

PROPHETIC TIMES

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N. KOREAN LEADER STILL UNDECIDED ON GIVING UP NUKES: ANALYST

January 2, 2008 SpaceWar.com reported: "North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il has still not decided whether to give up his nuclear weapons despite a disarmament pledge under an international deal, a senior analyst said Wednesday.

Nam Sung-Wook, a North Korea expert at Korea University who advises President-elect Lee Myung-Bak, said he expects Pyongyang to stall on the disarmament deal after missing a year-end deadline.

"National Defence Commission Chairman Kim Jong-Il seems not to have made a decision yet to abandon nuclear weapons," Nam told SBS radio. Pyongyang will "drag its feet in negotiations with the US over what it can get in return, probably until late February," he added.

Lee, who has promised a firmer line with North Korea, takes office on February 25. The following day, in what Nam described as an "unprecedentedly friendly event" between the two countries, the New York Philharmonic is to perform in Pyongyang.

Under a landmark six-nation agreement the North was supposed to have disabled its main atomic plants and declared all its nuclear programmes by December 31, in return for one million tons of fuel oil or equivalent energy aid and diplomatic benefits. But the year-end deadline slipped, with the North yet to complete the disabling work and no signs of an upcoming declaration.

The United States, Japan and South Korea -- members of the negotiations along with Russia, China and the North itself -- expressed disappointment at the missed deadline.

President-elect Lee, of the conservative opposition Grand National Party, says he will link future aid to North Korea more closely to progress in nuclear disarmament."..."

CYPRUS AND MALTA ADOPT THE EURO

January 1, 2008 The EU Observer reported: "The Maltese €1 and €2 coins represent the eight-pointed Maltese cross, seen as a symbol of the Maltese identity; the 10-, 20- and 50-euro cent coins feature the Maltese coat of arms; while the Mnajdra temples, considered to be one of the world's oldest free-standing temple groupings, are seen on the 1-, 2- and 5-cent coins.

The Cypriot €1 and €2 coins feature the idol of Pomos, seen as representing the country's contribution to civilisation since prehistory; the 10-, 20- and 50-euro cent coins represent the ancient Kyrenia ship symbolising the island's historical importance from a trading point of view; and the 1-, 2- and 5-cent coins depict a species of wild sheep representing the island's wildlife.

Cyprus and Malta got the green light to introduce the euro in May 2007, after fulfilling the necessary criteria, including a government deficit lower than three percent of GDP, a government debt not higher than 60 percent of GDP, as well as price and exchange rate stability.

On both islands, thousands of euro converters have been distributed to households to facilitate the transition to the new currency.

However, both Cypriots and Maltese citizens have indicated they fear the euro entry may be followed by a possible price rise -- as it happened in Slovenia in 2007.

Meanwhile, as a side-effect of Cyprus' adoption of the euro, the European currency will also be used in British military bases on the island. Britain kept its sovereign military bases under an agreement signed in 1960 which released Cyprus from colonial rule."..."

GULF STATES FORM COMMON MARKET

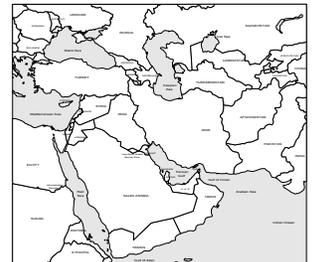
January 1, 2008 BBC News reported: "The wealthy six Gulf states have taken a step closer together economically with the formation of a common market. The Gulf Co-operation Council states, whose wealth is largely based on oil, say the move will give them a stronger negotiating position internationally. It will also mean their citizens can move freely between the countries for employment and education.

But analysts say it may also fuel inflation and other difficulties in the region's boom cities. One of the main results of the common market - much talked about and finally decided upon just last month - is expected to be migration.

The nationals of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are now to be seen as equal, economically, whichever country they chose to live in.

They will be able to work, buy houses and companies, trade shares, go to school and receive medical treatment in all six states.

But there is concern that migration will put further pressure on the limited housing, infrastructure, education and health services in the countries with higher standards of living like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar."..."



IRAN BACKTRACKS MISSILE ANNOUNCEMENT

December 31, 2008 The Jerusalem Post reported: "Iran has denied holding talks about launching a new missile system with Russian

officials during their recent visit to Teheran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad-Ali Hosseini said Monday.

Hosseini made the remarks at a weekly press appearing, commenting on discussions held by Iranian and Russian officials during a visit to Teheran earlier in December. "No talks have been held on this issue," Hosseini stressed.

"Iran's talks with Russia also include defense issues held within the framework of international laws. This is what has happened in the past and would continue in future within the same framework," he added.

The Iranians' denial contradicts their previous announcement on the issue, claiming Russia was preparing to equip Iran with the missile systems that would dramatically increase the country's ability to repel an air strike.

On Saturday, the federal agency overseeing Russia's military exports denied reports that the country planned to deliver S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran.

The Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service denied the claim Friday in a brief statement. "The question of deliveries of S-300 systems to Iran, which has now arisen in the mass media, is not currently taking place, is not being considered and is not being discussed at this time with the Iranian side," said the agency, known by its Russian initials, FSVTS.

The S-300 anti-aircraft missile defense system is capable of shooting down aircraft, cruise missiles and ballistic missile warheads at ranges of over 145 kilometers and at altitudes of about 27,000 meters. Russian military officials boast that its capabilities outstrip the US Patriot missile system.

The S-300 is an improvement over the Tor-M1 air defense missile system. Russia delivered 29 Tor-M1s to Iran this year under a US\$700 million contract signed in December 2005. Iranian media reports have claimed the S-300 missile systems could inflict significant damage on US or Israeli forces, were they to attack Iran."..."

FRANCE TO HALT LINKS WITH SYRIA

December 30, 2008 BBC News reported: "France is to suspend diplomatic contacts with Syria, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has announced. Links will be restored only when France has proof that Syria is not blocking progress towards installing a consensus president in Lebanon, Mr Sarkozy said.



Nicolas
Sarkozy

Lebanon has been without a president since November, as rival pro- and anti- Syrian factions argue over who should fill the post.

"I ask Syria to... work to create agreement," said Mr Sarkozy. France "will not make any more contacts with Syria... as long as there is no proof of Syria's willingness to let Lebanon choose a consensus president," he told reporters, during a visit to Egypt. BBC correspondent Heba Saleh in Cairo says attempts to install a new Lebanese president have stalled because of the standoff between the pro-Western government and the opposition backed by Syria and Iran.

France has attempted to mediate between the two sides and agreement has been reached on a compromise candidate - army commander Gen Michel Suleiman. But the rival factions cannot agree on how to share power once Gen Suleiman assumes his position. France now hopes that putting pressure on Syria will move the process forward."..."

FRENCH EU PRESIDENCY TO PUSH FOR DEFENCE INTEGRATION

November 13, 2008 EUobserver.com reported: "France will next year push for a Europe of defence, proposing Brussels-based EU planning staff, exchanges between professional soldiers and a harmonization of military education – ideas which are likely to raise concern in the UK.

In an interview with German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, French defence minister Hervé Morin said that Paris will put defence high on the agenda when it takes over the rotating presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008.

Mr Morin described European defence as an "absolute priority" which is at least as important for European integration as the EU's common currency, the euro.

"With the common currency, we have created a strong symbol for Europe. But nothing can better express the European community of fate than common defence, a common sense of Europe's threats and security interests," he said."..."

"A kind of European conscience can grow over the question where, if need be, we want to defend our values with weapons," he stated. "This is why during the presidency of the European Council in the second half of 2008 we would like to press ahead with a Europe of defence."

Mr Morin said Paris is still "co-ordinating" with its EU partners what its presidency agenda would mean in practical terms, but said "independent crisis capacities" for Europe would be one key goal."..."