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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

[Israeli airstrike damages Hamas premier's office](#)

CNN – 2 March 2008

Israeli aircraft hit the Gaza City building housing the office of Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh early Sunday, heavily damaging it. No one was in the building when it was struck. Shortly afterward, Israeli aircraft also struck a metal workshop in Gaza City and a house to the south belonging to a member of the military wing of Hamas, according to a CNN producer on the scene. It was the fifth consecutive day in which Israeli forces launched air and ground operations against militants in northern Gaza, aimed at stopping what Israel says is a steady barrage of rocket fire into its towns. The continuing unrest prompted United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to call for an end to the back-and-forth attacks at an emergency U.N. Security Council session Saturday night. "I am deeply concerned [about] the violence escalating," he said. "I call on all parties to step back from deeper and even more deadly clashes." A Palestinian representative warned that Israel's attacks threaten to "derail the peace process" and will undermine any progress that has been made. Fifty-two Palestinians have been killed and 200 wounded since Friday in Gaza, Palestinian medical sources said, in the deadliest 24 hours of violence in more than a year. The sources said 85 people, including civilians and children, have been killed in the Jebaliyah area since the incursion began Wednesday. Israel launched airstrikes and limited ground operations in northern Gaza after militants fired rockets into Israeli territory. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and seven wounded in clashes Saturday, the Israel Defense Forces announced. Hamas security and medical sources said that an Israeli airstrike early Saturday in northern Gaza killed Hamas commander Iyyad al-Ashram. The Israeli military confirmed that it had "hit" at least 23 armed Palestinians late Friday and early Saturday.

[Senior East Timor rebel soldier surrenders](#)

Reuters – 2 March 2008

A Senior East Timorese rebel soldier accused of being involved in attacks on the tiny country's president and prime minister last month surrendered on Sunday, a military official said. Rebel soldiers attacked the home of President Jose Ramos-Horta on Feb 11, seriously wounding him during a gunfight. Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao, who escaped unhurt in a separate attack the same morning, ordered the country's military and police forces to form a joint command to arrest followers of rebel leader Alfredo Reinado, who was killed in the attacks. Amaro da Costa, also known as Susar, surrendered to the joint command in Turiscai, 120 km south of the capital Dili. Filomeno Paixao, head of the joint command, told a news conference on Sunday. Arrest warrants had been issued against 17 people suspected of involvement in the attack, including deputy rebel leader Da Costa and Gastao Salsinha, who took command of rebel soldiers after Reinado was killed during the attack on Mr Ramos-Horta. 'We have also had direct and indirect contact with rebel leader Gastao Salsinha,' said Mr Paixao, adding that he hoped the rebel leader would also surrender soon. Prime Minister Gusmao urged Da Costa and other rebels to cooperate. 'I am asking you to cooperate with the joint command so that people

can live in tranquility", Mr Gusmao said at the government palace. Asia's youngest nation, under a state of emergency since the attacks, has been unable to achieve stability since hard-won independence in 2002. The army tore apart along regional lines in 2006, when about 600 soldiers were sacked, triggering factional violence that killed 37 people and drove 150,000 from their homes. Foreign troops were sent to restore order in the former Portuguese colony of about one million people, which gained full independence from Indonesia after a UN-sponsored vote in 1999 that was marred by violence. The UN Security Council last week extended for another year the mandate for the UN peacekeeping mission in East Timor, saying the security and humanitarian situation in the country remained fragile.

[Twin blasts in Baghdad shopping district kill 54](#)

AFP – 7 March 2008

At least 54 people were killed and 123 wounded in a double bomb attack in a crowded commercial district in central Baghdad late on Thursday, security officials said. The twin attack, comprising a roadside bombing followed by a suicide attack, ripped through Al-Atar Street in central Baghdad's Karada neighbourhood, one official said. 'First a roadside bomb went off and as people and police gathered to rescue the victims, a suicide bomber blew himself up amid the crowd,' he said. Another security official said those killed and wounded included several women and children. Iraqi emergency personnel evacuated the wounded to nearby hospitals. The US military said the attack took place at around 7.00 pm (3am Singapore time). 'Iraqi security forces and emergency responders were first on the scene. Coalition forces arrived after and are coordinating with them on how many Iraqi citizens were killed and wounded in the attack,' the military said in a statement. 'This terrorist attack was a senseless act of violence directed against the Iraqi people,' said US chief of staff Colonel Allen Batschelet. The bombings come after Iraq witnessed a sharp rise in the number of people killed in violence, following a six month period in which the death toll fell. In February the number of Iraqis killed rose by 33 per cent over the previous month, reversing a six-month trend of fewer casualties, ministerial figures obtained by AFP showed on March 1. The drop in the violence during the six months to January was attributed to a 'surge' of an extra 30,000 US troops in Iraq, the formation by Sunni leaders of anti-Qaeda fronts, and Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's freezing of the activities of his Mahdi Army militia. Thursday's bombing is the worst since 100 people were killed in two bombings of Baghdad bird markets on Feb 1 and came as the US military announced a reduction in troops numbers in Iraq. The military said some 2,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, deployed in last year's surge, would not be replaced once they leave the country, likely within the next few weeks. Once the brigade re-deploys, 'the number of US combat brigades in Iraq will drop from 19 to 18, with three additional brigades scheduled to redeploy by July. The unit will not be replaced,' said a statement on the redeployment. The redeployment 'represents the increased capability and progress being made in Iraq by the Iraqi security forces to provide their own security,' said said Colonel Billy Buckner, a spokesman for US-led forces in Iraq. The US military currently has 158,000 troops in Iraq.

[China talks tough over Darfur](#)

BBC – 7 March 2008

China has issued an unusually energetic call to its ally, Sudan, to do more to stop fighting in Darfur. The "humanitarian disaster" in the region was a grave concern to China's government, said its envoy Liu Guijin. Mr Liu called for Khartoum to do more to speed up the arrival of peacekeepers in the region but he also criticised Darfur's rebel groups. China is a key ally of the Sudanese government - buying its oil, selling it weapons and using its weight at the UN. Mr Liu has just returned from a trip to Sudan which included Darfur. He said he had been profoundly affected by things he had seen in the province. He said he was also moved by the stories he had heard from Darfuris forced to flee their homes after five years of conflict. China has been stung by Western accusations that it is colluding with the Sudanese government, and is eager to ensure the issue does not overshadow this year's Olympic Games in Beijing. Last month, US film director Steven Spielberg pulled out as artistic adviser to the Olympics, saying that China had failed to use its influence on Khartoum over Darfur. The BBC's Amber Henshaw in Khartoum says Beijing is keen to defend its economic interests but also wants to be seen to be taking a more aggressive stance against Khartoum in the run up to the Olympics. She says when Mr Liu spoke to journalists in Khartoum last week he was much less outspoken. Then he pointed out that China was a friend to Sudan and that the Chinese government was already doing a lot to work with the West over Darfur. The United Nations says more than 200,000 have died in Darfur during the four-year conflict and at least two million have been displaced and live in camps.

[Hamas claims deadliest attack in Israel in 2 years](#)

Reuters – 8 March 2008

Hamas claimed responsibility for shooting eight students at a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem, the most lethal Palestinian attack on Israelis in two years and a blow to international efforts to revive peace talks. The Islamists, who also claimed a suicide bombing a month ago, had vowed to hit back after an Israeli offensive on the Hamas-run Gaza Strip killed more than 120 people in recent days. A lone gunman killed the young men on Thursday at the Merkaz Harav religious college. But the Israeli government said it would keep talking with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas's secular rival in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Washington, sponsor of a peace process already buffeted by the killing of dozens of civilians in Israel's latest Gaza offensive, said the fact that the talks were continuing was 'the most important thing'. Some mourners at funerals for the dead, who were studying at a bastion of the Jewish settler movement in the West Bank, were less positive about the process. And Israel's security minister said hostile Arabs like the dead gunman should be forced out of the mixed city of Jerusalem and sent to live in the West Bank. 'The Hamas movement announces its full responsibility for the Jerusalem operation,' a Hamas official said on Friday in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas seized control from Mr Abbas in June. He spoke on condition of anonymity and the group released no official statement. A spokesman for Hamas's armed wing called the attack 'an honour we have not claimed yet'. An Israeli official said authorities were still investigating the incident. The attack and the Hamas claim prompted celebrations in

Gaza. A White House spokesman called that 'fairly disgusting'. Israel imposed a security clampdown on Jerusalem as thousands attended funerals for the eight victims, aged 15 to 26. Police set up roadblocks and troops tightened limits on Palestinian travel from the West Bank into Israel. Gunman Ala Abu Dhaim, whose family in East Jerusalem said he once worked as a driver for the college, was shot dead after opening fire with an automatic rifle at students in the library. Hamas flags and banners of other Islamist groups flew at the home of the gunman, identified by neighbours as Ala Abu Dhaim, in his early 20s, after what proved to be a suicide mission.

[Venezuela restores Colombia ties](#)

BBC – 9 March 2008

Venezuela says it will immediately normalise diplomatic relations with Colombia, a week after ties were cut. Caracas broke off relations with its neighbour in protest at a Colombian military raid into Ecuador, in which a leading leftist Farc rebel was killed. Over subsequent days, regional tensions soared, but the crisis was defused when leaders met at a summit on Friday. But Ecuador, which accused Colombia of violating its sovereignty, has said it will take some time to restore ties. Last week's crisis saw both Venezuela and Ecuador deploy troops to their respective borders with Colombia, diplomatic ties between Colombia and a number of countries in the region cut, and commercial traffic disrupted. Observers said the tensions threatened to spill over into military confrontation, but just a week after the crisis blew up it was apparently resolved at Friday's Rio Group summit. There, the region's leaders accepted a 20-point declaration by the Organization of American States (OAS), sealing their reconciliation with smiles and handshakes. The declaration included a promise by President Alvaro Uribe that Colombia's forces would never again violate the territory of its neighbours. In its statement on Sunday, Venezuela's foreign ministry called the summit outcome a "victory for peace and sovereignty... which demonstrated the importance of Latin American unity". It said Venezuelan diplomatic personnel would be immediately returned to their embassy in Bogota, and Colombian personnel had been invited to do the same.

[Islamic Jihad rockets hit Israel after West Bank raid](#)

Reuters – 13 March 2008

Islamic Jihad fired rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip on Thursday after Israel killed five militants in the occupied West Bank, in renewed violence that threatened prospects for an Egyptian-brokered truce. No one was injured by the salvo against the border town of Sderot, the first such attack by Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian militant faction, since March 5. Israel, which had not struck in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip in a week, said it carried out two air strikes against rocket launchers in the northern Gaza Strip. No one was hurt. The Israeli army said militants fired at least 22 rockets on Thursday. Islamic Jihad had vowed revenge after Israeli troops killed four of its members in the West Bank on Wednesday. The fifth man belonged to al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah. Israel has rebuffed Hamas's call for the West Bank to be included in any ceasefire arrangement. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the operations showed that Israel would continue to "pursue and attack all

murderers with blood on their hands and their dispatchers". U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who spoke at the Islamic Summit in Senegal, demanded that Israel stop what he called "disproportionate and excessive force" against Palestinians.

TERRORISM & COUNTER-TERRORISM

[FBI's 'most wanted' Yemeni-American walks free](#)

AP – 10 March 2008

A Yemeni-American who is among the FBI's most wanted terrorism suspects appeared unexpectedly at his trial in a Yemeni court on Sunday for the second time in roughly two weeks and again walked free. Mr Jaber Elbaneh entered the courtroom with several bodyguards and called on Judge Mohammed al-Hakimi to drop the charges against him, saying the Yemeni government was working for US interests. 'The verdict is unjust,' said Mr Elbaneh, referring to the decision by a Yemeni court last November to convict him and 36 others of masterminding two attacks in Sept 2006 in the country's eastern provinces of Marid and Hadramawt. They were also convicted of belonging to al-Qaeda and planning to assassinate foreigners. The court sentenced Elbaneh to 10 years in prison at the time, but he was never captured or jailed. 'This is an American verdict and the government is collaborating with the Americans and is an agent for America,' Mr Elbaneh told Mr al-Hakimi, who is presiding over an appeals court ruling on the cases of the 37 men. Elbaneh first walked into al-Hakimi's courtroom unexpectedly on Feb. 23 and was allowed to walk free. After Sunday's session, Mr al-Hakimi demanded that Mr Elbaneh post bail to leave the courthouse. He eventually walked free after a third-party posted bail in his name, said a court official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to the media. Security authorities have declined to comment about Mr Elbaneh's legal situation. Mr Elbaneh is a former resident of Lackawanna, NY. He left the United States in spring 2001 as part of a larger group that authorities said travelled to Osama bin Laden's al-Farooq training camp in Afghanistan. In May 2003, US prosecutors charged Mr Elbaneh in absentia with conspiring with a group known as the 'Lackawanna Six' to provide material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organisation. The US asked Yemen to hand over Mr Elbaneh, and while he was subsequently arrested by authorities in January 2004, he was never extradited. Mr Elbaneh was eventually sentenced to prison for his involvement in a 2002 attack on the French tanker Limburg off Yemen's coast that killed one person. But Mr Elbaneh and 22 other prisoners broke out of their Yemeni jail in February 2006 by digging a tunnel to a nearby mosque. Mr Elbaneh surrendered in May 2007 to Yemeni authorities but was never sent back to jail despite his ongoing trial. The US is offering up to US\$5 million (\$\$7 million) for information leading to his arrest. Al-Qaeda has an active presence in Yemen despite government efforts to destroy the network.

[Report: China thwarts two terrorist attacks](#)

CNN – 9 March 2008

Chinese officials told the state-run media Sunday that they successfully thwarted two terrorist attacks, including one targeting the Summer Olympic Games. Officials blamed both attacks on separatists operating out of an autonomous region in northwest China. According to one report in Xinhua, militants who were killed earlier this year in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region were planning an attack on the Games, set to begin on August 8. The news agency did not provide additional information on the plot. The autonomous region is home to about 19 million people, most of whom are Muslims and other minorities. Many of them oppose Beijing's rule. Also Sunday, another Chinese official told Xinhua that a China Southern Airlines plane was forced to land because "some people were attempting to create an air disaster." The flight had taken off from Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The militants' attempt to hijack the plane was foiled by the flight crew, the official said. Wang Lequan, chief of the Xinjiang regional committee of the Communist Party of China, said the government was prepared to strike against the "three evil forces" in the region: terrorists, separatists and extremists. "We are prepared to strike them when the evil forces are planning their activities," he told Xinhua.

[Militants reap recruits for escalating campaign of violence in Pakistan](#)

AP – 13 March 2008

Top Pakistani officials say the latest suicide truck bombing that killed 24 people and nearly toppled a seven-storey police headquarters marks a dangerous escalation by militants who are striking nationwide. A police interrogation report obtained by The Associated Press involving a previous case shed light on how militants find recruits - such as a 19-year-old former Islamic seminary student - and bring them to bases along the Afghan border for training. A yearlong wave of suicide bombings has intensified in recent weeks, posing a stiff challenge to the victors of Feb 18 elections, as they prepare to form a new government and begin a new era of civilian rule after eight years of military domination under President Pervez Musharraf. In the past, militants generally targeted troops and military convoys in the volatile northwest, where some 100,000 Pakistani forces are deployed in support of the US-led war on terror. But five of the 16 attacks this year have been in Punjab, Pakistan's biggest and most prosperous province, including its main city of Lahore, which has been hit three times in two months. Tuesday's blast, which killed at least 24 people and wounded over 200, left a 1.6-metre -deep crater and blasted out walls of the Federal Investigation Agency building, creating a sea of rubble and twisted metal in its forecourt. Fallen masonry and crumpled vehicles still litter the surrounding residential neighbourhood. A separate attack in another part of the city on the same morning killed three more. "We only ever saw images like this on TV," said police constable Abdul Ghafar, 54, who came back to see the carnage as the cleanup began on Wednesday. He escaped injury although he was just six metres from where the mini-truck, loaded with over 40 kilogrammes of high explosive, rammed into the building in an apparent attempt to topple the structure - a tactic reminiscent of militant attacks in Iraq. "This is a bigger attack and a different modus operandi from what we have seen

before,' Mr Azhar Hassan Nadeem, the Punjab inspector general of police, said after attending the funeral service for 16 policemen. 'They (the militants) have an organisational network and the problem is quite huge.' Mr Tariq Pervez, the FIA chief, said it was the largest amount of explosives that he had seen used in an attack during his 20 years in counterterrorism. Past vehicle-borne attacks in the country's northwest used only 15 to 20 kilogrammes, he said. 'It indicates an escalation' in the militant campaign against the military and law enforcers, Mr Pervez said.

[Iraqi archbishop found dead, al Qaeda blamed](#)

Reuters – 13 March 2008

A Chaldean Catholic archbishop who was kidnapped in Iraq last month was found dead on Thursday, his body half-buried in an empty lot in the northern city of Mosul, police said. Paulos Faraj Rahho, the archbishop of Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, was abducted on February 29 after gunmen attacked his car and killed his driver and two guards. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki blamed Rahho's death on al Qaeda and said his Shi'ite Islamist-led government was committed to protecting Christians, who make up about 3 percent of the population in mostly Muslim Iraq. "The perpetrators of this horrible crime will not run from the hand of justice," Maliki said. Pope Benedict, who had made several appeals for the archbishop's freedom, called Rahho's death "an act of inhuman violence that offends the dignity of the human being" in a letter to Iraqi church leaders. Chaldeans belong to a branch of the Roman Catholic Church that practices an ancient Eastern rite and form the biggest Christian community in Iraq.

[Al Qaeda gives 3-day ultimatum on Austria hostages](#)

Reuters – 13 March 2008

Al Qaeda's North African wing threatened on Thursday to kill two Austrian hostages it had abducted in Tunisia if Vienna failed to secure the release of some of the group's members jailed in Tunisia and Algeria. The three-day ultimatum starts at midnight on Thursday, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb said in a statement posted on an Islamist Web site. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik said efforts were being made to secure the release of the hostages but noted that the demands were outside Vienna's jurisdiction. "Austria would be responsible for the lives of the two hostages should the deadline come and our demands are not met," the militant group said. "As you care for the safety of your citizens, we care to free our brothers who face the ugliest forms of torture at the prisons of Tunisia ... and Algeria," it said. "We ask the families of the hostages and the Austrian public opinion to press their country's (government) to meet the demands of the mujahideen to preserve the lives of the two tourists," it added. The demands and a list of the names of the group's prisoners were sent to Vienna through unidentified mediators, it said in the posting, which had pictures of the hostages identified in Austrian media as Andrea Kloiber, 43, and Wolfgang Ebner, 51. The group, which has been waging a violent campaign against government forces and foreign interests in North Africa, said its members were jailed for confronting "the new crusade against Islam".

[U.S. report links China arms sales to Darfur carnage](#)

Reuters – 13 March 2008

Chinese sales of assault rifles and other small arms to its ally Sudan have grown rapidly during the Darfur conflict despite a U.N. arms embargo, a human rights group said on Thursday. Human Rights First, a U.S.-based nonprofit group, said a detailed study of Sudanese and U.N. trade data showed that China was virtually the sole supplier of small arms to Sudan, which pays for the weapons with its growing oil revenues. "The people of Sudan's Darfur region will endure more death, disease and dislocation, and this will be due in no small part to China's callousness," said the report, which called on Beijing to stop all arms sales to Sudan and urged the world to link that campaign to the Beijing Olympics. China bristles at Western criticism that it has not used its influence to press for an end to the bloodshed in Darfur, which the United States has labeled as genocide. It angrily rejects efforts to link its policies to the showcase Beijing Games due to take place this summer. China sold Sudan \$55 million worth of small arms from 2003-2006 and provided 90 percent of Sudan's small arms since 2004 when a U.N. arms embargo took effect, the report said. Chinese-made AK-47 assault rifles, grenade launchers and ammunition for rifles and heavy machine guns have all flowed into Darfur, said the report.

DIPLOMACY & DEFENCE STRATEGY

[China, US to push on with nuclear, security talks](#)

AFP – 2 March 2008

China and the United States have agreed to deepen a dialogue on nuclear and Asian security issues following the end of high-level talks in Beijing this week, the US defence department said on Saturday. The discussions were part of ongoing Sino-US defence consultations aimed at increasing mutual understanding and avoiding miscalculation between the two powers, said David Sedney, deputy assistant secretary of defence for East Asia. "We had very positive discussions on that (nuclear strategy and policy) and we expect to be moving forward with that dialogue very shortly," Sedney said at a press briefing in Shanghai. "We also had an in-depth exchange of each other's views of Asian security issues – that will lay the basis for us continuing that kind of discussion that we both agree is very important." The talks were followed by a signing on Friday of two agreements announced earlier this week between the countries. The first gives Washington access to Beijing's military archives to search for missing servicemen from conflicts since World War II. The other was an agreement to establish a telephone hotline between the two armies, which is expected to be operational in about a month, Sedney said. The military hotline was first suggested by the United States in 2003, and US President George W. Bush reached agreement on the link when meeting his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao at a regional forum in Sydney in September. The two nations discussed the issue further in November last year when US Defence Secretary Robert Gates visited Beijing. US and Chinese heads of state have been able to communicate over a similar line since the late 1990s but the new hotline will be China's first direct military

telephone link with another country. Sedney said it aims to reduce misunderstandings between the two militaries, although its effectiveness and exact use was still to be determined. "In terms of specifically how we use it, for what issues and at what time is something we will have to develop with the Chinese. "The purpose is to address emergency, crisis or important issues that need immediate communication," said Sedney, adding that the line would have come useful amid tensions between Beijing and Washington last year. Sino-US relations remain tetchy despite warming dramatically since spiralling to a low in 2001 when Chinese jet fighters collided with a US Navy surveillance plane forcing it to land on Chinese soil. The US Pentagon remains irked by a Chinese military build-up that it believes is aimed at thwarting American intervention in a conflict over Taiwan, and ultimately challenging its access to the region. US suspicions intensified in January last year after a Chinese anti-satellite test in which a ballistic missile was used to destroy a Chinese weather satellite in low Earth orbit. And in a flare-up in November, Beijing denied US warships port entry in Hong Kong, a decision that Sedney said the Chinese have never adequately explained. Meanwhile, China called on the US earlier this month to provide more information about its shooting down of a defunct US spy satellite, amid concerns about space security.

[Iran president on landmark Iraq visit](#)

CNN – 2 March 2008

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in Baghdad Sunday for the start of a historic two-day trip, said "visiting Iraq without the dictator is a good thing." The Shiite-led Iraqi government rolled out the red carpet, literally, for Ahmadinejad as he became the first Iranian president to visit Iraq, a country that was a bitter enemy when Saddam Hussein's Sunni government was in power. Ahmadinejad, at a joint news conference with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, said the trip "opens a new chapter in bilateral ties with Iraq." "We have had good talks in a friendly and constructive environment," Ahmadinejad said. "We have the same understanding of things and the two parties are determined to strengthen their political, economic and cultural cooperation." Later in the day, Ahmadinejad met Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Both al-Maliki and Talabani have made official trips to Iran since taking office. Ahmadinejad shunned the security measures followed by many other leaders on visits to Baghdad, riding from Baghdad's airport in a civilian-style sedan -- and not an armored military vehicle or helicopter -- to central Baghdad. His official welcome and meeting with Talabani was at the presidential house outside of the heavily-fortified International Zone where most high-level events in Baghdad are held. Ahmadinejad said a unified and powerful Iraq is in the best interest of Iran and all its neighbors. "Iraqi people are passing through a critical situation but as we know, the Iraqi people will overcome the situation and the Iraq of tomorrow will be a powerful, developed and unique Iraq," he said. Ahmadinejad was warmly welcomed in Baghdad. An Iraqi military band played the Iranian and Iraqi national anthems as Ahmadinejad and Talabani stood side-by-side at the end of a long red carpet outside the presidential house. Ahmadinejad then walked down the carpet where he was greeted by two Iraqi children with flowers and a long line of Iraqi officials. Ahead of his trip, Ahmadinejad said it would "contribute to regional peace and security" and stressed that the people of Iran and Iraq share close bonds. "My visit to Iraq is to the benefit of all

countries, because if there's peace, if we establish peace and put an end to (U.S.) occupation, that will be to the benefit of all countries," the Iranian leader told Tehran-based Press TV before his departure. Although Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980 after a territorial dispute, and the two countries fought an eight-year war, Ahmadinejad said the nations share a common history. "The people of Iran and Iraq have close bonds, and there are many holy shrines in Iraq," he said. "People travel there, so we have age-old, historical bonds and common civilization." He noted that Iraq has a new government, and is an "independent state." "We should help them," he added.

[Russians choose Putin successor in one-sided election](#)

AFP – 2 March 2008

Russians began voting on Sunday in a presidential poll seen by critics as rigged to hand almost certain victory to Vladimir Putin's favoured candidate, Dmitry Medvedev. Voting began on the Pacific coast of the world's biggest country and was to roll 12,000 kilometres west to Moscow and on to the Baltic Sea territory of Kaliningrad to close at 1800 GMT on Sunday. Mr Medvedev faces three challengers, but his overwhelming victory was almost a foregone conclusion after a campaign in which Russia's heavily censored television networks rammed home the message that he is Mr Putin's anointed successor. Opinion polls predict Mr Medvedev, currently first deputy premier and head of gas monopoly Gazprom, will win at least 60 per cent of the vote and possibly more than 70 per cent. None of the other candidates - Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, populist nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the almost unknown Andrei Bogdanov - presents a serious challenge. At 42, Mr Medvedev reflects a new generation of post-Soviet politicians in one of the world's biggest energy exporters and a major nuclear power. Unlike Mr Putin and most of his allies, Mr Medvedev has no KGB or other security service background. However, Mr Medvedev says his main goal is to follow Mr Putin's course and he is set to install his mentor as prime minister. The power-sharing formula suggests that Mr Putin, 55, will continue to dominate the political scene well beyond Mr Medvedev's likely inauguration in May.

[Armenian president declares state of emergency](#)

CNN – 2 March 2008

Armenian President Robert Kocharian declared a state of emergency Saturday night after a day of clashes between police and protesters, a spokeswoman for the Armenian Foreign Ministry said. The protesters claim last month's presidential election was rigged. The state of emergency will "hopefully bring some order" to the capital, Yerevan, said Salpi Ghazarian, assistant to the Armenian foreign minister, who spoke to CNN early Sunday. The state of emergency could last until March 20, she said, but the government hopes "that it will be lifted sooner." The clashes began when authorities used force to clear Freedom Square of thousands of demonstrators who had camped there for the past 10 days, according to a U.S. Embassy official. Ghazarian said the authorities "moved in" because "they thought that there were arms there, and it turned out that they were right." The embassy official estimated that the demonstrations in Freedom Square grew to as many as 60,000 Armenians at times over the last 10 days. As of early Sunday morning,

Freedom Square was empty, Ghazarian said, but the protesters were demonstrating in a main square elsewhere in the city. "What is happening on the streets of Yerevan is people protesting what they consider to be unfair elections," Ghazarian said. "After the president was forced to declare a state of emergency, things have quieted down. There are a couple of burning cars, and there are a few hurt people," she said. "We're convinced that this will come to an end soon." She did not elaborate on the number of people injured or the extent of their injuries. Witnesses told CNN that Saturday morning's action by Armenian riot police was bloody, but the U.S. official said there were no confirmed deaths or serious injuries.

[Greek name fury threatens NATO bid](#)

CNN – 3 March 2008

NATO's secretary-general said Monday that Macedonia's hope of joining the military alliance could be dashed if it fails to settle a 17-year-old name spat with Greece, a long-time NATO member. The former Yugoslav republic hopes to win NATO's endorsement to join the 26-member alliance at a summit in Bucharest, Romania, next month. But Greece has threatened to veto those plans if its northern neighbor does not change its self-given name and agree to a new one. The country is officially known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia but is commonly referred to as Macedonia -- which is already the name of a historically important region of Greece. "We have to realize that Greece is a staunch ally," Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told reporters after talks with Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis in Athens. "Aspiring nations are not members and that is a basic difference." Scheffer, who met earlier with Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, said there is "no certainty that invitations will be issued" to FYR Macedonia, Croatia and Albania during a key meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels next week. "Invitations," he said, "will be issued only on the basis of (the) performance of aspiring members." He refused to elaborate and it remained unclear whether the NATO chief might put Macedonia's application on hold until relations with its Greek neighbor have healed. Squeezed between Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Kosovo, Macedonia secured independence from the Yugoslavia without bloodshed. Now, years after offering its support for the U.S.-led war in Iraq and after signing a string of treaties that exempt U.S. citizens from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, it expects to win NATO's go-ahead to join the security organization. What's more, say officials in the capital of Skopje, Kosovo's declaration of independence and fears of fresh unrest in the region have given urgency to Macedonia's bid to come under NATO's security umbrella. Athens has long argued that the name Macedonia implies territorial claims on its northern province of the same name -- the birthplace, also, of Greece's most revered ancient warrior, Alexander the Great. In recent weeks, a special United Nations negotiator has proposed five alternative names for Macedonia to consider, but negotiations in New York over the weekend failed to yield any signs of a breakthrough in the dispute that has festered between Greece and Macedonia for 17 years. Nearly 90 percent of Greeks favor a veto on Macedonia's membership bid if no compromise solution is found, according to a weekend opinion polls published in the Athens daily Kathimerini. "The door to NATO is open to any aspiring member," Scheffer said. "But to go through it, though, there are preconditions, and entry is not an automatic process."

[China's military budget will jump 17.6% in 2008](#)

AP – 4 March 2008

China said on Tuesday that spending on its military this year will jump by 17.6 per cent compared with 2007, the latest in a string of double-digit defence increases. Most of the increase will go to boosting salaries and to pay for higher oil prices, with moderate increased spending for armaments, said Mr Jiang Enzhu, spokesman for the National People's Congress. The congress, which will approve China's annual budget, opens Wednesday for its annual two-week session. Jiang said spending would total 417.8 billion yuan (\$81.7 billion) in 2008, an increase of 62.4 billion yuan over last year. Other countries say China vastly underestimates how much it spends on its military and the real figure could be three times as much as the publicly released figure. The increase follows a similar one last year of nearly 18 percent. China has had double-digit increases in military spending every year since the early 1990s.

[Afghans protest over Danish cartoon](#)

CNN – 8 March 2008

Thousands of Afghans packed a sports stadium in the western Afghanistan city Herat Saturday to protest the reprinting of the same Danish cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed that sparked rage in the Muslim world two years ago. Several newspapers in Denmark reprinted the controversial drawing last month after Danish authorities arrested several people who allegedly were plotting a "terror-related assassination" of the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. The protesters shouted slogans in their native Dari language that, translated into English, included "death to enemies of Islam" and "death to Denmark and Holland and the insulters of Islam." Anti-American slogans were also heard. "We have gathered here to express our anger against this inhuman act of the Danish paper that insulted our Holy Prophet," said Faqir Ahmad Herawi, a scholar who helped organize the protest. Herawi said they were also demonstrating against a Dutch movie that is expected to be released soon "that will insult our holy book of Koran." "We want to tell them that it is not acceptable for the Muslim people of Afghanistan," Herawi said. Far-right Dutch lawmaker Geert Wilders has said that he will soon release an anti-Islam film in the Netherlands that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the FBI has warned may spark global protests and riots. Herawi said that the protesters were demanding the Afghan government expel Dutch and Danish soldiers who are part of the NATO-led ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Herat is not far from the Iranian border and many of its residents are sympathetic to the Iranian government. There were some indications the demonstration had the support of the provincial government. A Herat resident, who goes by the name Daud, said he attended the rally after hearing about it on a state-run television broadcast. Noor Khan Nikzad, a Herat provincial police spokesman, estimated the crowd size at about 10,000 people. Nikzad said several hundred police officers were deployed around Herat's center to control the protesters should they turn violent. The uproar over the cartoons ignited after the Danish newspaper published caricatures of Islam's Prophet Mohammed. Some Muslims believe it is forbidden by the Quran to show an image of the prophet. Demonstrations erupted across the world in early 2006 after other newspapers reprinted the images months later as a matter of free speech. Some

protests turned deadly. Many protesters directed their ire at Denmark, prompting the closure of several Danish embassies in predominantly Muslim countries, including Indonesia and Pakistan. Westergaard's cartoon depicted the prophet wearing a bomb as a turban with a lit fuse. Westergaard said he wanted his cartoon to say that some people exploited the prophet to legitimize terror. However, many in the Muslim world interpreted the drawing as depicting their prophet as a terrorist.

[N. Korea condemns Taiwan for attempting to join the UN](#)

AP – 8 March 2008

North Korea condemned Taiwan for attempting to join the United Nations, saying on Saturday that the move would escalate tension in the region. The North's Foreign Ministry said Pyongyang supports Beijing's 'one China' policy and 'sternly opposes' Taiwan's bid to join the global body. China is North Korea's chief ally in the region. 'This move by Taiwanese authorities is a grave act that aggravates the situation in the Taiwan Strait and in northeast Asia,' the ministry said, according to the country's official Korean Central News Agency. The statement came in response to Taiwan's plans to hold a referendum at the same time as its March 22 presidential election to decide whether to pursue UN membership under the name Taiwan, instead of using its formal name of the Republic of China. Taiwan and China split amid civil war in 1949. Beijing considers the self-governing island Chinese territory and has threatened military attack if Taiwan tries to formalize its de facto independence. Taiwan held the UN seat for China until 1971, when it was transferred to the Beijing-based government of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese government has since blocked efforts by the island to obtain UN recognition as an independent nation. China is the North's last-remaining major ally and a major aid donor for the impoverished nation. North and South Korea simultaneously joined the UN in 1991.

[Canadians extend Afghan mission](#)

BBC – 13 March 2008

Canada's parliament has voted to extend the army's mission in Afghanistan by two years to 2011, but only if Nato sends reinforcements and equipment. MPs voted 198-77 to keep the 2,500 troops in the southern province of Kandahar if Canada's allies send 1,000 more soldiers, drones and helicopters. Otherwise, Canada would withdraw next year at the end of its current mandate. The confidence motion had been expected to pass because the minority governing Conservatives had opposition support. The Conservatives, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, were backed by the opposition Liberal Party after they adapted their motion to include greater emphasis on reconstruction and training for Afghan troops. The New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois voted against the extension of the Canadian mission past February 2009. The motion was treated as a confidence vote in the government. Had it not been passed, it would have triggered early parliamentary elections. In parliamentary debate on the vote last month, Defence Minister Peter Mackay had urged MPs to support the motion. "The consequences of pulling Canada's military out of Afghanistan could have a far-reaching effect or a domino effect on others," he said. "If we were to pack up and leave Afghanistan, why wouldn't other

nations follow suit?" Canada's role in the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) is becoming increasingly controversial at home. Eighty soldiers and one diplomat have been killed as the mission's original role of reconstruction has become increasingly aimed at fighting Taleban and al-Qaeda insurgents in volatile Kandahar province.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[Marine Commandant Halts Purchase of New Tactical Vests](#)

American Forces Press Service – 29 February 2008

Marine Commandant Gen. James T. Conway halted purchases of the Marine Corps' new modular tactical vest after Marines complained about the equipment's design. Marines said the new vests are heavier and more impractical than the outer tactical vests they had been wearing. "The feedback on the vests is that the Marines don't like the pullover design," said Lt. Col. T.V. Johnson, the commandant's spokesman. "A lot of the guys get scraped about the ears and face when they put them on. "The commandant wore it during a trip over there for Thanksgiving, and he absolutely did not like it," Johnson said. "He made the call to not buy more until perhaps they find a way to mitigate the issues the troops are raising. That's typical of our commandant. He listens to the Marines, and where it makes sense, he executes based on their feedback." The tactical vests have saved many lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are stories of Marines getting struck by 7.62 mm rounds and walking away with just bruises. Johnson said most of the casualties in Iraq are Marines struck in the extremities. Both the old and new vests are built around small-arms protective inserts, ceramic plates that fit in pockets in the vests. "I would trust my life to either one of these pieces of gear," Johnson said. "Safety has never been an issue. If anything, the MTV is a refined edition of the OTV. It doesn't open in the front, but it provides refined protection around the shoulders. "The ceramic plates are integrated into the vest," he continued. "You don't have to strap those on and adjust them like you do in the OTV." Weight, however, is a problem. The basic load of a Marine is anywhere between 40 and 60 pounds, and that doesn't include crew gear. The Marine Corps ordered 84,000 of the new vests in 2006. The service has received 76,000. All Marines deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan are wearing the new vests, Johnson said. "Some very senior discussions are going to take place on what the way ahead is going to be," the colonel said. Among options are adding features to the MTV to mitigate the annoying features or for the Corps to jump to the next-generation vest, Johnson said. Marine Corps Systems Command continually looks at and suggests ways to improve gear.

[US lawmakers blast Boeing defence contract snub](#)

AFP – 2 March 2008

US lawmakers reacted angrily to the award of a 35-billion-dollar Defence Department contract to a Northrop Grumman/EADS team, a major coup for Europe's Airbus at the expense of US giant Boeing. Reacting to Friday's decision by the US Defence Department to award the contract for a fleet of in-flight refuelling aircraft, Republican

Senator Sam Brownback said he was "shocked at this decision and very disappointed". "I'll be calling upon the Secretary of Defence for a full debriefing and expect there will be a protest of the award by Boeing," Brownback added. "It's stunning to me that we would outsource the production of these airplanes to Europe instead of building them in America." Republican Representative Todd Tiahrt said he was "deeply troubled." He added: "We should have an American tanker built by an American company with American workers," he said. "I cannot believe we would create French jobs in place of Kansas jobs." According to the Boeing website, the company is the largest employer in Kansas. But a senator from Alabama, where some of the work will be done, welcomed the decision. "Not only is this the right decision for our military, but it is great news for Alabama," said Richard Shelby, a Republican. The contract was expected to bring up to 1,800 jobs to the Mobile area and 5,000 to the state, he added. Airbus will assemble the tankers in Mobile, Alabama, and had said that if it won the contract it would transfer assembly of its commercial 330 aircraft there, creating jobs. Los Angeles-based Northrop Grumman and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS), parent of Airbus, will provide up to 179 tankers for the US Air Force. The Boeing Company, the second leading US defence contractor after Lockheed Martin, had been considered the heavy favourite. The contract for the newly named tanker, the KC-45, is one of the largest Pentagon contracts in recent years and the first order on a tanker market valued at more than 100 billion dollars in more than 30 years. It marked an unprecedented triumph for EADS, which has achieved a foothold in the world's largest defence market after a history of minor contracts.

[Russia and China rethink arms deals](#)

IHT – 2 March 2008

For almost two decades, it was close to the perfect match of buyer and seller. Denied weapons and defense technology from the West, China was almost totally reliant on Russia for the hardware it needed to jump-start an ambitious military buildup. And while the Russian economy teetered in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, huge orders from China helped keep a once-mighty defense industry afloat. But powerful new forces, including a fear in Moscow of renewed rivalry with its neighbor and a desire in Beijing to become more self-reliant, have led both sides to re-evaluate this trade. After orders peaked at more than \$2 billion a year early in this decade, Chinese arms deals with Russia shrank to almost nothing in 2006, and no major new contracts are in the pipeline, according to Russian, Chinese and U.S. defense experts. "We are in a strategic pause," said Ruslan Pukhov, an expert on the Russian military and director of the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a Moscow-based research institute specializing in the arms trade. "The Chinese and Russians are like long-term lovers who are thinking, 'Shall we continue to share this bed?'" A halt or slowdown in Russian arms deliveries could hamper the Chinese drive to modernize its military. It would also increase pressure on the Chinese arms industry to innovate. Some Western and Russian military experts say they believe that despite decades of intensive effort, Chinese arms makers are still struggling to master the advanced engineering skills needed to build important hardware. In China, there is confidence that these problems will be solved. "The Russians can maintain their lead for a certain period, but eventually we will catch up," said Shen Dingli,

an international affairs analyst at Fudan University in Shanghai. "China will be a formidable technological competitor to anybody." In the meantime, Russia - which, with its economy booming, is no longer dependent on arms sales to China - is concentrating on managing a complex relationship with its increasingly powerful neighbor, analysts say. Neither country publishes comprehensive figures on weapons shipments. But drawing on some announced deals, press reports and private monitoring of arms transfers, Russian analysts estimate that arms deliveries to China from 1992 to 2006 were valued at \$26 billion. Total Russian arms exports over that period were estimated at more than \$58 billion.

[China trying to crack U.S. computers, buy nukes](#)

CNN – 4 March 2008

The Chinese military continues to increase spending on efforts to break into U.S. military computer systems, expand its Navy, and invest in intercontinental nuclear missiles and weapons to destroy satellites, according to the latest U.S report on China's military power. The annual report from the Pentagon to Congress says China's total military spending in 2007 was between \$97 billion and \$139 billion, but it is hard to tell exactly how much was spent and on what. In comparison, the U.S. military budget request for 2008 is \$481.4 billion, not including war requests. Pentagon officials said a chunk of China's spending went to cyberwarfare, because 2007 saw several "intrusions" believed to be from the Peoples Liberation Army. In the incidents, unclassified U.S. military computer systems were broken into and information was taken, according to Pentagon officials. While the information taken was not classified, Pentagon officials said the worry is the Chinese hacking required many of the skills and capabilities that would also be required for a computer network attack. Last summer, a cyber-attack on Department of Defense computer systems took down the e-mail capability of hundreds of staffers for weeks, but the Pentagon still will not comment on who initiated the attack. It is widely believed among the military to have been the Peoples Liberation Army. China is also investing heavily in and fielding improved nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles and antisatellite missiles, according to the report. The United States expressed its concern last year after China fired a missile at one of its old satellites and destroyed it, sending thousands of dangerous pieces of space debris into orbit. The United States conducted a similar strike last month on a broken U.S. spy satellite before it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere. U.S. officials said the satellite was hit and broke into thousands of small pieces that burned up as they re-entered Earth's atmosphere. The United States is also concerned about the purchase of more submarines by the Chinese navy as well as plans for more aircraft carriers. The Chinese once had a small Navy. Now the United States is keeping an eye on the growing service amid concerns over Taiwan. The concerns include "China's near-term focus on preparing for contingencies in the Taiwan Strait, including the possibility of U.S. intervention, which is an important driver of its modernization," the report says. Additionally, the Chinese have placed about 100 more short-range missiles on the shore opposite Taiwan in the past year, it says. Pentagon officials worry the continued increase in Chinese military spending is slowly tipping the balance of power between China and Taiwan in China's favor. The United States has said it would help defend Taiwan if China invaded. The report also says the Peoples Liberation Army

is "pursuing comprehensive transformation from a mass army designed for protracted wars of attrition on its territory to one capable of fighting and winning short-duration, high-intensity conflicts along its periphery against high-tech adversaries." Such an army, the report says, would have "the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could, over time, offset traditional U.S. military advantages." The United States says the lack of transparency by the Chinese on its spending poses "risks to stability by increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation," and that China has yet to explain to the international community the purpose of its military expansion, Pentagon officials said.

[Excalibur Round Debuts in Afghanistan](#)

US Army News Service – 10 March 2008

Soldiers fired the first 155mm GPS-guided Excalibur artillery round in Afghanistan Feb. 25. The GPS-guided Excalibur round was given the proper grid coordinate to seek out and destroy a target using the Enhanced Portable Inductive Artillery Fuse Setter by placing the system on the tip of the round and sending a digital message containing the coordinate for the round to find. "The Excalibur round travels farther and is designed to hit targets that conventional ammo does not always hit," said Army Staff Sgt. Darius Scott of C Battery, 3rd Battalion, 321st Field Artillery Regiment. The Excalibur was fired using the M-777A2 155mm howitzer. The M-777 is designed to be a digitally programmed weapon and is about 9,800 pounds lighter than the more commonly used M-198 Howitzer and is reportedly more accurate. "The main purpose of the M-777A2 is that it is more able to help the units in the Korengal Valley by providing more timely and accurate fire," said Army Capt. Ryan Berdiner, 28, commander of C Battery, 3rd Bn., 321st FAR. "By using the Excalibur, we are mitigating a lot of collateral damage that other rounds may cause," said Scott. The test fire was deemed to be a success when word came back from the impact area that the Excalibur successfully completed its mission by finding and destroying the target at the provided grid coordinate.

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

[Bird flu well entrenched in Asia: WHO](#)

AFP – 5 March 2008

The bird flu virus is 'firmly entrenched' in Asia and a pandemic among humans remains possible, a World Health Organisation (WHO) expert warned. While Asian countries are more prepared to react to any outbreaks than before and have vaccine stockpiles, deaths and infections have continued, noted Mr Takeshi Kasai, the WHO's regional adviser in communicable disease surveillance and response unit. 'The virus has been firmly entrenched in this region, I'm afraid,' Mr Kasai told reporters on Wednesday during an exercise to test the Philippines' preparations against the disease. 'The virus itself keeps changing, so the risk of pandemic persists.' Experts fear the virus, which is usually spread directly from birds to humans, could mutate into a form easily transmissible between people, sparking a deadly global pandemic. Three people have died in China this year of

bird flu while a boy and his father were admitted this week to a hospital in Indonesia on suspicion of having the disease. Since the first human cases were reported in 2003, at least 200 people have died from the H5N1 virus around the world, the WHO said. Indonesia is the world's worst-hit country, with 11 deaths so far this year. Brunei, Singapore and the Philippines remain the only countries in the region where the flu, either in birds or humans, has not been detected. Mr Kasai praised China for being more transparent in reporting suspected cases. 'I think China now is very open and has been positively sharing information, including lab results,' he said. China has been highly criticised in the past for withholding information relating to the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars) that ravished the region several years ago.

Chinese hackers: No site is safe

CNN – 7 March 2008

They operate from a bare apartment on a Chinese island. They are intelligent 20-somethings who seem harmless. But they are hard-core hackers who claim to have gained access to the world's most sensitive sites, including the Pentagon. In fact, they say they are sometimes paid secretly by the Chinese government -- a claim the Beijing government denies. "No Web site is one hundred percent safe. There are Web sites with high-level security, but there is always a weakness," says Xiao Chen, the leader of this group. "Xiao Chen" is his online name. Along with his two colleagues, he does not want to reveal his true identity. The three belong to what some Western experts say is a civilian cyber militia in China, launching attacks on government and private Web sites around the world. If there is a profile of a cyber hacker, these three are straight from central casting -- young and thin, with skin pale from spending too many long nights in front of a computer. One hacker says he is a former computer operator in the People's Liberation Army; another is a marketing graduate; and Xiao Chen says he is a self-taught programmer. "First, you must know about the Web site you want to attack. You must know what program it is written with," says Xiao Chen. "There is a saying, 'Know about both yourself and the enemy, and you will be invincible.'" CNN decided to withhold the address of these hackers' Web site, but Xiao Chen says it has been operating for more than three years, with 10,000 registered users. The site offers tools, articles, news and flash tutorials about hacking. Private computer experts in the United States from iDefense Security Intelligence, which provides cybersecurity advice to governments and Fortune 500 companies, say the group's site "appears to be an important site in the broader Chinese hacking community." Arranging a meeting with the hackers took weeks of on-again, off-again e-mail exchanges. When they finally agreed, CNN was told to meet them on the island of Zhoushan, just south of Shanghai and a major port for China's navy. The apartment has cement floors and almost no furniture. What they do have are three of the latest computers. They are cautious when it comes to naming the Web sites they have hacked. But eventually Xiao Chen claims two of his colleagues -- not the ones with him in the room -- have hacked into the Pentagon and downloaded information, although he wouldn't specify what was gleaned. CNN has no way to confirm if his claim is true.

[Whites fleeing racially mixed schools in Australia](#)

AFP – 10 March 2008

White students are fleeing public schools in Australia to avoid studying with Aboriginal, Muslim and Asian pupils, a report said. A confidential survey of school principals revealed serious concerns about 'white flight' undermining public education and social cohesion, the Sydney Morning Herald reported on Monday. The findings, described by some teachers as 'de facto apartheid', were presented to the New South Wales state government in 2006 but were not released, the paper said. In some remote rural parts of the state, Aboriginal students reportedly fill public schools while white students attend Catholic and other private institutions. Around Sydney, the parents of some Anglo-European students are avoiding what they see as predominantly Lebanese, Muslim and Asian schools, the Herald said. 'This is almost certainly white flight from towns in which the public school's enrolment consists increasingly of indigenous students,' the survey found. 'The pattern is repeated in the Sydney region. Based on comments from principals, this most likely consists of flight to avoid Islamic students and communities.' Education Minister Julia Gillard criticised the attempt to avoid racial mixing in schools. 'Part of growing up and part of being an adult in Australia today is you have got to have the ability to mix in multicultural Australia,' she told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. 'I would have thought that parents would value as part of the education experience, their child being in multicultural Australia, learning about different cultures, learning about diversity - because that is the nation they are going to live in.' But in a reversal of the bussing of black schoolchildren into white areas in the United States in an attempt to end racial segregation, white pupils are in some cases taking buses across state borders to attend predominantly white schools, the report said.

[Climate change 'will spark global conflict'](#)

The Telegraph – 10 March 2008

Climate change poses a global security threat as competition over energy and other resources heralds "significant potential conflicts" in Africa, the Middle East and between the European Union and Russia. A stark report, written by two senior EU officials, Javier Solana, foreign policy chief and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the Commissioner for External Relations, highlights seven threats unleashed by "intensified competition over access to, and control over, energy resources". The warning comes as Europe's leaders prepare for an EU climate change summit to be held in Brussels later this week. Mr Solana and Mrs Ferrero-Waldner predict growing increased tensions between north and south because global warming is mainly driven by the rich north and west while its impact will be most devastating in the poor south. One major concern is growing rivalry with Russia over a scramble to claim the geological resources opened by a thawing Arctic, developments with "potential consequences for international stability and European security interests". "The rapid melting of the polar ice caps, in particular the Arctic, is opening up new waterways and international trade routes," says the report. "The increased accessibility of the enormous hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic region is changing the geo-strategic dynamics of the region." As man-made climate change gathers pace, the EU report raises the spectre of water wars in the Middle East, where two-thirds of the Arab world relies on

external supplies. "Existing tensions over access to water are almost certain to intensify in the region, leading to further political instability with detrimental implications for Europe's energy security and other interests. Water supply in Israel might fall by 60 per cent over this century," the paper says. Falling harvests in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia are, the EU analysis warns, in danger of sparking conflicts, such as the fighting in Darfur. "Climate change will fuel conflicts over depleting resources, especially where access to those resources is politicised," the report said. The issue of energy security is also beginning to concern Nato ahead of next month's meeting, Bucharest, of the Alliance's leaders. A new manifesto, being drawn up for the Nato of the 21st century, sees the Alliance "as an instrument of energy security".

[Experts fear deadly fungus in south Asia wheatfields](#)

AFP – 13 March 2008

A wheat-killing fungus has spread from Africa to Iran and may already be in Pakistan, which depends crucially on wheat to feed its population, *New Scientist* magazine says. The killer pathogen, known as Ug99, emerged in Uganda in 1999, spread to Kenya in 2001, to Ethiopia in 2003 and then leapt to Yemen, its spores blown by Cyclone Gonu in June 2007. The fungus has now been found in Iran 'and may already be in Pakistan,' the British weekly says in next Saturday's issue. 'If so, this is extremely bad news, as Pakistan is not only critically reliant on its wheat crop, it is also the gateway to the Asian breadbasket, including the vital Punjab region.' Experts have been meeting in Syria this week to decide emergency measures to track the progress of Ug99 and to try to brake its progress, such as by spraying fungicide or stopping farmers from planting wheat in the spores' path. Canada and the United States, worried that Ug99 could hit their own breadbaskets, are pumping money into breeding programmes that will boost Ug99-resistant genes in wheat. However, such programmes usually take at least five years to come up with disease-resistant strains which are crossed with wheat varieties that can adapt to local climate conditions, and then grow enough seeds to replant fields threatened by the fungus, the report said. 'People will start starving if Ug99 cuts harvests enough to push up grain prices,' the report quoted Mr Rick Ward of CIMMYT, the corn and wheat breeding institute in Mexico that played a key role in the Green Revolution, as saying.

[Gold, oil reach highs amid U.S. recession fears](#)

CNN – 13 March 2008

World stock markets were shaken Thursday as problems facing the ailing U.S. economic juggernaut continued to send ripples of fear through investors. The price of gold topped \$1,000 an ounce for the first time ever, and investors dumped the dollar which hit a 12-year low against the Japanese yen and slumped to new lows against the euro. Meanwhile, oil was also continuing its soar skywards, hitting \$111 a barrel before sliding back to below \$110. *CNN International's* Business Editor Todd Benjamin says the activity is all based on the belief that the U.S. is in recession. Gold futures reached \$1,001 on the New York Mercantile Exchange before dropping slightly to \$997.10. In uncertain times, it is seen as a safer bet for investors, and has risen 20 percent this year. Because gold is bought and sold in U.S. dollars, it has also become much cheaper for investors holding

overseas currencies -- and central banks around the world have stepped in along with big hedge funds among others.

MILITARY / PEACEKEEPING / HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

[Colombia says top FARC commander killed in combat](#)

Reuters – 2 March 2008

Colombia's military said on Saturday troops had killed a top rebel commander in an attack on a jungle camp across the border in Ecuador in a severe blow to Latin America's oldest guerrilla insurgency. Raul Reyes, one of seven members of the secretariat of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or Farc, was killed in an operation that included an air strike on a camp and fighting with rebels across the border, Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos said. Reyes was considered by analysts to be the No 2 Farc commander and is the most senior member of the group to be killed in President Alvaro Uribe's US-backed campaign against the guerrillas fighting a four-decade-old conflict. 'As a result of this operation, 17 guerrillas were killed.' Among them was Farc secretariat member Luis Edgar Devia Silva, better known as Raul Reyes,' Mr Santos told reporters. Colombia's El Tiempo newspaper published on its Web site a photograph of what it said was Reyes' bloodied corpse in a stained white shirt lying on a black body bag. Mr Santos said intelligence had revealed Reyes' movements near the border. After an air strike by the Colombian military, Colombian troops came under fire from guerrillas in Ecuadorean territory and they responded. Reyes' body was brought back into Colombia to prevent rebels taking it away, he said. Mr Uribe contacted Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa to inform him of the operation and Quito sent troops to investigate. Venezuela and Ecuador often complain about the guerrilla war spilling over their borders. Violence from Colombia's conflict has ebbed under Mr Uribe, who has sent troops to retake regions under the control of armed groups. But the Farc is still potent in remote areas, where it holds scores of hostages, including three Americans and French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt.

[Chavez orders troops to Colombia border](#)

CNN – 3 March 2008

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez Sunday ordered his military to move 10 battalions to the country's border with Colombia, and ordered the closure of the Venezuelan embassy in Colombia's capital. He made the comments on his weekly Sunday talk show "Alo Presidente," or "Hello, President." The move was in apparent reaction to Colombia's joint operation Saturday in Ecuador that resulted in the death of the second-in-command of the FARC Colombian rebels group. Chavez condemned the operation Saturday, saying the Colombian government violated Ecuador's sovereignty. He said if the operation had been conducted in Venezuela, he would have declared war against Colombia. "Colombia's government recognizes -- in a happy and irresponsible attitude -- that it has violated the sovereignty of a neighbor country. And that's worrisome," he said. "President Uribe, think well. Don't think about doing that over here, don't think it. Because it would very

serious, a military raid in Venezuelan territory would be 'causus belli.' There is not any excuse." Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos denied that Colombia violated Ecuadoran airspace in the joint operation that killed Luis Edgar Devia Silva, known as "Raul Reyes." The operation, which involved Colombian air forces attacking a FARC camp from the Colombian side, also involved Colombia's national police Santos said. Reyes was among 17 killed. Santos also said Colombian President Alvaro Uribe had spoken to Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa to inform him on the activities. The White House weighed in on the situation Sunday, saying, "We're monitoring the situation." "This is an odd reaction by Venezuela to Colombia's efforts against the FARC, a terrorist organization that continues to hold Colombians, Americans and others hostage," spokesman Gordon Johndroe said. FARC is the Spanish acronym for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. The Marxist group has been trying for some 40 years to overthrow the Colombian government. On Wednesday, the group released four former Colombian lawmakers who were among the estimated 750 hostages the group has held in the jungles of Colombia. In the past two months, FARC has released six hostages overall. Reyes, who was a member of the seven-man FARC leadership council, known as the general secretariat, had played a key mediation role in the release of those hostages. Chavez, whose left-wing political philosophy comes closer than that of Colombia's rightist leaders to the stated doctrines of FARC, brokered the two deals to release hostages.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[UN Security Council certain to approve new sanctions against Iran](#)

AP – 3 March 2008

The UN Security Council is certain to approve a third round of sanctions against Iran on Monday for refusing to suspend uranium enrichment, but it's doubtful the new measures will receive the unanimous support that the first two sanctions resolutions did. The five permanent council members with veto power - the US, Russia, China, Britain and France - are all backing the new resolution, and they have more than the nine 'yes' votes needed for approval in the 15-member council. But four non-permanent council members have raised a variety of concerns - Libya, Indonesia, South Africa and Vietnam. Britain and France, who co-sponsored the resolution, put off the vote from Saturday until Monday to try to get them on board, but council diplomats said it was doubtful all four would vote in favour of the resolution. Britain's UN Ambassador John Sawers said on Thursday the resolution would definitely be approved, but he added: 'We think the wider the base of support, the clearer the political signal' sent to Iran. Libya's UN Ambassador Giadalla Ettalhi told reporters last Monday that he would vote against the draft resolution circulating at that time, which is very similar to the final draft. And Indonesia's UN Ambassador Marty Natalegawa reiterated his country's serious concerns on Thursday, saying the resolution 'raised more questions than answers.' One concern raised by the four countries is the latest report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Feb 22 which said suspicions about most past Iranian nuclear activities had eased or been laid to rest. The Libyan and Indonesian envoys stressed that this indicated progress, and questioned

the need for additional sanctions. The Americans and their European allies countered that the report from the UN nuclear watchdog confirmed that Iran has continued to enrich uranium, in defiance of Security Council resolutions, and demanded that Teheran suspend its uranium centrifuge programme. The IAEA also reported that Iran rejected new documents that link Teheran to missile and explosives experiments and other work connected to a possible nuclear weapons programme. Iran called the information false and irrelevant, and Iran's UN Ambassador Mohammad Khazee accused an Iranian opposition group listed as a terrorist group by the US and European Union of feeding fabricated evidence to Washington. One council diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue disputed his claim, saying the information came from an Iranian defector. Iran insists its enrichment activities are intended only for peaceful civilian purposes, but the US, the EU and others suspect its real aim is to produce atomic weapons. Iran rejected the two previous Security Council resolutions as 'illegal', saying it will never give up its right under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to enrich uranium and produce nuclear fuel. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the IAEA report vindicated Iran's nuclear programme and left no justification for any Security Council sanctions - a view he reiterated Saturday, saying in a television interview that new sanctions would prove criticism of Iran's nuclear program is entirely politically motivated. 'We said from the beginning that it was a political pretext not a legal and technical issue,' Mr Ahmadinejad added. The draft Security Council resolution would freeze the assets of about a dozen companies and a dozen individuals with links to Iran's nuclear or ballistic missile programmes. It would require countries to 'exercise vigilance' and report the travel or transit of those individuals.

[Iran rules out nuclear talks outside IAEA: Ahmadinejad](#)

AFP – 5 March 2008

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Wednesday Iran would not hold talks outside the UN atomic watchdog over its nuclear programme, after the Security Council urged Tehran to resume dialogue with the European Union. 'Iran will not negotiate with anyone with regard to its nuclear issue,' Mr Ahmadinejad said after a cabinet meeting, according to state news agency IRNA. 'From now on, the nuclear issue of Iran will be only in the UN nuclear agency and in the framework of mutual commitments and nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT),' he added. His comments came after six world powers on Monday urged EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana to resume talks with Iran's nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili following the latest sanctions imposed against Teheran.

[US pushes India on nuclear deal](#)

AFP – 5 March 2008

The United States on Wednesday urged India to quickly complete all steps required to conclude a civilian nuclear technology deal with Washington before the US presidential polls in November. 'Time is very tight' to get the deal through the US Congress before the United States goes into election mode, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Richard Boucher, told reporters in New Delhi. 'I am certainly aware that things fall apart

... but on the other hand, my job is to make things work. What I am focused on right now is how to make things succeed. We both want this to happen,' said Mr Boucher, who is on a two day visit. 'We are kind of playing in overtime right now,' added the diplomat, the latest in a line of US officials who have recently told India to move ahead with the deal. The agreement, which would give New Delhi crucial access to civilian atomic technology even though it has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, requires final approval of the US Congress - where it currently has bipartisan support. But before that, India needs approval from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to place India's civilian nuclear reactors under UN safeguards. It also needs the approval of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which regulates global civilian nuclear trade. Stiff opposition from Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Communist allies, who prop up his minority Congress-led government, has held up the deal. New Delhi has completed five rounds of talks with the UN atomic watchdog in Vienna with the Indian Express newspaper reporting on Wednesday that India and the IAEA were close to finalising the text of their pact.

[US sees no breakthrough in N. Korea nuclear talks](#)

AFP – 14 March 2008

North Korean and US negotiators failed to reach any breakthrough in talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme and do not plan to resume negotiations on Friday, the chief US negotiator said. 'It was good consultations but we are not there yet,' Mr Christopher Hill told journalists late on Thursday outside the US mission in Geneva after meeting his North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-gwan. 'We are going to report to our capitals,' he said, adding there are no plans for now to continue the talks on Friday. Earlier in the day, Mr Hill had hinted the talks might be extended, but by late evening he simply said: 'We had a long day of discussions, (and) we are in a better position now than when we arrived.' The two sides talked about a host of sensitive issues including uranium enrichment and humanitarian assistance, he added. North Korea last year signed a landmark deal to abandon all its nuclear weapons in exchange for badly needed energy and economic aid and major security and diplomatic benefits. But the process - involving China, Japan, both Koreas, Russia and the United States - has been stalled since North Korea missed an end-2007 deadline to declare all its nuclear programmes and disable its plutonium plant. Mr Hill insisted earlier that Washington needed a full and frank declaration, and that verbal assurances would not suffice. We cannot be flexible on the fact that we need a complete and correct declaration,' Mr Hill said. At stake is a US call for North Korea to clarify its suspected uranium enrichment programme (UEP) and secret nuclear technology transfers to Syria - both of which are denied by Pyongyang.