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CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

[Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism](#)

International Crisis Group – 29 March 2007

More than five years after President Pervez Musharraf declared his intention to crack down on violent sectarian and jihadi groups and to regulate the network of madrasas (religious schools) on which they depend, his government's reform program is in shambles. Banned sectarian and jihadi groups, supported by networks of mosques and madrasas, continue to operate openly in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, and elsewhere. The international community needs to press President Musharraf to fulfil his commitments, in particular to enforce genuine controls on the madrasas and allow free and fair national elections in 2007. It should also shift the focus of its donor aid from helping the government's ineffectual efforts to reform the religious schools to improving the very weak public school sector.

[Nigeria's Elections: Avoiding a Political Crisis](#)

International Crisis Group – 28 March 2007

Nigeria's democracy faces a crucial test. Presidential, parliamentary and state gubernatorial and assembly elections scheduled for 14 and 21 April 2007 are not a routine quadrennial ritual. Success would offer the country the first opportunity to achieve a genuine constitutional succession from one civilian administration to another since independence in 1960, thus consolidating democracy. Failure could provoke violent rejection of the results by wide sections of the populace, denial of legitimacy and authority to the new government, intensification of the insurgency in the Niger Delta and its possible extension to other areas, with potential for wider West African destabilisation. The preparatory phases have indicated failings in terms of basic fairness for the opposition, transparency and respect for the rule of law. Unless stakeholders make urgent efforts to rescue the credibility of the process, Nigeria's already serious internal instability could be fatally aggravated.

[Iran Continues to Hold Royal Navy Personnel](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 27 March 2007

Fifteen Royal Navy personnel are still being detained in Iran after being taken at gunpoint from Iraq's Shatt al-Arab waterway on 23 March following a routine boarding operation. The four sailors and 11 Royal Marines attached to the Broadsword-class Type 22 Batch 3 frigate HMS *Cornwall* - flagship of the UN-mandated Combined Task Force 158 (CTF158) - had successfully completed an inspection of a dhow suspected of smuggling cars when their two Pacific 24 rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) were surrounded by gunboats belonging to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The personnel and their craft were then observed being escorted into Iranian territorial waters by the Westland Lynx HMA.8 helicopter attached to HMS *Cornwall*, although there is some doubt as to whether this aircraft was directly covering the RIBs as their crews were apprehended.

[IDF Resumes Operations in Gaza Strip](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 27 March 2007

The Israel Defence Force (IDF) resumed operations in the Gaza Strip on 28 March for the first time since a ceasefire was declared with the Palestinians in November 2006. An IDF unit detected four Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) militants preparing to launch Qassam rockets from the beach in the northern Gaza Strip. A missile that was fired at the militants killed one of them and wounded the others.

[Is a US-Iran War Inevitable?](#)

Time Magazine – 29 March 2007

You wouldn't be wrong to wonder if Iran hasn't lost its mind seizing the 15 British marines and sailors, and in so doing, handing Bush a *casus belli* even he couldn't have imagined. But then again you'd be missing the grim fatalism that has settled over Iran of late, the resigned belief that a war with the U.S. is all but inevitable. This week Iranian diplomats are telling interlocutors that, yes, they realize seizing the Brits could lead to a hot war. But, they point out, it wasn't Iran that started taking hostages — it was the U.S., when it arrested five members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Erbil in Northern Iraq on January 11. They are diplomats, the Iranians insist. They were in Erbil with the approval of the Kurds and therefore, they argue, are under the protection of the Vienna Convention.

DEFENCE BUDGET

[UK Chancellor Announces Rise in Defence Budget](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 6 March 2007

UK Chancellor Gordon Brown has announced a projected defence budget for the UK armed forces in 2007 of GBP32.8 billion (USD64.6 billion), a headline increase of GBP200 million (0.6 per cent) over the 2006 budget of GBP32.6 billion. In addition to the regular budget, Brown also announced that the UK special reserve, which funds military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan outside the normal defence budget, will be GBP400 million in 2007 and GBP200 million in 2008.

[Ukraine Defence Ministry Plans to Divest Enterprises](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 30 March 2007

The number of state-owned enterprises that will remain under the control of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry will decline from 213 to 48 by 2011, Valeriy Yasyuk, the head of the Defence Ministry Economic and Management Department, has announced. He added that only the "most powerful, highly profitable" ventures would be retained. The divestment will be achieved partly through privatisation, as well as by moving responsibility for some activities to other government departments.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY

[The Poor Bloody Infantry](#)

The Prospect – March 2007

The lives of British soldiers are being sacrificed to save jobs in an inefficient domestic arms industry. We should buy more "off the shelf" equipment from the US and thereby also reduce the excessive influence of BAE Systems on our politics.

DEFENCE STRATEGY

[Japan Broadens Horizon](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 15 March 2007

Japan and Australia have concluded a groundbreaking umbrella agreement on security co-operation that should lay the foundation for expanded military ties. The 'Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation' was signed in Tokyo on 13 March by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his visiting Australian counterpart, John Howard. It is the first such accord signed by Japan that supplements its long-standing military alliance with the US, which is anchored by a formal mutual defence treaty.

[NATO Prepares to Discuss Territorial Missile Defence](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 29 March 2007

The North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's highest decision-making body, will begin the political discussion of territorial missile defence on 19 April, according to alliance and US officials. The NAC will be reinforced by experts from various NATO countries including US Air Force Lieutenant General Henry Obering, director of the US Missile Defense Agency, the officials said. It will be the first time that Gen Obering has briefed the NAC on US plans for missile defence, following similar briefings to the NATO-Russia Council in November 2006 and February 2007.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[Nanorockets- The Ultimate Baby Boosters?](#)

New Scientist – 23 March 2007

Brian Gilchrist's design for a rocket ship sounds like a bad joke. For a start, its engine is about the size of a single bacterium. And for thrust it relies on the equivalent of chucking microscopic beer cans out of the spacecraft's rear window. Gilchrist, an electrical engineer at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is not joking though. He proposes to

harness the latest nanotechnology to create an engine that will make its way across the solar system by firing out minute metal particles like so much nano-sized grapeshot.

[‘Plastic Plane’ Takes Shape](#)

New Scientist – 30 March 2007

Boeing's bet that plastic composite is the aerospace material of the future is a step nearer being put to the test. Assembly of Boeing's 787 kicked off last week at its plant near Seattle following delivery of two carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic (CFRP) fuselage sections by Italian company Alenia Aerospace. The airframe of the 250-seat 787 will be half composite by weight - the highest percentage of plastic used in any commercial jetliner. It is due to enter commercial service in 2008.

[Blimps to Swim Through the Air Like Fish](#)

New Scientist – 23 March 2007

Blimps steered by artificial muscles may one day swim through the air like fish, suggest recent flight tests. The blimps would be much quieter than those steered by traditional blimp propellers, making them ideal for observing wildlife. Researchers believe artificial muscles – plastics that stretch when a high electrical voltage is applied – could be a way to mimic nature's efficiency at accomplishing tasks. Using the technology, future robots may be able to "run on Mars like a cheetah, climb a mountain or a cliff like a gecko, or fly like a bird", says Yoseph Bar-Cohen, a physicist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, US.

[Hybrid Electric Future Heavy Truck Begins UQM Propulsion System Testing](#)

Space War – 30 March 2007

UQM Technologies has announced that two hybrid electric future heavy truck demonstrators developed by Armor Holdings for the U.S. Army that are powered by UQM electric propulsion systems have begun Military Utility Assessment (MUA) Testing in March 2007.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

[UK Looks at Thermobaric Hellfire for Afghanistan](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 21 March 2007

UK attack helicopter commanders in Afghanistan have requested the acquisition of thermobaric warheads to improve the effectiveness of their Lockheed Martin AGM-114 Hellfire missiles. The move comes amid concerns that the Army Air Corps' (AAC's) current inventory of air-to-ground precision-guided missiles is not able to counter Taliban insurgents hiding in caves or fortified compounds. If the purchase is approved by

government ministers, it would be the first time the UK armed forces have deployed thermobaric weapons

[Iraqi Navy Embarks on Modernisation Strategy](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 22 March 2007

The Iraqi Navy may grow significantly in size and capability over the next three years, US Navy officials said on 18 March. The Iraqi Ministry of Defence is seeking funds from the national government to buy 21 major vessels and about 26 fast attack boats over the next three years. The funding package also would pay for infrastructure upgrades at the naval base at Umm Qasr and double the size of the naval force from 1,200 sailors to up to 2,500.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[A New Era of Nuclear Fear May Loom in Shadow of Missile Shield](#)

Space War – 30 March 2007

Media reports from the last few weeks increasingly resemble Hollywood horror movies. The United States is reportedly developing a new-generation hydrogen warhead for its Trident II, (D-5) strategic submarines. The Pentagon plans to deploy elements of its National Missile Defense System, namely, an early-warning radar and ground-based interceptor, or GBI, launchers, in the Czech Republic and Poland.

[CIA Chief Says North Korea Not Nuclear Power](#)

Space War – 28 March 2007

Central Intelligence Agency director Michael Hayden has said the United States does not recognise North Korea as a nuclear power because its first atomic test last October was a failure, a report said Wednesday. The US position was made clear when Hayden met South Korean Defence Minister Kim Jang-Soo on Tuesday, the JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said. "The United States does not recognise North Korea as a nuclear power, because its nuclear test last year was a failure," Hayden was quoted by a South Korean defence source as telling Kim.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

[Indonesia: How GAM won in Aceh](#)

International Crisis Group – 22 March 2007

When local elections were held in Aceh on 11 December 2006, conventional wisdom (shared by Crisis Group) was that candidates from the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) would not do well. They might pick up two or three of the

nineteen district races, but the biggest prize – the provincial governorship – was almost certainly out of reach. The old Jakarta-linked parties would benefit from deep pockets, established structures and a split in the former insurgency’s leadership. Polls just before formal campaigning began showed GAM’s governor/deputy governor slate – Irwandi Yusuf and Muhammad Nazar – virtually out of contention. But GAM won overwhelmingly, in what an analyst called “a perfect storm between the fallout from the peace accord and the failure of political parties to understand the changing times”. The challenge now is to govern effectively and cleanly in the face of high expectations, possible old elite obstructionism and some GAM members’ sense of entitlement that it is their turn for power and wealth.

[Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup](#)

International Crisis Group – 15 March 2007

The September 2006 coup in Thailand, despite its damage to democratic development, opened the way for improved management of the conflict in the Muslim South. Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont’s interim government has overhauled some of its predecessor’s worst policies and signalled willingness to address longstanding grievances. But verbal commitments in Bangkok have been difficult to translate into changes on the ground, and relations between security forces and local communities continue to be strained while violence mounts. Thais outside the South have exerted pressure for a return to heavy-handed crackdowns on suspected militants. The government must respond to the escalating attacks, but with care – widespread arbitrary arrests and civilian casualties would only increase support for insurgents.