

Soldiers used as guinea pigs in French nuclear tests: Report

By AURELIEN GIRARD
Epoch Times Staff

PARIS—A confidential report confirms that the French army deliberately exposed its soldiers and local civilians to massive radiation in Algeria in the 1960's, says French newspaper Le Parisien.

The aim was to study the effects of the bomb on humans.

The revelation surfaced just as France was marking 50 years since its first nuclear explosion on Feb. 13, 1960, in the North African Sahara desert. A total of 17 bombs were tested between 1960 and 1966, exposing hundreds of soldiers and an estimated 30,000 Algerian civilians to harmful radiation.

Le Parisien broke the story on Tuesday, disclosing the content of a confidential military report that shows soldiers were deliberately exposed to radiation. The aim was "to study physiological and psychological effects produced on man by nuclear weapons, so as to obtain necessary information to physically and mentally prepare modern warriors."

In an excerpt entitled "Gerboise verte," from the name of the last open air nuclear test on April 25, 1961, the report explains that French soldiers were sent to within 900 feet of where a bomb was detonated in an

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-French Defense Minister
Hervé Morin

experiment to "study the possibility of launching an attack in contaminated zones."

One conclusion from the study was that soldiers in such situations should not wear gas masks but only surgical masks so as to ensure easier communication.

French Defense Minister Hervé Morin told Le Parisien that he was not aware of the report, but claimed that radiation levels soldiers had been exposed to were low.

"There is nothing new in this report; the ministry disclosed all of this in 2007. That was another time and we would of course not do things the same today. All of this happened 50



CLASSIFIED: Patrice Bouveret, President of the Observatoire des Armements (weapons observatory), shows the classified report handed over anonymously to the observatory regarding French nuclear tests carried out in Algeria between 1960 and 1961. THIERRY ZOCCOLAN/AFP/GET

years ago and we cannot analyze this with our 2010 vision. The life of these soldiers was not put at risk," the minister said in an interview on

France Info radio.

But Jean-Paul Tessonier, a lawyer representing the affected veterans, thinks the report could have a big

impact on calculating compensation amounts.

Last December, the French Parliament passed a new law offering

compensation to thousands of army veterans, many of whom claim they developed cancer or other diseases as a consequence of radiation exposure.

According to Tessonier, the official position of France has always been that radioactive contamination was unintentional collateral damage. The long debate over the amount of compensation has always been calculated on that basis, but that could change if it is confirmed that the exposure was intentional.

Patrice Bouveret from the National Armaments Observatory said the report shows that soldiers were intentionally exposed then sent home without further medical checks.

Ammar Mansouri, a researcher at the Nuclear Research Center of Algeria, wants France to fully own up to its actions in the Sahara.

"It is time for the French government to be transparent on the nuclear tests in Algerian Sahara and the dramatic consequences they had on populations and on the environment," Mansouri told AFP.

Mansouri said he wants the relevant documents declassified in order to bring everything out into the open.

"Contrary to France's official position, there were 57 explosions, not 17, because 40 additional tests were performed using plutonium," Mansouri said.

Saudi Arabia mulls ban on child marriages

By STEPHEN JONES
Epoch Times Staff

The girl was said to have been shaking as she approached the witness stand. She hitched up her black 'abaya' as she mounted the steps, and composed herself as she told the Saudi court that she no longer wanted to divorce her elderly husband.

The girl, who is just 12 years old, said that she did not want to challenge her father's wishes for her marriage last year to an 80-year-old man.

"I agree to the marriage. I have no objection," she told the court in Buraidah, in the Al-Qasim Province of Saudi Arabia.

"This is in filial respect to my father and obedience to his wish," she added.

The announcement came as a surprise to her lawyers and human rights officials.

Just a month before, she had begged journalists to save her from the marriage. Her mother had claimed that she had been raped and had filed for divorce on the girl's behalf.

The marriage was arranged by the girl's father in exchange for a dowry of 85,000 riyals (CA\$23,700). However because the girl is underage, the money was transferred to her father.

The couple was married last September. The case is the latest in a long line of child marriages in Saudi Arabia, where the practice is heavily ingrained in tribal custom.

There is no minimum age for marriage in the hard-line Sunni country, and a young woman is under the guardianship of her father.

However, after it was first reported in January, this case has stirred debate in Saudi Arabia about whether laws need to be introduced to curb the practice of child marriage.

Despite the case being dropped by the girl's mother, the country's Human Rights Commission (HRC) is planning to intervene and pursue divorce proceedings on the girl's behalf.

Lawyer Sultan bin Zahim has been appointed by the state rights organization and is currently reviewing the case.

"[HRC] became involved in this case as a public rights issue that concerns the Saudi community... This case is still valid even after the mother withdrew," Zahim told Reuters.

This is the first time the commission has intervened in a case of child marriage. The issue has previously been seen as a family matter and outside the remit of the state.

Religious clerics have defended the practice on the basis that the Prophet Muhammad was said to have married a nine-year-old girl named Ayesha.

The kingdom's most senior religious authority, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz al-Sheikh, defended the practice to a Riyadh university audience last year.

"If a girl exceeds 10 or 12 then she is eligible for marriage, and whoever thinks she is too young, then he or she is wrong and has done her an injustice," he was quoted as saying by newspaper Al Hayat.

"Our mothers and before them our

grandmothers married when they were barely 12," he added. "Good upbringing makes a girl ready to perform all marital duties at that age," and those who say women should not marry before 25 years are following a "bad path."

However, there are signs that attitudes could be changing. Another senior religious figure, Sheikh Abdullah al-Manie, said last month that using the example of the Prophet's marriage, 14 centuries ago, "cannot be equated with child marriages today because the conditions and circumstances are not the same."

"It is a grave error to burden a child with responsibilities beyond her years," he said, in comments given to the Saudi Gazette. "Marriage should be put off until the wife is of a mentally and physically mature age and can care for both herself and her family."

Late last year, Fawziyah Abdullah Youssef, a Yemeni girl, died during childbirth. She was 12 years old. The practice of child marriages is particularly ingrained in Yemen, as it is elsewhere in the Arab world.

Some 37 percent of Yemeni between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18, according to United Nations figures. In other countries within the region, such as Afghanistan, nearly half of all marriages involve brides under the age of 16.

However, many analysts have pointed out that child marriage also violates Islamic law on two counts.

First, a marriage contract is only valid if husband and wife voluntarily consent, which a minor is unable to do. Secondly, the dowry paid by a husband is the property of the wife, not her father, who would control it in the case of a minor.

Saudi columnist Amal Al Zahid said that allowing child marriages was a "crime against childhood."

"The trafficking of child brides—a most reactionary practice that takes us back to the days of concubines [and] slave girls," should be outlawed "with absolutely no exceptions," she wrote.

Some Arab countries, including Tunisia, Jordan, and Syria, have set a legal minimum marriage age. However, Saudi Arabia has not yet followed suit, despite a recommendation from the HRC to fix 15 as the legal marriage age.

Despite that, there have appeared signs that things could change. If the HRC intervenes in annulling the Saudi girl's marriage even though the mother has dropped the case, it could set a legal precedent.

Princess Adela bint Abdullah, the influential daughter of Saudi King Abdullah, made a statement last week over the marriage of the 12-year-old girl.

"I, personally, and many specialists in social and education fields, share the opinion" that it is in violation of children's rights, Al-Riyadh newspaper reported.

"A child has the right to live her childhood and not be forced to get married. Even an adult would not accept that," she said.

Greece given a month to show evidence of deficit reduction

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
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The 15 other nations within the eurozone, to which Greece belongs, gave Greece a one-month deadline to show the effectiveness of its new financial plan to gradually reduce its budget deficit to the limit for a European Union (EU) member.

Otherwise, the country will face restrictive measures.

The eurozone refers to the 16 members of the European Union that use the euro as official currency. There are 27 countries within the EU, but the eurozone members are taking the lead in helping Greece since a downturn in its economy could devalue the euro throughout the other 15 countries that use it.

In November 2009 it emerged that reports in Greece had been falsified to conceal a huge budget deficit—exceeding more than four times the limit of the EU—and a national debt of 300 billion euro (CA\$427 billion). This is considered a large debt for a country with a population of approximately 11.3 million.

It was also discovered that the

projected budget deficit for 2010 was more than four times the EU limit.

In response to stern criticism from the EU finance ministers in Brussels in January, the Greek government froze public officials' salaries and raised gasoline and diesel taxes, which Greek officials hope will bring an additional 1.3 billion euros (CA\$1.85 billion) to state coffers.

Initially, this triggered a huge wave of strikes throughout Greece.

Greek authorities promised to submit a report to the European Commission and to the European Central Bank on March 16. The report is to detail any positive effects of its recently implemented adjustment plan, which aims to lower its budget deficit by 4 percent of GDP in 2010 and to further cut it to less than 3 percent in 2012, according to the conventions of the European Stability and Growth Pact.

Some of the requirements the EU set for entering the eurozone are that countries should have a budget deficit of no more than 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), a national debt limit of up to 60 percent



TROUBLED TIMES: Greek Finance Minister Giorgos Papaconstantinou arrives at a meeting with representatives of the eurozone nations on Feb. 16, at the EU headquarters in Brussels. Greece has been given until March 16 to show some effectiveness of its financial plan which aims to reduce the country's budget deficit. GEORGES GOBET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

of GDP, and an inflation rate not more than 1.5 percent above that in the most economically stable member states.

The new EU commissioner for economic and monetary affairs, Olli Rehn of Finland, who took over the post from Spain's Joaquin Almunia, warned that Greece will very soon have to explain how it used sophisticated financial derivatives to hide huge financial deficits.

According to EU officials, investment banks may have taken advantage of loopholes in procedures for

reporting debt and deficit rates.

According to George Papaconstantinou, Greece's finance minister, such derivatives were legal when the country used them, but they are no longer in use. According to a 2008 report from Eurostat, Greek authorities had confirmed that by law "government units could not enter into fictitious derivatives transactions."

Now, some Greek officials face possible prosecution by the European Commission for improper statistical reporting.

Bloomberg, Biden disagree over 9/11 terror trials

By JACK PHILLIPS
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NEW YORK—Over the past few days, controversy has sprung up in the United States over holding the trials in Lower Manhattan.

On Sunday, Vice President Joe Biden went after Mayor Michael Bloomberg's estimate that the trials, which seek to convict alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four others, would cost over US\$200 million (CA\$209 million) per year.

Biden said on CBS's "Face the Nation" that Bloomberg was overestimating the cost.

"We have no doubt that the best and most effective legal way to put this guy behind bars ... is in an Article III Court," said Biden, rejecting a military tribunal for the terror suspects.

Bloomberg fired back on Tuesday in an Associated Press report saying his original estimate was "reasonable." He added that prior to Biden's comments on Sunday, no official in the White House objected to the mayor's original estimate of \$200 million per year.

The mayor was previously a primary proponent of holding the trials in Lower Manhattan's District Court, located just blocks from where the World Trade Center used to stand.

One of the main reasons for Bloomberg's objections over the trials being held in New York City is the security costs. He also said the trials would be a disruption for residents due to the massive amount of security needed.

In the past month, many



GROUND ZERO: (L-R) U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, his wife Dr. Jill Biden and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg walk to visit the reflecting pool as they pay their respects at Ground Zero during a 9/11 memorial ceremony on September 11, 2009. CAIRO-POOL/GETTY IMAGES

Manhattan residents as well as New York City Council members have rallied against holding the trials in New York City, and the proposal has been blasted in the local media.

Republican Congressman Peter T. King last Friday said White House politicians were "blind to political realities" and the "legitimate grassroots feelings" of city residents.

Last month, the Real Estate Board of New York, which has started a Web site called www.MovetheTrial.com, publicly asked the Obama administration to move the trials out of Lower Manhattan. They assert that

the trial will adversely affect Lower Manhattan's business district, the third largest in the United States.

President Barack Obama has said that he has not ruled out holding the trials in New York City, but is considering a military tribunal. Biden said Obama will have the final say as to where the trials will be held.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, in his original proposal to hold the trials in New York City said a criminal court is a better option to try the terror suspects rather than a military tribunal.

U.S. debt

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Now, China took action. Over the last five months, the communist nation sold more than \$45 billion in U.S. Treasuries it holds. That leaves Japan, with \$768.8 billion in U.S. treasury holdings, as the biggest creditor of the U.S. government.

The action is not entirely unexpected, as some U.S. economists have voiced concerns of China funding the nation's debt, even as the United States grappled with an economic recession and a \$1.6 trillion budget deficit.

Treasury data shows that most of the recent ramp-up in Japanese purchases did not come from the Japanese government, but mostly private institutions in Japan.

"As U.S. long-term yields became higher, Japanese banks and financial institutions were willing to buy Treasuries," Mizuho Securities analyst Masashi Shimomiyama said in an interview with the Wall Street Journal.

The Bank of Japan, Japan's central bank, has indicated that it would keep Japanese interest rates low. As a result, many Japanese banks and investment funds have shifted their governmental holdings from Japanese government bonds to U.S. Treasuries as the Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates in the near future.

While China dumps its Treasury holdings, other nations have increased their purchases. Japan bought \$11.6 billion in Treasury investments. The U.K. bought \$25 billion in Treasuries, while Hong Kong also bought nearly \$7 billion. Overall net purchases totaled \$63 billion in December 2009.