

## Contemporary Conflict

- [UNHCR: Up to 85,000 people to flee Sri Lanka war](#)
- [Mullen, Gates Vow to Combat Taliban's Rise](#)
- [U.S.: 12,000 Troops to Leave Iraq by September](#)
- [Sri Lanka says 250 rebels killed in fierce clashes](#)

## Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism

- [Abu Sayyaf back to terror](#)
- [Pakistan: Gunmen attack Sri Lanka's cricket team](#)
- [Jemaah Islamiyah remains potent threat in Southeast Asia](#)

## Diplomacy & Defence Strategy

- [Malaysia wants Myanmar to be open about refugee problem](#)
- [U.N. begins work to outline 1<sup>st</sup> treaty to restrict conventional arms trade](#)
- [North Korea holds rare DMZ meeting with U.N. forces](#)
- [Saudi urges joint Arab strategy on Iran](#)
- [Russia-NATO Council 'could restart this month'](#)
- [South Korea and Australia announce security pact](#)
- [South Korea and Indonesia agree to boost cooperation](#)
- [Latin Defense Chiefs Urge End to Cuban Embargo](#)
- [France Will Take Full NATO Membership Again, With Greater Military Role](#)
- [Obama Team Plots Opening of Iran Ties](#)
- [Obama Calls for Military Dialogue With China](#)
- [China: Manila's move on islands 'illegal'](#)

## Defence Acquisition and Technology

- [New Space Launch Center to be built in Hainan](#)
- [India plans to modernise defence forces despite economic slowdown](#)
- [Asia to lead arms spending](#)
- [Russian-Chinese Su-33 fighter deal collapses](#)
- [India to deploy space-based surveillance systems for ballistic missile defense shield](#)

## Non-Traditional Security

- [ASEAN countries sign petroleum security deal](#)
- [Japan to deploy 2 destroyers, 400 personnel for anti-piracy mission off Somalia](#)
- [Japan, China to coordinate moves on antipiracy missions off Somalia](#)

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)



- [S. Korea-Japan talks on EEZ end without deal](#)
- [US: Cyberdefense policy in flux](#)

## **Military / Peacekeeping / Humanitarian Operations**

- [Cambodia to host ASEAN-US military exercise in 2010](#)
- [Thailand invites Philippines to join annual multinational exercises](#)
- ['Aman 09' naval exercises in Pakistan](#)
- [Pentagon: Chinese Ships Harass U.S. Navy Vessel](#)
- [Indian navy invited to patrol Malacca](#)

## **WMD Proliferation**

- [Russia Set Against Extending START Treaty: Lavrov](#)
- [France to send huge nuclear fuel shipment to Japan](#)
- [India successfully tests missile interceptor](#)
- [India secures weakened nuclear safeguards protocol](#)
- [North Korea declares rocket plans](#)

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [UNHCR: Up to 85,000 people to flee Sri Lanka war](#)

Reuters – February 28

Up to 85,000 civilians trapped in northeastern Sri Lanka could flee the war zone in coming weeks as the army closes in on rebel-held territory, the United Nations refugee agency said on Friday.

The Sri Lankan government has allocated 300 acres of land where the UNHCR can receive up to 42,000 people by the end of next week, spokesman William Spindler said, citing the need to double the space to accommodate uprooted people in the region.

Aid agencies estimate 200,000 people are trapped in a narrow 12-km war zone on the northeastern coast, where the military has boxed in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels.

"Given the magnitude of the civilian population still trapped inside the LTTE-held territory and expected to flee into government-controlled areas as military operations advance further, UNHCR has requested the government of Sri Lanka to provide another 300 acres to bring the total potential reception capacity to 85,000 persons," Spindler told a news briefing.

Some 36,000 displaced Sri Lankans have already fled to government-controlled areas of Vavuniya and Jaffna, according to the U.N.'s World Food Programme (WFP), which delivered 40 metric tonnes of food by tugboat to the northern government-designated safe zone in the Vanni area on Thursday.

It was its first delivery in six weeks after WFP land convoys were interrupted by the fighting on Jan. 16, WFP spokeswoman Emilia Casella said. The agency hopes to deliver up to 300 metric tonnes of food per week, she said.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Mullen, Gates Vow to Combat Taliban's Rise](#)

*Defense News* – March 1

Top military and defense officials March 1 declined to confirm or deny a suspected U.S. missile strike in northwest Pakistan but said Washington was determined to counter militants operating on the border with Afghanistan.

Asked if two suspected missile strikes were proof that President Barack Obama was escalating U.S. attacks on al-Qaida and Taliban militants in Pakistan, top military officer Admiral Mike Mullen said: "Well, I'm not going to talk a lot about our operations specifically." "There is a continuing concern with the existence of the safe haven in Pakistan, and that has to be addressed, has been addressed and needs to continue to be addressed," Mullen said in an interview on "Fox News Sunday."

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates also declined to discuss possible U.S. missile strikes when asked about covert action possibly fomenting turmoil in Pakistan. "Well, I'm not going get into any intelligence operations," Gates told NBC's "Meet the Press."

Their comments came after security officials in Pakistan said at least eight people were killed in two suspected U.S. missile strikes in the northwest, near the Afghan border.

The tribal South Waziristan region bordering Afghanistan is known as a haven for Taliban and al-Qaida extremists.

Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said NATO-led troops were working with Pakistani and Afghan forces to counter al-Qaida and allied insurgents operating in the border region.

"We've brought pressure on both sides of the border, Pakistani military as well as coalition forces and Afghan forces, and we did toward the end of 2008 and that will continue to happen, and we need to continue to bring that pressure on both sides and continue to coordinate those operations," Mullen said.

The attack March 1 was the fourth suspected missile strike by unmanned U.S. aircraft since President Barack Obama took office Jan. 20.

A suspected U.S. missile strike Feb 16 destroyed an Afghan Taliban camp and killed 26 in Pakistan's northwest tribal area of Kurram.

While the Pakistani government has pledged support for the U.S. fight against terrorist threats, the strikes have fueled anti-American sentiments in Pakistan and particularly in the tribal belt, where Washington says al-Qaida and Taliban operate from sanctuaries.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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# révolutionnaire

06/2009

01 Mar 09 – 12 Mar 09

Gates said U.S. officials held productive talks with their Pakistani counterparts last week in Washington and said the U.S. government wanted to help "enable" Islamabad to fight al-Qaida and associated groups operating on the border with Afghanistan.

"I will just say that I think that the key here is our being able to cooperate with and enable the Pakistanis to be able to deal with this problem on their own sovereign territory," Gates said.

"I believe based on my talks with the Pakistanis here in Washington this past week, that they clearly now understand that what's going on up there in that border area is as big a risk to the stability of Pakistan as it is a problem for us in Afghanistan," he said.

The tribal areas have been wracked by violence since hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaida rebels sought refuge in the region after the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan toppled the Taliban regime in late 2001. "I think as long as they have a safe haven to operate there - it's going to be a problem for us," Gates said.

Recalling his work for the Central Intelligence Agency during the Cold War when the United States sought to undermine Soviet troops in Afghanistan, Gates said he understood all too well the effect of a cross-border haven. "After all, 20 years ago, I was on the other side of that border as deputy director of CIA - fighting the Soviets. And we had the safe haven in Pakistan. "And let me tell you. It made a big difference."

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [U.S.: 12,000 Troops to Leave Iraq by September](#)

*Defense News* – March 8

The United States will pull 12,000 troops out of Iraq by the end of September, Baghdad government spokesman Ali Dabbagh announced March 8, marking an acceleration of the U.S. withdrawal. "We have agreed that a total of 12,000 U.S. troops will be withdrawn by the end of September 2009," he said.

Under a U.S.-Iraqi security agreement signed in November during President George W. Bush's tenure, U.S. troops are to withdraw from towns and cities by June 30 and from the whole country by the end of 2011. Some 140,000 U.S. troops are currently deployed in Iraq - down from a peak of about 160,000 during the "surge" offensive against insurgents and al-Qaida in 2007. "The Iraqi government has no intention of keeping foreign forces in the country after 2011," Dabbagh told a press conference. "Iraq's armed forces are under construction," he added, standing next to coalition forces spokesman Maj. Gen. David Perkins of the U.S. Army. "We do not consider the Iraqi security forces are ready. Iraqi forces need to be equipped and trained, Dabbagh said. "By 2011 they will be able to stand on their own. We are confident of the fact that the security agreement will be respected."

Perkins said the U.S. forces would be reduced from 14 to 12 brigades. The 12,000 men would be from two combat brigades, including the 4th Brigade, 82nd Airborne and Marines battalions, as well as their support staff in the military police, engineers, logistics and transport. An F-16 squadron would be pulled out, too, and will not be replaced. "We will not leave any seams with regard to security," Perkins said. "We know how to do this. This is not the first time we have done this."

U.S. President Barack Obama has announced an end to combat operations in Iraq within 18 months, but details of withdrawals had remained sketchy. U.S. counter-terrorism and training forces numbering up to 50,000 are to remain in Iraq until a full withdrawal by the end of 2011. "In addition, 4,000 British troops will withdraw in July 2009 according to an agreement between the United Kingdom and Iraq," Dabbagh said. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown visited Iraq in December and announced his country's 4,100 troops would leave by the end of July, but their mission would already be complete "by the end of May, or earlier."

British forces on Jan. 1 handed over control of Basra airport, its main military base in the south, to Iraqi officials. British troops had withdrawn from Basra city in September. British troops have since been training the Iraqi army and after the full withdrawal, a small contingent of military advisors is likely to stay on in Iraq.

Security has improved dramatically in Iraq since late 2007 bringing a fragile stability, but attacks remain common in the capital, in confessionally divided Diyala province and around the main northern city of Mosul, which is split between Sunni Arabs, Christians and Kurds.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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# révolutionnaire

06/2009

01 Mar 09 – 12 Mar 09

A suicide bomber on a bicycle blew himself up killing at least 28 people and wounding 58 more outside a police academy in the Iraqi capital March 8 in the bloodiest attack in weeks. On March 5, a truck bomb killed 10 people and wounded more than 50 at a crowded livestock market near Hilla, a mainly Shiite provincial capital south of Baghdad.

That blast was the deadliest single attack in the country since a suicide bomber killed 35 pilgrims heading to the shrine city of Karbala south of Baghdad in February.

Some 258 Iraqis were killed in violence in February, a sharp rise from the previous month that saw the lowest casualty figures since the U.S.-led invasion of March 2003, according to government statistics.

The February death toll was up 35 percent on January's total of 191, which was the lowest figure since 2003. A total of 4,556 U.S. soldiers have died in Iraq over the past six years as well as 179 British soldiers.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Sri Lanka says 250 rebels killed in fierce clashes](#)

*Channel News Asia* – March 10

The Sri Lankan military said Monday its troops had killed at least 250 Tamil Tigers during a weekend of fierce fighting around the rebels' shrinking hideout in the northeast of the island. Army spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said the Tigers, boxed into an area of less than 50 square kilometres, had launched a series of counter-attacks against advancing troops in the district of Mullaittivu.

The military said it had killed 100 rebels in clashes on Friday and Saturday. On Monday it said it found another 80 bodies from Sunday's fighting. But Nanayakkara said at least 150 Tigers had been killed, calling it the bloodiest day for the guerrillas in the latest military campaign aimed at completely defeating them. "We have killed over 150 Tigers on Sunday and that is the biggest loss for them in a single battle," Nanayakkara said adding that troops used special forces, artillery guns and aircraft to pound rebel strong points. "Security forces also lost a few soldiers... and a few (were) wounded," he said, without giving precise figures for government casualties. He added that a large haul of guns and ammunition were found.

The Sri Lankan government bars most journalists and aid workers from the north of the island, meaning the claims cannot be verified. On Sunday, the defence ministry announced that the fighting had reached the "final phase" of operations against Tiger rebels, who have been leading a campaign for a separate Tamil state since 1972.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last week reiterated his call for a swift halt to the conflict to avoid further civilian casualties after the International Red Cross said in January hundreds had been killed. Sri Lanka officially estimates that 70,000 civilians remain trapped in the war zone along with around 500 Tiger fighters, but the United Nations says the number of non-combatants could be about 200,000.

The government also insists it is trying to aid civilians and accuses the Tigers of using them as "human shields". Another 200 civilians crossed the front lines and sought shelter with government forces on Sunday, the defence ministry said, adding that a 17-year-old girl was wounded while trying to escape. Some 36,000 people have already sought shelter with security forces since January.

The army spokesman said the Tigers had on Monday fired at a ship carrying emergency supplies for the trapped civilians in a government-declared no-fire zone in Mullaittivu district. "The captain took the ship out to deep sea to prevent any damage," Nanayakkara said. "Hopefully, the ship will return and unload the remaining cargo, once it is safe." However, the foreign ministry said reports from local UN officials in the area indicated that there was no attack against the ship and unloading would go ahead depending on weather in the area. The government withdrew from a Norwegian-brokered truce at the start of last year, after accusing the Tigers of using a peace process only to re-arm.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Abu Sayyaf back to terror](#)

*The Washington Times* – February 27

Not long ago, the al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf group was dismissed as all but dead, thanks to a much-heralded joint effort against terrorism by the U.S. and the Philippine military. Now there is fear that the Abu Sayyaf may be coming back.

The group is blamed for a spate of kidnappings in recent months, including that of a Sri Lankan peace worker on southern Basilan Island earlier this month. In 2008, Abu Sayyaf raised more than \$1.5 million through ransoms, and its ranks rose to 400 members from 383 in 2007, a confidential government report noted. Also, new leaders are rising to take the place of those captured by U.S.-backed troops.

The rebirth of Abu Sayyaf raises renewed fears of terrorism. So far, Abu Sayyaf has focused on raising money through kidnappings, but it is likely to pursue high-profile assaults to reassert its stature as a terror group, the report noted. Abu Sayyaf has also allowed foreign militants, mostly members of the regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah, to make the region their home.

"As long as they are there, they can provide safe haven for Jemaah Islamiyah where they can train the next generation of bombers and terrorists. That's why they're a threat," said Col. William Coultrup, who heads the U.S. counterterrorism forces on the island of Mindanao.

Abu Sayyaf, which means "father of the swordsman" in Arabic, was founded in 1991 in Basilan province and supported by Asian and Middle Eastern radical groups. It came to the attention of the U.S. in 2001, when three Americans were among 20 people taken from a tony Philippine resort.

Abu Sayyaf was also thought to be sheltering Indonesian members of Jemaah Islamiyah, including Umar Patek and Dulmatin. The two are suspected of masterminding the Bali nightclub bombings that killed 202 people in 2002 and then fleeing to Abu Sayyaf strongholds in Mindanao to evade a crackdown on terror in Indonesia.

The Philippine military did not have the funds for a full-out assault against Abu Sayyaf, so American troops came in with weapons, combat training and surveillance. They helped rein in a brief but brutal era of mass kidnappings, bombings and beheadings by the militants. Washington has poured millions of dollars into the Philippines in military assistance and civic projects.

Amid its problems in Iraq, Washington hailed the success against Abu Sayyaf, and life and commerce bounced back on Basilan. But in 2004, Abu Sayyaf and Indonesian militants were blamed for a bombing that ignited an inferno in a ferry near Manila Bay, killing 116 people. Abu Sayyaf also espoused a more violent "jihad," or holy war, in Mindanao, where more than 120,000 people have died in decades-long Muslim separatist unrest.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

Last year, Abu Sayyaf kidnapped at least 12 people in Jolo Island, Basilan and three other southern provinces, including a TV news team, according to the government report. Several captives have been ransomed off since, but 10, including three Red Cross workers taken on Jan. 15, remain in Abu Sayyaf's hands. Snatched from a car at gunpoint on Sulu province's Jolo Island after inspecting a jail water project, the missing Red Cross workers - two Europeans and a Filipina - are being held in the lush jungle.

On Feb. 13, Sri Lankan peace activist Umar Jaleel was snatched from his Basilan residence. Abu Sayyaf's comeback is led by a new generation of leaders, said Maj. Gen. Juancho Sabban, who heads a Jolo anti-terrorism task force. "All the Abu Sayyaf's ideologues are dead; the ones left behind are bandits," Gen. Sabban said. "The support they're counting on from other countries has vanished. Now, everybody's on his own, trying to raise money through kidnappings. They say they're fighting for a cause? No way."

Out of the 24 original leaders and militants whose faces were on a wanted poster widely distributed across the sprawling archipelago, only nine remain at large. The rest are dead or in jail, their faces marked off one by one. Abu Sayyaf's oldest, ailing commander, one-armed Radulan Sahiron, is missing, and vanished after a Dec. 7 clash that killed his cherished white horse, said Gen. Sabban.

Among the new leaders is the colorful Albader Parad, who was just a scrawny foot soldier with an M203 grenade launcher dangling from his small frame nine years ago. Parad was involved in a 2000 mass kidnapping from the Sipadan resort in nearby Malaysia that netted 10 Europeans and 11 other people. When the kidnappers allowed a group of journalists to visit the hostages, Parad swiped the watch of an Associated Press reporter.

A military dossier seen by the AP described Parad as coming from a poor family in which most relatives belonged to the Abu Sayyaf or had links to it. He has amassed 20 million pesos (more than \$400,000) from a string of early 2000 abductions, some of which was invested by relatives in passenger transport and coconut farmlands, according to the military dossier.

"We want the military to pull out. If not, we won't talk to anyone," Parad said in a video aired in early February by the ABS-CBN news network, boldly showing his face to the camera while a bunch of masked gunmen stood behind him in the woods near Jolo's Indanan township.

Philippine government via Associated Press Abu Sayyaf militants set up camp in the thick jungles of Jolo in the southern Philippines, the terror group's stronghold. After the 2001 kidnappings of three Americans, the U.S. military helped the Philippine government fight the group.

Behind the scenes, there are widespread reports that Parad is privately seeking money to free the hostages. Parad was one of the earliest new Abu Sayyaf commanders to emerge, but he has plenty of

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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violent company at the top. There are at least three others, according to the government security threats report and a military official.

The report said two new commanders now lead their own factions - Nurhassan Jamiri from Basilan and Sulaiman Pattah from Jolo, both predominantly Muslim provinces in the country's most destitute region.

Jamiri, who is in his 20s, has been linked to kidnappings and the beheading of 10 marines during a 2007 clash. Pattah, a one-armed militant, gained notoriety for reportedly helping lead last year's kidnapping of popular TV news anchor Ces Drilon and her two crewmen in Jolo.

Another new commander is Furuji Indama, marine Lt. Col. Leonard Vincent Teodoro told the AP. He helps lead the same faction as Jamiri and has been blamed for kidnappings and other terrorist attacks in Basilan, said Gen. Teodoro, who has overseen assaults against the two.

Even the government concedes that the battle against one of Southeast Asia's most violent groups is far from over. "I think they've morphed into something else, just like ... criminal gangs," Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro told the AP

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Gunmen attack Sri Lanka's cricket team in Pakistan, 8 dead](#)

*Channel News Asia* – March 3

Pakistan: Attackers armed with guns and grenades launched a brazen assault on Sri Lanka's cricket team in Pakistan on Tuesday, killing eight people and wounding seven members of the squad.

The brazen attack in the city of Lahore sparked condemnation from around the world and threw a massive question mark over the future of the game in the troubled nation - a co-host for the 2011 cricket World Cup. "The plan was apparently to kill the Sri Lankan team but the police came in the way and forced the attackers to run away," Lahore's police chief Habib-ur Rehman said. "They appeared to be well-trained terrorists," he told reporters.

Rehman said up to 12 gunmen ambushed the team's convoy close to the Gaddafi stadium with rockets, hand grenades and automatic weapons, unleashing a fierce gunbattle with security forces. The gunmen, who appeared young and well-trained, fled in stolen vehicles, triggering a giant manhunt. Pakistani officials said the incident showed marked similarities to November's devastating Mumbai attacks.

It was the first deadly attack against a sports team in this nuclear-armed country, where more than 1,600 people have died in a wave of Islamist attacks in 21 months, and where Al-Qaeda and Taliban shelter in its northwest. Witnesses said the upmarket district of Lahore, home to designer boutiques, was transformed into a battle zone as gunmen hidden behind trees opened fire in a sophisticated, coordinated attack. "The gunmen targeted the wheels of the bus first, and then the bus. We all dived to the floor to take cover," Sri Lanka's captain Mahela Jayawardene told Cricinfo.

Most of the team's injuries appeared to be minor and the players owed their "lives" to the bus driver for his courage under fire, he said. Police chief Rehman said the toll could have been higher, as the attackers fired a rocket which missed the bus, then threw grenades underneath which failed to explode. A police official said two civilians and six policemen were killed in the attack. A Pakistani umpire and 10 policemen were wounded along with the seven Sri Lankan players and assistant coach Paul Farbrace, a British national.

Star batsman Thilan Samaraweera, who completed his second double-century in consecutive matches on Monday, and Tharanga Paranavithana were treated in hospital but were out of danger. Skipper Jayawardene, vice-captain Kumar Sangakkara, spin bowler Ajantha Mendis, Thilina Thushara and Suranga Lokumal all escaped with minor injuries. The Sri Lankan cricketers were airlifted from Gaddafi Stadium by helicopter, then flew out of Lahore late Tuesday in a specially chartered plane, abandoning a tour which was only arranged when India refused to visit in the wake of Mumbai.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the violence and ordered an inquiry, while Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse called the incident a "cowardly terrorist attack". US President

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

Barack Obama said he was "deeply concerned" about the latest violence to hit Washington's "war on terror" ally, while British Foreign Secretary David Miliband condemned the incident "unreservedly".

Experts recovered rocket-propelled grenades, shotguns, 32 grenades, plastic explosives, five pistols and walkie talkies, said Punjab police chief Khalid Farooq. Blood stained the front seats of a vehicle used by Pakistan's elite force that had been assigned to protect the team, its wheels shot up and radio system disabled.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility although fears of an attack by Islamic militants linked to Al-Qaeda have caused many cricket teams to cancel tours to Pakistan in recent years.

Pakistani officials said the attack bore all the hallmarks of the November 2008 assault on the Indian city of Mumbai, which was blamed on Pakistan-based Islamic militants. They said they were interrogating five people about the attackers. India said Pakistan needed to dismantle its "infrastructure of terrorism" and that security for the Sri Lankans had been "hopelessly inadequate." The attack also came as the Sri Lankan army pressed its final offensive against ethnic Tamil rebels in the north of the country in a civil war that has cost tens of thousands of lives.

The International Cricket Council cast doubt on Pakistan's hopes of remaining a co-host of the 2011 World Cup, saying the attacks had changed the global landscape of the game. Security fears stopped Australia touring Pakistan last year and New Zealand also turned down a one-day series. Last month, concerns raised by other teams forced the ICC to move the 2009 Champions Trophy out of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Cricket Board said the attack was "beyond (its) control," adding that it was "deeply shocked" by the incident.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Jemaah Islamiyah remains potent threat in Southeast Asia](#)

*Philstar* – March 3

The al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group remains a potent security threat in Southeast Asia. Security officials acknowledged the continued threat of the Jakarta-based Jemaah Islamiyah international terrorist network during the 27th Chairmen's Conference of the Philippines-Indonesia Border Crossing Committee held in the North Sulawesi capital of Manado.

Armed Forces Eastern Mindanao Command chief Maj. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer, chairman of the Philippine delegation, cited the need to further strengthen bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and the Philippines to address the continued security threats brought about by the JI. Indonesian Maj. Gen. Djoko Susilo Utomo likewise emphasized the importance of enhancing the capabilities of both countries in patrolling the border of their territorial waters as a way of addressing the security threat.

Both countries have also intensified intelligence gathering and reciprocal information sharing in the pursuit of the same goal, to put an end to the operation of the JI terrorist network.

Ferrer said security in the border between the territorial waters of Indonesia and Philippines has to be further tightened. Authorities said there are more than 26,000 boat trips between Indonesia and the Philippines that have not been properly documented. JI members were among those who travel undetected by boat through the route to Mindanao. The JI has reportedly been responsible for bombings in Mindanao and Manila as well as those in Jakarta and the resort island of Bali.

A document on counter-terrorism obtained by The STAR pointed to an Indonesian national, a certain Imam Lamai, as the JI financier, while one Abdul Sakim Sali, alias Commander Kidlat, was identified as the team leader of the local JI in the Philippines.

A Malaysian national, one alias Al Poze, and an Indonesian national, one alias Joling, were reported to be the organizers of the JI based in Camp Khalid in Maasim, Sarangani province.

Another Indonesian national, one Elmer Ambran also known as Elmer Enuran, is said to be the finance officer of the JI's operation in the Philippines. A certain Ustadz Usman Colano has also been identified as the contact of JI financier Imam Lamai. Authorities are also monitoring the local counterparts of the foreign terrorists operating in the Philippines. The hunt for JI Bali bomber Dulmatin also continues as he is believed to have sought refuge among his supporters in Sulu.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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[Malaysia wants Myanmar to be open about refugee problem](#)

*The Star* – February 27

The problem of Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar has become a regional problem and Malaysia wants the military junta to address the matter.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim raised the issue at the Asean Foreign Ministers informal dinner on Thursday night where he stressed to Myanmar that the problem was immense. “We need to float this matter as something that Asean must look at and the best level to discuss this is at the foreign ministers level,” he said.

“The difficulties are immense because no one authority is in charge of this exodus. “The data seems to be different from one authority to the other. There are authorities that say Malaysia has no less than 14,000 but these are (just) the registered ones, so there could be more,” he told Malaysian journalists.

Lately Indonesia has been facing an incoming exodus of Rohingyas after allegations that the Thai navy turned them away from their shores after fleeing from Myanmar.

Dr Rais said Malaysia and Indonesia should be together in voicing the matter to Myanmar which he said appeared to be avoiding the problem. “Myanmar must understand this is their problem as much as ours,” he said. “We understand these people are encouraged to leave but we do not know the actual story. So we would like Myanmar to be open about it.”

He said that if Myanmar refused to own up to the issue, it would become a worldwide problem and the United Nations might have to step in.

Dr Rais also said Malaysia was working towards getting a separate statement on Gaza to be issued by Asean leaders at the 14th Asean summit this weekend. The matter was raised at Asean seniors officials meeting Thursday.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [U.N. begins work to outline 1<sup>st</sup> treaty to restrict conventional arms trade](#)

*Breitbart* – March 2

A U.N. General Assembly expert panel convened its first meeting Monday to outline what would be the first international treaty aimed at restricting trade in conventional weapons.

The move is in response to calls for formulating an international framework to restrict imports and exports of conventional weapons such as small arms and light weapons. At present, a global framework exists to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

The expert panel was set up based on a resolution the General Assembly adopted in December 2006. The resolution was drafted by seven countries including Japan, Britain and Australia.

At Monday's meeting, Japan and other countries cited the need for making a treaty to restrict the arms trade in order to prevent flows of weapons into conflict-hit areas and to terrorist organizations.

The current discussions will continue for about one week with the expert panel following up twice a year in the future, U.N. diplomatic sources said, adding that the United Nations aims to begin negotiations on the proposed international treaty by the end of 2010.

The biggest challenge facing U.N. members at the expert panel is how to persuade major weapons-trading nations such as the United States, Russia and China to agree to start negotiations, the sources said.

The panel's second meeting in July is expected to focus on the definition of conventional weapons whose trade is to be restricted and the specific content of restrictive measures, the sources said.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [North Korea holds rare DMZ meeting with U.N. forces](#)

Reuters – March 2

North Korean generals met the U.S.-led U.N. military command in South Korea for the first time in about seven years on Monday after Pyongyang warned at the weekend "arrogant" acts by U.S. troops could spark a war. Local news reports said the North had protested against joint U.S.-South Korean military drills that will be held from next week and the activities of American troops stationed in South Korea to support its soldiers. "North Korea argued that holding the joint military training at a moment when the situation on the Korean peninsula is already tense would only raise more tension," the South's Yonhap news agency quoted a military source as saying.

Prickly North Korea has stoked tensions in recent weeks by readying a test flight of its longest-range missile, which is designed to carry a weapon as far as Alaska but has never successfully flown, U.S. and South Korean officials say. North Korea also has severed dialogue with the South and threatened to reduce its neighbor to ashes in anger at President Lee Myung-bak's policy of cutting off what once had been a free flow of unconditional aid and instead tying handouts to the North's nuclear disarmament.

In Washington, a U.S. State Department official played down any prospect of the United States postponing the joint exercises with South Korea because of North Korean protest. "The idea that we would change that planned calendar is not one that anybody has presented to me," said the official, who spoke to reporters on condition that he not be identified. Asked if he had any indication of a postponement, the official replied: "None whatsoever." The U.N. Command said in a statement the North requested the meeting, which lasted half an hour, to "discuss issues of mutual trust and tension reduction."

Talks were held at the Panmunjom truce village inside the Demilitarized Zone that has divided the peninsula since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a ceasefire. The two sides agreed to meet again, it said.

### "RESOLUTE COUNTERACTION"

The North's KCNA news agency on Saturday quoted a North Korean military official as saying: "If the U.S. forces keep behaving arrogantly in the area under the control of the North and the South, the (North's) Korean People's Army will take a resolute counteraction." The official said U.S. troops had come near the actual border several times over the past two months. The Pentagon sought to present the meeting in a positive light. "We think that discussions of this nature can be very useful in building trust and preventing misunderstanding," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said. "It is a positive development."

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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# révolutionnaire

06/2009

01 Mar 09 – 12 Mar 09

The border, called the Military Demarcation Line, is at the center of the 4-km-wide (2.5-mile-wide) DMZ -- a no man's land buffer zone. North Korea positions most of its 1.2 million troops near the DMZ.

North Korean, South Korean and U.S. soldiers are on their respective sides of the Military Demarcation Line on a daily basis at Panmunjom, where low-level meetings can be arranged by shouting into a bullhorn to the other side. U.S.-led U.N. forces signed the armistice in 1953 and the United States has kept troops in the South after the fighting formally ended to deter North Korea from attacking again. There are about 28,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea to support its 670,000 soldiers.

The new U.S. government will be sending Stephen Bosworth, its special envoy for North Korea, to the region this week with stops in China, Japan and South Korea, the State Department said. In Seoul, Bosworth will likely meet Wi Sung-lac, a specialist in North American affairs and adviser to the foreign minister, who was named on Monday as South Korea's new chief to six-country talks on ending the North's nuclear program.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Saudi urges joint Arab strategy on Iran](#)

*Middle East Online* – March 3

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal called on Tuesday for a joint Arab strategy to deal with the "Iranian challenge" at a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in the Egyptian capital. "In order to cement Arab reconciliation we need a common vision for issues that concern Arab security and deal with the Iranian challenge," he said. The relationship between Sunni-ruled Arab states in the Gulf, including oil kingpin Saudi Arabia, and Shiite Iran has long been strained amid US concern about Tehran's nuclear programme.

At the UN General Assembly last year, the Saudi prince urged Iran to comply with its nuclear obligations to spare the Middle East "devastating conflicts, futile arms races and serious environmental hazards." The US fears Iran is secretly trying to build an atomic bomb but Tehran insists its nuclear drive is entirely peaceful and aimed at generating electricity for its growing population.

IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei had recently suggested that nuclear weapons states bore some blame for other countries seeking such arms, because they are modernizing arsenals rather than scrapping them. The US, France and Britain are three nuclear weapons states that have ratified the Nonproliferation Treaty.

"How can I go with a straight face to the non-nuclear-weapon states and tell them nuclear weapons are no good for you, while the weapon states continue to modernize and to say 'we absolutely need nuclear weapons,'" ElBaradei said.

Iran insists it has the right to develop nuclear technology, which it says is aimed at generating energy for its growing population. Israel is the only country in the Middle East that actually has nuclear weapons. Observers say due the strong Jewish and pro-Israel lobbies in the US and some European countries, these countries have taken a hypocritical stance in relation to nuclear issues in the region.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [Russia-NATO Council 'could restart this month'](#)

*RIA Novosti* – March 4

The work of the Russia-NATO Council, frozen after the war with Georgia last August, could resume later this month, the Russian envoy to the military alliance said on Wednesday. "I expect a formal Russia-NATO Council meeting to be held during March," Dmitry Rogozin said.

A NATO spokesman said earlier today that Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer hopes a March 5 NATO foreign ministerial meeting will decide to resume the work of the Russia-NATO Council. Rogozin said a council meeting on the defense and foreign ministerial level could take place in May or June. He also said that the "period of estrangement" in Russia-NATO relations is "largely behind us."

Rogozin took part in an informal meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels last Wednesday, the second meeting between the Russian representative and 26 NATO envoys since ties were frozen following the Russia-Georgia conflict.

The Russian envoy earlier said Scheffer had been invited to attend a Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Moscow on March 27, which would discuss, among other things, the situation in Afghanistan and its impact on neighboring countries.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [South Korea and Australia announce security pact](#)

*International Herald Tribune* – March 5

Australia and South Korea announced Thursday a new joint security cooperation pact, as North Korea reportedly moves ahead with plans to test-fire a long-range missile.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called on North Korea to halt "threatening language" and return to six-country talks aimed at ending the country's nuclear program, and expressed his support for South Korea's efforts to deal with North Korean threats. "I think it would be very wise for the regime in Pyongyang to get back properly to the negotiating table through the six-party talks and to adopt a reasonable posture to bring about a long-term, peaceful solution to the Korean peninsula," Rudd told reporters in the capital of Canberra.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said the secretive communist state was ramping up threats to achieve "a more positive position" at the negotiating table with President Barack Obama's administration over a disarmament-for-aid deal. "That perhaps could be a reason why they decided to ... continue to threaten to test fire a missile," he said. Lee recalled that Australia sent troops to fight in the Korean War from 1950-53.

Last month, South Korea's Defense Ministry said North Korea had recently deployed a new type of medium-range ballistic missile capable of reaching northern Australia and the U.S. territory of Guam. The report comes amid speculation that the isolated regime also is preparing to test-fire another, longer-range missile capable of hitting Alaska.

Lee, meanwhile, criticized China over its commitment this week to boost defense spending by nearly 15 percent. "In Northeast Asia, it is not desirable to have countries engaged in a race for military buildup or increasing their military spending," he said through an interpreter.

The two leaders also announced that their governments would begin negotiations in May on a free trade agreement. Lee is in Australia on a trip that also includes New Zealand and Indonesia.

The new security pact aims to increase cooperation between South Korea and Australia on global disarmament and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It will cover a range of security threats including terrorism, drug smuggling and piracy as well as people and weapons trafficking.

It also aims to increase joint military training exercises and exchanges. And it includes a separate agreement that would ensure safe sharing of classified military information such as defense industry contracts.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

[South Korea and Indonesia agree to boost cooperation](#)

*Channel News Asia* – March 6

South Korea and Indonesia agreed Friday to cooperate more closely on a range of issues including defence, the global financial crisis and alternative sources of energy.

South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed several agreements after talks at the state palace here on the last stop of Lee's three-nation tour, which included Australia and New Zealand. "This meeting will make a big contribution to bilateral and international cooperation," Lee told reporters after the talks, speaking in Korean. "We are facing a world economic crisis. Both countries have had economic difficulties but we will work hand-in-hand in the future," he added.

The two leaders signed a memorandum of understanding to "cooperate more actively" in security and defence issues, Lee said. Both countries are eager to build economic and defence ties and boost cooperation through the ASEAN+3 forum -- the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as China, Japan and South Korea. Indonesia's trade with South Korea has been soaring in recent years, almost doubling in value in 2008 to 20 billion dollars, Yudhoyono said. "We are committed to maintaining investment cooperation between both countries despite the current global economic crisis," he said.

"Apart from trade and investment cooperation, we also discussed cooperation in other sectors including information technology, alternative energy, defence and security, Indonesian workers (in South Korea) and tourism." Indonesia is the second-largest supplier of liquefied natural gas to South Korea, which is the seventh-biggest country of destination for Indonesian non-oil and gas exports. Yuohoyono said the countries had a long history of cooperation in energy, oil and gas but "we agreed that investment and trade in this sector should be improved."

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [Latin Defense Chiefs Urge End to Cuban Embargo](#)

*Defense News* – March 10

A group of South American defense ministers called on the United States on March 10 to lift its embargo against Cuba, saying a change in U.S. policy was long overdue.

Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador took the position at the inaugural session of the newly created South American Defense Council, which includes 12 countries. "A fundamental point is that for the United States to have good relations with South America, it is important that it change its policy toward Cuba," said Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim.

Argentine Defense Minister Nilsa Garre said "the reincorporation of a country that many years ago, too many years ago, was expelled" is a pending issue for the region.

Echoing that view, Chilean Defense Minister Jose Goni said that "in principle, Chile believes that the Latin American community must be integrated by all its members, and that's a position that has been put forward for a long time."

Uruguayan Defense Minister Jose Bayardi also stressed the need for "a change of vision and relations by the United States toward Cuba."

The United States and Cuba do not have full diplomatic relations and Washington has had a full economic embargo on Havana since 1962.

U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged dialogue with all foreign leaders including the U.S.' traditional foes, but so far he has offered few details on how far he might be willing to go in reaching out to Cuba.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [France Will Take Full NATO Membership Again, With Greater Military Role](#)

*The New York Times* – March 11

President Nicolas Sarkozy announced Wednesday that France intended to become a full member of NATO, 43 years after Charles de Gaulle pulled France out of the alliance's military command and threw NATO, and American forces, out of the country.

"Because it is in her interest and because it is her choice, France will take her full place, that of an ally both free and in solidarity, independent but engaged, a country that assumes all its responsibilities, everywhere and speaking to everyone, at the service of our values and of peace," Mr. Sarkozy said.

France is already a major contributor of money and troops to the alliance, but now it will reintegrate into NATO's military command structure.

Several hundred French officers will take up NATO jobs, and France is expected to get two important commands: the Allied Command Transformation project in Virginia, examining a more modern alliance, and the regional command headquarters in Lisbon, which is in charge of NATO's rapid response force.

The issue has been politically delicate, with some in Mr. Sarkozy's own center-right party, as well as on the left, criticizing the move as limiting France's freedom of action in a world dominated by the United States. Some say they believe that the decision will hurt the chances for Europe to develop its own military capacity.

Martine Aubry, the Socialist Party leader, said Wednesday that "nothing today justifies returning to NATO's military command," adding, "There's no hurry, no fundamental need, except this Atlanticism that's becoming an ideology." "Atlanticism" is a code word for pro-Americanism.

In 1966, though, the precursor to the Socialist Party moved a censure motion in Parliament after de Gaulle pulled out of the NATO military command that year. Mr. Sarkozy will write to other NATO members next week, after a parliamentary debate next Tuesday on the decision. Mr. Sarkozy, as president, can decide on his own, but his government will face a no-confidence vote, which it is expected to survive. Speaking in Paris, Mr. Sarkozy repeated his arguments for reintegration, saying that the world had changed, threats had changed and NATO had changed. "European defense will be stronger" when France rejoins the NATO military command, Mr. Sarkozy said. "The Americans understand perfectly well that having weak allies serves nothing."

NATO "is the only international organization where France doesn't seek to be present and influential," he said. "The moment has come to put an end to this situation, since it is in the interest of France and of Europe."

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Obama Team Plots Opening of Iran Ties](#)

*The Wall Street Journal* – March 12

The Obama administration is considering lifting a ban on regular diplomatic contacts with Iran and looking at ways to develop a direct line of communication to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, said officials briefed on the deliberations.

American and European officials say Mr. Khamenei is the only Iranian leader who can make the ultimate decision to suspend or freeze Iran's nuclear program.

"The key issue is now to find a channel to Khamenei," said a senior Western diplomat briefed on the Obama administration's policy review in recent days. "If the supreme leader moves, he's going to do it in a very prudent and incremental way."

The discussions are part of a larger Iran-policy review that the Obama administration is aiming to complete this month, according to U.S. officials.

Advocates say a new opening to informal diplomatic contacts could lead to discussions of sensitive matters such as Iran's nuclear program or its support for the militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah.

The Obama administration's first direct contact with Iranian officials is expected to come later this month at a U.N.-sanctioned conference on Afghanistan in the Netherlands. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other U.S. officials say Washington and Tehran could collaborate in countering the Afghan narcotics trade and weakening the Taliban.

State Department spokesman Robert Wood declined to discuss specifics of the Iran policy review.

The U.S. has tightly controlled all diplomatic contacts with Tehran since the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. American officials are largely banned from talking to Iranian officials at conferences, cocktail parties and the like, unless they get a specific waiver.

Former President George W. Bush granted waivers after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The U.S. sought Iranian support in forming a new Afghan government following the overthrow of the Taliban, and that cooperation is seen as a possible model for future contacts.

The strategists conducting the review have been seeking the views of outside analysts and foreign diplomats. The growing consensus is that the U.S. should seek to begin a dialogue with Iran before June elections there, despite concerns that such recognition could strengthen the position of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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# révolutionnaire

06/2009

01 Mar 09 – 12 Mar 09

According to the officials briefed on the review, the Obama administration is leaning against opening a diplomatic interest section in Tehran in the near term. U.S. and European officials say such a facility could become a target for Iranian groups hostile toward an opening to Washington.

American strategists are also gauging how to place benchmarks and timetables for any negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. The fear is that Tehran will seek to string out the dialogue while continuing to advance its nuclear program and long-range missile capabilities.

"At some point you have to be able to say it's over," said the Western diplomat briefed on the Iran review.

European officials say Iran's deteriorating economy might encourage Tehran to enter a dialogue as a way of easing international sanctions.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Obama Calls for Military Dialogue With China](#)

*The New York Times* – March 12

President Obama told China's foreign minister on Thursday that their two countries need to raise "the level and frequency" of military dialogue "in order to avoid future incidents" like the high seas confrontation between naval vessels this week, the White House said.

The two met in the Oval Office in the highest level contact since a tense encounter Sunday involving a United States Navy survey vessel and five Chinese ships that escalated into what the chief American intelligence officer called the "most serious" military incident with China since 2001.

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi spent two hours at the White House, meeting first with the national security adviser, Gen. James L. Jones, and then with Mr. Obama and Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. The White House played down the meeting, keeping it closed to reporters and news photographers. But it did release its own handout photo afterward.

Mr. Yang made no statements to reporters as he left the White House and did not mention the naval confrontation in a speech elsewhere in Washington earlier in the day.

The incident occurred Sunday about 75 miles off Hainan island, south of the Chinese mainland. Five Chinese ships surrounded and harassed the USNS Impeccable as it conducted surveillance in an area Beijing claims jurisdiction over but other countries consider international waters, according to the American account. The Chinese tried to block the ship and snag its cables with hooks. The Americans used a fire hose to spray water at the Chinese.

In meeting with Mr. Yang, General Jones "raised the recent incident in the South China Sea with the USNS Impeccable," the White House said in a statement. The description of the conversation during the later meeting with Mr. Obama was more general, focusing on how to avoid future incidents. White House spokesmen would not say whether Mr. Obama talked about the Impeccable episode in any detail.

The president pledged to work closely with China on stabilizing the global economy and pressing North Korea to give up nuclear weapons.

And while Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recently said disputes over human rights "can't interfere" with work on other issues with China, Mr. Obama said "the promotion of human rights is an essential aspect of U.S. global foreign policy" and urged Beijing to make progress in a dialogue with representatives of the Dalai Lama.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [China: Manila's move on islands 'illegal'](#)

*China Daily* – March 13

Beijing yesterday renewed its protest against the Philippines' claim over China's islands in the South China Sea.

Filipina President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on Tuesday signed a bill that counts the Huangyan Island and the Nansha Islands as part of the Philippines' territory. China had protested the bill when it was tabled in the Philippines' congress last month. With Arroyo's signature, the bill has now "come into effect" under Philippine laws.

China's Foreign Ministry yesterday termed the move "illegal" and "invalid". Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said China has indisputable sovereignty over these islands and the adjacent waters. The bill "has violated China's sovereignty in defiance of our earlier protests".

The Philippines' move is the latest territorial dispute between China and its neighbors.

For instance, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi landed on the Swallow Reef and Ardasier Reef of China's Nansha Islands in the center of the South China Sea on March 5 to claim Malaysia's sovereignty there.

Experts say the nations are making these claims because the United Nations has sought details from countries on their maritime territories before May 13. "It is unlikely that the UN will approve the Philippines' baseline bill since it has disputes with China on the matter," said Sun Xiaoying, an expert on Southeast Asian affairs at the Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences. "Only through talks and consultation can the dispute be resolved."

Xu Liping, associate researcher at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said: "Some nations make territory claims so they can divert attention from their domestic economic difficulties."

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [New Space Launch Center to be built in Hainan](#)

*CRI English* – March 2

China will start the construction of a new space launch center in the southernmost Hainan Province in the near future, according to military sources. The State Council and the Central Military Commission approved the new space launch center at the end of 2008. It features high carriage efficiency, high launch capacity, and low launch costs, said the sources.

The new space launch center will be in Wenchang City, and it will be divided into three parts, with functions to transfer, test, and launch rocket-carriers, and provide logistic, meteorological, telecommunications and technological services. The Wenchang Space Launch Center is designed for launching new-generation rocket-carriers and space vehicles like geo-synchronous (GEO) satellites, polar-orbiting satellites, space stations and deep-space exploration satellites.

The government has taken the issues of ecological protection and tourism into consideration, according to the sources, who declined to give details on the date of the start of building the new project and its budget. China's space industry began in 1956, when the government published its first plan to develop jet and rocket technology. Four year later, the country launched its first rocket. On April 24, 1970, China launched its first satellite into orbit. On Oct. 15, 2003, China carried out its first manned space flight and Yang Liwei became the first Chinese astronaut in space.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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[India plans to modernise defence forces despite economic slowdown](#)

*Channel News Asia* –March 2

India is among the world's top ten spenders on military equipment and the country is going ahead with its plans to modernise its defence forces despite the economic slowdown. India's 2008-09 defence outlay was nearly US\$20.6 billion, about 2.5 per cent of its GDP and three times more than the expenditure on health and education.

Defence spending will continue to get priority because of security concerns, especially after the Mumbai attacks. Guralp Singh, deputy director general, Confederation of Indian Industries, said: "Downturn is not going to affect procurement plans. They (government) will go ahead with the procurement plans because this is a different sector. Funds are already earmarked for it. I don't think there would be any delay in going ahead with this procurement."

India has some major acquisition plans. The Air Force will buy 126 fighter planes, a deal estimated to be around US\$10 billion. There are also plans to spend US\$3.5 billion on acquiring 700 helicopters on top of billions for artillery, warships and other hardware.

Mr Guralp Singh added: "If you look at the recently announced policies, they are allowed to acquire or import such equipments, armaments and aircrafts. This is because there is a need to upgrade and modernize." The country is also tightening its offshore security after the Mumbai attackers travelled unnoticed by sea. India is likely to jointly develop an Airborne Standoff Radar system with US defence firm Raytheon to reinforce its coastline defences.

India is not only a top spender on defence but also a key outsourcing destination for military equipment due to its low costs, skilled engineers and competitive software and technology. After the economic slowdown, India will gradually replace about 70 per cent of imports with domestic production.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [Asia to lead arms spending](#)

*Straits Times* – March 5

Asia is expected to outstrip the rest of the world in defence spending within seven years as China and India upgrade their armed forces, a research consultancy said here on Thursday.

Asia's overall defence budget will account for 32 per cent of global military spending by 2016, or US\$480 billion (S\$745.5 billion), up from 24 percent in 2007, Frost and Sullivan's regional director for defence practice Ratan Shrivastava said.

North America, the biggest defence spender in 2007 with 39 per cent of the world arms market, will see its share fall to 29 per cent or US\$435 billion, he said at a conference organised by the company.

In India, about US\$100 billion will be spent on defence procurement over the next five years, said Mr Shrivastava.

'Moving forward, we feel that the focus will shift from North America to Asia Pacific markets,' he said. 'This shift will happen by the growth of Asian economies, primarily China who will be driving it... and India will emerge as one of the biggest importers of weapons and technology systems.' The current global economic crisis will not dampen national defence spending, said Mr Shrivastava.

'No country will risk its security for the sake of saving a few million dollars,' he told AFP. 'Defence spending is a long-term recession-proof industry which is not really affected by cyclical downturns and upturns.' Mr Shrivastava said there were limited details available about the nature of China's defence spending but estimated Beijing's arms budget would increase from US\$120 billion in 2007 to US\$255 billion by 2016.

China's growing military spending in recent years has come in for increasing criticism, particularly from the United States and its allies. At its annual meeting of parliament, which began Thursday, China announced its defence spending in 2009 will grow 15.3 per cent to 472.9 billion yuan (S\$107.2 billion) but insisted the bigger military spending posed no threat to the world.

'China's limited military powers will be solely used for the purpose of safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity,' said Li Zhaoxing, spokesman for the National People's Congress. 'This will not pose a threat to any country,' he said at a parliamentary press conference.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

## [Russian-Chinese Su-33 fighter deal collapses](#)

*Asia Bulletin* – March 10

Russia has refused to sell its Su-33 carrier-based fighters to China over fears that Beijing could produce cheaper export versions of the aircraft, a Russian daily said Tuesday.

The Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper said that since 2006 China and Russia had been in negotiations for the sale of 50 Su-33 Flanker-D fighters, to be used on future Chinese aircraft carriers. But the talks collapsed recently over China's request for an initial delivery of two aircraft for a 'trial'.

Russian defense ministry sources confirmed that the refusal was due to findings that China had produced its own copycat version of the Su-27SK fighter jet in violation of intellectual property agreements. In 1995, China secured a \$2.5-billion production license from Russia to build 200 Su-27SKs, dubbed J-11A, at the Shenyang Aircraft Corp.

The deal required the aircraft to be outfitted with Russian avionics, radars and engines. Russia cancelled the arrangement in 2006 after it discovered that China was developing an indigenous version, J-11B, with Chinese avionics and systems. The decision came after China had already produced 95 aircraft.

This time, Russia refused the Chinese offer even after Beijing had offered to buy 14 Su-33 aircraft, saying that at least 24 jets should be sold to recoup production costs. However, the Moskovsky Komsomolets said that the Su-33 deal may be reviewed later because China desperately needs carrier-based aircraft to equip its first indigenous 48,000-tonne aircraft carrier, due to be built by 2011.

Beijing has also announced plans to build a nuclear-powered aircraft-carrier by 2020. Chinese media recently quoted China fleet commander Admiral Xu Hongmeng as saying: 'China will very soon have its own aircraft carrier.'

The Su-33 is a carrier-based multi-role fighter, which can perform a variety of air superiority, fleet defence, air support and reconnaissance missions. The aircraft entered service with the Russian Navy in 1995 and are currently deployed on board the Nikolai Kuznetsov aircraft carrier. Russian Su-33 naval fighters are significantly cheaper than any similar foreign models, such as the French Rafale-M, the US F-35C or the F/A-22N Sea Raptor.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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[India to deploy space-based surveillance systems for ballistic missile defense shield](#)

*China Daily* – March 10

India is mulling to deploy space-based surveillance systems to counter any threat posed to its indigenous ballistic missile defense (BMD) system, a top Indian Defense official said Monday night. "We are certainly looking to develop space-based surveillance capabilities for the BMD. Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is working on the project," Indian Air Defense Program Director V.K. Saraswat told the media.

He also said that to tackle enemy attack, missiles with a striking range of over 6,000 km and hypersonic interceptor missiles will have to be developed for the phase II of the air defense program. In the phase I of its air defense program, India had successfully tested the BMD system in November 2006 outside atmosphere at a 48-km altitude and inside atmosphere at an altitude of 15-km in December 2007.

India last week successfully test-fired its indigenous ballistic missile shield in the eastern state of Orissa. The interceptor missile was fired from the Wheeler Island off the Orissa coast and destroyed the "enemy" missile at an altitude of 80 km. The Indian Ballistic Missile Defense Program is an initiative to develop and deploy a multi-layered ballistic missile defense system to protect the country from missile attacks. The program is a two-tiered system consisting of two interceptor missiles, namely Prithvi Air Defense (PAD) missile for high altitude interception, and the Advanced Air Defense (AAD) Missile for lower altitude interception.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [ASEAN countries sign petroleum security deal](#)

*China Daily* – March 1

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed here an energy security agreement on Sunday that will ensure their members "the physical availability of oil and oil products through the establishment of stockpiles on voluntary and commercial basis." The agreement said "ASEAN is increasingly becoming more dependent on petroleum resources outside the region, there is a need to recognize, coordinate and rationalize these efforts, plans and programs to enhance security of petroleum supply for ASEAN member states." The deal was part of increased cooperation paving the way for ASEAN to form an ASEAN Community by 2015.

A total of 24 ASEAN related documents were signed or adopted by ASEAN leaders at the 14th ASEAN summit. These documents include, among others, the issues relating to the ASEAN community building, trade and investment, sub-regional economic cooperation, food and petroleum security. ASEAN, established in 1967, groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Japan to deploy 2 destroyers, 400 personnel for anti-piracy mission off Somalia](#)

*Mainichi* – March 4

Japan will deploy two destroyers and approximately 400 personnel for an anti-piracy mission off Somalia, the Defense Ministry said Wednesday. According to the ministry's plan, two destroyers along with about 400 Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) members and eight coast guard officers will be dispatched to engage in seaborne policing action in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia. The decision will likely spur criticism from opposition parties who feel the expansion of activities undermines the law.

The government explained that the destroyers to be dispatched to the Gulf of Aden will receive necessary supplies from vessels deployed to the Indian Ocean on a refueling mission for foreign vessels engaging in the war against terrorism. However, the government made no mention of the MSDF's anti-piracy mission during Diet deliberations on the new anti-terrorism bill last year, under which the refueling mission is being conducted. MSDF destroyers will protect Japanese commercial ships as well as foreign vessels carrying Japanese nationals, and also patrol the Gulf of Aden if necessary.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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[Japan, China to coordinate moves on antipiracy missions off Somalia](#)

*Japan Today* – March 6

Japan and China may agree later this month on coordination between the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Chinese navy in thwarting pirate attacks off the coast of Somalia, government sources said Thursday. The operational-level coordination, which would mainly involve the exchange of information on piracy, would be the first of its kind between the Self-Defense Forces and the People's Liberation Army.

The agreement is expected to be reached at an upcoming meeting between Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and his Chinese counterpart Liang Guanglie, which is scheduled to be held in China on March 21. The planned coordination is partly aimed at boosting confidence between the two countries at a time when Beijing is engaging in rapid military modernization and Tokyo is calling for more transparency in the Chinese military program.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [South Korea-Japan talks on EEZ end without deal](#)

*Yonpah* – March 9

South Korea and Japan held working-level talks in Seoul Monday on the vague demarcation of their maritime border, but as expected, they produced no tangible deal, Seoul's foreign ministry said. The meeting, the 10th of its kind, was aimed at clarifying the boundary of their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) amid Tokyo's continued claim to sovereignty over Dokdo, a set of South Korean-controlled rocky outcroppings in the East Sea. "The two nations shared the perception that drawing up the boundary of the EEZs is important in the establishment of the maritime order in Northeast Asia," the ministry said in a press release. The two sides agreed to continue consultations on the issue and hold the next round in Japan on a date to be set later, it added. South Korea was represented by Hwang Seung-hyun, head of the foreign ministry's treaties bureau, and his counterpart was Koji Tsuruoka, director general of Japanese foreign ministry's international legal affairs bureau.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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[US: Cyberdefense policy in flux](#)

*Kansas City Star* – March 11

Switching U.S. cyberdefenses to an electronic spying agency and away from the Department of Homeland Security remains only an idea, an Obama Cabinet member said Wednesday. In her visit to address law enforcement officials gathered from across the country in Kansas City, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said shifting the responsibility to the National Security Agency is under review but hardly a settled matter. “We’re looking ... at what is the best way that we protect the private sector, the government and military from cyberattack,” she said. “It’s the right analysis to do at this point. ... There’s been no decision or conclusion.” Rather, Napolitano said, the review “is exactly what ought to be happening at the beginning of a new administration.”

Such a change would be a dramatic move in how the country guards against the possibility that terrorist or criminal groups might sabotage America’s computer networks, which have become integral to commerce and public safety. The possibility of shifting those defenses to the NSA, the government’s largest intelligence-gathering agency, came under sharp attack on Capitol Hill this week. Amit Yoran, the former head of the DHS National Cybersecurity Division, testified to Congress that it would be “ill-advised” to hand the job over to a spy agency because its work is veiled from the public. And Rod Beckstrom, who resigned as head of the National Cyber Security Center over concerns that the NSA is angling to seize control of cybersecurity, has said private firms working with Washington on the issue won’t team well with an agency noted for its secrecy. But Napolitano said no conclusion has been reached. “It is a re-examination, a re-evaluation of where things are so that good, educated decisions can be made about where things need to be,” she said.

She came to Kansas City to speak to a conference of about 1,000 people associated with so-called fusion centers — created after the 9/11 attacks to help agencies share information about terror dangers and coordinate responses. Napolitano said fusion centers like the one in Jefferson City are critical to sharing intelligence that might reveal conspiracies or thwart terrorists before they strike.

The secretary said law enforcement doesn’t just need to share tips, but to analyze and sort data so patterns and connections become clear. “We are here (because) we did not have the capacity to connect the dots on various bits of information prior to 9/11,” Napolitano said.

The conference she spoke to was the subject of a protest earlier in the week from people who fear that the growing networks of fusion centers — outfits that began to form in 2006, populated mostly by state and local officials under federal direction— could become a domestic surveillance system. “Fusion centers are not domestic spy agencies,” she said. “They are not designed to invade the privacy of American citizens.” Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon said after her speech that the Jefferson City fusion center largely sorts and shares information. “We put that law enforcement data into patterns,” the governor said. “We’re not out there snooping on anybody.”

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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[Cambodia to host ASEAN-US military exercise in 2010](#)*China View* – March 3

Cambodia will host a large-scale ASEAN-U.S. military exercise in 2010, Khmer-language newspaper the Deum Ampil said on Tuesday. "It is an honor for Cambodia to be chosen by ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and superpower U.S. as the location for such a large-scale international military exercise," Pol Saroeurn, Commander-in-Chief of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), told the paper. "We will take efforts to make it a success," he said, adding that he will also instruct all his subordinates to be careful with the work.

The Sihanoukville port will be used as the maritime location of this military haul, the paper also quoted a governmental official as saying on condition of anonymity. Cambodia once joined international military exercises respectively in Bangladesh and Mongolia and also sent peacekeepers to Sudan for de-mining operation under the U.N. umbrella.

In April 2008, 40 Cambodian soldiers participated in a three-week multi-national peace-keeping exercise in Bangladesh. The U.S.-led mission was named "Ambassador of Peace" and involved some 400 soldiers from 12 countries, including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, Brunei, Mongolia, Tonga, Cambodia and U.S. In July 2007, 43 Cambodian soldiers took part in a military exercise for UN peacekeeping mission in Mongolia.

In addition, Cambodia sent 135 deminers to Sudan in 2006 for UN peacekeeping mission, and then 139 in June 2007 to replace the old ones. The deminers were renewed again in 2008.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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[Thailand invites Philippines to join annual multinational exercises](#)

M&C – March 3

Thailand's armed forces chief on Tuesday invited the Philippine military to join annual multinational war exercises in Thailand with four other countries, including the United States. General Songgitti Jaggabatara, chief of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, made the invitation during a meeting with his Philippine counterpart, General Alexander Yano. Jaggabatara, who was in Manila for an introductory visit, said he was looking forward to the active participation of the Philippine armed forces in the annual Cobra Gold training. The Philippines is currently a mere observer in the exercises, which are participated in by troops from Thailand, the US, Indonesia, Singapore and Japan. 'The Philippine armed forces is still an observer,' Jaggabatara said after the meeting. 'After this, maybe the Philippine armed forces will take part (in) the exercises.' During their meeting, Jaggabatara said they agreed to 'enhance the cooperation between the Philippine armed forces and the Royal Thai Armed Forces.'

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## ['Aman 09' naval exercises in Pakistan](#)

Press TV – March 8

The Pakistan multinational Naval Peace Exercise "Aman 09" is underway in the north Arabian Sea off the southern port city of Karachi. The navies of 38 countries from the region and across the world are participating in these exercises. The navies of 11 countries are taking an active part with their battleships, maritime aircraft and other forces, Press TV correspondent reported on Friday. As many as 46 observers from naval forces of 27 countries have arrived in Karachi's harbors to monitor the maritime exercise, the private TV channel Geo News said.

The Geo news quoted a navy spokesman as saying that geographically speaking, Pakistan was situated in an important maritime location where its naval forces have been operating at the frontlines to combat international sea menaces of pirates, drug and human trafficking and terrorism.

The formal inauguration of "Aman 09" took place at Karachi's dockyard on Thursday. The exercise will last from March 5-14 in the Arabian Sea under arrangements by the Pakistani Navy.

Extensive briefing and debriefing sessions are being held before and after the main sea maneuvers phase of the exercise in order to enhance understanding and information regarding operations of different navies among the participants, our correspondent said.

The exercise will be conducted in three phases: planning, operational exercise at sea and analysis and debriefing. The countries actively participating include Australia, Bangladesh, China, France, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, United States and the United Kingdom. The first series of Aman exercises were held in March 2007 when 14 ships belonging to Bangladesh, China, France, Italy, Malaysia, the UK and the US navies took part. This is the second exercise in the Aman series. The word Aman is Urdu for "PEACE" and the slogan of the exercise is "Together for Peace".

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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[Pentagon: Chinese Ships Harass U.S. Navy Vessel](#)

*Defense News* – March 9

Several Chinese ships maneuvered dangerously close to an unarmed U.S. Military Sealift Command ship in international waters, the Pentagon said on Monday. "This was a reckless, dangerous maneuver that was unprofessional" and violated international law, Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman told reporters. He said the United States would be conveying its "displeasure" to the Chinese government over the incident, which occurred on Sunday in the South China Sea, about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from Hainan Island.

One of the Chinese vessels came within 25 feet and at one point the Chinese crew stripped to their underwear, he said. The Chinese also dropped pieces of wood into the water in the path of the American ship, he said. The small Chinese vessels, which resembled fishing boats, had no apparent military markings, according to photos Whitman showed to reporters.

The Impeccable is one of five ocean surveillance ships that are part of Military Sealift Command's Special Mission Ships Program. These ships gather "underwater acoustical data," Whitman said. Ocean surveillance ships use both passive and active low frequency sonar arrays to detect and track undersea threats. Impeccable's speed is 12 knots, and crew is usually 25 civilian mariners and 25 military members, according to MSC's Web site.

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<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

---

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## [Indian navy invited to patrol Malacca](#)

*AsiaInt* – March 13

India has been invited to send ships to patrol the Malacca Strait, one of the world's major trade funnels and a potential chokepoint in any regional conflict. The invitation, extended by Indonesia, is another victory for India's naval diplomacy. The defeated party is China.

The invitation was reported by Indonesia's official Antara news agency on 5 March. "We are discussing various possibilities to optimise security in the Malacca Strait, including inviting several countries with an interest in shipping in the strait or countries directly bordering [it] to take part in securing it," said Major General Supiadin, the operations assistant to the commander of the TNI armed forces.

He described Indian involvement as "very positive" because then all approaches to the Strait would be safeguarded. Supiadin also announced that Thailand would be joining the joint naval patrols, and that its involvement would be formalised by the middle of this year. Thai ships began participating in the patrols informally in January. India has set out to become the dominant naval power in the Indian Ocean, which the Strait connects to the South China Sea. Since 2004 it has been patrolled by the navies of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, and these have proven very successful, slashing the rates of piracy and other seaborne crimes by two-thirds. Funding for the operation comes from the Aids to Navigation Fund (ANF), set up last year by Japan.

The mooted Indian involvement will not please China, which in February last year offered Indonesia help with securing the Strait. It is massively reliant on trade through the Strait, particularly oil. This potential weakness could be exploited by, for instance, the US in any military confrontation over Taiwan. The possibility of India's navy imposing its own blockade is equally unpalatable to Chinese military planners, given that India and China have warred in the past over their outstanding Himalayan border dispute. India has made no bones about the fact that the Indian Ocean is not the end of its naval ambitions; it has established a Far East command in the Andaman Islands - near the Strait of Malacca – to project naval power towards the Pacific. India views China as a competitor in this regard, and excluded it from membership of the multinational Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which India established in February 2008.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [Russia Set Against Extending START Treaty: Lavrov](#)

*Defense News* – March 2

Moscow is set against extending the key nuclear arms treaty that expires in 2009, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said March 2. "The limits set in the existing accord have all been met and exceeded, both we and the Americans have, in reality, far fewer [missiles] than the existing accord allows," Lavrov said as quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency. "So extending it further would mean sending a wrong signal that one can build arms now, and that is wrong," Lavrov explained.

The Cold War-era Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty signed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union expires in December 2009, and Washington and Moscow have been seeking to thrash out terms of a new accord. The 1991 treaty limits the number of missiles and warheads that each side may have and is a cornerstone of Cold War strategic arms control.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [France to send huge nuclear fuel shipment to Japan](#)

*Channel News Asia* – March 2

France is set to send recycled nuclear fuel to Japan in what environmentalists say is the biggest ever plutonium shipment and one that increases the chance of nuclear proliferation. "We confirm the preparation of a shipment to Japan of MOX fuel," said a spokesman for nuclear group Areva at its plant in La Hague in northern France where the MOX is stored after being made from used Japanese nuclear fuel.

MOX, or mixed oxide, is a blend of plutonium and reprocessed uranium that Japan, which has virtually no natural energy resources, wants to start using for the first time.

The environmental group Greenpeace said on its website that transporting MOX was "unsafe, insecure and unnecessary." "This is the first MOX transport to Japan for eight years. This will be the largest shipment of plutonium in history - the MOX fuel elements contain a total of 1.8 tonnes of plutonium. "That's enough to make 225 nuclear weapons," it said.

Greenpeace said two ships from Britain's Pacific Nuclear Transport company, each with armed police on board, had already left their home ports and would this week take on board the fuel at the northern French port of Cherbourg.

Greenpeace, whose activists were arrested in 2001 when they tried to stop a similar convoy from leaving Cherbourg for Japan, did not say if it was planning any actions this week to try to prevent the ships leaving.

Areva, which says the production of MOX is safe and that it helps reduce the levels of nuclear waste, gave no details about the size of the shipments and did not give a precise date for their planned departure. MOX fuel has been used in various countries across the world for more than three decades, the French state-controlled group noted.

Greenpeace argues that the chances of nuclear weapons proliferation are increased because of the risks of the shipments being seized en route by would-be terrorists.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) believes that MOX can be used to make nuclear bombs," it said.

Thierry Dujardin of the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency said "if a malevolent person managed to separate the plutonium from the uranium, which is a difficult process, this plutonium... would be capable of making a nuclear bomb." "No-one has done this," he told AFP. "One cannot exclude the possibility that an organisation would try, and that is why these convoys are protected."

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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06/2009

01 Mar 09 – 12 Mar 09

Areva said on its website that the two ships that will transport the MOX "are also armed with guns and are protected by a specially trained force, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary." The fuel will travel from France to Japan using three possible routes -- via the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Horn or the Panama Canal, it said.

The nuclear fuel reprocessed by Areva came from three regional Japanese power companies -- Kyushu Electric, Shikoku Electric and Chubu Electric. It is intended for use at light-water reactors of the companies based in southern and central Japan.

Japan, which relies on nuclear power plants for nearly one-third of its power demands, has built its own reprocessing plant in northern Aomori prefecture, which is expected to begin operating soon. But the plant's opening has been delayed after a series of minor accidents stirred up objections from the local community.

The Japanese government aims to step up the use of nuclear power as the Asian economic power has virtually no natural energy resources. But public fears rose last year when an earthquake caused a fire and a small radiation leak at the world's biggest nuclear plant of Kashiwazaki-Kariwa northwest of Tokyo.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [India successfully tests missile interceptor](#)

*International Herald Tribune* – March 6

India successfully tested its homegrown missile interception system Friday for the third time, the Defense Ministry said, boosting the chances of turning it into a viable defense system.

The incoming missile was fired from a ship in the Bay of Bengal and intercepted at an altitude of 46 miles (75 kilometers), the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

"The mission control room burst into raptures as the radar display indicated the interception and destruction of the decoy enemy missile by the interceptor," the statement said.

The test comes at a time of heightened tension between India and its archrival Pakistan over the deadly Mumbai attacks, which India blames on Pakistani militants. Both nations are nuclear armed.

The test was believed to be routine and part of an ongoing series of trials.

India first tested the system, using a modified version of the medium-range and nuclear-capable Prithvi II surface-to-surface missile, in 2006.

If the interceptor missile can be transformed into a viable defense system, it would see India join an elite club of nations with working missile shields. However, this is expected to take several more years and tests.

[<< Return to the Contents Page](#)

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## [India secures weakened nuclear safeguards protocol](#)

*AsiaInt* – March 6

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) board of governors gave its official approval to India on 3 March for an Additional Protocol (AP) to its nuclear safeguards agreement, thereby allowing India to complete all of its obligations under its civilian nuclear deal with the United States.

India has never signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but was given permission to engage in nuclear trade with the US by the IAEA in September 2008. The AP, which still has to be ratified by New Delhi, was designed to give the IAEA additional powers to monitor India's nuclear activities.

The IAEA originally agreed to lift the nuclear-trade ban on India on the condition that its inspectors are in place there, and that all the commitments under the US agreement are met. India also agreed to place 14 of its 22 nuclear reactors under IAEA monitoring by 2014, up from the six currently under their supervision.

However, the AP has been criticized for being too weak. Although the full text of the document has not yet been released, it is understood that the wording differs from the standard AP that has been agreed in the past with other non-NPT countries. Crucially, India's protocol makes no reference to verification of nuclear imports. Also, short-notice inspections of facilities are not discussed, nor is there any mention of the IAEA being able to take chemical samples which could indicate hidden nuclear activities.

The protocol was agreed by the IAEA's 35-country governing board, but some nations were less than enthusiastic about the document. In particular Switzerland, South Africa, Cuba, and Ireland were critical of it, saying that the council had only been given the document two days before the vote – not long enough to assess it properly. India is forging ahead with its nuclear activities, having already concluded nuclear cooperation agreements with the US, France, Russia, and Kazakhstan. India, which relies on imported oil for 70% of its energy needs, says that being able to engage in nuclear trade will help feed energy demands in its rapidly expanding economy, and will also help to combat global warming.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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[North Korea declares rocket plans](#)

*Financial Times* – March 12

North Korea has informed international shipping and aviation authorities it will launch a satellite between April 4 and 8, undeterred by foreign claims that it is actually testing a long-range missile that could hit the US. “We received information very early this morning from the International Maritime Organisation that North Korea will launch its satellite between April 4 and 8,” Park Young-seon, an official at South Korea’s maritime safety authority, told the *Financial Times*.

Lee Adamson, an IMO official, said that North Korea had specified the tests would be conducted between 0200 and 0700 GMT on one of the four days. The organisation was due to issue a circular detailing risks to shipping on Thursday. The announcement comes as a sharp rebuff to Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, who on Wednesday called on Pyongyang not to do anything provocative and said that a “range of options” could be pursued if North Korea went ahead with the launch.

Pyongyang announced through its KCNA state news agency that it was informing several international organisations about the launch, including the IMO and the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

North Korea said this would pave the way for the launch of the Kwangmyongsong-2 satellite. But Washington says the rocket to be launched is actually the Taepodong-2, a long-distance missile that could hit Alaska. This weapon was first tested in 2006 but disintegrated seconds after blast-off. A successful test would help North Korea’s weapons sales to traditional customers such as Iran, Syria and Libya, bringing in much-needed hard currency.

It would also be seen as an ideal way to celebrate the birthday of Kim Il-sung on April 15. He is still styled as the nation’s eternal president although he died in 1994. The reclusive communist state says it will regard any attempt to shoot down its rocket as an act of war. The Pentagon has declined to comment on what action it may take if the launch goes ahead. Enacting further sanctions against North Korea would be problematic on humanitarian grounds because the country cannot feed itself. International experts estimate that as many as 1m people died of famine there in the 1990s.

North Korea’s relations with South Korea and the US have hit a nadir in recent months, with Pyongyang claiming that the peninsula stands on the brink of a second Korean war. Kim Jong-il, North Korean president, is furious that the administration of Lee Myung-bak, South Korea’s conservative president, has dropped the détente policy of his leftist predecessors, making vital aid contingent on progress in nuclear talks. Mr Kim is thought to have promoted hardline officials in a reshuffle and demoted supposed moderates who might have favoured a less confrontational approach to the elected government in the South.

<< [Return to the Contents Page](#)

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