

International Intelligence

Russian Maneuvers Are Answer To Mini-Nukes

In a press conference Feb. 11, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky stated that the Russian military exercise currently underway will help develop weapons systems “capable of providing an asymmetric answer to existing and prospective weapons systems, including missile defense.” While he dismissed the idea that the maneuvers resembled those of the Soviet Union, in preparation for war with the United States, he did reaffirm Russia’s concern about the development of low-yield nuclear weapons (mini-nukes) by the United States, saying it was destabilizing. He also said that the Russian maneuver was a reaction to that program, but added, “it’s not sabre-rattling.”

Israel’s Sharon Being Pushed Out?

Ariel Sharon was given ultrasonic treatment for kidney stones on Feb. 9. Although press statements said that the procedure was considered routine, Israeli intelligence sources told *EIR* that the problem is most likely more serious, pointing out that a few months ago Sharon was operated on for “skin cancer,” which was kept under wraps for a long time.

Another indication that people may be prematurely putting Sharon in his grave, or his prison cell because of the on-going bribery scandal, is that the battle for succession in the Likud is already in full stream. On the same day as Sharon’s medical procedure, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce—headed by Ehud Olmert, who is also Deputy Prime Minister—allowed a 30% increase in the price of bread, the price of which had been controlled by the government. This hits Israel’s low-income sector very hard. Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized the move, even though his own economic reform policy has caused tremendous suffering. Others in the Likud also attacked the price hike. Now it is being claimed that the criticism is linked to the succession fight within the party.

As Deputy Prime Minister, Olmert is a likely successor, at least until a new party

chairman is elected. However, he is not at all popular within the Likud’s central committee, in which Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, another contender to replace Sharon, are more popular.

Russia: NATO Ignores Afghan Opium Explosion

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said in his speech at the 40th international Munich Conference on Security Policy, held on Feb. 7-8, in Munich, Germany: “It is understandable that by allowing drug peddling in Afghanistan, the NATO alliance ensures loyalty of warlords on the ground and of some Afghan leaders. . . . Nevertheless, the drug flow from Afghanistan is posing serious threat to the national security of all of the Central Asian CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] and Russia. It results from the absence of a truly international approach towards stabilization in Afghanistan.”

Afghan opium, which is about 70% of the world’s entire opium production, has affected Russia and Europe badly. Some 90%, or so, of Afghan heroin stays in Europe and is consumed, causing huge problems.

For years, Russia had been implying that the Americans are not interested in stopping the opium explosion in Afghanistan, because it does not affect them. Russia thought perhaps NATO would do better. But the Afghan opium is not simply opium: It has become the center of Afghan politics since the 1980s.

Blix: Blair ‘Dramatized’ Iraq Evidence

Prime Minister Tony Blair’s government “dramatized” some of its prewar evidence about the threat posed by Iraq, former chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix said in Britain Feb. 8. On the British Broadcasting Corp.’s “Breakfast with Frost” program, Blix said it was unclear what was meant by the claim in a September 2002 intelligence dossier that Iraq could deploy some weapons of mass destruction on 45 minutes’ notice. “The intention was to dramatize it just as the

vendors of some merchandise are trying to increase and exaggerate the importance of what they have,” he said. “From politicians, from our leaders in the Western world, I think we expect more than that. A bit more sincerity.”

Blix, whose team of UN inspectors did not make any significant weapons finds during months of searching in Iraq before the war, said it was clear now that there were no weapons of mass destruction there before the U.S.-led invasion. “I think we issued the correct warning. Nevertheless, they did not take that seriously,” he said. “We would all like to see the truth come out after all this wrangling,” he added. “And we now know that there were no weapons of mass destruction when the invasion started. Now we hear a case saying that ‘Well, there were programs, there were laboratories that were suitable . . . or there were intentions. I would say, all right, let’s have evidence of that.’”

Iraq Electricity Not Restored in 10 Months

Despite ten months of occupation, Al-Jazeera reports on Feb. 2 that each district in Baghdad has to do without electricity for at least six hours each day. Yet after the 1991 Gulf War, which destroyed Iraq’s main power plants, electricity was fully restored within three months.

But at present, with all Iraqi power plants being German-, Russian-, and French-made, the United States insists on assigning technicians from Bechtel to assess Iraq’s power plants, and insists on buying equipment from Bechtel; they are not using the skilled Iraqi technicians and workers, and they are not allowing Iraqis to get technical assistance from the foreign builders of the plants—because these countries opposed the war on Iraq.

Electricity dealers have installed generators in every district and now sell electricity to people who can pay—but only 60-70% of the Iraqi workforce is employed. The relatively enormous cost of electricity is especially hard on the poorest families.

The disruption in power supply has closed small and medium businesses.