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# International Intelligence

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## ***Strikes and Protests ead Through Europe***

Truckers' strikes and protest actions against escalating diesel and other fuel prices are spreading throughout Europe, causing fuel and food shortages. The hard line that governments and the European Union are taking against the strikers suggests that the crisis is being used to further the EU's fascist dictatorship, creating a paradigm-shift and forcing the implementation of a genocidal energy policy. Both the national governments and the European Commission have been protecting the British-Rotterdam spot market and all other forms of speculation, while calling for an increase in biofuels and implementation of more neoliberal restructuring policies.

In Spain, 70,000 truckers, more than 20% of the industry workforce, mostly independent operators, continue their strike and road blockages. The government has deployed 25,000 police to break up the road blockages. Gas stations all over Spain are running out of gas, while fresh meat, vegetables, and fruits are disappearing from supermarket shelves. Car manufacturers SEAT, Nissan, and Mercedes have suspended production for lack of parts.

In Portugal, the Lisbon airport has run out of aviation fuel for commercial planes. Only military and emergency aircraft are being fueled.

There is fear in the capitals of Italy, France, and Britain that the strike actions could spread. Italian truckers are planning a five-day strike at the end of the month. The British government is drafting contingency plans for July 2, when British truckers plan to target London for a mass protest. There were reports of cars lining up at gas stations as it was announced that truck drivers from Shell are planning a four-day walkout.

In Poland, 50,000 truckers staged one-hour protests across the country.

Dutch truckers announced plans to block roads at 18 points for 30 minutes June 12.

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## ***Truckers Across Asia Mount Stoppages, Strikes***

In addition to the well-publicized truckers' strikes across Europe, similar strikes are spreading across Asia where consumers and truckers are no less hit by the skyrocketing price of oil. Major trucking strikes are reported in South Korea, Thailand, and Hong Kong at present.

In South Korea, the Korean Transportation Workers Union announced a general strike to start June 13. Strikes have already begun in some industrial cities.

The Transportation Federation of Thailand claimed on June 11 that it has idled 120,000 of Thailand's 700,000 trucks to protest high fuel prices. "If we work, we lose money, so it's better not to work," said Thongu Kongkhan, secretary-general of the union.

Thai fleet and private operators have demanded that the government help solve the rising cost of fuel. They threatened to drive trucks into midtown Bangkok June 17, if "the problem" is not solved. Trucks were parked along the shoulders for 10 kilometers back from a major entrance to the Bangkok expressway system, and trucks lined the sides of other major highways in provinces around Bangkok.

Thongu told the news agency Deutsche Presse-Agentur, "If we don't get the subsidy [for diesel] by June 17, the entire national truck fleet of 700,000 vehicles will go on strike and descend on Bangkok."

Central Hong Kong was brought to a standstill June 11, when drivers blocked two of the island's key thoroughfares. Just before peak rush hour, four container trucks blocked Queen's Road Central and three trucks sealed off Connaught Road Central, causing a tense 45-minute stand-off with police—creating traffic chaos. The drivers want the government to scrap a fuel tax. Some 500 protesters also staged a rally outside Government House, and until the night of June 10 about 50 remained outside, demanding a meeting with chief executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen.

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## ***Mexican Senator: Get Out Of WTO To Feed People***

Pointing to free trade as the cause of the world food crisis, Sen. Heladio Ramírez López, chairman of the Mexican Senate's Rural Development Committee, called on June 10 for agriculture to be removed from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and all free trade accords, including the North American Free Trade Accord (NAFTA), as the only way to end the world food crisis.

Speaking to a hearing of his Senate committee, with representatives of the World Bank and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization present, Ramírez López charged that the "revolt of the hungry" in 40 countries has exposed those governments which let themselves be "seduced by the economic model which turned developing nations into grain importers."

To solve a world food crisis in which 845 million people worldwide are underfed, and another 100 million are on the verge of malnutrition, markets and international trade must be regulated and controlled; agriculture must be removed from the WTO and NAFTA; free access must be provided to water, seeds, and land for peasant and farm families; and a stop must be put to speculation in agriculture stocks, he told the hearing.

The world has to decide between producing crops to eat, or for fuel, he added. Where does the Mexican government stand on this?

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## ***Argentine President: We Will Defend the Nation***

In a nationally televised speech June 9, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner delivered a sharp message to agricultural producers who have been on strike intermittently for more than 90 days, to protest taxes the government increased last March, on exports of soybeans and sunflower seeds. The strike is an attempt by the British Empire faction to bring down the government, alleging that an "authoritarian" President is "robbing" producers' profits, by

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demanding more regulation. That argument has not worked too well, and the agro producers, led by the oligarchical Rural Society, are on the defensive.

The increased taxes are protectionist in nature, Fernández underscored, and are necessary for two purposes: to guarantee the nation's food security, and to ensure fair income-distribution, aiding those still-poor citizens without jobs or homes. To those producers who are screaming about higher export taxes, the President noted with some irony, that perhaps she had failed to sufficiently explain her policies, or had been disingenuous in assuming that producers would understand the need to contribute to assisting those who have less.

Let's get one thing straight, Fernández de Kirchner said. If we are serious about tackling poverty, people should understand that it is "impossible" to do so, "without income redistribution and without touching the extraordinary profits" of certain sectors.

She then proceeded to announce the creation of a Social Responsibility Fund, which will use the revenue from the higher taxes to build a series of projects nationwide, including 30 large hospital complexes, 300 primary health-care centers, and affordable housing and roads in rural areas.

Fernández stated emphatically: "I am the President of the Republic," not just the other side in some argument. "I must govern for all Argentines, and when I make decisions, I do so to benefit all Argentines."

## *British Seek To Oust Afghan President*

The leaked release of a confidential report by the U.K. government may set the stage for British troops' planned extended stay in Afghanistan and takeover of Kabul. The document, allegedly compiled by British diplomats, contends that Afghanistan's growing drug trade and the corruption of its government will prolong the Taliban insurgency against British troops. The document was designed to undermine the authority of U.S.-backed President Hamid Karzai, and

could be used as a vehicle to push for his removal. Britain has long been trying to remove Karzai, and take control of Kabul.

The document was leaked following Prime Minister Gordon Brown's insistence that British troops would stay in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future, despite the U.K. death toll in the country, which has now reached 100.

The reaching of that milestone has put renewed focus on the 7,800-strong UK mission in Afghanistan, and fuelled fears among some that Britain has been sucked into an unwinnable war in the country.

## *Israeli Early Elections Seem Almost Inevitable*

Early Israeli elections are almost inevitable. A bill dissolving the Knesset and calling for new elections is expected to pass the Israeli parliament the week of June 16. It will be submitted by the opposition Likud party, but is said to already have the support of 74 of the 120 Knesset members, including members of the Labor and Shas parties, who are in the government, and the pro-peace Meretz party. If the bill passes, elections will be held most likely in November, after the U.S. elections. The odds are still that Likudnik Benjamin Netanyahu would gain the most seats if elections are held.

The issue now is Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's legal entanglements, including ongoing police investigations for corruption and fraud. Olmert, after meeting with top Kadima Party officials, announced June 11 that the party has to prepare for primaries, which will most likely take place in September.

Olmert's troubles come at the point when his government has made increasingly open overtures toward peace negotiations with Syria over the Golan Heights.

If Olmert is indicted, and has to step down, he is widely expected to be replaced by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who is expected to pursue the same policy of negotiations with Syria. All other negotiations, specifically with the Palestinians, are at a total standstill.

**BRITISH LORDS VOTED** on June 11 against holding a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, 280 to 218. Baroness Liz Symons was the lead speaker in favor of pushing through the Treaty without scrutiny. She claimed, as does Prime Minister Gordon Brown, that the Lisbon Treaty is totally different from the European Constitution which was defeated in 2005.

**CHINA'S STOCK** market dropped dramatically on June 10, in the wake of the Bank of China's having sharply raised the reserve requirement for Chinese banks. The Bank of China itself was responding to the news of a dramatic rise in inflation in the country's Producer Price Index.

**MARIO DRAGHI**, the head of Italy's Central Bank and of the Global Financial Stability Forum, said in Amsterdam June 11 that "we are still on the razor's edge," and that "things could still get worse." "It is now clear that at the root of the problem there are strong uncertainties on the quality of financial products amounting to thousands of billions of dollars," he added.

**SOUTH KOREA'S** government is in a precarious situation, following mass demonstrations that brought an estimated 200,000 people into the streets of Seoul, and virtually shut down government operations. Demonstrations took place in about 80 other cities as well. The ostensible cause was a free trade agreement with the United States on beef imports, but economic conditions are building up the mass ferment as well.

**CHINA AND TAIWAN** signed historic deals on air travel during their discussions June 13. On the second day of landmark talks in Beijing aimed at easing decades of tensions, negotiators agreed to establish regular direct flights between China and Taiwan starting in July, finally ending time-consuming forced stopovers in Hong Kong.