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CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

[Discord in Pakistan's Northern Area](#)

International Crisis Group – 2 April 2007

Almost six decades after Pakistan's independence, the constitutional status of the Federally Administered Northern Areas (Gilgit and Baltistan), once a part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and now under Pakistani control, remains undetermined, with political autonomy a distant dream. The region's inhabitants are embittered by Islamabad's unwillingness to devolve power to its elected representatives, and a nationalist movement, which seeks independence, is gaining ground. The rise of sectarian extremism is an alarming consequence of this denial of basic political rights. Taking advantage of the weaknesses in the imposed dispensation, religious organisations espousing a narrow sectarian agenda are fanning the fires of sectarian hatred in a region where Sunnis, Shias and Ismailis have peacefully coexisted for several centuries.

[Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations](#)

International Crisis Group – 10 April 2007

Abruptly interrupted in 2000, Israeli-Syrian negotiations seem only a distant possibility but a renewal is urgent and would have a real chance of success. The obstacles appear daunting, including a weak Israeli government and a U.S. administration intent on isolating Syria. However, Syria's President Bashar repeatedly has stated his desire to resume talks, and in recent conversations with Crisis Group in Damascus, senior officials have clarified these could take place without any precondition – thereby removing what had been a principal hindrance. Peace negotiations between Israel and Syria would profoundly alter the regional atmosphere; a peace deal between them would fundamentally transform it. This opportunity may not last long and should not be wasted.

[Kurdistan: Iraq's Next Battleground?](#)

Times Magazine – 12 April 2007

Like residents of Berlin during the airlift, inhabitants of Arbil--capital of the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq--get a little flutter in their hearts when they see a plane coming in to land. Built after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Arbil's international airport is a symbol to Kurds that their years of isolation as an oppressed ethnic minority are over and that the Kurdish region, unlike the rest of Iraq, is open for business. Passengers flying into Baghdad have to endure a corkscrew landing to avoid possible surface-to-air missiles. But a trip to Arbil is so safe that on my flight I was the only passenger packing body armor. When I arrived, my biggest problem was the \$50 fare charged for a 10-minute cab ride by the drivers of Hello Taxi--and finding a room at one of the city's packed hotels. Such is life in Iraqi Kurdistan, the last beacon of stability amid the wreckage of the U.S. enterprise in Iraq. Of course, stability is a relative term. True, the airport is putting in a runway long enough to accommodate jumbo jets, but for now it will be used mainly for U.S. military flights. That's because only one Western carrier--Austrian Airlines--is brave enough to land there. Other flights are run by off-brand

charters with names like Flying Carpet and Middle Eastern carriers like Iraqi Airways. And even those are unreliable. Many of the officials at Iraqi Airways are former Baathists who deliberately try to delay flights. Flights from Turkey often get canceled when there's a public dispute between Kurdish and Turkish politicians. And all flights in and out of Kurdish Iraq still have to receive clearance from both the civil-aviation authority in Baghdad and the American air base in Qatar.

[Middle East Blog: On Suicide Attacks](#)

Time Magazine – 14 April 2007

It wasn't the intended targets or the number of casualties that struck me about the suicide bombings this week. It was their geographical arc across the Arab world from Morocco to Iraq. In Casablanca, three Moroccans blew themselves up and killed one policeman during a police raid in connection with a March 11 suicide attack at an Internet cafe. In Algiers, an Al Qaeda-affiliated Algerian group claimed responsibility for two suicide attacks on the prime minister's HQ and a police station, killing 33 people. In Baghdad, there was the suicide bombing inside the HQ of Iraq's parliament, which killed an Iraqi MP.

DEFENCE BUDGET

[Defense Seeking \\$131M for Energy-Saving Projects](#)

National Defense Magazine – April 2007

The Pentagon has asked Congress for \$131 million to develop energy-saving technologies during the next five years. The proposed budget would fund a mix of fuel cells, generators and engine technologies. The projects were selected based on input from the military services, says John Young, director of defense research and engineering. His office oversees the so-called "Energy Security Task Force," which was created to find ways to reduce fossil-fuel consumption.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY

[US Eases Arms Trade Embargo on Vietnam](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 11 April 2007

The US has eased its longstanding restrictions on trade with Vietnam involving defence-related articles, following up on a bilateral agreement signed in mid-2005 that opened the door to military training co-operation. The US State Department announced that, with effect from 3 April, it has amended the International Traffic in Arms Regulations to allow the start on a case-by-case basis of two-way trade with Vietnam in non-lethal defence articles and services.

DEFENCE STRATEGY

[Navy's Revised Strategy to Emphasize 'Global Partnerships'](#)

National Defense Magazine – April 2007

In its soon-to-be-unveiled strategy for future maritime operations, the Navy will emphasize the importance of international partnerships and global naval presence. In June, the Navy is expected to publish an updated strategy document that will reflect the post 9/11 security challenges, and articulate the role of maritime forces — including Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard — in defending U.S. interests.

[Russia Protests Against US Missile-Defence Plans for Europe](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 13 April 2007

US plans to situate part of its missile-defence system in Europe would "fundamentally alter the continent's geostrategic landscape", Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an article in the UK daily *Financial Times* on 11 April. Lavrov declared that it was "unacceptable for anyone to use the continent as their own strategic territory". "Any unilateral anti-missile projects would fundamentally alter the continent's geostrategic landscape. It would also be an affront to all Europeans," he said.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[Flash Fire Suits for Soldiers Perfected](#)

National Defense Magazine – April 2007

DuPont has adapted its Nomex Limitedwear protective clothing for the Defense Department. The garment is designed to protect soldiers — mechanics and infantrymen — from flash fires. The product, which comes in desert tan, camouflage and other colors, is made with a breathable fabric that is flame resistant. It will not melt or drip or support combustion in air. And, says a spokesman, it can be machine washed without any loss of its beneficial properties.

[Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Refuelling Accomplished](#)

National Defense Magazine – April 2007

The Air Research Laboratory and Boeing's Phantom Works have demonstrated that unmanned aerial vehicles can be refueled in the air. A KC-135R tanker from the New York Air National Guard and a specially equipped Learjet were used in the tests. "This can enable a quicker response for time-critical targets and will reduce the need for forward staging refueling areas. Another benefit is increased in-theater military presence with fewer military assets," said David Riley, Boeing's automated aerial refueling program manager.

[LockMart and Gibbs Tech Develop High Speed Amphibious Military Vehicles](#)

Space War – 4 April 2007

Lockheed Martin and Gibbs Technologies have agreed to develop a family of high speed amphibious vehicles designed specifically for military operations. The militarized High Speed Amphibians (HSAs) will use technology from a fleet of prototype amphibious vehicles developed by Gibbs Technologies for consumer use, including the Gibbs Aquada, a three-person sports car, Gibbs Humdinga, a four-wheel military vehicle, and Gibbs Quadski, an amphibious all terrain vehicle. Gibbs' technology enables amphibians to travel at speeds over 45 mph on water and over 100 mph on land - and to transition from water-to-land or land-to-water in five seconds. These features provide a much needed capability for military littoral, riverine and special operations.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

[Japan Launches Rapid-Reaction Force](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 2 April 2007

Japan's Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF) has established a rapid-reaction unit to spearhead the response to domestic threats from terrorists or hostile special operations personnel and to undertake international peacekeeping operations. The Central Readiness Command (CRC) will also have a pivotal role in GSDF co-ordination with US Forces Japan, both within the country and overseas.

[North Korea Introduces New Hovercraft](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 4 April 2007

North Korea has introduced a new class of hovercraft aimed at countering rival South Korea's fast patrol boats, according to unnamed military officials in Seoul who briefed local media. The vessel is reported to have a displacement of 170 tons, with a length of 38 m and a width of 12 m. It is credited with a maximum speed of 48.5 kt and is fitted with a 57 mm gun forward and a 30 mm machine gun aft.

[Dutch Intensify Civil-Military Cooperation](#)

Janes Defence Weekly – 10 April 2007

The Dutch government has announced that it is increasing integration between the armed forces and civil authorities in crisis preparedness and management and will ensure that at least 25 per cent of the armed forces will be available in times of disaster. The initiative, known by its Dutch acronym ICMS, or 'Civil-Military Co-operation Intensification Project', will not include dedicated, stand-by 'disaster units', but instead capabilities that can be drawn as needed from existing air, ground, naval and special forces units on a rotational basis.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[Iran to Build 2 Nuclear Power Plants](#)

Washington Post – 15 April 2007

Iran said Sunday it is seeking bids for the building of two more nuclear power plants, despite international pressures to curb its controversial program. Ahmad Fayyazbakhsh, the deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization in charge of power plants, said the plants would be light-water reactors, each with the capacity to generate up to 1,600 megawatts of electricity.

[India Successfully Tests Missile Able to Hit China](#)

Space War – 12 April 2007

India announced Thursday a successful test-firing of a nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic missile than can reach the Chinese cities of Beijing and Shanghai. The Agni-III missile was launched from Wheeler Island, 180 kilometres (110 miles) northeast of Bhubaneswar, capital of the eastern state of Orissa.

[North Korea Will Allow UN Inspectors: Richardson](#)

Space War – 15 April 2007

Former US envoy Bill Richardson said on Sunday he was optimistic North Korea will begin taking steps to shut down its nuclear program despite failing to meet a promised deadline at the weekend. Richardson, who served as US ambassador to the United Nations during former president Bill Clinton's administration, said he believed North Korea would allow in UN inspectors and move to shut down a nuclear reactor as part of an international agreement. "My prediction ... is that early this week, they will invite the inspectors. They will start the process of shutting down the reactor," said Richardson, governor of the US state of New Mexico, in an interview with ABC television.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

[Horta, Lu-Olo Head to Presidential Runoff in Timor-Leste](#)

People's Daily Online – 11 April 2007

Nobel peace laureate Jose Ramos Horta and former guerrilla fighter from the biggest party of Fretelin Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo will contest in the second round of the presidential election in Timor-Leste on May 8, the country's electoral commission announced Wednesday. The two leaders were on the top two of the counted ballot papers from all 13 districts of the new nation as Lu-Olo was in the first position with 28.79 percent of votes and followed by Horta with 22.60 percent, the spokesman of the commission, Martinho Gusmao, told a press conference.

[Thailand's Prime Minister Hospitalised as Resignation Rumours Denied](#)

International Herald Tribune – 9 April 2007

Thailand's embattled prime minister, Surayud Chulanont, was hospitalized Monday for several days for a medical checkup amid rumors that the military-appointed leader might resign. Government spokesman Yongyuth Maiyalarb denied that Surayud had any intention to resign. Surayud, 63, abruptly canceled all his scheduled appointments Monday to check into privately-run Bangkok Hospital. His personal physician said initial tests did not show any major problems.

[Ways to End the Sino-Japanese Chill](#)

The Financial Times – 9 April 2007

The visit by Wen Jiabao, the Chinese prime minister, to Tokyo this week provides a valuable opportunity to shore up the volatile ties between the two east Asian giants. To be sure, Sino-Japanese relations have warmed considerably since the much-applauded visit to Beijing by Shinzo Abe, Japan's prime minister, last October. Because Mr Abe has so far refrained from visiting the Yasukuni shrine (where the spirits of some second world war criminals are honoured), the most contentious quarrel in recent years has been temporarily contained. The Chinese government has also since then quietly censored the fiery anti-Japanese rhetoric in the Chinese print media and cyberspace.