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Articles from subscriber only sites are available on request. Révolutionnaire is edited by Samuel Chan, with contributions from Bernard Loo and Joshua Ho. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) is a key research component of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). It focuses on security research to serve national needs. IDSS' faculty and research staff conduct both academic and policy-oriented research on security-related issues and developments affecting Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Its research agenda presently comprises the following programmes: Maritime Security, the Revolution in Military Affairs, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Contemporary Islam, Indonesia and China.

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

Chad declares state of emergency

CNN – 15 February 2008

Chad's president declared a nationwide state of emergency Thursday, telling citizens that tightened controls are needed to restore order after recent rebel attacks. In a speech broadcast on national radio and television, President Idriss Deby said he signed a decree increasing the government's powers for 15 days, beginning Friday, as provided for in Chad's constitution. Deby said the decree instituted "measures important and urgent to maintain order, guarantee stability and assure the good functioning of the state." Forces loyal to Deby battled rebels February 2-3 in and around the capital of this former French colony in Central Africa. The Red Cross said more than 160 people were killed and 1,000 wounded in the fighting, which reached the edge of the presidential palace before the rebels were driven out of N'Djamena and back toward Chad's eastern border with Sudan. Deby's decree, which was read on the broadcast, said that as of Friday there will be "a state of emergency throughout the territory of the Republic of Chad." The measure empowers regional governors to control the movement of people and vehicles, bans most meetings, allows the government to control what is published in the press, and imposes a curfew from midnight to 6 a.m.

Trust shot to pieces in Timor

The Australian – 16 February 2008

East Timor is a changed land, with what remained of its simple innocence lost the moment gunmen opened fire on its most revered statesmen. These leaders - particularly President Jose Ramos Horta - liked to move among the poor, touching them, talking to them, reassuring them that they would never be forgotten. All that is gone. There is no one left to trust. There are many different versions of what happened on Monday morning. Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao has gone for the simplest. He yesterday said he could, under other circumstances, imagine that Major General Alfredo Reinado may not have intended to kill the President - except for the fact that on this occasion there was another group of men waiting to ambush him as he drove to his Dili office in a motorcade. "It was a well-coordinated attack," said Gusmao. But the story has taken a deeply sinister turn, with Ramos Horta's brother-in-law, Joao Carrascalao, claiming that both the President and Reinado were set up and attacked by, it would seem, sections of the army, or F-FDTL. The suggestion is that the Australian-led International Security Force, trying to track down two groups of Reinado's men, are looking for the wrong people. Despite Gusmao's confidence that this was a double assassination attempt by Reinado's group - a view he is certainly entitled to, given his vehicle was shot up by renegades - virtually no one in East Timor believes it. Not even Reinado, an accomplished bigmouth who liked to taunt the Government in media interviews and his own DVD propaganda releases, seemed capable of an act of such outright stupidity. The semi-official version is that Ramos Horta was on his early morning run. Reinado and his offsider Leopoldino entered the presidential compound and were shot dead by the F-FDTL guard. As Ramos Horta returned with his bodyguards, they came upon the

remainder of Reinado's men - four or five of them - who were concealed in the deep open storm drain outside the front gate of the compound. The group turned their weapons on the President and started firing. What does seem clear is that Reinado and Leopoldino were shot early in the raid - if it was a raid. Most East Timorese, from senior government ministers to the ordinary but news-aware street people, are convinced it was a set-up. Carrascalao, an MP, is married to Ramos Horta's sister, Rosa. Her brother, Arsenio, was in the compound when the shooting started. "The sequence is this," Carrascalao says. "My bother-in-law Arsenio rang my wife from the compound saying there was shooting. My wife then immediately rang Jose Ramos Horta on his morning walk. Jose told her that he heard some shooting in the direction of the house and he was going back to investigate. He had one bodyguard with him." Why this bodyguard did not prevent his President from walking into a gun battle is somewhat mysterious, but it may be as simple as the fact that Ramos Horta had relatives inside and could not be prevented from approaching. Carrascalao continues: "Arsenio rang again a few minutes later saying, 'Jose is wounded'. My wife rang the hospital and they dispatched an ambulance. It did not come to him straight away. "I have another niece that lives at Balide (about a 15-minute drive from Ramos Horta's compound). She tried to go to the house but outside the Hotel California (on the coast road near the Ramos Horta residence), the UN police tried to prevent her from proceeding. Someone - I don't know who - had rung the UN police. They stayed about 300-400m away. They didn't go in. They were even trying to prevent the ambulance from entering." Carrascalao says the ambulance finally ignored the UN guard and proceeded through to the villa. "Jose didn't know Reinado was coming," Carrascalao says. "Not at all. He was very confident he was going to resolve the problem (of the renegade major taunting the Government after fleeing prison following the laying of murder charges). He would talk to Reinado any time but he would never invite Reinado to his house. I can go there unannounced, but he's my brother-in-law. It's a private house." Carrascalao does not believe Reinado went to kill the President. "I personally don't think someone who had military training would ever prepare something to kill Jose in that way. I'm not a military man but I don't think they would do it. I think - I can speculate - I think they were both ambushed. I think both Jose and Reinado were tricked." One of Horta's guards said, on the day of the attack, that Reinado's band disarmed the guards at the front gate. All the men were wearing balaclavas except for Reinado. Reinado and Leopoldino prowled the compound, finding a house lady and demanding to know where Ramos Horta's bedroom was. They kicked in the door and were engaged by guards and shot dead. One suggestion is that Reinado had been told Ramos Horta wanted to see him. When he arrived at the front gate and was told Ramos Horta was not there, the self-important Reinado stormed in and demanded his promised audience. Carrascalao points to the fact that the President was shot in the back as he walked up the hill towards Reinado's men hiding in the storm drain. "Jose was shot in the back. He was not running away. The shots came from behind. The indications are that it was not Reinado's men who shot him - it was a set-up. There was another group laying in wait, across the road." Carrascalao says there is no doubt Reinado and Leopoldino were shot inside the compound, by F-FDTL guards using machine-guns. In short, he believes Reinado was summoned to the scene, by someone, to set him up for killing his brother-in-law, the President. "I think someone had told Reinado to come down and meet Horta. That is my personal belief. Knowing Jose, knowing how punctual he is, he would never

leave the house without keeping an appointment." He also suggests it is possible that Reinado's own balaclava-clad colleagues may have led him into the trap. As for the ambush on the Prime Minister, Carrascalao believes it was part of a co-ordinated attack but says: "By whom I don't know." Carrascalao is a free-speaking man. If he thought Reinado's men had tried to kill the President, he would have little hesitation in saying so. The ISF has for the past three days been prowling the hills above Dili looking for 18 men who it is believed are associated with Reinado's band. One of them is second-in-command, Lieutenant Gastao Salsinha, who is accused of leading the prime ministerial ambush. He insisted several days ago that he had nothing to do with it. Given he is being hunted, he might well say that. But if you wind back to the start of this problem, in April 2006, when Timor was torn by rioting and mutiny within the armed forces, it was Reinado and Salsinha who abandoned their roles in a protest against the violent actions of the army they were serving in. Even when Reinado came down from the hills in 2006 and was involved in a gun battle with the army, which saw him charged with murder, vision of the encounter showed him repeatedly warning the army soldiers approaching him that he didn't want to kill them. Reinado may have seen himself as a freedom fighter, but he never seemed like a cold-blooded killer.

[Mentally ill latest fodder for Al-Qaeda, says US military](#)

AFP – 19 February 2008

Al-Qaeda has infiltrated the records of Iraqi psychiatric hospitals and is using the information to recruit mentally ill women as suicide bombers, the United States military believes. Two women who carried explosives into Baghdad pet markets on Feb 1 and caused blasts that killed 100 people had both being treated at different psychiatric hospitals in Baghdad in the weeks prior to the attacks, said US military spokesman Rear-Admiral Gregory Smith. 'We believe Al-Qaeda may have approached them individually, away from their families, and recruited them for these barbaric attacks,' Rear-Adm Smith said. He believed their files and contact details may have been leaked by hospital staff. The women, Rear-Adm Smith added, had been identified 'by our investigators using photos of the women and showing those to people in the area as well as various psychiatric hospital officials'. One of the women involved in the Feb 1 bombings had been treated for schizophrenia and depression for several months as an outpatient at Ibn-Rushd hospital. She had told doctors she had been hearing voices telling her to kill herself. The other woman also had a history of mental illness and was being treated, also as an outpatient, at another clinic, which Rear-Adm Smith did not identify. But claims by the Iraqi authorities that the pair had been suffering Down's Syndrome did not appear to be supported by their psychiatric records, he added. One woman was carrying a rucksack packed with explosives while the other wore a suicide vest. There was no indication they knew each other, he said.

[Admiral: Al Qaeda in Iraq 'killing off' former allies](#)

CNN – 19 February 2008

Video provided to CNN shows an al Qaeda in Iraq firing squad executing one-time allies -- fellow Sunni extremists -- who were not loyal enough to the terror organization, coalition military analysts said. In the video provided by coalition military officials, armed men wearing masks are shown standing behind nine kneeling men, all of whom are wearing blindfolds or hoods with their hands presumably tied behind their backs. The video shows the men being executed. The video was recovered late last year during a raid on a compound near Samarra that was being used for killing and torture, a coalition official said. A number of documents -- some found in the same raid -- bolster the coalition notion that al Qaeda in Iraq is waging a violent campaign against its former allies, intelligence analysts said. Samarra is the site of a February 2006 attack on al-Askariya Mosque, revered by Shiites. The attack set off a wave of sectarian violence between Shiites and Sunnis, who were suspected of perpetrating the attack. The northern Iraqi city lies in Salaheddin province, one of four provinces where coalition forces have beefed up operations against Sunni militants. Coalition officials say the documents are indicative of a deep rift among the militant groups fighting coalition forces. Al Qaeda in Iraq "would like nothing more than to aggravate the situation," Smith said last week. Al Qaeda in Iraq has a history of documenting its actions, the analysts said. One document found in the Samarra raid shows the execution of a woman believed to have helped Iraqi police. Another describes the murders of 12 men who al Qaeda in Iraq felt were not sufficiently loyal. In another document, al Qaeda in Iraq criticizes jihadist groups that it says are following "a false path," according to the analysts. The analysts said one document also describes the stance of six Sunni splinter groups being targeted by al Qaeda in Iraq. The document, signed by leaders of the groups, outlines their opposition to the U.S. presence in Iraq but includes a pledge to avoid attacks on civilians. Coalition officials said the documents and video may reflect a move toward reconciliation among some Sunni factions. In recent months, the U.S. has paid Sunnis and some Shiites \$148 million to help fight extremists, military officials said. These groups have taken on many monikers, including Awakening Councils, Concerned Local Citizens and Sons of Iraq. Coalition officials said they are trying to determine whether the documents found last year are a reason to expand efforts to bring more Sunnis into the fight against al Qaeda in Iraq.

[Protecting Darfur's Women From Rape](#)

AP – 19 February 2008

U.N. peacekeepers in armored vehicles and pickup trucks whizzed into this refugee camp. A dozen women came to meet them, bringing their donkeys, water rations and homemade axes. It was time for one of the refugees' most perilous tasks: collecting firewood. Countless refugee women have been assaulted or raped, mostly by Arab janjaweed militiamen, after leaving the relative safety of their camps to gather wood in the open wilderness of Sudan's Darfur region. Most men don't even leave the camps because they risk being killed. But one of the first steps taken by U.N. peacekeepers since they launched their mission in Darfur in January is to restore "firewood patrols" to protect

women on their forays outside Kalma, home to 90,000 refugees and one of the region's largest camps. The women walking out of Kalma one morning in late January were smiling and waving hellos as their leader, Khadidja Abdallah, came up to greet the peacekeepers who had come to escort them. It was a stark contrast to nearly a year ago, in May, when an Associated Press reporter first met Khadidja. Then, the "sheikha," or woman chief, was cowering in a mud hut deep inside Kalma, trying to comfort seven refugee women who had been gang-raped while collecting firewood. African Union peacekeepers in place then had halted firewood patrols because they felt powerless to stop violence. Khadidja and the woman bitterly complained that the AU force had all but given up on protecting Darfur civilians. More than 2.5 million people have fled to camps around Darfur in the war between the Arab-dominated Khartoum government and ethnic African rebels. The government is accused of unleashing the janjaweed, who are blamed for widespread atrocities against ethnic African villagers and refugees. The 7,000-member AU force, in place since 2004, was woefully underequipped and understaffed. The force failed to pacify Darfur, where over 200,000 people have died since fighting broke out in 2003. The joint U.N.-African mission, known as UNAMID, that has taken its place faces some of the same problems. It is almost entirely composed of the same AU troops, with an additional 2,000 peacekeepers. It could take much of 2008 to reach its planned strength of 26,000. It still lacks the same heavy equipment and air power the AU force needed, top U.N. officials say.

[Islamic insurgency in southern Thailand intensifies](#)

AP – 22 February 2008

The tea shop is abandoned. Rubber plantations stand untended. Soldiers constantly patrol the one-lane road leading into this Muslim village. Rae Poh was once designated a 'green zone' village, one of more than 1,600 such islands of peace amid the violence that has torn Thailand's southern tip since a Muslim insurgency erupted four years ago. Then, on Jan 14, insurgents ambushed an army patrol about 2 kilometres away, killing all eight soldiers and beheading one of them. Now Rae Poh is a 'red zone' - one of some 320 loosely designated by the authorities as insurgent hotbeds and under virtual military siege. Their number is up from 215 at the end of 2004, the first year of the insurgency - a dramatic example of the failures of a government hearts-and-minds campaign to quell an uprising that has taken more than 2,900 lives. The insurgency worsened as the government of Thaksin Shinawatra adopted an iron-fist policy. The military regime that overthrew him in 2006 tried a conciliatory approach, apologising for Thaksin's crackdown. But since December the violence has escalated. Now Thailand again has an elected government, and the insurgency is its big challenge. The rebels have never made public their demands, but researchers who have spoken to them say they are seeking an independent Islamic state in the three southernmost provinces that were a Muslim sultanate until annexed by Buddhist-majority Thailand a century ago. The new government describes the insurgency as a security problem that the military, with 40,000 troops and police in the south, can handle. But on the ground, 800 kilometres from the capital, Bangkok, a senior army officer says the military can't resolve the crisis alone. 'We have managed to suppress the violence in a number of red zones but I acknowledge we still don't have strong political or communications teams that work to create

understanding with villagers after something like this happens,' said Lieutenant-General Veerachai Nakwanit, referring to the January ambush. 'Soldiers can provide security,' said Lt-Gen Veerachai, who heads military operations in Rae Poh's Narathiwat province. 'But men in uniform can't do much to win the trust of the people, especially when the other side is relying on religious leaders for its political work.' A reporter, who had to talk her way past a suspicious army commander to enter Rae Poh one week after the attack, found soldiers reluctant to go in and villagers afraid to go out. The night before the attack, the normally bustling village market and tea shop were unusually quiet. Investigations later showed that insurgents had been planning the attack for at least three days from a nearby jungle hideout, said Colonel Kanart Nikornyanond, whose unit is based in a deserted Buddhist monastery near Rae Poh. Nobody from Rae Poh stepped forward to report the suspicious activity, despite his troops' efforts to cultivate trust, he said. 'We thought we had a good relationship with the local Muslims here, but they don't trust us and they are scared of the insurgents,' the colonel said. Ms Pati Mudoloh, whose son Isamael was detained after the ambush, acknowledged that villagers noticed something amiss but said they were too frightened to talk to the soldiers. 'What's the point?' she asked. 'They already suspect we Muslims are all insurgents.' After the ambush, troops searched homes and found traces of explosives and gunpowder. At least 17 men were detained, of whom four have been released. One of those held is Ms Mena Jeh-ha's 19-year-old son, Asaman. He is accused of triggering the bomb that flipped the soldiers' vehicle before insurgents unleashed a barrage of gunfire, leaving no survivors. 'They are taking the breadwinners of the family,' said Mr Zachary Abuza, an expert on terrorism in South-east Asia at Simmons College in Boston. 'It could be counterproductive in the long run and add fuel to the already tense situation.' Mr Masoh Maeh, a southern Muslim leader sympathetic to the government, said the authorities face a long fight. The problem, he said, 'is deeply rooted in history and no matter what the government does, they can't change that immediately'. In Rae Poh, villagers watch approaching soldiers with suspicion.

[Intelligence chief: Taliban making gains in Afghanistan](#)

CNN – 28 February 2008

A resurgent Taliban is back in charge over parts of Afghanistan, the nation's chief intelligence official said Wednesday in an assessment that differed from the one made last month by Defense Secretary Robert Gates. More than six years after the United States invaded Afghanistan, the Taliban has regained control of about 10 percent of the country, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell told the Senate Armed Services Committee. Just a few weeks ago, Gates touted NATO military success in Afghanistan in 2007 and said the Taliban controlled no land. "The Taliban occupy no territory in Afghanistan on a continuing basis," Gates said during a Pentagon briefing in January. Despite his less-optimistic assessment on that score, McConnell said the Taliban has suffered "significant degradation" in its leadership and is unable to successfully face off against U.S. and NATO forces. He attributed an uptick in violence to the Taliban resorting to the terrorist tactics used by al Qaeda in Iraq -- suicide attacks and roadside bombings. McConnell also said the Taliban chooses other means to engage. "They'll fill in an area when we withdraw, or they will influence a village or region if our presence is

not there," he said. He stressed the need not only for improved security, but also for better governance, noting the federal government controls only about 30 percent of Afghanistan, leaving the majority of the country under the influence of local tribes. At the Senate threat assessment hearing, McConnell said the same safe haven in Pakistan that has enabled al Qaeda to regain strength has allowed the Taliban to "train, recruit, rest and recuperate and then come back into Afghanistan to engage." But he praised Pakistani authorities for helping the United States "more than any other nation in counterterrorism operations." However, Gen. Michael Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told the senators Pakistani efforts to confront al Qaeda and the Taliban in the ungoverned regions of the country have had little impact. "Pakistani military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas have had limited effect on al Qaeda," Maples said. Both Maples and McConnell expressed concern about al Qaeda's continued effort to recruit and train operatives for terrorist operations against the United States and its allies and its stated desire to obtain weapons of mass destruction. McConnell and Maples spoke on the eve of a Senate Foreign Relations committee hearing to discuss Pakistan with Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, the second most senior official at the State Department. The committee's chairman -- Sen. Joe Biden, D-Delaware -- just returned from the region and called the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan "a superhighway for extremists." "The main message I bring back is that Afghanistan is the forgotten war and Pakistan is the neglected frontier," Biden said Tuesday. "Afghanistan is slipping toward failure because it has never been a priority, and it has to become one." He said the Pakistani-Afghan border should be considered the central front in the war on terror.

TERRORISM & COUNTER-TERRORISM

[Israel: UN official's remarks encourage terrorism](#)

The Jerusalem Post – 18 February 2008

Israel accused UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes on Monday of encouraging terrorism when he used the phrase "a vicious cycle of violence" to describe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict along the Gaza border. "Such comments create an analogy between terrorists and those who are defending themselves from terror," said Foreign Ministry Director-General Aharon Abramovitch in the aftermath of a contentious meeting with Holmes. It was a charge that the UN official flatly denied as he wrapped up a five-day visit to the area that included trips to Gaza and to Sderot. It was his first trip here since taking office in January 2007. Holmes, who in the last days had urged Hamas to stop launching rockets against Israel and listened to the anguish of the wounded victims, said he was puzzled by the Foreign Ministry's statement. "I think it is hard to construe anything from what I said to encourage terrorism," Holmes told reporters at a Jerusalem press conference. But Abramovitch warned that the language of equity could unwittingly encourage terrorist elements to believe that the international community would exert pressure on Israel instead of dealing with the roots of the violence. Abramovitch said Jerusalem expected the UN and democratic states to support Israel in its struggle against terror and the organizations that deny its right to exist. Holmes said that in spite of the Foreign Ministry's statement, he had productive meetings with people

in that office as well as the Defense Ministry. He said scheduling problems had kept the foreign minister and the defense minister from meeting with him in person. Holmes, who tried to walk a balanced line between the two sides, said he supported Israel. But that did not stop him from harshly condemning the goods embargo Israel has imposed on the Gaza Strip since Hamas's violent overthrow of Fatah in June 2006. He also took issue with the security fence and the West Bank roadblocks. Israel reassured him that the bare minimum of humanitarian aid would be allowed into Gaza, Holmes admitted, but he said this was not enough. "There is a crisis [in Gaza] that has increasingly severe humanitarian consequences," Holmes said. The harm caused the people in Gaza is not justified by the rocket attacks. "It collectively penalizes an entire population," he said. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on Monday blamed Hamas for the fact that economic conditions in Gaza were so bad that some 80 percent of the 1.4 million citizens exist on food subsidies provided by United Nations agencies. But Holmes leveled the blame at Israel, which he said was "largely in control of what happens in Gaza. Israel continues to have the obligation of an occupying power in the West Bank and Gaza and Israel must fulfill those obligations." Overall, he said, "I am deeply concerned that what is happening on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank is not a good basis on which to build a successful peace settlement," Holmes said. There is a disconnect between the reality on the ground and the political negotiations which needs to be urgently bridged, he said.

[US embassy in Belgrade attacked](#)

BBC – 21 February 2008

Several hundred protesters have attacked the US and other embassies in Serbia's capital in anger at Western support for Kosovo's independence. Protesters broke into the US compound and briefly set part of the embassy alight. Firemen later found an unidentified charred body inside. The UK, Belgian, Croatian and Turkish missions were also attacked. The violence followed a peaceful rally earlier by at least 150,000 people outside the main parliament building. The US, UK, Germany and Italy are among those to have recognised Kosovo. Earlier, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica delivered an impassioned speech condemning the territory's secession. "As long as we live, Kosovo is Serbia. Kosovo belongs to the Serbian people," he told the flag-waving crowd. Most Serbs regard Kosovo as their religious and cultural heartland. In New York the US ambassador to the United Nations, Zalmay Khalilzad, expressed outrage at the attack, and said he would ask for a Security Council condemnation. He said the Serbian government should be reminded "of its responsibility to protect diplomatic facilities". Serbian President Boris Tadic appealed for calm. "This only keeps Kosovo distant from Serbia," he said. About 1,000 protesters attacked the building, throwing flares through the window while others scaled walls to rip down the US flag. Several other embassies were also attacked by crowds. There are reports of various businesses and restaurants being attacked. Serbia, supported by Russia and China, says Kosovo's Sunday declaration violates international law. In the coming weeks, an almost 2,000-strong EU mission will be deployed to help the country develop its police force and judiciary.

Morocco busts al Qaeda-linked terror network funded by crime

CNN – 21 February 2008

Morocco's government said it has dismantled a terrorist network that had plotted to assassinate Cabinet ministers and members of the North African kingdom's Jewish community. Authorities believe the network has links to al Qaeda and local terror groups, the official MAP news agency said late Wednesday. A total of 32 people were arrested in sweeps this week, Moroccan newspapers said. Morocco also has banned an Islamist political party, Al Badil Al Hadari, because some members were linked to the network, the Interior Ministry said. The network raised money by waging holdups, selling stolen goods and taking contributions from its members, the ministry said in a statement issued Wednesday. One suspected member of the group, with help from criminals in Europe, carried out a heist of an armored truck in Luxembourg in 2000, netting the group \$25.65 million, it said. Gold jewelry stolen in Belgium was melted down by a goldsmith who belonged to the network and then sold, the ministry statement said. The group had plotted to assassinate Cabinet ministers, army officers and members of the Jewish community, the ministry said. Only a few thousand Jews still live in the Muslim kingdom, as many have emigrated to Israel and elsewhere. Among those arrested was the group's suspected leader, Abdelkader Belliraj, who Interior Minister Chakib Benoussa said had links with al Qaeda and local terror groups. Also arrested in the sweeps were political leader Mostafa Lmouatassime; Abdelhafid Sriti, a correspondent for the Hezbollah militant group's Al-Manar television; and a university professor and a police superintendent, the MAP agency reported. Morocco, a strong U.S. ally, has been on alert since 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca killed 45 people and stunned this relatively moderate Muslim country, a popular vacation spot. Those bombings targeted a Jewish community center and cemetery, a hotel, a restaurant and a Spanish social club. Authorities have carried out regular anti-terror sweeps since then, raising concerns among human rights groups that say many innocent people have been arrested and tortured. In March, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Casablanca Internet cafe, and investigators later uncovered an alleged plot targeting tourist sites across Morocco. Police cornered four suspects, shooting one dead and prompting the other three to blow themselves up to avoid capture. The blasts killed a policeman and wounded 21 other people. Two brothers strapped with explosives blew themselves up near the U.S. consulate in April.

Britain admits CIA rendition flights

AFP – 22 February 2008

was forced to admit to the use of its territory by two US planes carrying terror suspects on 'rendition' flights and the White House said 'mistakes' were made in the official record. Britain has always denied any involvement in so-called 'extraordinary rendition' operations run by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), but Foreign Secretary David Miliband apologised to parliament after a US 'record error' came to light. Mr Miliband said new information showed that two flights, each with one suspect on board, refuelled at the US air base on the British Indian Ocean territory of Diego Garcia in 2002. His apology prompted some lawmakers to accuse Washington of lying to its closest ally in the 'war on terror', while legal and civil liberties groups called for a full-scale inquiry.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he was disappointed by the US error. 'It is obviously a very serious issue,' Mr Brown told a news conference on a visit to the EU headquarters in Brussels. 'The United States has expressed regret about us not knowing about these issues. We share the disappointment that everybody has about what actually happened. I think the important thing is now that we put in place the best possible procedures to ensure that this could not happen again,' he said. The United States acknowledged its fault, but the White House stressed there would be no impact on counter-terrorism cooperation with Britain. 'Our government had told the British that there had been no rendition flights involving their soil or airspace since 9/11,' CIA Director Michael Hayden said, referring to the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. 'That information, supplied in good faith, turned out to be wrong,' Mr Hayden added in a statement on the CIA website. Mr Hayden denied that the CIA had a holding facility on Diego Garcia. Meanwhile, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack shot down suggestions that a US official could have lied to the British, and added that neither the British government nor anyone else believed it was anything but an administrative error.

[Al-Qaeda eyes role in Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#)

AFP – 26 February 2008

Al-Qaeda is staking new terrain - the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - taking advantage of the chaos reigning in Gaza and the radicalisation of part of Palestinian public opinion, analysts say. Signs are mounting that the international Islamist terrorist group is trying to become a factor in the longstanding Middle East dispute, from harsh anti-Israeli discourse by Al-Qaeda head Osama bin Laden to calls for foreign fighters to head to Gaza. 'We will not recognise a state for the Jews, not even one inch of the land of Palestine. Blood calls for more blood and demolishing calls for further demolishing,' said Osama, in late December remarks carried on a jihadist Internet site. Since his remarks, anti-Israeli rhetoric traditionally found in the most radical and violent Internet forums has become even more virulent and precise - calling on young Palestinians to prepare for a forthcoming Al-Qaeda cell in Gaza and the West Bank. 'When the border was opened between Gaza and Egypt, I saw calls on forums for foreign fighters to come and infiltrate the Gaza Strip to lead the battle against Israel,' said Mr Dominique Thomas, a specialist on radical Islam at the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris. He referred to a flood of Palestinians into Egypt after militants blew up part of Gaza's border in January. 'And recently there were calls from key figures or important emirs of jihadist movements in Iraq, Lebanon who continue to preach on Palestine,' Mr Thomas added. In remarks carried on the Internet earlier this month, for example, the head of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi described Israel as an 'evil germ that has infected the body of the Umma (the community of Muslim believers) and must be extracted'. The day before, another extremist cell - the Gaza-based Fatah al-Islam - described the Palestinian cause as 'central for the global jihad'. 'Israel has assumed a heretofore unprecedented priority on the target list of Al-Qaeda and its allies,' said Mr Michael Scheuer, former head of the United States Central Intelligence Agency's Osama unit. 'Al-Qaeda believes it has achieved a durable strategic victory by gaining safe haven in Iraq contiguous to the Levant (an area generally encompassing Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian territories),' he added. Several incidents, mostly in Gaza,

suggest global jihadists have already arrived, experts say. A case in point: A Feb 15 bombing attack against a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) centre by a gang of gunmen. 'It's typical of the Salafist,' or the international terrorist movement, said Mr Ruben Paz, an expert on Islamic movements at the Israeli International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, near Tel Aviv. ' Hamas wouldn't do that, but they were not able to prevent it. It's a bad sign. It's on the model of what's going on in Iraq,' he added. But Mr Paz believes Gaza's ruling Hamas movement will not let things go to far. 'I think that if there's a successful terrorist attack coming from Gaza and carried out by Salafist, Hamas would open an open war against these elements, because they could endanger them also' he said. As they await the moment they can set up shop in Gaza, the jihadists are multiplying their advice on the Internet to an ever more radicalised Palestinian youth. One author, signing himself as 'Assad al-Jihad 2', recommended young Palestinians take martial arts courses, form autonomous cells and offer shelter and protection for foreign fighters arriving in Gaza.

[Al-Qaeda influence grows on Afghan/Pakistani frontier](#)

Reuters – 27 February 2008

Al-Qaeda appears to be increasing its influence among Islamist militant groups along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan, with offers of money, training and other assistance, United States experts say. Osama bin Laden's group, which has been rebuilding in safe havens in Pakistan for over a year, has taken a prominent role in a new effort by Taleban and other radical organisations to coordinate their operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. 'We are seeing an increase in cooperation between the (Afghan) insurgents as well as the terrorists led by Al-Qaeda. They are increasing in their coordination,' US Army Major-General David Rodriguez, top commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in eastern Afghanistan, said on Tuesday. 'They're cross-fertilising their tactics, techniques and procedures and also again getting resourcing mainly from Al-Qaeda, who is the central player in the terrorism equation,' he told Pentagon reporters in a videolink from Afghanistan. US-led forces toppled Afghanistan's former Taleban regime and expelled Al-Qaeda's leadership after the Sept 11 attacks on the United States in 2001. But insurgent violence in Afghanistan has increased steadily over the past two years. Last year also saw rising violence across the border in nuclear-armed Pakistan, where suicide bombings killed hundreds of people including former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Some analysts say the violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan constitutes a single struggle against a cross-border militant threat in the Pashtun region. 'It really always has been. The fact is that we drove the Taleban into Pakistan, along with the other Islamist elements (after the 2001 invasion),' said Mr Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

DIPLOMACY & DEFENCE STRATEGY

[Serbia defiant as Kosovo breakaway looms](#)

CNN – 15 February 2008

Serbia defiantly told the United Nations on Thursday that it will never allow Kosovo to become independent -- despite U.S. and European Union support for the province to make the move. Kosovo has been under U.N. control since a NATO-led invasion in 1999 to drive out Serbian forces who were brutally repressing an uprising of the majority ethnic Albanian population. In January, a coalition government that strongly backs independence from Serbia took over and promised independence "in weeks." Serbia remains vehemently opposed to the split and called the meeting of the Security Council -- where they have the support of Russia -- to discuss Kosovo's status. According to a transcript, Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic said: "Let me be very clear. The Republic of Serbia shall never accept any violation of its territorial integrity. "We shall never recognize Kosovo's independence. We shall not waiver, we shall not yield, should this cowardly act proceed unchecked. Not now. Not in a year. Not in a decade. Never." Jeremic said that if Kosovo declares independence, "we shall undertake all diplomatic, political and economic measures designed to impede and reverse this direct and unprovoked attack on our sovereignty." Kosovo is a province of Serbia, which in turn used to be part of Yugoslavia before it split apart -- sometimes peacefully, sometimes violently -- in the 1990s.

[India opens massive weapons fair, denies arming for war](#)

AFP – 16 February 2008

A massive defence fair opened in India's capital on Saturday, with hundreds of global weapons firms competing for billions of dollars of sales to one of the world's largest armies and biggest spenders. Some 450 firms from countries including the United States, Russia, Britain, Russia and Israel are displaying their latest hardware to technology-hungry India, the top arms buyer among emerging nations and expected to shell out 30 billion dollars (\$42.42 billion) over the next four years. The four-day 'DefExpo' in New Delhi is also expected to see several big-ticket deals confirmed, with US firms hoping to take a slice of a market that was traditionally the domain of India's Cold War ally Russia. India's Defence Minister A.K. Antony insisted the event did not signal that his country was engaged in an arms race with its nuclear-armed neighbours and rivals Pakistan and China. 'India is buying equipment so that we can offer a deterrent. We are not preparing for war,' he told reporters. Since 1999, nuclear-armed India's military purchases have been worth 25 billion dollars (\$35.35 billion). And the country, which has the world's fourth largest military and is Asia's second-fastest growing economy, will be spending even more in the coming years to modernise its Soviet-era weaponry. Up for grabs are deals for six submarines worth 2.3 billion dollars (\$3.25 billion), an artillery contract tagged at three billion dollars and a global tender for helicopters. India, which has a history of tense relations with neighbours Pakistan and China, also plans to issue a tender for 126 war planes worth a colossal 10.2 billion dollars as early as March. The defence minister also told participants that the days of bribing Indian officials to win government

contracts were over, citing a ban on the use of local brokers and backhanders in defence deals. 'We will not show favours to anybody as it is our objective to get the most advanced technology at a reasonable price,' Mr Antony told a press conference. 'The government stand is very clear: no middlemen in defence deals. And whenever we see any complaint, we go to the root of the complaints,' he said. India imposed the ban after 1986 when the purchase of 410 howitzer guns for 1.23 billion dollars from then-Swedish firm Bofors sparked allegations that brokers bribed politicians to clinch the deal. The scandal contributed to the collapse of the government of then-prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1989. But the problem lingers. India in December scrapped a 600-million-dollar (\$848 million) deal to buy 197 military helicopters after allegations of corruption in the bidding process involving Eurocopter, a unit of the European aerospace giant EADS. The minister did not name Eurocopter, or problems surrounding a 1.5-billion dollar artillery tender that was frozen last year, but said 'two-three deals' threatened to 'compromise transparency' in India's arms buying. 'All our procurements are on schedule and two or three contracts we cancelled despite pressure from international quarters. These were big-ticket contracts... and we have gone for fresh tenders,' he said.

[Positions clouded as Olmert-Abbas set for meeting](#)

Reuters – 18 February 2008

Israeli and Palestinian leaders will meet for another session of peace negotiations in Jerusalem on Tuesday but conflicting statements by both parties have clouded the state of progress in the talks. Disputing comments by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the Palestinians say they have not agreed to put off talks on the future of Jerusalem until the end of the process, a senior adviser to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Monday. Officials in the West Bank also responded sharply to the latest assurance by an Israeli minister, aimed at right-wingers in Olmert's coalition, that the government had plans to press on with building Jewish settlements on Arab land around the city. Olmert said on Sunday Abbas had consented to hold off discussing any possible division of Jerusalem until the end of the negotiating process, a move that could help the Israeli leader hold together his fragile coalition government for now. "We will postpone dealing with Jerusalem to the last phase of the negotiations," he said, stressing that Abbas had "accepted" his suggestion. Palestinian spokesmen have repeatedly said postponing talks on Jerusalem would be unacceptable. "The issue of Jerusalem is a fundamental issue and cannot be postponed. The president did not agree to postpone it," said Nimer Hammad, Abbas's senior political adviser.

[East Timor merges police, army](#)

National Nine News – 18 February 2008

East Timor authorities have merged the nation's police and army in their attempts to catch those responsible for last week's attacks. The major opposition party Fretilin and analysts expressed grave concern at the move, just two years after violence between sections of the two forces destabilised East Timor in 2006, killing 37 and forcing 150,000 to flee their homes. International Crisis Group (ICG) analyst Sophia Cason said the move could have significant ramifications for the two forces, which were still trying to rebuild after

the 2006 crisis. "Since 2006, or prior to that, there were a lot of difficulties within the PNTL (Timorese Police) and within the FTDL (East Timor army) and between the two forces, and that was part of the cause of the crisis in 2006," Cason said. "As the most recent ICG report points out, those differences have still not been resolved. "I suppose the danger in doing this, is that in a way it is militarising the police at a time when most people involved with the police have been actively trying to demilitarise them." "It could be interpreted much more broadly and then we may see FTDL doing what we presume are police functions and police doing what we presume are military functions and I think that's the danger of this." It follows criticism last week by the chief of East Timor's army about how the armed rebels were able to attack the key leaders in a nation swarming with international security forces. Cason said the move was "very significant" in trying to build a functioning police force and army. "The issue of clarity of roles and separation of the forces, this just goes against everything in terms of international best practice in regards to those issues," she said.

[Kosovo pushes for global recognition](#)

CNN – 18 February 2008

Kosovo on Monday began its campaign for global recognition a day after declaring independence from Serbia, but bitter divisions in the European Union and United Nations raised the specter of conflict over the Balkan territory. Facing severe economic problems and high unemployment, Kosovo is banking on the support of Western powers including the United States and key EU nations to give it immediate backing. But while the move is broadly favored by the West, U.N. Security Council members Russia and China have expressed outright opposition and "grave concern" over Kosovo's unilateral decision. Serbia insists it will not respond with violence to Kosovo's sovereignty claim, although it refuses to recognize the move. In the Serb-dominated northern Kosovo town of Mitrovica, scores of Kosovo Serbs took to the streets waving Serbian flags in a demonstration against independence. The U.N. Security Council was expected to meet to discuss the issue later Monday, with Serbian President Boris Tadic due to address the body on the breakaway his country bitterly opposes. Asked on Monday whether the United States -- which has expressed support for Kosovo's secession -- would officially recognize Kosovo, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "Stay tuned." European Union foreign ministers were Monday also due to discuss the independence declaration, with several members, including Spain, who fear it will send signals to separatists within their own borders, likely to oppose. "Our position is that this declaration should be disregarded by the international community," as well as by the head of the U.N. mission in Kosovo, Moscow's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin said on Sunday. In Beijing Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao expressed grave concern over Kosovo move for independence. "Kosovo's unilateral act can produce a series of results that will lead to seriously negative influence on peace and stability in the Balkan region ..." Liu said, according to China's Xinhua news agency. He called on Kosovo and Serbia to seek a solution under international law.

[Japan complains over new crimes blamed on U.S. military](#)

AP – 18 February 2008

Japan protested a new string of alleged crimes by U.S. troops and criticized American military discipline Monday, as indignation mounted over the arrest last week of a Marine on suspicion of raping a 14-year-old girl. Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka called U.S. Ambassador Thomas Schieffer to complain about the latest incidents, which in addition to the alleged rape included allegations of drunken driving, trespassing and theft by American servicemen, the ministry said. "We had to protest strongly because it was just ridiculous that these alleged crimes were committed just as we were discussing the very problem," ministry official Ryo Fukabori said. The government's top spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura, also accused American servicemen of continuing their alleged carousing despite the accusations of lax discipline. Machimura suggested Tokyo expects further expressions of American regret over the behavior when U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits Japan next week. "They must be slacking off," Machimura said of the U.S. troops. "Secretary of State Rice is visiting Japan next week. We must urge the U.S. government to reflect seriously on what has happened." The arrest last week of Staff Sgt. Tyrone Luther Hadnott, 38, a Marine from Camp Courtney in Okinawa, in the alleged rape of a young girl has raised tensions over crimes committed by U.S. troops. Hadnott admitted to investigators that he forced the girl down and kissed her, but said he did not rape her, police said. Schieffer traveled to Okinawa last week to express his sadness over the alleged attack, and the U.S. military announced a review of its anti-sexual assault guidelines, pledging to tighten discipline among its 50,000 troops in Japan. Despite the attention, police reported more accusations involving the U.S. military. Japanese police arrested a 22-year-old Marine for allegedly driving while drunk in central Okinawa on Sunday, and another Marine, 21, was accused of getting drunk, entering someone's house and passing out on the couch Monday. A U.S. sailor was also accused of shoplifting last Wednesday in Sasebo, the site of a large naval base on the southern island of Kyushu. The new allegations surfaced as a group of Okinawan assembly members were in Tokyo to confer with Cabinet ministers about the crime problems. The rape case has prompted comparisons with the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan girl by three U.S. servicemen. The attack triggered massive protests against the American military, and the three were convicted and sentenced to prison.

[Myanmar issue at critical stage, says UN envoy](#)

AFP, AP, Reuters – 19 February 2008

UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari said yesterday that Myanmar is now in a 'critical phase', and he called on world leaders to prod the country's ruling junta towards democratic reforms. Professor Gambari told Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi that it is crucial the international community moves quickly to lobby the generals to pledge changes. Beijing is the UN envoy's first stop on a regional tour. China is an important trading partner of Myanmar and also a big arms provider to the country. Prof Gambari will also visit Indonesia, Singapore and Japan. ASEAN has called repeatedly on Myanmar to hold talks with the country's opposition leaders, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Ms Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy

(NLD), said yesterday - in its first reaction to the junta's timetable for new elections - that the military rulers must respect the election the party won in order to build a true democracy. The junta made a surprise announcement earlier this month of a referendum on a new, as yet unfinished, Constitution in May, to be followed by a general election in 2010 - the first specific dates for steps in an earlier-announced 'road map to democracy'. The military last held elections in 1990 but never recognised the landslide victory by Ms Suu Kyi's NLD, and instead has kept her under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years. It also slammed the junta for announcing the referendum 'one-sidedly and without genuine dialogue', and accused the regime of ignoring UN recommendations to open talks on national reconciliation. The regime announced its timetable for elections amid mounting international pressure over its crackdown on peaceful demonstrations led by Buddhist monks last September in which the UN says at least 31 people were killed. China has objected to Western criticism of Myanmar's military regime, saying conditions in the country have improved dramatically since the crackdown. China has been credited with convincing Myanmar's generals to issue Prof Gambari with visas for an earlier visit. While the junta has yet to approve another visit by the envoy, Mr Wang said it was important that Prof Gambari visited China ahead of any future follow-up trip to Myanmar.

[Serbia steps up anti-Kosovo pressure](#)

CNN – 19 February 2008

The United States officially recognized Kosovo -- the Balkan province which split from Serbia on Sunday -- as an independent nation on Monday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a written statement. In response, Serbia ordered its ambassador to the United States to return home, the Serbian Embassy said. Serbian President Boris Tadic said Kosovo's move sets a dangerous precedent for other nations with separatist provinces. Tadic asked the U.N. Security Council to annul the declaration of independence. "Imagine you were in my place -- the president of a country, which has been deprived of a territory against its will. How would you feel and how would you respond?" he said. "I'm asking this question of you because if you cast a blind eye to this illegal act, who guarantees to you that parts of your countries will not declare independence in the same way?" European Union nations Monday were also starting to individually recognize Kosovo as the world's newest nation -- but had not agreed collectively on the way forward. Britain, France and Germany back Kosovo's independence but other EU nations including Greece, Spain and Romania have signaled that they would not follow suit amid concerns about the precedent that such a move would set. Spain -- where militants wanting a separate Basque nation have carried out a 30-year campaign of violence -- said it did not consider Kosovo's independence to be lawful. Two pro-Russian separatist provinces in Georgia -- South Ossetia and Abkhazia -- were looking to use Kosovo's move to help them declare their own independence. But the U.S. and EU say that Kosovo's move is not the precursor for a wave of declarations of independence. In Beijing Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao expressed grave concern over Kosovo's move for independence. Russia was also standing with its traditional ally, Serbia. Kosovo has been under U.N. administration and patrolled by NATO troops since a 1999 bombing campaign that halted a Serb-led campaign against

Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority. About 100,000 Serbs still live in Kosovo, making up about 5 percent of the population. Sejdiu pledged to create a nation "where all citizens of all ethnicities feel appreciated."

[Russia threatens force over Kosovo](#)

CNN – 22 February 2008

Russia has not ruled out using force to resolve the dispute over Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia if NATO forces breach the terms of their U.N. mandate, Moscow's ambassador to NATO warned on Friday. "If the EU works out a single position or if NATO steps beyond its mandate in Kosovo, these organizations will be in conflict with the U.N., and then I think we will also begin operating under the assumption that in order to be respected, one needs to use force," Dmitry Rogozin said, in comments carried by Russia's Interfax news agency. Russia, which has close ties with Serbia, has refused to recognize Kosovo's sovereignty, triggering a terse diplomatic standoff with the U.S. and several EU member states including the UK, France and Germany which have already recognized its independent status. NATO has led a 15,000-strong peacekeeping operation -- known as KFOR -- in Kosovo since 1999 under the terms of a U.N. Security Council mandate authorized following a 78-day bombing campaign by the military alliance against Serbia. Following Kosovo's declaration of independence last weekend, NATO Secretary-General said KFOR would "respond swiftly and firmly against anyone who might resort to violence in Kosovo." Police were guarding the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade on Friday, one day after a charred body was found and dozens of people were reportedly injured in an attack by angry demonstrators protesting Kosovo's independence from Serbia. The Embassy's consular section remained closed on Friday as officials were advised to remain in their residences and avoid movement amid continuing fears over anti-Western protests, according to a statement on the U.S. Embassy Web site. The Embassy warned American citizens to avoid areas of demonstration and to exercise "extreme caution." Throwing rocks, breaking windows and setting fires, the protesters capped a day of mass protest against Western support for an independent Kosovo. Thursday's violence was part of a much bigger, peaceful demonstration where up to 150,000 people chanted "Kosovo is Serbia," and vowed to never accept the province's independence. The larger group of protesters marched to the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Sava, where a huge outdoor prayer service was held. Serbian TV showed someone trying to set fire to the U.S. flag at the embassy, which was closed and unstaffed when the masked protesters attacked. Riot police fired tear gas at the rioters and lines of armored vehicles were on the streets before the embassy perimeter was secured. Kosovo declared independence last Sunday and the United States was among the first countries to offer official recognition of its split from Serbia.

[EU pulls out of divided Kosovo city](#)

AFP – 24 February 2008

The European Union has withdrawn staff from a divided Kosovo city following violent protests by the Serb minority, an EU envoy said as Russia warned Kosovo's independence could increase terrorism. The EU staff in the northern city of Mitrovica

have been preparing a 2,000 strong EU police-judicial mission in Kosovo after its declaration of independence, which has been rejected by the Serbian government and Kosovo Serbs. 'We have temporarily brought back our personnel, but we will maintain our office in the north,' EU envoy Peter Feith told reporters in the southern Kosovo town of Prizren on Saturday. He did not give details on the numbers involved but added: 'We hope that conditions will soon allow us to resume our activities' in northern Kosovo. Mitrovica, where there are 80,000 Albanians in the south of the city and 20,000 Serbs in the north, has become a symbol of Kosovo's ethnic tensions. The Serbian government and the Serb minority that remains in Kosovo oppose the EU mission. Just before the independence proclamation, an explosion went off near the building housing the EU preparatory team in Mitrovica. Kosovo Serbs in the north have been protesting ever since Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia on Sunday. Russia has also strongly opposed Kosovo's independence and blamed the West's support to the breakaway province for violent unrest in Belgrade this week targeting the United States and European embassies. A top aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said that Kosovo's move would strengthen terrorist forces. 'With Kosovo now the gun has been cocked and no one knows when and where the shot will ring out,' said Mr Anatoly Safonov, Mr Putin's envoy for international cooperation against terrorism and organised crime, in an interview with the Russian news agency Interfax.

[Pakistani Taliban ready for talks with new govt: spokesman](#)

AFP – 24 February 2008

A Pakistani Taliban militant commander welcomed the victory of President Pervez Musharraf's opponents in elections and is ready for peace talks, a rebel spokesman said on Sunday. But Baitullah Mehsud - whom the government has accused of masterminding the slaying of former premier Benazir Bhutto in December - warned the victors of Monday's vote not to pursue Mr Musharraf's 'war on terror', the spokesman said. 'The Taliban movement welcomes the victory of anti-Musharraf political parties in the election and announces its willingness to enter into negotiations with them for bringing peace in the restive tribal area,' Taliban spokesman Maulvi Omar said, quoting a statement by Mehsud. Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, where Mehsud is based, has seen heavy fighting in recent months that has left hundreds of militants and dozens of troops dead. Omar sporadically speaks to journalists by telephone saying he is a spokesman for Islamist Taliban groups operating in the region. There is no way to independently verify his claim. 'Taliban are ready for negotiations with the political parties as long as they do not re-impose war on them. If they do so, then Taliban will continue their activities against them,' Mr Omar told journalists in Peshawar by telephone, citing Mehsud's statement. 'Taliban have no enmity with the political parties and these parties who have got the mandate of the people should strive for bringing peace and avoid repeating the mistakes of Musharraf government.' Mr Omar said the opposition victory was also thanks to the Taliban's activities - which according to the government include a string of suicide bombings that have left hundreds of people dead. 'The victory of political parties was due to Taliban who gained sympathies of the people by giving their blood and as a result of which people rejected US and Mr Musharraf policies and gave victory to their opposing political forces,' he said.

[N. Korea says US-South drill could hurt nuke talks](#)

Reuters – 24 February 2008

Korea has criticised a joint military drill between the United States and the South, saying the exercise will harm six-party talks for Pyongyang's denuclearisation, the official media reported on Sunday. The six-party negotiations, in which two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia are involved, have been stymied by North Korea's failure to meet a Dec 31 deadline to declare all its nuclear programmes. South Korea and the United States plan to hold military drills from March 2 to March 7, a Seoul defence ministry official said. 'The projected joint military war exercise of the U.S. runs counter to the six-party talks. Through the adventurous nuclear test war exercise the US warmongers intend to pose a serious menace to the DPRK and spoil the atmosphere for dialogue,' the official KCNA news agency quoted an article of the official Rodong Sinmun as saying. The North's official name is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Their aim is to ignite a war against the north when a chance presents itself, while wasting time under the pretext of the six-party talks. Leveling a gun at dialogue partner while talking about dialogue and improved relations is an act contrary to common sense and diplomatic practice,' said the newspaper article, according to KCNA. 'If the US warmongers opt for the war gamble against the DPRK, bringing the situation of the Korean Peninsula into the irreversible grave phase against peace, they will be wholly responsible for the ensuing consequences,' it added.

[US slaps more sanctions on supporters of Myanmar regime](#)

AFP, AP – 26 February 2008

The United States on Monday said it was imposing additional economic sanctions on supporters of Myanmar's military regime which it accuses of grave human rights abuses. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced sanctions targeting several business figures, including Steven Law, also known as Tun Myint Naing and his father, Lo Hsing Han, dubbed the 'Godfather of Heroin.' The sanctions were also extended to Mr Law's wife, Cecilia Ng, and 10 Singapore-based companies owned by her, including property firm Golden Aaron Pte Ltd, which were blacklisted. Additional financial sanctions were also imposed against the business network of Tay Za, a Burmese tycoon and arms dealer with ties to Myanmar's military rulers. Any bank accounts or other financial assets found in the United States that belong to those named on Monday must be frozen. Americans also are prohibited from doing business with them. US President George W. Bush branded 'deplorable' the situation in Myanmar, whose military rulers last September cracked down violently on peaceful pro-democracy protests. 'Concerted international pressure is needed to achieve a genuine transition to democracy in Burma,' President Bush said in a statement on Monday, referring to Myanmar by its old name. He accused its army of 'severe human rights abuses' including killings of civilians. 'We encourage Burma's neighbours and other stakeholders in Southeast Asia to impress upon the regime the need to release all political prisoners,' he added.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[India to relax arms purchase rules](#)

AFP – 17 February 2008

India, which plans to purchase billions of dollars worth of military hardware in the next five years, will soon relax strict rules on arms imports, officials say. A new Defence Procurement Policy, or DPP, will be unveiled by April, Defence Minister A.K. Antony said on Saturday at a defence fair in the capital. 'We have been fine-tuning and improving the DPP based on periodical reviews (and) the current procurement procedure is also under review to make it more transparent and user-friendly,' he said. Many of the major players in the race to grab a share of arms deals worth US\$30 billion (S\$42.4 billion) by 2012 see the current so-called offset policy part of the DPP as restricting growth. The policy stipulates foreign firms selling products to India must re-invest up to 50 per cent of the total amount through tie-ups and services in the country. Mr Antony promised the new policy would help India's fledgling defence sector. 'For our defence industry to expand and to be able to meet critical technological requirements of armed forces, there is a need for far greater synergy between private players and the government.' Global vendors have recently 'publicly questioned' the capacity of India's private sector to absorb largescale joint ventures with overseas companies, the Press Trust of India said. Others said the new rules would take into account the 'fears and reservations' of global firms on re-investment. 'Our procurement policies which were formed in 2006 are restrictive and now they will become wider-based and easy,' a senior defence ministry official said. Global companies including US-based aerospace firm Lockheed Martin, however, said they would continue to support India's offset rules in any form. 'We have done enormous offset worth US\$37 billion around the world and technology is our capability which would also benefit India,' said Lockheed vice president Philip Georgariou. BAE Systems said it was locally building 42 of the 66 Hawk trainer jets it sold to India in 2004 for US\$1.45 billion as part of its offset obligations. 'Offset is certainly a concept we supported even before the recent regulations in India,' BAE spokesman Guy Douglas said in a statement. On Sunday at the defence fair, several arms firms said they were already meeting requirements needed to win contracts such as the purchase of 126 multi-role fighters for as much as US\$12 billion. 'We are submitting our bids three days in advance and which are fully compliant with Indian requirements,' announced Chris Chadwick, president of Boeing's Integrated Defence Systems at the four-day arms fair in New Delhi. Boeing is offering its F-18 Super Hornet fighter jets in line with the global tenders India floated last August. Mr Lockheed said it would give Boeing a run for its money. 'We have come up with a configuration in our F-16 which meets the needs of India,' Mr Georgariou told AFP. Also in the race for the fighter deal are the Russian MiG-35 and MiG-29, Saab's Gripen, Dassault's Rafale and Mirage and Eurofighter's Typhoon. France's state shipbuilder DCN also unveiled plans on Sunday to set up a subsidiary to back the local manufacture of six Franco-Spanish submarines worth US\$3 billion which India agreed to buy in 2005. 'The wholly-owned subsidiary will be our keystone to back the project and will also offer special services and design for the production of any kind of ships,' DCN vice president Bernard Planchais told a news conference. India has the world's fourth largest military.

Generals warn of 'geriatric Air Force'

CNN – 18 February 2008

Air Force officials are warning that unless their budget is increased dramatically, and soon, the military's high-flying branch won't dominate the skies as it has for decades. After more than seven years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Air Force's aging jet fighters, bombers, cargo aircraft and gunships are at the breaking point, they say, and expensive, ultramodern replacements are needed fast. "What we've done is put the requirement on the table that says, 'If we're going to do the missions you're going to ask us to do, it will require this kind of investment,'" Maj. Gen. Paul Selva, the Air Force's director of strategic planning, said in an interview with The Associated Press. An extra \$20 billion each year over the next five -- beginning with an Air Force budget of about \$137 billion in 2009 instead of the \$117 billion proposed by the Bush administration -- would solve that problem, according to Selva and other senior Air Force officers. Yet the prospects for huge infusions of cash seem dim. Congress is expected to boost the 2009 budget, but not to the level urged by the Air Force. In the years that follow, a possible recession, a rising federal deficit and a distaste for higher taxes all portend a decline in defense spending regardless of which party wins the White House in November. The Air Force's distress is partly self-inflicted, says Steve Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington. The F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning, the new jet fighters that will supplant the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Falcon, have drastically higher price tags than their predecessors and require a bigger chunk of the defense budget. It's not as if the Air Force has gone without any new airplanes. The B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, the C-17 Globemaster airlifter and the CV-22 tilt-rotor, which flies like a helicopter or an airplane, have all been added since the mid-1990s. The Air Force also is planning to spend between \$30 billion and \$40 billion over the next 15 years for new refueling tankers. A contract is expected to be awarded soon. Those new tankers, however, won't be flying until 2013. Current F-15s and F-16s are on average more than 20 years old and have reached a point where spending more money on extensive repairs is a poor investment, Selva said. Originally designed to last 4,000 flying hours, both have been extended beyond 8,000. An F-15 with a comparatively low 5,000 flying hours disintegrated during a routine training flight over Missouri in early November. For the Air Force, that crash has become a touchstone event that demonstrates the precarious state of a fleet collectively older than any in the service's 60-year history. Following the Missouri accident, more than 400 F-15s were grounded as Air Force mechanics scoured them for defects that might cause a similar accident. The F-15, a twin-engine jet with a top speed of 1,875 miles per hour, is the anchor of the nation's air defense network. As aircraft age, corrosion eats away at metal parts. Wiring and sealing begin to deteriorate. The fatigue, which can be hard to detect, is most acute in fighters that make turns while going at incredible speeds. It's not just the fighters that are elderly. B-52 bombers and KC-135 tankers, which refuel airplanes in flight, have been in the inventory for more than four decades. And mechanics are finding it difficult to keep rust off the A-10 Thunderbolt, a tank-killing plane now a quarter-century old. Each F-22 Raptor costs about \$160 million. The Air Force says it needs 381 of the radar-evading planes and is fighting to keep the production line from being shut down too soon. The price for a single F-35 Lightning is \$77 million, and the Air Force wants close to 1,800 of these fighters. The F-

35 won't be in use for several more years. The Air Force says the Raptors are needed for future threats, with China, Russia and Iran at the top of the list. Officials at Air Force Special Operations Command say it will become increasingly hard to keep two key aircraft flying: The MC-130H Combat Talon II, used to drop commandos into hostile territory and then retrieve them, and the AC-130U, a hulking gunship that flies low to deliver firepower, are both in need of substantial overhauls. There are only 20 Combat Talons and 17 AC-130Us. This small fleet is in heavy demand by special operations forces around the globe. In 2001, the AC-130Us flew just over 5,200 hours. The gunships logged more than 9,000 hours in 2007. It's comparable, Heithold said, to putting 70,000 miles on a car in a single year instead of a more normal 12,000 miles.

[China set to launch record number of spacecraft in 2008](#)

AFP – 19 February 2008

China will launch a record number of spacecraft this year, state media reported, amid a rise in tensions among world powers over the militarisation of space. China plans to send up more than 10 missions this year, said Mr Yang Baohua, head of the China Academy of Space Technology, according to the China Daily on Tuesday. 'China's space technology has entered a new stage. The design and manufacture of satellites takes less time, and homemade satellites are more reliable and have a longer lifespan,' Mr Yang said. China has launched an average of eight spacecraft in the past two years, according to the report. The missions this year will include two Shenzhou VII spaceships - one of which will feature the country's first spacewalk - two environmental satellites and a communications satellite for Venezuela. The news comes amid rising tensions between Russia, China and the United States over the militarisation of space. China and Russia have expressed concerns about a United States plan to shoot down what officials in Washington say is a crippled spy satellite, with that event to take place potentially as early as this week. Russia's defence ministry has said it fears the US plan is a veiled weapons test and represents an 'attempt to move the arms race into space', while Washington has insisted it is merely trying to prevent it hitting Earth. The United States, meanwhile, remains concerned over China's own satellite destruction effort in January last year. China used a ballistic missile to intercept and destroy one of its own ageing weather satellites in low Earth orbit, becoming only the third nation after the United States and the former Soviet Union to do so. Adding to the tensions, Russia and China last week unveiled plans for a new treaty banning the deployment of any weapons in space, but the United States rejected the move as 'impossible'. Washington is currently negotiating with Warsaw and Prague on the possible installation of 10 interceptor missile sites in Poland by 2012 and associated radar stations in the Czech Republic, as part of a missile shield.

[Air Force: 1 pilot dies, another survives after F15Cs collide](#)

CNN – 21 February 2008

A US Air Force fighter pilot died Wednesday after two F-15C jets collided during a training exercise over the Gulf of Mexico, according to Air Force officials. The planes were from the 33rd Fighter Wing, a combat-flying unit out of Eglin Air Force Base, near Pensacola, Florida. A spokesman for the wing said the pilot died after having been

rescued by a fishing boat and transported to the hospital at the base. The pilot of the other jet was also rescued and was listed in good condition, he said. The crash happened at about 3 p.m. ET, about 50 miles south of Tyndall Air Force Base which is in Panama City, Florida. A statement from the 33rd said the pilots were rescued at about 6 p.m. ET. "The 33rd FW Nomads and Team Eglin have suffered a great loss today and my heart goes out to the family and friends of our former airman," said wing commander Col. Todd Harmer in a written statement. "We will continue to do everything we can to assist our families and airmen at this tragic time." Capt. Jim McPherson of the Coast Guard told CNN the crew of a Coast Guard aircraft on a training mission spotted a parachute dropping into the Gulf Wednesday afternoon. The crew used radar and an automated identification system to detect a fishing boat in the area and directed that boat to the area where the parachute landed. The Air Force was not identifying the pilots late Wednesday pending notification of their families. Harmer said both were "assigned to the wing for quite some time." He said the Air Force will convene a board of officers to investigate the crash and determine its cause.

[Missile defence works, says Gates](#)

BBC – 21 February 2008

The US defence secretary has said that the shooting down of a disabled spy satellite with a missile shows the country's missile defence system works. Robert Gates said the operation "speaks for itself", adding the US was prepared to share some technology with China. The comments came after China said the missile strike could harm security in outer space. US officials are confident that the satellite's potentially toxic fuel tank was destroyed by the missile. Marine Gen James Cartwright said there was a 80-90% chance the tank had been hit. A fire ball, vapour cloud and spectral analysis indicating the presence of hydrazine all indicated this, he told reporters. The satellite, USA 193, was struck 153 nautical miles (283 km) above earth by an SM-3 missile fired from a warship in waters west of Hawaii. Mr Gates said the issue of whether the technology would work was already decided. "I think the question over whether this capability works has been settled," he said, quoted by AFP news agency. "The question is what kind of threat, how large a threat, how sophisticated a threat [the US faces]." The US approach was one of "complete transparency", he said. "We provided a lot of information... before it took place," he said, adding: "We are prepared to share whatever appropriately we can." China called on the US on Thursday to provide more information about the mission. Russia suspects the operation was a cover to test anti-satellite technology under the US missile defence programme.

[Marines want probe into armored vehicle program delays](#)

CNN – 26 February 2008

Casualties could have been reduced by half among Marines in Iraq if specially armored vehicles had been deployed more quickly in some cases, a report to the Pentagon says. Marine Corps spokesman Col. David Lapan said the Defense Department's inspector general wants to investigate the report's claims that bureaucratic delays undermined the program to develop the armored vehicles. The program was designed to provide combat

forces with Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles, known by the acronym MRAPs. The Marine Corps requested an investigation last week after receiving Marine technology expert Franz Gayl's report. "If the mass procurement and fielding of MRAPs had begun in 2005 in response to the known and acknowledged threats at that time, as the USMC is doing today, hundreds of deaths and injuries could have been prevented," Gayl wrote in the report. The report concluded that bureaucratic delays plagued the program at the height of the insurgency, when U.S. troops were regularly being attacked and killed by roadside bombs. Until MRAPs began arriving in Iraq in large numbers in 2007, troops had limited protection in armored Humvees. The MRAPs, which are the newest armored vehicles, have a V-shaped hull that helps deflect the blast of a roadside bomb.

[S. Korean troops to get uniforms that can change pattern](#)

AFP – 27 February 2008

South Korean soldiers will be kitted out with hi-tech combat gear by 2020 including chameleon-style uniforms which can change camouflage patterns, the defence ministry said. The ministry said in a statement on Wednesday it would equip servicemen with new outfits and weapons under a three-phase plan to maximise combat capabilities. In the first phase to be completed by 2012, the current olive green combat uniform will be replaced with grey fatigues capable of evading enemy infrared night-time search devices. The uniform will be provided to selected units next year for testing. A bulletproof helmet weighing only 1,150 grammes, compared with a US equivalent's 1,400-1,600 grammes, will be issued by 2016. This helmet, which should be sturdy enough to fend off point-blank pistol shots, is to be fitted with communication devices including headsets and image-transmitting equipment. Between 2017 and 2020, uniforms will be made of hi-tech material with digital camouflage patterns that can be changed to blend into surroundings. They will have electronic devices and sensors for heating and cooling, and anti-biochemical capabilities. Small personal computer systems will also be attached. The military will upgrade combat boots to better protect soldiers against mines and chemical, biological and radioactive agents. The soldiers will be equipped with an already-developed next-generation rifle, which features laser-based aiming systems and fires bullets that explode over enemy soldiers and scatter shrapnel.

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

[Oil prices hit record US\\$101.27](#)

AFP – 21 February 2008

New York oil prices struck a record 101.27 dollars a barrel on Wednesday amid renewed global supply jitters, analysts said. New York's main oil futures contract, light sweet crude for delivery in March, subsequently receded, but closed up 73 cents at an all-time high of 100.74 dollars. The latest price spike burst Tuesday's record price of 100.10 dollars and record close at 100.01 dollars. In London, Brent North Sea crude for April delivery settled 14 cents lower at 98.42 dollars, after striking a record 98.70 dollars Tuesday. Prices have soared amid growing speculation that OPEC, which supplies about

40 percent of the world's oil, may cut output at its March 5 meeting in Vienna, anticipating a fall in demand at the end of the northern hemisphere winter and a US economic slowdown, analysts said. "Supply worries and comments by some OPEC members that the group might not raise output at their March meeting provided the catalyst for the sharp rally," said Barclays Capital analyst Kevin Norrish. Prior to Wednesday's new record, prices had traded in negative territory as many dealers opted to take profits following a rally. "Oil gained sharply (on Tuesday) supported by a combination of factors, including persistent supply concerns," said Sucden analyst Andrey Kryuchenkov. "In addition to continuing worries over the ongoing row between ExxonMobil and Venezuela, with the Latin American exporter threatening to cut more supplies to the US, investors are receiving more comments from various OPEC members indicating no change or even a possible cut to the group's supplies at its meeting in early March," he said. Libya's oil chief Shukri Ghanem said that OPEC will wait to see if oil prices hold around record highs of 100 dollars before making any decision on whether to cut output. Ghanem told AFP that with prices at current levels, OPEC wanted to see if 100 dollars per barrel prove to be the ceiling or if they would begin to fall back. Ghanem, chairman of Libya's National Oil Corporation, said that by then, OPEC members would have more information on the global economic situation. He said current price levels, "which have become very high," were at least as much due to financial speculation in the market as to geopolitical concerns. Earlier this month OPEC left its official daily output ceiling at 29.67 million barrels of oil, resisting calls from US President George W. Bush to increase supplies to help bring down prices.

[Thailand detects minor mutation in bird flu virus](#)

AFP – 22 February 2008

Outbreaks of bird flu in Thailand last month were caused by a strain of the virus that had slightly mutated from earlier cases but did not pose a greater health risk, officials said on Friday. The deadly H5N1 virus was detected among chickens last month in the provinces of Pichit and Nakorn Sawan. After studies, scientists found that the virus had undergone minute changes but appeared to pose no greater threat to humans than earlier cases of bird flu, said Sakchai Sriboonsue, director general of the livestock department. 'According to our research team, the virus's genes have gradually changed from those of the H5N1 strain found in previous outbreaks. But there is little change in the harm it can cause to animals or humans,' Sakchai told a press conference. Scientists have long feared the the H5N1 virus could mutate to a form that passes easily among humans, causing a global flu pandemic. Yong Poovorawan, chief of the department's research team, said the existing strain remained a threat and urged people to closely follow the government's prevention guidelines. He noted that the disease's mortality rate in humans is about 70 per cent. H5N1 has killed more than 200 people and ravaged poultry flocks worldwide since 2003, according to the World Health Organisation. Thailand, the world's fourth-largest exporter of poultry, was criticized for being slow to respond to the first outbreak of bird flu, but now is considered one of the countries best prepared to battle the disease.

Half the world's population will live in urban areas by end 2008

AP – 27 February 2008

Half the world's population will live in urban areas by the end of this year and about 70 per cent will be city dwellers by 2050, with cities and towns in Asia and Africa registering the biggest growth, according to new UN projections released on Tuesday. The report predicts that there will be 27 'megacities' with at least 10 million population by mid-century compared to 19 today, but it forecasts that at least half the urban growth in the coming decades will be in the many smaller cities with less than 500,000 people. According to the latest UN estimate last year, world population is expected to increase from 6.7 billion in 2007 to 9.2 billion in 2050. During the same time period, the new report said, the population living in urban areas is projected to rise from 3.3 billion to 6.4 billion. 'Thus, the urban areas of the world are expected to absorb all the population growth expected over the next four decades while at the same time drawing in some of the rural population,' the report said. 'As a result, the world rural population is projected to start decreasing in about a decade, and 600 million fewer rural inhabitants are expected in 2050 than today.' The report stresses that these projections will take place only if the number of children in families in the developing world continues to decline, especially in Africa and Asia. At a news conference launching the 2007 Revision of World Urbanisation Prospects, Hania Zlotnik, head of the UN Population Division, expressed hope that increasing urbanisation 'will go hand in hand with economic growth.' She said more than 70 per cent of the population in Europe, North America, and many other richer developed countries already live in urban areas. But only 39 per cent of Africans and 41 per cent of Asians lived in urban areas last year - and these regions and other less developed countries are going to experience the most population growth in their cities and towns in the coming decades, the report said. 'During 2008, for the first time in history, the proportion of the population living in urban areas will reach 50 per cent,' it said. 'Globally, the level of urbanisation is expected to rise from 50 per cent in 2008 to 70 per cent in 2050,' the report said. By mid-century, Asia is projected to see its urban population increase by 1.8 billion, Africa by 900 million, and Latin America and the Caribbean by 200 million, it said. 'While in the more developed regions, the proportion urban was already nearly 53 percent in 1950, in the less developed regions the 50 percent level will likely be reached around 2019,' the report said. Ms Zlotnik said the UN expects Africa to reach the 50 per cent mark between 2045 and 2050. 'Asia, if it continues to urbanise as rapidly as it's doing now, especially because of the rapid urbanised in China, is expected to become 50 per cent urbanised around 2020-2025,' she said. China, the world's most populous nation, at this moment is 40 per cent urban, Zlotnik said. The UN expects its urban population to reach more than 70 per cent by 2050 - increasing from more than 500 million now to slightly more than 1 billion at mid-century, she said. By contrast, the world's second most populous nation, India, currently has just over 300 million urban residents, or 29 per cent of its population living in urban areas, Ms Zlotnik said, and by 2050 it is expected to have only 55 per cent of its population, about 900 million, in cities. 'So India is expected to urbanise much less than China, and therefore it is expected to remain the country with the largest rural population during most of the future decades,' Ms Zlotnik said.

MILITARY / PEACEKEEPING / HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

[Myanmar's Karen leader killed](#)

CNN – 15 February 2008

The Karen National Union secretary-general Mahn Sha was shot and killed Thursday in what the ethnic rebel group is calling an assassination by the Myanmar junta, a KNU official told CNN. Two gunmen attacked him at his home in Mae Sot, a town on the Myanmar-Thailand border, the official said. The rebel group has received numerous warnings that Myanmar's military leaders were planning to target and kill KNU leaders, the official said. Thai police Col. Pasawat Tangjui said the killing may have been the result of internal differences in the rebel group, The Associated Press reported. No one has claimed responsibility for the murder, according to AP. The killing comes less than a week after Myanmar's ruling junta announced a plan to hold a referendum on a new constitution in May and national elections in 2010 -- a plan denounced by pro-democracy opposition leaders. KNU is a major rebel group that operates in the border area and is trying to establish autonomy for the Karen ethnic minority. The government of Myanmar, also known as Burma, blames the KNU for waging attacks to destabilize the military junta that has run the country for two decades.

[Colombian soldiers convicted of killing narcotics cops](#)

CNN – 18 February 2008

A cashiered army lieutenant colonel and 14 soldiers were convicted Monday of murdering 10 elite counternarcotics police agents in an ambush that showed how deeply drug corruption threatens Colombia's security forces. Lt. Col. Byron Carvajal and his soldiers face prison sentences of up to 60 years. Prosecutors want Judge Edmundo Lopez to impose the maximum. The convictions came despite numerous attempts to subvert the trial, including a prosecutor's offer to help the defense in exchange for more than \$400,000, senior police officials and prosecutors familiar with the case told The Associated Press. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid jeopardizing investigations, said the bribe was never paid and the prosecutor who sought it had been removed from the case before he made the offer. Carvajal was convicted of ordering the May 22, 2006, ambush in the town of Jamundi, where an informant told police they would find at least 220 pounds of cocaine at a psychiatric center. When police pulled up, the soldiers cut them down with 420 bullets and seven grenades. No drugs were found. Carvajal, who was not at the scene, said his soldiers believed they were surprising leftist rebels. The other defendants refused to testify to avoid incriminating themselves. Defense attorney Eugenio Vergara said the defendants would appeal after April 21 sentencing. Carvajal claimed innocence even after the verdict, insisting he "had no motive whatsoever to order the murder of these agents." He and former Lt. Harrison Castro described themselves as wronged patriots: "I've fought so that all you people here today can be free," Castro told the court.

[US military confirms Turkish raid into Iraq](#)

AFP – 22 February 2008

The US military confirmed Friday that Turkish forces had crossed Iraq's border to hunt for separatist Kurdish rebels in the country's northern mountains. "Turkish ground forces have entered into northern Iraq for what we understand is an operation of limited duration to specifically target PKK terrorists in that region," said spokesman Rear Admiral Gregory Smith. "Turkey has given its assurances it will do everything possible to avoid collateral damage to innocent civilians or Kurdish infrastructure," he added, in a statement sent to AFP. Earlier the Turkish army general staff had announced that it had launched an operation in northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region to target bases used by the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkish television reported that 10,000 troops were involved in the mission, but it was not clear how many crossed the frontier and Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari denied there was a large-scale incursion. "The United States continues to support Turkey's right to defend itself from the terrorist activities of the PKK," Smith said. According to the spokesman, the US "has encouraged Turkey to use all available means, to include diplomacy and close coordination with the government of Iraq, to ultimately resolve this issue."

[More Australian police for Afghanistan](#)

AAP – 24 February 2008

Australia will send more federal police to Afghanistan to help train the local force. Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said today that Afghanistan needed help to build its own police force because international troops could not be there forever. "We are looking at a greater complement of Australian Federal Police to go to Afghanistan," Mr Smith said on Channel 9. Just four AFP officers are in Afghanistan at present. Fairfax newspapers today reported that the AFP officers could also be used to counter the illegal drugs industry in Afghanistan, which produces 93 per cent of the world's opium. The United Nations has warned that the illegal drugs trade has brought widespread corruption, which has penetrated all levels of government and police. An AFP team recently visited Oruzgan province in southern Afghanistan, where Australian troops are based, to investigate a possible role for an expanded force, Fairfax newspapers said. The boosted police force was just one type of nation-building assistance the Government was considering offering Afghanistan, Mr Smith said on Nine. The aid could include building Afghanistan's bureaucratic, judicial and legal capacity, infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals, or humanitarian assistance. "We are giving consideration to that," he said. Mr Smith also called for NATO nations to provide a stronger military commitment to Afghanistan. He said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd would push for the boosted international commitment at the NATO summit in April. But Australia was not proposing to increase its own troops above the current 1,000 strong force.

[Iraq warns Turkey over incursion](#)

AFP – 24 February 2008

Turkish troops killed 35 Kurdish militants and destroyed rebel hideouts in northern Iraq, as Iraq's foreign minister warned the three-day-old offensive risked destabilising the region. The death toll brings to 79 the number of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants killed since Turkey launched the offensive on Thursday evening to purge rebels from northern Iraq, a Turkish military statement said on Saturday. It added that two soldiers died in Saturday's clashes, bringing the total losses to seven. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari warned in a BBC interview that Turkey's ground offensive should end quickly before it destabilises the region. 'This is a limited military incursion into a remote, isolated and uninhabited region,' Mr Zebari said. 'But if it goes on, I think it could destabilise the region, because really one mistake could lead to further escalation.' He added that the Iraqi government had only been informed 'in the last minute' before the raid. The PKK, listed as a terrorist group by Ankara and much of the international community, threatened retaliatory attacks inside Turkey unless the offensive is halted. 'If not, we will move the theatre of combat to the heart of Turkish cities,' PKK spokesman Ahmed Danis said. The Turkish military suggested the actual PKK death toll was higher because it did not include militants killed in bombings or by artillery fire. 'Air Force planes, helicopter gunships and artillery fire destroyed terrorist refuge facilities... at different locations, together with large amounts of ammunition and explosives stored inside them,' the statement said. PKK positions, including anti-aircraft defence posts in the snow-bound mountainous region, were also destroyed, it said. 'The operation is continuing with determination,' it said, adding that clashes were underway at four locations as of Saturday afternoon. PKK leaders said 22 soldiers and two rebels had been killed, according to reports from the Firat news agency, considered a rebel mouthpiece. Some of Saturday's most intensive air raids targeted the Qandil mountains, a major PKK stronghold along the Iraqi-Iranian border, and many militants were killed, unnamed sources told the semi-official Anatolia news agency.

[Iran reinforces Iraq border after attack](#)

National Nine News – 24 February 2008

Iran has reinforced its borders after Turkish forces launched an offensive into northern Iraq targeting Kurdish rebels, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said. Turkey said it launched the offensive after Iraqi authorities failed to stop an estimated 3,000 members of the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from using northern Iraq as a base to stage attacks on Turkish territory. Iranian forces have also often clashed in Iraqi border areas with rebels from the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), an offshoot of the PKK and which analysts say has bases in northeastern Iraq from where they operate against Iran. Tehran brands PJAK a "terrorist" group. "Necessary measures have already been taken to reinforce our borders," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told a weekly news conference. "Regarding the PKK and other terrorist factions active in the region, we stress that the best way to face regional terrorists is for security cooperation between the regional countries," he said. But Iran, which has been seeking to improve ties with Iraq, urged Turkey to heed Iraqi government concerns in its bid end Kurdish rebel

attacks. "Regarding the attack of the Turkish forces into Iraq, we believe the opinion of the Iraqi government must be valued although we also believe the terrorists must stop their terrorist operations there," the spokesman said. Hosseini repeated Iran's position that the presence in the region of "foreign forces", a term usually used to refer to the United States and its allies, was creating instability. Iran has postponed talks with US officials on Iraqi security, due to be held in Baghdad, citing technical reasons. But Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to become the first Iranian president since the 1979 revolution to visit Iraq next month.

[UN council extends Timor peacekeeping mandate](#)

Reuters – 26 February 2008

The United Nations Security Council extended for another year the mandate for the UN peacekeeping mission in Timor Leste, saying the security and humanitarian situation in the country remained fragile. The UN peacekeeping mission in Timor Leste, called Unmit, is authorised to deploy up to 1,608 police and nearly three dozen military personnel. The mandate, which was due to expire on Tuesday, has been extended until Feb 26, 2009. The South African-drafted resolution, which was unanimously approved by the Security Council, reiterated on Monday its condemnation of the attempted assassination of East Timorese President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos-Horta two weeks ago. The resolution of the 15-nation council also said that 'the political, security, social, and humanitarian situation in Timor-Leste (East Timor) remains fragile' and urged all interested parties in the country to shun violence and pursue peaceful dialogue to resolve all disagreements. The resolution also urged the government to continue working with Unmit on a comprehensive review of the security sector in Timor Leste and its future security needs. Mr Ramos-Horta was shot and seriously wounded at his home in the capital Dili in an assassination attempt by rebel soldiers on Feb 11. Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao escaped injury in another shooting on the same day. The former Portuguese colony of almost 1 million people gained full independence in 2002 after a UN-sponsored vote in 1999, which was marred by violence, ended more than two decades of Indonesian occupation. The Asia-Pacific country has been struggling to get back on its feet after the army tore apart along regional lines in 2006.

[Army aims to cut Iraq tours in summer: general](#)

Reuters – 26 February 2008

The U.S. Army aims to cut the length of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan this summer, its top general said on Tuesday, as commanders seek to reduce severe war strains on the force. Gen. George Casey said the Army hopes to move from 15-month to 12-month deployments once the U.S. military completes a planned drawdown to 15 combat brigades in Iraq in July. Casey said shorter tours should be possible even if Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, recommends a pause in drawdowns, as is widely expected, after the current series of planned withdrawals is complete. "If Gen. Petraeus is able to execute the announced plan of getting to 15 brigades by July, it would be our goal at that point to return to 12 months," Casey, the Army chief of staff, told the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services. "We believe it will still be possible, even

with a pause, to go from ... 15 months to 12 months," Casey said. Defense Secretary Robert Gates ordered the switch from year-long to 15-month tours last April as the United States poured extra troops into Iraq to curb rampant violence. The United States now has about 158,000 troops in Iraq and should have about 140,000 there in July after the planned drawdowns are complete, the Pentagon has said. There also are 28,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[China urges NKorea to resume nuke talks before US vote](#)

AFP – 17 February 2008

A Chinese envoy who visited North Korea last month pressed its leader Kim Jong-Il to resume a deadlocked nuclear disarmament deal before US presidential elections take place, a report said on Sunday. Wang Jiarui, Director of the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, told Kim he believed it was "highly likely" a Democrat would win the election in November, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper in Japan reported, citing unnamed diplomatic sources. "If that happens, officials in charge of the talks will be replaced by new ones so that negotiations in the six-party talks will get more difficult to bring forward," Wang told Kim, prompting him to resume the talks at an early date, the report said. The North was supposed to disable its main atomic plants by December 31 and list all its nuclear programmes under the six-nation deal negotiated by the two Koreas, China, the United States, Russia and Japan. North Korea said it submitted a full list in November, but the United States says it failed to meet the deadline for a full declaration, leading to an impasse. Kim told Wang in the meeting that there was no change in his nation's wish to move the talks forward, Chinese state media Xinhua news agency has said. Kim urged nations involved in the deal to fulfil their side of the bargain, saying North Korea was willing to work with China to try to push for its full implementation, Xinhua has said. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is due to visit South Korea, China and Japan later this month as part of diplomatic efforts to get the deal moving again, her spokesman said on Friday.

[Iran says more sanctions won't halt nuclear plan](#)

Reuters – 24 February 2008

World powers can pass United Nations sanctions resolutions for 100 years without deterring Iran from its nuclear ambitions, Iran's president said. Mr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's defiant comments on Saturday came a day after a report by the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran was being more transparent about its nuclear plans but was not doing enough to clear up concerns about whether Teheran had military aims. Teheran insists its plans are peaceful. But the United States, which has accused Iran of seeking to build nuclear bombs, said Friday's International Atomic Energy Agency report was a good reason to impose more UN sanctions. 'If they want to continue with that path (of sanctions), we will not be harmed. They can issue resolutions for 100 years,' the president told state television in an interview. Those leading the bid to impose more penalties, an

apparent reference to Washington, and its allies could not 'bring the Iranian nation to its knees', he said. 'If they continue (with this pressure), we have designed reciprocal actions,' he said without elaborating. Iranian officials have previously warned that the Islamic Republic could review cooperation with the IAEA, if pushed. The president declared the IAEA report a 'victory' for the Iranian nation, pointing to areas of the document which showed Iranian cooperation had cleared up suspicions. Other Iranian officials and media have echoed those sentiments since the report's publication, making little reference to other aspects of the report where doubts remain.

[Another nuclear reactor breaks ground in China](#)

Reuters – 27 February 2008

Builders started breaking ground for a nuclear reactor in east Zhejiang province that will use technology from United States-based Westinghouse, putting the plant on track to start operating in 2013, state media reported. The news came a week after a similar-sized plant started construction in south-eastern Fujian province, as China appears to be accelerating construction of nuclear power stations after nearly half of the nation was hit by blackouts in late January during the coldest winter in decades. Builders will dig a hole 12 metres deep and over 20 metres in diameter for the first generating unit, with 1.25 gigawatts capacity in Sanmen city, Xinhua reported late on Tuesday. Last July, Westinghouse - owned by Japan's Toshiba - signed a multi-billion-dollar deal with Chinese partners to build four nuclear reactors, two in Sanmen and another two in Haiyang city in eastern Shandong province. Xinhua said Sanmen Nuclear Power, operator of the Sanmen plant, will eventually build six generating units of the same capacity, without elaborating if such expansion plans have won state approval or giving a timeline for completion of all the units. China, the world's second-largest power market, currently has 11 working reactors with 9.07 GW of total installed capacity, which Beijing plans to expand to 40 GW by 2020. In 2007, nuclear plants generated 62 billion kilowatt hours of electricity, up 16 per cent from a year ago, but only accounting for 2 per cent of the nation's total, official data has shown, far behind the three-quarters in France and one quarter in Japan. China generates about 80 per cent its power from coal.