
Iranian links to North Korea.

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According to reports out of North Korea, not only were Iranian observers - primarily scientists and engineers - present at the multiple missile launches that the Dear Leader flung in the general direction of Japan during U.S.

Independence Day celebrations, but the Iranians may even have paid for the tests. It has long been known and reported in this column that the Iranians have worked for years with North Korean counterparts to improve the Nodong and Taepodong missiles (that Iran calls the Shehab class) and to co-develop terminal guidance technology and other aspects of warhead research. The rocket body itself is one of several critical parts of an effective missile, the warhead, payload, and guidance system being others.

Iran has threatened use of these weapons "complete with nuclear warhead" to exterminate Israel. Those who take the words of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seriously as he speaks of "wiping Israel from the map" recognize that every delay, every bit of procrastination, every "strategy" that relies on the unfit like the EU and UN to do the heavy lifting, are simply opportunities for Iran.

They need time to work with their North Korean pals to finalize warhead, nuclear payload, and guidance technologies. Before they can pull the trigger they need to be assured that the attack will work. Hence Iranian sponsorship of the North Korean missile shots.

Meanwhile those who might be able to exert some control, China and Russia, refuse to intervene each for its own reason. China, which now has an oil addiction that compares to America's like a heroin addict to a coffee drinker, will do anything, anywhere, to anybody in order to maintain and grow its supply of the precious substance. Without oil China is back to pre-Deng days of failing controlled economies, starving populations, and struggling military development. While they are not ready for full blown capitalism neither is the Beijing leadership willing to return to the bad old days when the Middle Kingdom was a tertiary world power. The vision of dominating first the Pacific, then the world looms large in Chinese eyes. Useful surrogates like Iran and North Korea can help.

But they can also hurt China, and hurt it very badly. Sure, it likes rambunctious, contentious surrogates eager to distract America from China's machinations. But a North Korea that pressures Japan into major rearmament could derail China's Pacific plans. And an Iran off its leash that may provoke a reaction to bring down the corrupt mullah regime, opening the way for a pro-American government, would not be in China's perceived best interests. Anything that threatens to turn off the oil spigot to China must be avoided; that is top priority. You can be certain that some of that oil is being burned to keep the lights on late at Party headquarters as China tries to walk an ever-narrowing line between keeping pressure on America and losing all influence in North Korea and Iran.

Russia on the other hand simply is selling everything portable while

desperately trying to recapture Putin's vision of past glory days of world communism. With a vanity that typifies Russian leaders he thinks that just by turning a few more screws he can bring back the glory days of gulags and politburos.

Russian influence on North Korea is ephemeral compared to the halcyon days of the Soviet empire, but it still has a role to play. However, Russia definitely has systems and know-how that Iran lusts for including air defense weaponry, high performance aircraft, and nuclear technology. The surprise isn't that Putin or one of his ex-KGB pals would sell Ahmadinejad suitcase nucs, the surprise is that they haven't done so already. Or maybe they have.

Suppose a surprise nuclear attack is what Ahmadinejad meant when the Islamic Republic News Agency reported that he promised a "rejoicing" for Muslims in the Middle East "soon." Speaking to university officials in the town of Mashhad Ahmadinejad said the "volcano of rage" at the "arrogant powers" was "on the verge of eruption." Of course we have listened to a litany of apocalyptic statements by Ahmadinejad previously. Most of the West has studiously ignored or downplayed the threats, much in the same manner that intellectuals and government leaders made light of that foolish man Hitler and his wild threats in the 1930s. Like his Nazi role model, he has not armed Iran overnight. It has been done gradually but with a sharp, rising curve of intensity.

Historically these aggressors use surrogates to test their weaponry prior to launching an irreversible attack against their enemies. Hitler used first the Baltic fighting then the Spanish Civil War as made-to-order settings for experimenting with tactics and weapons before he burst blitzkrieg upon a slumbering world. Similarly Ahmadinejad has reportedly paid for rocket testing in North Korea, experimenting with much more than simply firing off long-range missiles. Key to the Korean test "and confusing to many observers" are the number of rockets shot off. Why, analysts question, did Kim have to shoot so many? Wasn't the real test about the long-range Taepodong II, capable of reaching America?

It could well be that the Taepodong II test was a smokescreen. Was the entire affair a sleight of hand intended to deceive American and Japanese observers naturally preoccupied with national defenses? It is an entirely plausible hypothesis. The real test was to see how swiftly these missiles could be deployed and simultaneously mass-launched. Suppose the simulation was that each test missile was fired by a military unit that in wartime would be armed with several missiles. Therefore each separate North Korean launch actually represented a score or more of missiles. Then Iranian observers would be able to assess how well the missiles perform in the tactical combat situation they anticipate. In war perhaps hundreds of these rockets could be flying at unsuspecting targets, maybe with VX nerve gas or radiological warheads, achieving surprise and inflicting massive casualties on the enemy. This, according to some observers, is exactly the kind of live simulation for which the Iranians paid large sums to the North Koreans.

Meanwhile, on other fronts "the Hamas/Hezbollah attacks" are proving to be additional testing grounds for Ahmadinejad and the mullahs. Longer range rockets, multiple launching sites, and surface-to-surface guided missiles have already been tested. What new surprises lurk for Israeli and possibly allied forces in the region? We must look across the spectrum at all international linkages to see where the weapons are originating, what work is being conducted inside Iran, and what new tactics and strategies that may spring up. A

too-narrow, closed-minded focus will result in a disaster, perhaps of strategic proportions. Ahmadinejad is telling us he has something big " something huge and earth-shaking " planned. We must take his rantings seriously and we absolutely must look at the larger picture to make sense of the horrible possibilities that could result.

Yet one of our major intelligence weaknesses in the West is our inability or unwillingness to see big pictures. Analysts are trained to stay inside the box. They hang their careers on micro-analysis that they defend regardless of contrary evidence. Think of the more recent egregious examples: secular Muslims don't work with al Qaeda religious zealots, Saddam did not have WMD, Sunnis and Shia cannot work together, Koreans and Middle Easterners don't work together, and so on. These arbitrary, artificial boundaries in our thinking and analysis must be shed and changed quickly before we fall into a calculated trap being set for us by our sworn enemies. We must recognize the deadly connections and react accordingly. A conventional surprise like 911 was painful.

Allowing a nuclear surprise is unacceptable.
