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Subject: NightWatch: north Korea, China, Pakistan, US, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Libya

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Kim Jong Il in Beijing apparently without Kim Jong Un. Could be a significant indication of Kim Jong Il's intent to slow any visible signs of leadership succession.

Another massive bombing in Pakistan.

More on the Naval base in Pakistan and China.

US SOF Helo from Bin Laden raid returned to the US.

Tribal/Police fighting in Yemen.

Friday will be a day of protests in Syria and Egypt.

Renewed fighting in Sudan.

Libya – Qadhafi regime weakening?

NightWatch

For the Night of 24 May 2011

North Korea-China: For the record. Kim Chong-il visited an electronics factory in Nanjing on 24 May. His personal secretary Kim Ok accompanied him. The heir-apparent, Kim Jung Un, has not been reported to be in Kim's entourage.

During this Watch, Yonhap reported that Kim arrived in Beijing by his special train on 25 May and will meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Pakistan: A "massive" suicide bombing on 25 May flattened a police station in Peshawar in northwestern Pakistan. "Two police were killed and 19 people wounded," said Liaqat Ali Khan, chief of police in Peshawar. A senior police source said the bomber drove his explosives-laden car into the Criminal Investigation Department police station in the Peshawar Cantonment area.

Comment: This is the third major bombing of government buildings since 2 May. Every one appears to have had inside support. This is beginning to look like an organized Pakistani Taliban offensive against the government. Pakistani media have begun sharply criticizing the security lapses by Pakistani forces.

Pakistan-China: "We have asked our Chinese brothers to please build a naval base at Gwadar," Chaudhary Ahmed Mukhtar, Pakistan's Defence Minister, told the Times.

However, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said that China is unaware of the proposal by Pakistan to build a naval port at the deep-water port of Gwadar. The issue was not discussed during Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani's visit to China last week, the spokesman said.

Comment: Defence Minister Mukhtar did not say when Pakistan asked the Chinese to build a base at Gwadar. In fact, construction of a naval facility has been part of the plans for Gwadar since the early 1990's.

Forty years ago, Gwadar, on the coast of Baluchistan Province and 47 miles east of the Iranian border, was a fishing village with a small port in a sheltered, deep water natural harbor with two bays. In the 1971 War, Pakistan Navy surface ships deployed from Karachi to Gwadar to avoid destruction by the Indian Navy.

Since 1993 Pakistani governments have worked to develop Gwadar as a planned, modern, deep water port and city, as well as a "sensitive defense zone." The primary investors in the port, adjacent road and rail infrastructure and planned city of Gwadar have been China and the government of Pakistan. Construction on the highway link to Karachi and on the port began in 2002. The port was inaugurated officially in 2007 by General Musharraf. It received its first maritime ship, carrying a cargo of wheat from Canada, in 2008. The Port of Singapore Authority has the administration contract.

The 50-year master plan calls for Gwadar to develop into a major economic hub in the Arabian Sea for energy, oil tankers and deep-draft container shipping and ship building and to be the location of a main naval base for the Pakistan Navy. For China, Gwadar port will be one of three in the Indian Ocean that will have overland links to western or southwestern China that will enable it to avoid relying on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore for shipment of strategic raw materials. The other two are Chahbahar, Iran, and Kyauk Phyu, Burma.

In an interview broadcast on 24 May about the Karachi terrorist attack, Pakistan Chief of Naval Staff Admiral N. Bashir explained, "When the navy created the Karsaz Establishment in the Karsaz area, it was outside the city (Karachi). Now it has become a part of the city center. Similarly, when this base was established, the Faisal Town built up on the backside did not exist. I have been trying for the past three years to relocate from the area. The government has supported us on this. Our major naval base is under construction, far from Karachi.... We are aiming to minimize our presence in Karachi."

The Admiral was referring to Gwadar. The Chinese are the primary builders of the port, so it is almost certain that they are building the naval base, though security considerations would prevent them from admitting it in public.

News reports over the weekend suggested that the Chinese were building a base for the Chinese navy. Those mischaracterized this long time project. Chinese naval ships will call at Gwadar when the base is complete, as they do at Karachi. However, the base will be a Pakistan Navy base.

Chinese involvement at Gwadar is not news, but it is part of a sophisticated, long term strategic plan.

Pakistan-US: For the record. Pakistan has returned the US helicopter destroyed during the raid by US special operations forces that killed al Qaida leader Usama bin Laden, a Pentagon official said. The Pentagon spokesman said the helicopter was returned over the weekend and is now back in the United States.

Yemen: Fighting between Yemeni police and Hashid tribal fighters of Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar renewed early 24 May in Sanaa's al-Hasaba neighborhood. Gunfights occurred sporadically near al-Ahmar's home, and the Trade and Industry Ministry and other government buildings were under the control of al-Ahmar supporters. Al-Ahmar supporters reportedly fired on the buildings of the Rescue Police and Interior Ministry with heavy weapons, the official Republic of Yemen TV reported.

Fourteen Yemeni soldiers and 24 tribesmen were killed in the clashes in Sanaa, according to local officials. A security official said 20 other soldiers are missing. President Saleh called for a cease-fire.

Comment: Al-Ahmar is the sheikh of President Saleh's tribe, which is the second largest tribal federation in Yemen. Its members have been prominent in the Saleh government. Early in the uprising he declared his support for the protestors, but only in the past week has he committed his tribal fighters to support the opposition. If President Saleh's forces are unable to control Sanaa, Saleh will be overthrown or must flee.

Protest update: Friday will be another day of protests.

Yemen: The youth called for a million-man march on 25 May

Syria: The opposition has called for another day of demonstrations after prayers on Friday, 27 May.

Egypt: Activists and revolutionary groups have called for a second "Friday of Anger" to be held 27 May to express their opposition to calls to pardon former President Mubarak, his sons and other figures from his regime. Egyptians have been encouraged to march from mosques and churches to public squares on that day.

Sudan: Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir said 24 May that the region of Abyei belongs to the north and that Sudanese Armed Forces will not withdraw from the region. Al-Bashir said the army has been given instructions to respond to any possible provocation by the army of south Sudan.

Comment: For now this settles the issue of ownership between north and south Sudan, which was to have been decided in an internationally supervised referendum. It also ensures more fighting.

Libya: Comment: Nearly all news services, from Libyan and non-Libyan sources, describe NATO attacks and their results. In the past week, official Libyan news outlets have carried damage and casualty reports from NATO attacks plus other news items, but no combat successes by pro-Qadhafi forces. The overall impression is that the regime is weakening steadily.

End of NightWatch for 24 May.

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