "deep respect" for those who disagree with the bill because of religious conviction but added that "we owe it to ourselves and future generations" to back stem cell research.

He said his government had sought to introduce "clear laws" permitting use of stem cells within a "clear, managed, legal framework, subject to the strictest supervision".

"Let me be clear: if we want to sustain stem cell research and bring new cures and treatments to millions of people, I believe admixed embryos are necessary. "The question for me is not whether they should exist, but how their use should be controlled," he added.

"The scientists I speak to are committed to what they see as an inherently moral endeavour, that can save and improve the lives of thousands and over time, millions."

Mr Brown's appeal has a personal dimension because his younger son, Fraser, has cystic fibrosis - a condition that could benefit from embryo research."..."

STUBBORNLY HIGH FOOD PRICES THREATEN WORSE HUNGER

May 22, 2008 Reuters reported: "High food prices are here to stay for the foreseeable future, potentially forcing millions more people into hunger, two reports from the United Nations and the OECD showed on Thursday.

A surge in commodity prices in the last year was not a blip and prices will remain at or above current levels for at least the next decade as some of the main underpinning factors -- demand for a richer diet, the rise of biofuels and high oil prices -- will remain, one of the reports said.

"Food is no longer the cheap commodity that it once was," said Hafez Ghanem, assistant director-general of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Rising food prices are bound to worsen the already unacceptable level of food deprivation suffered by 854 million people. We are facing the risk that the number of hungry will increase by many more millions of people," he said.

In a 10-year look-ahead at likely food price scenarios, to be published next week, the FAO and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development saw no return to pre-crisis levels.

"On average over the coming 10-year period, nominal prices for cereals, rice and oilseeds are expected to be 35 percent to 65 percent higher than on average in the past 10 years," said a summary of the Agricultural Outlook report seen by Reuters.

"Prices in real terms are projected to be 10 percent to 35 percent higher than in the past decade."

Even a bumper harvest expected this year will do little to ease the plight of the world's poor, FAO said in its twice-yearly Food Outlook which gives short-term estimates.

Good weather and increased plantings will provide a 3.8 percent rise in world cereal output, with wheat up 8.7 percent. That has meant the price surge has started to level off, but prices will not plummet back to pre-crisis levels, FAO said.

Rice, a staple for more than half the earth's population, will remain in short supply on global markets, and poor countries that rely on food imports could see food bills up 40 percent this year after a similar price hike in 2007, its report said.

"The sustained rise in imported food expenditures (for poor countries) ... constitutes a very worrying development," it said. "Their annual food import basket could cost four times as much as it did in 2000."..."

