

PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

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CONCERN OVER IRAQI CHEMICAL BOMBS

February 22, 2007 The BBC News reported: "The warning came after a pick-up truck carrying chlorine gas canisters rigged with explosives blew up in south-west Baghdad, killing two Iraqis. Many others were wounded in the attack. It was the third such bombing in Iraq this month. Chlorine burns the skin on contact and can be fatal after a few breaths.

After Wednesday's bombing, a spokesman for the US military said chemical attacks appeared to be a fresh tactic by the insurgents, reflecting a desire to cause mayhem. He predicted there would be more copycat attacks by other militant groups.

On Tuesday a bomb blew up a truck carrying chlorine north of Baghdad, killing at least five people and emitting fumes that made more than 150 others ill. Three weeks ago, a truck carrying explosives and a chlorine tank blew up in Anbar province. More than 12 people were reported to have been killed. An Iraqi military spokesman, Brigadier General Qassim Moussawi, said militants were now using "dirty means".

The BBC's James Westhead in Washington says the bombings do not seem to reflect any new technical capability. He says chlorine may have been used because it is present in large quantities in Iraq to deal with the country's poor water sanitation."

ASSAD AIDES ENGAGE IN POWER STRUGGLE

February 22, 2007 The Middle East Newline reported: "Leading aides to President Bashar Assad were said to have been caught in a power struggle. Opposition sources said the power struggle included Assad's brother-in-law, regarded as the most powerful member of the regime after the president. The brother-in-law, Assaf Shawkat, has headed the Syrian Military Intelligence, the lead agency in the nation's security.



"Shawkat has been fighting with just about everybody in the Syrian leadership," an opposition source said. "It appears that Bashar is getting worried."

The opposition sources said Assad has sought to curb Shawkat's authority as the president has cast doubts over the loyalty of his closest advisers. Over the last year, the president appointed Gen. Ali Yunis as a deputy to Shawkat and banned senior aides and spouses from traveling abroad, particularly the United States."..."

U.S. REPORTS UNPRECEDENTED GULF TENSION

February 22, 2007 The Middle East Newline reported: "The U.S. military has determined that the Gulf has been undergoing unprecedented tension amid Iran's arms build-up. U.S. officials and officers said Iran's frequent exercises have raised alarm in the six Gulf Arab states. They said Iran has sought to intimidate the Gulf Cooperation Council states against cooperating with the United States.

"We consider this moment in time unprecedented in terms of the amount of insecurity and instability that is in the region," U.S. Fifth Fleet commander Vice Adm. Patrick Walsh said.

"Although our presence in the Arabian Gulf is for defensive and not offensive purposes, the U.S. will take military action if ships are attacked or if countries in the region are targeted or U.S. troops come under direct attack," Walsh added."..."

RUSSIA MAKES MOVES TO REVIVE ARMY

February 21, 2007 SpaceWar.com reported: "As everyone knows, the level of technical equipment determines the army's combat readiness. Until now, Russia's limited resources prevented it from overhauling military equipment, most of which was developed over 20 years ago. However, the situation has been gradually improving, and increased defense spending has largely facilitated Moscow's efforts to supply its Armed Forces with modern weaponry and equipment.

Michael Maples, director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, recently said the Russian Army's combat and theater-level training is now at its highest since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The United States is somewhat concerned because the Russian Defense Ministry is focusing on rearmament, modernization of available weapons and efforts to revive the defense industry. This only proves that the Russian Armed Forces have now started improving.

On Feb. 7, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov addressed the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, at the Government Hour and said his Ministry would receive 821 billion rubles (\$30.98 billion, or Euro 23.87 billion) in 2007. This is a great improvement on 2001, when Russia's defense budget stood at just over 214 billion rubles (\$8.08 billion, or Euro 6.22 billion).

Russian defense spending still accounts for three percent of the country's GDP. The Armed Forces are spending more on development, and this trend will persist in the future. Such allocations, which totaled about 44 percent of the defense budget in 2006, will increase to 50 percent by 2011. Most of this money will be used to buy large batches of weaponry and military equipment.

The 2007 state defence order stipulates 300 billion rubles (\$11.32 billion, or Euro 8.72 billion), of which over 144 billion rubles (\$5.43 billion, or Euro 4.19 billion) will be spent on the acquisition of new weapons.

For instance, the armed forces are to buy 17 inter-continental ballistic missiles, four spacecraft and four launch vehicles. There are plans to re-equip one Strategic Air Command squadron, six Air Force and helicopter squadrons, as well as seven tank and 13 motorized-rifle battalions.

There are also large allocations for purchasing, repairing and upgrading telecommunications and troop-control systems, artillery pieces and anti-tank guided missiles, airborne infantry fighting vehicles and other motor vehicles.

As for long-term prospects, the 2007-2015 State Armament Program, due to receive almost 5,000 billion rubles (\$188.68 billion, or Euro 145.35 billion), stipulates for a complete re-equipment of Russia's strategic nuclear forces. The Defense Ministry plans to commission 34 silo-based missile launchers and command centers and 66 mobile Topol-M ICBM systems, as well as to increase the number of strategic bombers.

The Strategic Air Command is to operate a total of 50 Tupolev Tu-160 Blackjack and Tu-95 Bear missile carriers.

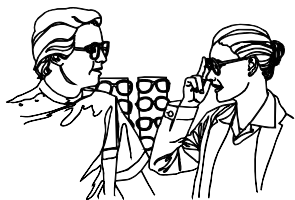
There are plans to build and commission up to eight Mk 955/955A strategic missile submarines, to develop space-based reconnaissance, telecommunications, data-relay, mapping, surveying, early-warning and troop-control systems.

It is intended to complete launch facilities for orbiting Angara and Soyuz-2 rockets, to fully restore the early-warning radar configuration, and to boost the Air Defense Force's combat potential by 20 percent.

The Russian Army is to fully re-equip 40 tank battalions, 97 motorized-rifle and 50 paratrooper battalions. Five missile brigades are to receive state-of-the-art Iskander-M tactical missile systems. Two multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS) regiments are to get the revamped Uragan (Hurricane)-1M MLRSs.

In addition, 116,000 motor vehicles will be purchased. The Navy is to receive 31 new warships.”...”

TRIALS FOR 'BIONIC' EYE IMPLANTS



February 16, 2007 BBC News reported: “A bionic eye implant that could help restore the sight of millions of blind people could be available to patients within two years. US researchers have been given the go-ahead to implant the prototype device in 50 to 75 patients.

The Argus II system uses a spectacle-mounted camera to feed visual information to electrodes in the eye. Patients who tested less-advanced versions of the retinal implant were able to see light, shapes and movement.

“What we are trying to do is take real-time images from a camera and convert them into tiny electrical pulses that would jump-start the otherwise blind eye and allow patients to see,” said Professor Mark Humayun, from the University of Southern California.”...”

TALIBAN DEPLOY 10,000 FIGHTERS FOR ATTACK: COMMANDER

February 18, 2007 Reuters reported: “The Taliban have deployed 10,000 fighters for a spring offensive of “bloody attacks” against foreign troops in Afghanistan, a rebel commander said on Friday.

More than 4,000 people, a quarter of them civilians, were killed in fighting last year, the most violent year since the Taliban were ousted in 2001. NATO commanders and analysts warn this year could be just as bad or worse.

As the harsh winter snows melt, the insurgents have resumed their attacks, mostly in the south, where they have captured a major town and have threatened a key hydroelectric dam.

Mullah Abdul Rahim, the Taliban's operational commander for southern Helmand province -- the opium center of the world's major producer -- said militants would step up attacks in spring.

“As the weather becomes warm and leaves turn green, we will unleash bloody attacks on the U.S.-led foreign troops,” Rahim told Reuters by satellite phone from a secret location.

“Our war preparations, especially in southern Afghanistan and in Helmand province, are complete and for this our 10,000 fighters are ready to take up arms the moment they are ordered.”

After attempts at conventional pitched battles failed last year, the Taliban are expected to return to more conventional guerrilla tactics against government forces and the roughly 45,000 foreign soldiers in the country.

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