

IN THE NEWS

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World News

It seems our good friend China is actively trying to undermine Western powers. For instance, one piece indicates China has been helping Iran with its missile program [1]. This comes as one report suggests China is rapidly closing the military gap with the US [2]. One piece suggests the new Chinese airborne early warning aircraft indicates China is planning six or more aircraft carriers [3]. Finally, China appears to have constructed South China Sea island facilities to house long range surface to air missiles [4].

Meanwhile, North Korea conducted a ballistic missile test [5]. However, a more immediate concern; all indications point to North Korea as the source for a VX nerve agent used as an assassination weapon in Malaysia's main international airport [6]. VX is considered a weapon of mass destruction by the UN and a 10 milligram dose on the skin can be fatal [7]. Two women being held for the attack said they believed they were part of a prank to smear a baby oil substance on the target [8]. It remains unclear how the women were protected against the agent during and after the attack. That North Korea would use such a weapon in an international airport indicates a new capability and willingness to use such weapons. Meanwhile, China is blaming the U.S. for tensions with North Korea [9].

In the Middle-East, the wars in Syria and Iraq continue. In Mosul, Iraq, Islamic State (IS) fighters are using car bombs, snipers and armed drones [10]. On the U.S. coalition side, the previous strict rules of engagement have been relaxed allowing faster access to firepower [11]. And for the first time, the Iraqi Air Force struck IS targets inside Syria [12]. One piece suggests American troops in Syria may be part of the request to defeat the IS [13].

1. Gertz, Bill, Washington Free Beacon, *Inside the Ring: Sanctions High-*

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Security

The race to secure Federal computers continues. One report indicates there are still cyberattack vulnerabilities to U.S. government computers [1].

Within the FBI, the number three priority is cybersecurity (behind terrorism and counter intelligence) [2]. This as bad actors are infecting banks with memory resident malware resulting in unauthorized ATM transactions [3].

There can be no question that cyberwarfare is part of military capabilities. For instance, Russia acknowledged it is expanding its military information warfare capabilities [4].

As we are well into tax season, the risk to our money remains. One piece indicates a rise in cyber attacks focusing on finances [5].

1. Kredon, Adam, Washington Free Beacon, *U.S. Government Com-*

puters Still Not Safe From Cyber Attacks, February 21, 2017.

2. IEEE Spectrum, *FBI Agent Mitchell Thompson*, February, 2017.
3. Barth, Bradley, SC Magazine, *Attackers steal from ATMs after infecting banks with memory-only malware*, February 8, 2017.
4. Gertz, Bill, Washington Free Beacon, *Rus-*

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Special points of interest:

- VX Nerve agent used in public airport assassination

Security

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- sia Reveals Information Warfare Troops*, February 23, 2017.
5. Flinders, Karl, *Computer Weekly*, *Number of people hit by professional financial cyber attack grows after lull*, February 24, 2017.

I do not believe that civilization will be wiped out in a war fought with the atomic bomb. Perhaps two-thirds of the people of the earth will be killed.—

Albert Einstein

(Continued from page 1)

- light China-Iran Missile Connection*, February 9, 2017.
2. Klopp, Jacques, *AFP*, *Chinese weapons reaching 'near-parity' with West: study*, February 14, 2017.
 3. Perrett, Bradley, *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, *Signaling Intent*, February 20, 2017.
 4. Ali, Idrees, *Reuters*, *Exclusive: China finishing South China Sea buildings that could house missiles - U.S. officials*, February 22, 2017.
 5. Almasy, Steve, *CNN*, *North Korea test-fires ballistic missile*, February 12, 2017.
 6. Everard, John, *CNN*,

World News

- Amazingly, North Korea is making itself even less popular*, February 25, 2017.
7. *USA Today*, *VX nerve agent used on Kim Jong Nam: 10 milligrams on the skin can kill*, February 24, 2017.
 8. Attewill, Frederick, *AFP*, *Nerve agent that killed Kim caused 'very serious paralysis'*, February 26, 2017.
 9. Shim, Elizabeth, *UPI*, *China says U.S., North Korea tensions responsible for nuclear problem*, February 24, 2017.
 10. George, Susannah, *Washington Post/AP*, *Iraqi forces facing stiff resistance in western Mosul*, February 25, 2017.
 11. Ernst, Douglas, *The Washington Times*, *Pen-*
- tagon ditches onerous rules of engagement, gives Mosul troops quicker firepower access*, February 24, 2017.
12. Abdul-Zahra, Qassim, et al., *Omaha World Herald/AP*, *Iraqi forces advance in Mosul, strike IS inside Syria*, February 24, 2017.
 13. Bergengruen, Vera, *McClatchy*, *With new anti-ISIS plan due next week, Pentagon considering U.S. troops in Syria*, February 23, 2017.

Terrorism

As we look toward the future, Iran serves as a reminder of the problems ahead. Case in point, hundreds of thousands of Iranians were in the streets chanting death to America [1]. This comes after a report indicates Iran is working against the US by supporting the Taliban in Western Afghanistan [2].

Around the world, acts of terrorism continue. In Pakistan a terrorist suicide bomb attack on the Sufi shrine in southern Pakistan left at least 88 dead [3]. In France, law enforcement arrested four people with ties to Syria, that were planning a terrorist attack [4]. In Somalia, a car bomb was used in an attack that killed at least 34 people [5].

Once again, terrorism hits countries where we have forces deployed. In Afghanistan, a bomb explosion during rush hour killed at least a dozen people [6]. In Iraq, a car bomb killed at least 48 people [7].

According to Malaysian police, Kim Jong-nam was assassinated with VX nerve agent while traveling in an international airport [8]. It is believed the nerve agent came from North Korea [9]. That VX could be used in a busy airport indicates a new threat for the traveling public.

1. Hafezi, Parisa, Reuters, *Hundreds of thousands rally in Iran against Trump, chant 'Death to America': TV*, February 10, 2017.
2. Johnson, Natalie, *Washington Free Beacon, Russia, Iran Supporting Taliban to 'Undermine' U.S. Mission in Afghanistan*, February 9, 2017.
3. Ahmed, Munir, and Faiez, Rahim, AP, *Pakistan shuts key border crossing in wake of shrine attack*, February 18, 2017.
4. Hinnant, Lori, Chicago Tribune, *France thwarts 'imminent attack'; 4 arrests, explosive found*, February 10, 2017.
5. BBC News, *Somalia Mogadishu car bomb: At least 34 people killed*, February 19, 2017
6. Mashal, Mujib, and Abed, Fahim, New York Times, *Bombing Near Afghan Supreme Court Kills and Wounds Dozens*, February 7, 2017.
7. BBC News, *Baghdad car bomb kills at least 48*, February 16, 2017.
8. Paddock, Richard C., et al., New York Times, *In Kim Jong-nam's Death, North Korea Lets Loose a Weapon of Mass Destruction*, February 24, 2017.
9. Smith, Alexander, NBC News, *North Korea's Kim Jong Nam Killed With VX, the 'Most Toxic Weapon Ever'*, February 24, 2017.

If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and of Hiroshima.—J. Robert Oppenheimer

Economy

Good news on the jobs front. Intel announced plans to invest \$7 billion in an Arizona factory, creating 3,000 jobs [1].

For the week ending February 4, the number of first time unemployment claims was 234,000 [2]. Then for the week ending February 11, the number was 239,000 [3]. For the week ending February 18, the number was 244,000 [4].

China's economy continues to expand. Case in point, China surpassed the US and France to become Germany's biggest trading partner [5].

On the stock market front, the Dow Jones Industrial Average set a 10th straight record high [6]. It's unclear how long the Dow will continue to rise before the inevitable contraction takes place.

1. Balakrishnan, Anita, CNBC, *Intel to invest \$7 billion in factory in Arizona, employ 3,000*, February 8, 2017.
2. Reuters/CNBC, *US jobless claims drop to near 43-year low*, February 9, 2017.
3. Laya, Patricia, Bloomberg, *Fewer Americans Than Forecast File for Unemployment Insurance*, February 16, 2017.
4. RTT News, *U.S. Weekly Jobless Claims Rise To 244,000*, February 23, 2017.
5. Wagner, Rene, and Nienaber, Michael, Reuters, *China steams past U.S., France to be Germany's biggest trading partner*, February 24, 2017.
6. La Monica, Paul R.,

Wow, Dow! Market hits 10th straight record high, February 23, 2017.

Who are we? We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than people.—Carl

Sagan
