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IRAN FINANCES N. KOREAN MISSILE PROGRAMS

March 29, 2007 The Middle East Newswire reported: "Iran has been the leading financier of North Korea's missile programs, a report said. The report by the Center for Iranian Studies said Iran has financed North Korea's missile programs for the last 25 years. Authored by Alon Levkowitz, the report said North Korea has also used Iran as a testing ground for new missiles.

"Indeed, several analysts believe that Iran was the primary financial supporter of North Korea's missile development program, although sources in Iran have denied the intelligence reports on this issue," the report said. "One example of the cooperation between the two states took place at the beginning of the 1980s, when Iran agreed to fund the reverse engineering of the Scud-B missile in exchange for the option to purchase production models."

Entitled "Iran and North Korea Military Cooperation: A Partnership Within the Axis of Evil," the report said Pyongyang and Teheran have expanded military technological cooperation in the field of missiles and nuclear technology. The report said the cooperation was spawned by the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, and converted Teheran into one of North Korea's best missile clients."..."

U.S. NAVY LAUNCHES MOCK STRIKES ON IRAN

March 29, 2007 The Middle East Newswire reported: "The U.S. Navy has launched its largest exercise in the Gulf since 2003. Officials said the navy began its exercise on Tuesday in the Gulf near the coast of Iran. They said two strike carriers conducted naval and air maneuvers that included mock attacks on Iran.

"The exercise should reassure our friends and our allies of our commitment to security and stability in the region," Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman said. The exercise was launched four days after Iran abducted 15 British Navy sailors during their patrol of Shatt Al Arab. Teheran accused the British patrols of entering Iranian waters for espionage missions."..."



EU WEAKENS OWN IDENTITY BY IGNORING CHRISTIANITY, WARNS POPE

March 26, 2007 The EU Observer reported: "Pope Benedict XVI has criticised EU leaders for ignoring Christianity in their reflections over the union's 50th birthday and warned about demographic trends that put Europe's future at risk. Speaking to European bishops gathered in Rome and Vatican over the weekend (22-24 March) to mark the 50th anniversary of the signature of the EU's founding treaties, the head of the Catholic Church suggested Europe was doubting its identity by committing a "form of apostasy of itself".

"If on the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome the governments of the Union want to get closer to their citizens, how can they exclude an element as essential to the identity of Europe as Christianity, in which the vast majority of its people continue to identify?" he asked.

"It is no surprise that today's Europe, while it purports to be a community of values, seems to increasingly contest the existence of absolute and universal values," he said, adding that a union that fails to respect "the true dignity of the human being, forgetting that each person is created in the image of God, ends up doing good for no one."

The speech came just as EU leaders were gathering in Berlin to celebrate the bloc's birthday, with German chancellor Angela Merkel signing a declaration on their behalf which makes no specific reference to religious values in a united Europe.

However, a meeting of the centre-right heads of states and governments in Berlin - including the German chancellor - preceding the full EU gathering adopted a separate declaration mentioning "Judeo-Christian roots" as well as the key contribution of Christian Democrats in Europe's integration.

Pope Benedict also spoke about the looming demographic crisis in Europe, saying its low birth rates could put the bloc "down a road which could lead it to take its leave from history," he said.

"You could almost think that the European continent is in fact losing faith in its own future," he argued, adding that part of these trends is due to a preference of "dangerous individualism" among Europeans.

According to the European Commission, the size of Europe's working population is likely to fall by 48 million between now and 2050 with serious implications for economic growth and public finances, particularly in countries like Italy and Poland."

AL QAIDA SEEKS TO PRODUCE ROCKETS IN SAUDI

March 28, 2007 The Middle East Newswire reported: "Al Qaida has sought to produce rockets and missiles for attacks in Saudi Arabia. U.S. intelligence analysts said Saudi authorities have found a deserted facility in Riyadh believed to have been used for the manufacture of explosives used in rockets and missiles. The analysts said the facility could have been established by Al Qaida agents in Riyadh with expertise posted on the Internet.

In February 2007, Saudi security forces announced the discovery of an explosives and munitions laboratory in a deserted resort in the

southern Riyadh neighborhood of Azizia. Saudi officials said the facility contained mixing equipment as well as sodium nitrate and ammonium nitrate, chemicals required for high-blast explosives.

"Jihadi websites present a clear idea as to why terrorists had sodium and ammonium nitrate stored in a deserted laboratory," the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation said in a report. "One jihadi website explains how to make pulverized ammonium powder for propelling projectiles and bursting powder."..."

GERMAN CHANCELLOR CALLS FOR EUROPEAN UNITY AS EU CELEBRATES ITS 50TH BIRTHDAY

March 24, 2007 The Voice of America reported: "German Chancellor Angela Merkel has urged European Union leaders to back reforms aimed at rejuvenating the 50-year-old bloc.

Ms. Merkel Saturday told her fellow EU officials that their citizens have a right to know where the union is heading. She made her remarks to German news media, as European leaders gathered in Berlin for two days of festivities marking the EU's half-century.

On Sunday, Ms. Merkel is to unveil the so-called Berlin Declaration, a statement of European achievements and values that is to point the way ahead for the bloc, after a two-year stalemate.

The German chancellor, whose country is holding the EU's rotating presidency, is making efforts to rekindle a drive for European unity, following the French and Dutch rejection of the bloc's draft constitution in 2005.

Ms. Merkel has urged EU leaders to agree on a reform treaty that would give the union a long-term government and more power to its institutions, avoiding the word "constitution."

France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Rome Treaty in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community, which is the basis of today's 27-nation European Union."

REPORT: SYRIA REJECTS ISRAELI OVERTURES

March 24, 2007 The Jerusalem Post reported: "Syria rejected Israeli overtures to engage in discreet negotiations regarding the Golan Heights, the Qatari newspaper *Al Watan* reported Saturday. Syrian officials told *Al Watan* that the Israeli offer was relayed to Syrian officials by European and other Western envoys visiting Damascus.

The same official said Syria was interested in open negotiations and that an agreement, if reached, would be voted on in a national referendum by the Syrian people.

Earlier in the week Syrian President Bashar Assad expressed pessimism regarding peace with Israel, saying "under the current circumstances we don't see signs for peace - despite all the recent talk about it, it has been just talk."

Assad told the Saudi newspaper *Al-Jazira* that diplomats arrived in Syria from the US and tried to restart a peace process with Israel. According to the Syrian president one of the diplomats told him that [Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert had informed the Americans that any decision regarding the issue is in Washington's hands. During the interview Monday Assad went on to add that "the current Israeli government is the weakest in Israel's history."

Vice Premier Shimon Peres responded to Assad's statements with the query, "And what is he - the strongest president in the world?" speaking to a press conference at the Knesset."

EUROPE CLAIMS ISRAEL PREPARING FOR WAR

March 23, 2007 WorldNetDaily reported: "European officials have been claiming to Syrian leaders the past few weeks Israel is preparing for a military confrontation with Damascus, in some cases providing Syria with inaccurate information, WND has learned.



A top source in Syrian President Bashar Assad's Baath party told WND European leaders visiting Damascus in recent weeks delivered messages stating Israel was taking measures in advance of a large-scale conflict with Syria including updating battle plans, training reservist soldiers and preparing the home front for missile attacks.

One senior European Union official told Assad the Israeli government instructed its major hospitals not to allow staff to take vacation time during the summer months for fear a conflict will break out during that period, according to the Baath party source.

Israeli security officials and spokesmen for several major Israeli hospitals denied the claim.

The European officials advised Assad to engage in dialogue with the Jewish state and the U.S. leading to a full Israeli withdrawal of the Golan Heights, the Baath official said. The Golan is strategic mountainous territory looking down on Israeli population centers twice used by Syria to mount ground invasions into Israel."..."