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CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

[Britain, Denmark to Pull Out Troops from Iraq](#)

Defence Talk – 23 February 2007

Britain, along with Denmark, confirmed it would begin a major troop withdrawal from Iraq in coming months and Lithuania too has indicated it may follow suit. Washington however denies its coalition is crumbling. British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Wednesday the British force in southern Iraq would drop from 7,100 to 5,500 in coming months and could fall below 5,000 this year.

[Behind the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide](#)

Time Magazine – 22 February 2007

It has come to this: the hatred between Iraq's warring sects is now so toxic, it contaminates even the memory of a shining moment of goodwill. On Aug. 31, 2005, a stampede among Shi'ite pilgrims on a bridge over the Tigris River in Baghdad led to hundreds jumping into the water in panic. Several young men in Adhamiya, the Sunni neighborhood on the eastern bank, dived in to help. One of them, Othman al-Obeidi, 25, rescued six people before his limbs gave out from exhaustion and he himself drowned. Nearly 1,000 pilgrims died that afternoon, but community leaders in the Shi'ite district of Khadamiya, on the western bank, lauded the "martyrdom" of al-Obeidi and the bravery of his friends. Adhamiya residents, for their part, held up al-Obeidi's sacrifice as proof that Sunnis bore no ill will toward their Shi'ite neighbors across the river.

[Pushing Toward Party Politics? Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement](#)

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace – February 2007

The political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood stands poised to achieve more political influence than almost any of its sister movements in the Middle East, yet must strike a balance between building a broad political coalition and pursuing its goal of Islamization – a vision for the nation challenged by a number of Kuwaiti political actors. How will this need for compromise affect future democratic reforms in the country, as well as the Brotherhood's long-term goal of a more Islamic society?

[Murder on the Friendship Express](#)

The Economist – 22 February 2007

OUTSIDE the burns unit of Safdarjung hospital in Delhi, a family of grim-faced mourners encapsulates the particular senselessness of war on the subcontinent. They are Indians visiting their Pakistani cousin, Rana Shaukat; he is lying sobbing inside, his body horribly burned by twin bomb blasts on a Pakistan-bound train near Panipat, 80km (50 miles) outside Delhi on February 19th. It killed five of his children. They were among at least 68 victims, mostly Pakistanis. The explosions caused a firestorm in two locked carriages of the train, a recently restored service called the Friendship Express.

[Yemeni Shia Strike Back](#)

The Strategy Page – 26 February 2007

In the last week, at least fifteen Yemeni soldiers, and twice as many rebel tribesmen, have died in several gun battles. Yemen has a war going on with one of its Shia tribes, and there seems no end to it. While Yemen is the original home of the bin Laden family, and harbors many al Qaeda fans, it also has a religious conflict between radical Shia tribes, and pro-al Qaeda Sunni Yemenis. There is also an ongoing insurrection by followers of Shia religious leader Hussein al Houthi.

[Seven Questions: A Detour on the Road Map](#)

Foreign Policy – February 2007

The factional fighting in the Palestinian territories is over—at least for the time being. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice now has the tough job of revitalizing a peace process that has been stalled for seven years. FP spoke with Aaron David Miller, an adviser to six secretaries of state on Arab-Israeli negotiations, on Condi's difficult road ahead.

DEFENCE STRATEGY

[China Military Build-Up out of Keeping with Peaceful Aim](#)

Space War – 22 February 2007

China's rapid military build-up and anti-satellite test last month are out of keeping with its stated aim of becoming a peaceful world power, US Vice President Dick Cheney warned Friday. Cheney, speaking in Australia, praised Beijing's role in helping seal a crucial nuclear deal with North Korea this month, but warned of Beijing flexing its military muscle.

[US on Charm Offensive to Avoid Clash with Russia](#)

Space War – 23 February 2007

The United States has launched a diplomatic charm offensive to mollify Russia over Washington's plans to expand its missile defense system into Poland and the Czech Republic. Washington announced in January it had begun negotiations to install 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar site in the Czech Republic.

[Japan's Stealthy Military](#)

Time Asia – 22 February 2007

Helicopters, it turns out, do not fly upside down. I know this by hard, albeit simulated, experience. I was on the stick of an MH-53 helicopter, a 21-ton flying monster that is one

of the largest craft of its type in the world, at the Iwakuni Air Base in western Japan. My co-pilot and instructor—an officer in the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)—guided me as I lifted the copter off the ground and pointed it toward the Akinada Sea. A little spin over the water, no problem, and then my instructor asked me to turn around for home. I pulled left on the stick, and pulled, and pulled. The next thing I knew, I was staring up at the pixelated ground of Iwakuni that was probably supposed to be below, and then the screen went red, which I knew was a bad thing because my instructor said "Uh-oh." But not to worry—he hit reset (the advantage of video games) and gave me another shot. I showed my gratitude by immediately crashing the new helicopter into the runway.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[New Technology Expands Air Force Combat Capability](#)

Space War – 28 February 2007

The 820th Security Forces Group was selected recently as the first Air Force unit to purchase and deploy the Ground Situational Awareness Toolkit. The GSAT system, consisting of the Scan Eagle unmanned aerial system and ShotSpotter gunfire acquisition technology, will allow Airmen to identify possible enemy firing locations by tracking where shots are coming from.

[Biologically Inspired Vision Systems](#)

Technology Review – 21 February 2007

Neuroscientists at MIT have developed a computer model that mimics the human vision system to accurately detect and recognize objects in a busy street scene, such as cars and motorcycles. Such biologically inspired vision systems could soon be used in surveillance systems, or in smart sensors that can warn drivers of pedestrians and other obstacles. It may also help in the development of so-called visual search engines, says Thomas Serre, a neuroscientist at the Center for Biological and Computational Learning at MIT's McGovern Institute for Brain Research, who was involved in the project.

ENERGY SECURITY

[Don't Blame Gazprom for Europe Energy Crunch](#)

Foreign Policy– February 2007

Gazprom is getting a bad rap. The state-controlled energy giant that supplies a huge amount of Europe's natural gas has been spun into a storybook villain for its hardball negotiating tactics. But it's not Gazprom's fault that Europeans want to consume more gas than they have.

[Where Bush Would Steer Energy R&D](#)

Christian Science Monitor – 22 February 2007

If new technology is a key answer to global warming and America's addiction to oil, then President Bush's proposal to boost federal spending on energy R&D – by no less than 30 percent in fiscal 2008 – would seem a welcome step. In the new \$2.7 billion budget plan, R&D dollars allotted to the US Department of Energy (DOE) continue a transition toward research that will help cut greenhouse gases.

[Iraq Drafts Deal on Oil Riches](#)

Christian Science Monitor – 27 February 2007

The Iraqi cabinet has signed off on draft legislation that would manage direct huge oil reserves, and spread its wealth among the country's ethnic and sectarian divisions. Reuters reports that passing such a law has been "a key demand" of the United States as part of its continuing support for the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

[US Aircraft Carrier Has No Plans to Intimidate Iran](#)

Space War – 25 February 2007

To the deafening roar of war planes taking off from the nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis, US military commanders insist that intimidating Iran is not part of their mission in the region. The carrier and its battle group has been in the Gulf of Oman since February 19, anchored about 120 nautical miles off the coast of Pakistan, in what the US Navy says is a mission to provide support for ground forces operating in Afghanistan and Iraq.

[Iran Launches War Games with Missile Tests](#)

Space War – 25 February 2007

Iran's ideological army, the elite Revolutionary Guards, launched three days of war games on Monday with a succession of missile tests aimed at improving defensive capabilities. The "Power Manoeuvre" exercises involving 3,000 units of the elite force in 16 of Iran's 30 provinces come at a time of mounting tension with the United States over Iran's nuclear programme and allegations it is arming militias in Iraq. "With the firing of short-, medium- and long-range missiles by the Revolutionary Guards, 'Power Manoeuvre' has started," the state news agency IRNA reported. It is the latest show of force by Iran's elite military in the face of

Washington's increasingly tough rhetoric although US officials have been at pains to deny speculation of a planned military strike. IRNA said a total of 750 missiles and canon munitions would be fired during the exercises, being staged less than two weeks after similar manoeuvres by the Guards' air force and naval units.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[British Military Police Storm Anti-Nuclear Protest Ship](#)

Space News – 23 February 2007

Military police on Friday stormed a Greenpeace vessel that sailed into a submarine base in Scotland to protest Britain's plans to modernise its nuclear deterrent, the Royal Navy said. About 20 officers with battering rams clambered aboard the "Arctic Sunrise" at 5:25 pm (1725 GMT) outside the Faslane Naval Base on the River Clyde, north of Glasgow, which is home to Britain's Trident fleet of nuclear submarines.

[South Korea to Press North on Ending Nuclear Arm](#)

Reuters – 27 February 2007

North Korea chief nuclear envoy looked set on Tuesday to make a rare trip to the United States while South Korea sent a top official to Pyongyang to persuade the North to quickly start scrapping its nuclear arms program.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

[Why Indonesia Matters](#)

Times Asia– 22 February 2007

Indonesia is undergoing a spiritual revolution. Since the 1998 fall of strongman Suharto, who during his 32-year rule suppressed not only political freedom but any faith that could challenge his authority, the country has re-embraced its religiosity. In 2004, Indonesia held its first-ever direct presidential election, shattering the notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Yet that same open system of politics has encouraged a flowering of conservative religious thought and allowed the rise of homegrown terrorists, threatening the country's reputation as a model of moderate Islam.

[Malaysia at a Crossroads](#)

Times Asia– 22 February 2007

Like Indonesia, Malaysia is struggling to determine how Muslim to be. Unlike Indonesia, which is governed by a secular constitution, Malaysia already counts Islam as its official faith—although the constitution also guarantees freedom of religion. Each state has a fatwa committee that makes religious decrees applicable to Malaysian Muslims, most of whom are Sunni. In Kelantan state, Muslim women must wear headscarves in public,

while several states have made forsaking Islam a crime that can result in prison time. "We should not limit Islam to a few rituals," says Sulaiman Abdullah, former president of the Malaysian Bar Council. "Malaysia would be better served if it were under Shari'a law."