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Articles from subscriber only sites are available on request. Révolutionnaire is edited by Samuel Chan, with contributions from Bernard Loo and Joshua Ho. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) is a key research component of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). It focuses on security research to serve national needs. IDSS' faculty and research staff conduct both academic and policy-oriented research on security-related issues and developments affecting Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

[US nears 4,000 dead in Iraq](#)

AP – 17 March 2008

Sometime soon, the US military will suffer the 4,000th death of the war in Iraq. When the 1000th American died in September 2004, the insurgency was just gaining steam. The 2000th death came as Iraq held its first elections in decades, in October 2005. The US announced its 3000th loss on the last day of 2006, at the end of a year rocked by sectarian violence. The 4000th death will come with the war further out of the public eye, and replaced by other topics such as the struggling US economy that are front-and-centre in the US presidential campaign. Analysts say the 4,000 dead, while an arbitrary marker, could inject the war debate back into the campaign season, particularly with the war's fifth anniversary falling on Thursday. Or, with overall violence lower in Iraq, the milestone could pass with far less public discussion than in past years. Last year was the deadliest for American troops in Iraq, with 901 troops killed. As of Sunday, at least 3,988 Americans have died in Iraq. James Carafano, a military analyst with the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, said that the decline in violence since 30,000 troops were sent into Iraq last summer has been more important in the public's eye. 'Americans are not casualty averse. They are failure averse,' Mr Carafano said. 'They were unhappy with the lack of progress and spiralling violence. That is why you have seen public support rebound after it was clear the surge was working.' The number killed in Iraq is far less than in other modern American wars. In Vietnam, the US lost on average about 4,850 troops a year from 1963-75. In the Korean war, from 1950-53, the US lost about 12,300 soldiers a year. Soldiers and analysts alike say the impact of the casualties in Iraq has been largely lost on many Americans who have no personal connection to the war.

[Iraqis lack basic services 5 years after invasion: Red Cross](#)

AP – 17 March 2008

Five years after the US-led invasion to topple Saddam Hussein many Iraqis still lack access to basic health care, sanitation and clean water, the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Monday. The humanitarian situation in Iraq is among the most critical in the world, the Red Cross said, noting that the current conflict has worsened the impact of previous wars and years of international sanctions that caused severe hardship in the country. Iraqi hospitals lack qualified staff and basic drugs, and facilities are not properly maintained, the Red Cross said. Public hospitals provide 30,000 beds, less than half of the 80,000 needed. Few Iraqis can afford to seek help in private clinics where consultations cost US\$2-US\$7 (S\$2.75-S\$9.65) because the average daily wage in the country is less than US\$5. The Red Cross said Iraqi officials estimate that more than 2,200 doctors and nurses have been killed and more than 250 kidnapped since 2003. Of the 34,000 doctors registered in 1990, at least 20,000 have left the country. The neutral body said water supplies have also deteriorated over the past year, causing shortages and forcing millions to rely on poor-quality supplies. At current prices, families with only one earner spend a third of their income - or about US\$50 a month - on water alone, the Red Cross said.

ICRC's head of operations for the region said that while security has improved in some parts of the country, more attention needs to be paid to meeting the basic needs of the population in order to prevent the humanitarian situation from getting worse. 'Better security in some parts of Iraq must not distract attention from the continuing plight of millions of people who have essentially been left to their own devices,' Ms Beatrice Megevand Roggo said.

[Female suicide bomber kills 43 in Shiite holy city of Karbala](#)

AP – 18 March 2008

A female suicide bomber struck Shiite worshippers in the holy city of Karbala on Monday, an official and a witness said, killing at least 43 people and leaving pools of blood on the street leading to one of Iraq's most revered mosques. The blast was the deadliest in a series of attacks that left at least 72 Iraqis dead, including six youths killed when mortar rounds slammed into a soccer field in eastern Baghdad. Two US soldiers also were killed on Monday in a roadside bombing north of Baghdad, bringing the American death toll closer to 4,000 as the US-led war enters its sixth year. At least 3,990 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The violence marred overlapping trips by Vice President Dick Cheney and Sen. John McCain to Baghdad. Their visits were aimed at touting recent security gains and stressing Washington's long-term commitment to fighting insurgents in Iraq. The American Embassy and the military issued a joint statement condemning the 'barbaric attack' and blaming it on al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Karbala attack came after the worshippers had gathered at a sacred historical site about a kilometre from the golden domed shrine of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad who was killed in a seventh-century battle. A police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorised to release the information, said the attacker was a woman - as did a witness. The US military described the attack as a suicide operation but put the casualty toll at 40 Iraqis killed and 65 wounded. The US statement said the identity of the bomber remained unknown. Brig. Gen. Raed Shakir Jawdat, Karbala's police chief, said 43 people were killed and 73 wounded. He denied it was a suicide attack, saying a bomb had been planted in the area. The discrepancies could not immediately be resolved. Mr Karim Khazim, the city's chief health official, said seven of those killed were Iranian pilgrims who had traveled to the holy site. AP Television News footage showed a man carefully picking up pieces of flesh and wires apparently from a fuse as evening prayer services were broadcast from loudspeakers nearby. The witness, who did not identify himself, told AP Television News that a woman in the crowd had blown herself up. If true, it would be among the deadliest attacks carried out by women during the Iraq conflict. Female suicide bombers have been involved in at least 20 attacks or attempted attacks since the war began, including the grisly bombings of two pet markets in Baghdad that killed nearly 100 people last month. The US military has warned that insurgents are using female attackers because they can more easily avoid checkpoint searches and can hide the explosives under traditional all-encompassing black Islamic robes. Police closed the area around the twin golden dome mosques and blocked all roads leading to the sites, which include tombs of Imam Hussein and his half brother, also a Shiite saint. Mr Ali Hassan, 30, a clothing merchant who was

wounded in the blast, said he was standing near his stall 'when I heard a big explosion and I felt strong fire throwing me in the air.' 'The only thing I know is there was a big explosion and I saw bodies flying in the air,' said Mr Hassan Khazim, 36, who was wounded in the face. 'All the tight security measures designed to protect us were in vain.' The predominantly Shiite city of Karbala, 80 kilometres south of Baghdad, enjoys tight security. Monday's attack was the deadliest in Karbala since a suicide car bomber killed at least 63 people on April 28, 2007.

[UN police forced out of Kosovo town after clashes](#)

AFP – 18 March 2008

UN police were forced to withdraw Monday from the Serb-populated part of this flashpoint Kosovo town after coming under attack as they stormed a court occupied by Serbs opposed to independence. Police said more than 100 people were injured as the troops met gunfire and suspected grenade blasts in the worst violence to have flared in Kosovo since its independence declaration a month ago on February 17. The clashes erupted after UN police and NATO-led KFOR (Kosovo Force) troops surrounded the courthouse in Kosovska Mitrovica for a pre-dawn raid to evict the Serb protestors. Kosovo police officials said that 63 international security force members were injured in the unrest while hospital sources put the number of Serbs hurt at as many as 80. Kosovo's independence has been recognised by many Western countries but Serbia and Kosovo Serbs -- backed by Russia -- have vehemently rejected the move as illegal. Serbian President Boris Tadic warned UN and NATO forces against any "excessive reaction" that could spark a further "escalation." Outgoing Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica condemned the "use of force" and said Serbia had "begun consultations with Russia over necessary mutual reaction in order to halt all violence against the Serbs." Russia earlier called for a resumption of talks on the status of Kosovo, saying the unrest was a result of the territory's unilateral independence declaration. UN chief Ban Ki-moon deplored the violence and urged "all communities to exercise calm and restraint," while the bitter differences between the US and Russia over Kosovo's independence were highlighted by contrasting responses. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she wanted the Serbian leadership to press Serbs in Kosovo to avoid "provocative action." "I do believe the Kosovars are doing everything that they can to maintain calm," Rice told reporters, referring to the Kosovar Albanians who make up the vast majority of the former Serb province. But Russia's ambassador to NATO accused alliance peacekeepers of using excessive force to try and remove the Serbs from the court house and warned against any escalation. Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaci accused Belgrade of "inspiring violence," saying it was "regretful that the Serbian government has not learnt any lesson from the past." Thaci urged Belgrade "to call the Serbian people to be calm and mature. There is no place for violence in a new Kosovo, no need for acts as in Mitrovica today," Thaci said. The Serbs in the courthouse -- many of whom worked in the judiciary before Kosovo came under UN administration in 1999 -- had demanded the establishment of their own court. As the UN police arrived, about 100 angry Serbs pelted them with stones. Police used tear gas to disperse them and several UN vehicles were set alight. Dozens of Serbs were arrested during the unrest and some were taken to Pristina for questioning before being released later, police said. At least 27 of the wounded UN police

were Polish, Poland's national police spokesman Mariusz Sokolowski said in Warsaw, adding they had been pelted with rocks, homemade explosives and possibly shot at. Kosovo's NATO-led KFOR peacekeepers have remained in the tense town and witnesses said more troops were seen on the roads leading to Mitrovica. Northern Kosovo has a 40,000-strong Serb population who are divided from the mainly ethnic Albanian south by the Ibar River, which passes through Mitrovica. The clashes came on the four-year anniversary of the March 2004 anti-Serb riots by ethnic Albanians in which 19 people were killed and dozens of mediaeval Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries were destroyed or damaged.

[NATO Progress in Afghanistan Significant, General Says](#)

American Forces Press Service – 19 March 2008

Despite the task NATO faced when it arrived in Afghanistan in 2003, the alliance has made significant progress in the country, the deputy chairman of the alliance's military committee said here yesterday. "NATO's done a remarkable job ... in expanding their operations, from what began just in the Kabul area, throughout the entire country by late 2006," U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry told the Pentagon Channel. "Today, NATO does have the responsibility for the maintenance of security throughout the entire country of Afghanistan." NATO came into Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate to establish an International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF. That force had the responsibility of providing security in the greater capital area of Kabul. By October 2006, NATO had expanded its operations throughout the country and was tackling three main tasks, which it continues today. Those tasks include helping the Afghan government extend control throughout the country and developing the necessary security institutions to maintain that control. "The third major task is helping to create the conditions throughout the country for sustainable reconstruction and development to be conducted," said Eikenberry, who commanded coalition forces in Afghanistan until NATO assumed responsibility in October 2006. About 47,000 NATO servicemembers, including about 19,000 Americans, serve in the country under the NATO flag. Most of an additional contingent of 3,200 U.S. Marines deploying to Afghanistan will serve in combat roles in the eastern or southern areas of the country. "Others in the Marine forces will be employed in smaller units that will be partnered with the Afghan National Police," Eikenberry said. They will provide training, logistics and combat support, operating in the more difficult districts of Afghanistan that are more threatened by Taliban, he added. Steady engagement and lessons learned have led not only to progress in Afghanistan, but also to growth in alliance members' capabilities. "I look at our non-U.S. NATO partners, (and) I'm seeing the same trends inside of Afghanistan of steady improvement in terms of their doctrine, their capabilities (and) the equipment they're bringing to bear," Eikenberry said. "I also see that the alliance, in terms of multinational practices or alliance practices, are steadily improving." That's a fact the general has noticed in the relaxing of some of the operational restrictions, or "caveats," that some alliance members place on their forces. Those restrictions have in the past and could continue to reduce NATO's overall operational effectiveness, he said. "But all told, again, I would emphasize that NATO has made significant progress even in terms of, over time, reducing these kinds of restrictions that are placed on forces," he added. "A bit more progress needs to be made." While the

alliance's mission moves forward in Afghanistan, it's status quo in the newly independent republic of Kosovo, the general said. The former Serbian province's declaration of independence has changed the environment on the ground, Eikenberry said. "But still today, the Kosovo force under NATO command operates under the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244, still maintains the mandate of maintaining a safe and secure environment, and it does so in an impartial manner," he said. The United States provides about 10 percent of the 16,000-member NATO force in Kosovo.

[Report: France to boost Afghan commitment](#)

CNN – 22 March 2008

French President Nicolas Sarkozy plans to announce that France will send 1,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, a British newspaper reported Saturday. The Times cited unnamed senior ministers as saying Sarkozy wants to demonstrate his commitment to the NATO alliance's Afghan mission during his two-day visit to London next week, which begins Friday. One minister was quoted as saying that Britain's Defense Ministry had made a working assumption Sarkozy would announce that "slightly more than 1,000 troops" are to be deployed to eastern Afghanistan. The British and French defense ministries and the presidential Elysee Palace all declined to comment on the report when contacted Saturday. France is widely expected to boost its role in Afghanistan beyond the 1,900 soldiers currently there at a NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, on April 2-4. The refusal of key European allies such as Germany, Italy and Spain to send forces to join the British, Americans, Canadians and Dutch who are leading the fight in the south has led to months of ugly infighting within NATO. France's expected announcement will help the need. However, it is not yet clear whether the French soldiers will be sent to the south in response to Canada's threat to pull out of dangerous Kandahar province unless NATO finds 1,000 reinforcements for its beleaguered troops there.

[US military Iraq toll hits 4,000](#)

BBC – 24 March 2008

The number of United States military personnel killed in Iraq since the US-led invasion five years ago has passed the 4,000 mark. The latest to die were four soldiers whose patrol vehicle was blown up by a bomb in southern Baghdad on Sunday. In response to the news, US Vice-President Dick Cheney said he regretted every US casualty in Iraq. Insurgent attacks and military operations left at least 47 people dead across Iraq on Sunday. According to an Associated Press breakdown of the figure, 97% of deaths occurred after US President George W Bush declared on 1 May 2003 that major combat was over. Roadside bombs accounted for 44% of deaths last year and 55% to date in 2008, the agency adds. Sunday's bloodshed comes despite an overall reduction in violence since last June. That was when the US deployed an extra 30,000 troops in violence-hit areas - the so-called "troop surge". Stephen Biddle, a senior fellow for defence policy at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, said he doubted the 4,000 milestone would "have the impact that the 3,000 did" in December 2006. "The conventional wisdom then was that things were going badly," he was quoted by Reuters as saying. "Today, by contrast, the public's general perception of Iraq is less negative, and

coverage for the last six months has tended to focus on the reduction in violence and US casualties. "The war has also been much less visible." US soldiers interviewed by AFP news agency in Iraq said they were saddened by the figure of 4,000 but argued the conflict was justified. "Every one of those people signed up voluntarily and it's a shame that that happens, but tragedies do happen in war," said senior Airman Preston Reeves, 26. Staff Sergeant Jonathan Criss, 37, said the US could not "just walk away and leave the Iraqi people". "If you interviewed the 30,000 [wounded], they would have no ill will," he added.

[Afghan aid pledges S\\$14 billion short](#)

AFP – 25 March 2008

Western countries have failed to deliver US\$10 billion (S\$14 billion) in promised aid to Afghanistan, undermining prospects for peace that depend on development, according to a report released on Tuesday. About 40 per cent of the aid that does arrive returns to rich countries in corporate profits and high consultant costs, according to the Agency Coordinating Body For Afghan Relief (ACBAR) report. The funds going towards reconstruction are, meanwhile, just 'a fraction' of military expenditure, with US\$25 billion spent on security-related assistance, such as building the Afghan security force, since 2001. The US military spends about a US\$100 million a day in Afghanistan, while the average volume of international aid from all donors since 2001 is just US\$7 million a day, the ACBAR document 'Falling Short' says. The international community had pledged US\$25 billion to Afghanistan since 2001, when the extremist Taliban government was removed from power, it says. However, 'just US\$15 billion in aid has so far been spent, of which it is estimated a staggering 40 per cent has returned to donor countries in corporate profits and consultant salaries,' it says. 'For example, a road between the centre of Kabul and the international airport cost the United States more than US\$2.3 million per kilometre, at least four times the average cost of building a road in Afghanistan.' Most full-time expatriate consultants working for private companies in Afghanistan cost US\$250,000 to US\$500,000 a year, including salary, allowances and associated costs, ACBAR says. The United States is the biggest donor to Afghanistan, contributing one-third of all aid since 2001. But it also has one of the biggest shortfalls, with the Afghan government saying it delivered only half of its US\$10.4-billion commitment between 2002 and 2008, ACBAR says. Similarly the Afghan government reports the European Commission and Germany distributed less than two-thirds of their respective US\$1.7-billion and US\$1.2-billion commitments, the document says. The World Bank was listed as distributing just over half of its US\$1.6-billion commitment, while Britain has pledged US\$1.45 billion and distributed US\$1.3 billion. 'Increasing insecurity and criminality is jeopardising progress in Afghanistan,' the report says. 'With low government revenues, international assistance constitutes around 90 per cent of all public expenditure in the country,' it says. 'Thus how it is spent has an enormous impact on the lives of almost all Afghans and will determine the success of reconstruction and development.' The report says the shortfalls could be partly attributed to 'challenging operating conditions, high levels of corruption and weak absorption capacities - and government data may not capture all donor spending.' However, it showed the importance of donors increasing efforts to work with such problems. 'Given the slow

pace of progress in Afghanistan, and the links between poverty and conflict, the international community must urgently get its act together,' says author Matt Waldman an advisor with the British charity, Oxfam. ACBAR includes 94 aid agencies including Oxfam, Christian Aid, CARE, Islamic Relief and Save the Children.

[Bandits kill three UN drivers in Sudan](#)

AAP – 26 March 2008

Three drivers from the UN World Food Program have been killed by bandits in separate attacks over the past week in Sudan's war-stricken western Darfur region and in its south, the agency said. The attacks highlight the security dangers in Sudan, where the world's biggest humanitarian operation is trying to cope with the crisis in Darfur while aid agencies are trying to help the south rebuild after decades of civil war. On Monday, a driver working for WFP was shot dead and his assistant seriously wounded in South Darfur state. On March 22, two drivers on their way to the oil-rich Abyei state were stabbed to death in south Sudan by six assailants, WFP said. In Darfur alone, the agency has had 56 trucks and six passenger vehicles hijacked this year and 24 drivers were still missing, the agency said. "We are extremely shocked and saddened by these incidents. This situation is completely unacceptable," the agency's head in Sudan, Kenro Oshidari, said in a statement. More than 12,000 humanitarian workers provide aid to around two-thirds of Darfur's population as a five-year-old rebellion drags on. International experts put the death toll at 200,000 although the Khartoum government says it is about 9,000. WFP said hijackings were rare in south Sudan, where a 2005 north-south peace deal ended Africa's longest civil war.

[Fresh clashes break out in Basra](#)

BBC – 26 March 2008

Fresh fighting has erupted in the southern Iraqi city of Basra and elsewhere, as Iraqi security forces battle Shia militants for a second day. Police and witnesses report clashes in five districts of Basra. More than 40 people are said to have died overall. Fighting is continuing in Baghdad, and there have been casualties after rockets were fired at the Green Zone. Prime Minister Nouri Maliki has given militants 72 hours to lay down their arms or face "severe penalties". His campaign to "re-impose law" in the city triggered unrest elsewhere in Iraq, and many towns are under curfew. Unrest in Basra has been stoked by a variety of militias and criminal gangs. But the government's unspoken intent is to stop it falling under the sway of the Mehdi Army, led by the radical young cleric Moqtada Sadr.

[Somalia fighting prompts warning](#)

BBC – 26 March 2008

Forty humanitarian agencies have warned of an impending catastrophe in Somalia unless urgent action is taken. They say 20,000 people continue to flee violence in the capital every month. The warning comes ahead of a UN Security Council meeting to consider sending 27,000 peacekeepers to Somalia to replace the stretched African force.

Correspondents say there are increasing attacks outside the capital, with Islamists raiding Jowhar town on Wednesday morning to release prisoners. Residents told the BBC that hundreds of fighters, belonging to the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), briefly held the town, about 90km (55 miles) north of the capital, Mogadishu, before pulling out after freeing the prisoners. The BBC's Mohammed Olad Hassan in Mogadishu says five soldiers and two civilians were killed in the clashes. Ethiopia intervened to help Somalia's interim government to oust the UIC from power in December 2006. The agencies say two million Somalis need daily help to survive the crisis caused by continued fighting between insurgents and the government. Somalia's ambassador to the UN said his government lacked enough international support and called for the partial lifting of the arms embargo. "It is ironic when the UN puts an arms embargo on a country which cannot secure its borders then anybody can import or export whatever they like and that's what was happening for 17 years," Elmi Ahmed Dualeh told the BBC. "Now the government is weak. It is weak because it never had support."

[Afghan Forces to Assume 'Leading Role' Against Enemy, General Says](#)

American Forces Press Service – 26 March 2008

The Afghan National Army will assume a leading role in the fight against enemy forces this spring, a military official said in Kabul, Afghanistan, yesterday. Enemy activity has been down in recent months due to the harsh winter weather in Afghanistan, but violence has historically increased when conditions improve in the spring, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Robert Cone, commander of Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan, said during a conference call with online journalists and "bloggers." Cone said the coalition was very productive in generating Afghan forces during the enemy's downtime. "The Afghan National Army decided to double its production of soldiers over the course of the winter," he said, "and that'll give us around about 8,000 soldiers that are ... beyond the training base and out into the fielded units." The Afghan army now has a fielded force of about 51,000 soldiers, who make up 11 full brigades throughout Afghanistan, Cone said. An additional 10,000 new soldiers are in training and will be out in units in the next couple of months, he said. He said the coalition also is training and fielding six Afghan commando units equipped with U.S. elite light-infantry tactics. Three of the six commando battalions are already in the field, he said. "The first three battalions have acquitted themselves in operations with special forces extremely well in their performance and conduct," Cone said. "It sets an example and tells us what a well-trained Afghan National Army soldier is truly capable of accomplishing." Afghan forces currently are leading the majority of "named operations" -- which are major operations -- in Afghanistan, Cone said. "A lot of (the operations) are small right now because the season hasn't really started," he said, "but we expect (Afghan forces) to take a very leading role here in the weeks to come." In addition, Cone said, new equipment was acquired over the winter to reduce shortages for the Afghan army. The coalition will be equipping the Afghan forces with M16 rifles at a rate of 10,000 new rifles per month through the summer and fall, he said. The rifles are a contribution from the U.S. and Canada, he added. Afghan forces are also being provided up-armored humvees for protected mobility and survivability against IED attacks, which Cone acknowledged are on the rise. The Afghan army will receive 5,000 of the latest version of the up-armored

humvee, he said, and the first shipments have already begun to arrive from acquisition sources. The Afghans will begin drivers' training for those vehicles soon, he added. Cone also said he recently completed a tour where he visited each of the Afghan National Army corps headquarters located in various parts of Afghanistan. The Afghan soldiers are "very much attuned to supporting the (International Security Assistance Force) campaign plan," he said. "I believe that investment in the Afghan forces, in training and equipment and time, ... rewards itself," he added, "because of the fact that the Afghans now are at a point where they will be taking the fight to the enemy."

[Supplier under scrutiny on aging arms for Afghans](#)

IHT – 27 March 2008

Since 2006, when the insurgency in Afghanistan sharply intensified, the Afghan government has been dependent on American logistics and military support in the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. But to arm the Afghan forces that it hopes will lead this fight, the American military has relied since early last year on a fledgling company led by a 22-year-old man whose vice president was a licensed masseur. With the award last January of a federal contract worth as much as nearly \$300 million, the company, AEY Inc., which operates out of an unmarked office in Miami Beach, became the main supplier of munitions to Afghanistan's army and police forces. Since then, the company has provided ammunition that is more than 40 years old and in decomposing packaging, according to an examination of the munitions by The New York Times and interviews with American and Afghan officials. Much of the ammunition comes from the aging stockpiles of the old Communist bloc, including stockpiles that the State Department and NATO have determined to be unreliable and obsolete, and have spent millions of dollars to have destroyed. In purchasing munitions, the contractor has also worked with middlemen and a shell company on a federal list of entities suspected of illegal arms trafficking. Moreover, tens of millions of the rifle and machine-gun cartridges were manufactured in China, making their procurement a possible violation of American law. The company's president, Efraim Diveroli, was also secretly recorded in a conversation that suggested corruption in his company's purchase of more than 100 million aging rounds in Albania, according to an audio file of the conversation. This week, after repeated inquiries about AEY's performance by The Times, the army suspended the company from any future federal contracting, citing shipments of Chinese ammunition and claiming that Diveroli misled the army by saying the munitions were Hungarian.

[Monks in Lhasa interrupt briefing and say China lying](#)

Reuters – 27 March 2008

A group of Tibetan monks disrupted an official news briefing at a key temple in Lhasa on Thursday, accusing Chinese authorities of lying after more than two weeks of unrest in the Himalayan region, witnesses said. The Chinese government brought a select group of foreign and Chinese reporters to Lhasa on Wednesday for a stage managed three-day tour of the city that was rocked by anti-Chinese violence on March 14 to show that stability had been restored. The group of monks at the Jokhang Temple, the most sacred temple in Tibet and a top tourist stop in central Lhasa, barged into a briefing by the head of the

temple's administrative office. "About 30 young monks burst into the official briefing, shouting: 'Don't believe them. They are tricking you. They are telling lies'," USA Today reporter Callum MacLeod said by telephone from Lhasa. Another reporter said some of the monks asserted that they had been unable to leave the Jokhang Temple since March 10. A third journalist on the trip, Wang Che-nan, a cameraman for Taiwan's ETTV said the incident lasted about 15 minutes, after which unarmed police took the Tibetans to another area of the temple, away from the journalists. It was unclear what happened to them next, the reporter said. Police and government minders did not confiscate notes or film from reporters but told them to move on. "They said: 'Your time is up, time to go to the next place'," Wang said.

[U.S. steps up missile strikes in Pakistan: report](#)

Reuters – 27 March 2008

The United States has escalated air strikes against al-Qaeda fighters operating in Pakistan's tribal areas fearing that support from Islamabad may slip away, The Washington Post reported on Thursday. U.S. officials, who were not identified, said Washington wants to inflict as much damage as it can to al Qaeda's network now because Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf may not be able to offer much help in the months ahead. Musharraf, a vital U.S. ally in the campaign against terrorism who has generally supported such strikes, has seen his power wane dramatically over the past year. Over the past two months, U.S.-controlled Predator aircraft have struck at least three sites used by al-Qaeda operatives, the Post reported. About 45 Arab, Afghan and other foreign fighters have been killed in the attacks, all near the Afghan border, U.S. and Pakistani officials were cited as saying. Neither U.S. nor Pakistani authorities officially confirm U.S. missile attacks on Pakistani territory, which would be an infringement of Pakistani sovereignty.

[Baghdad under curfew amid clashes](#)

BBC – 27 March 2008

A curfew has been imposed on Baghdad amid continuing clashes between Shia militias and Iraqi security forces. The curfew will last from 2300 (2000 GMT) on Thursday until 0500 on Sunday to "protect civilians", officials say. More than 130 people have died since a clampdown on Shia militias in the southern city of Basra started on Tuesday. Unrest has spread to Baghdad. Earlier US President George W Bush praised Iraqi PM Nouri Maliki's decision to order the crackdown. Heavy fighting between the Shia Mehdi Army, led by radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr, has continued in Basra for a third day, with violence in other parts of southern Iraq. Late on Thursday, Sadr called for a political solution to the crisis. In a statement relayed by his aide Hazem al-Aaraji, he said he wants "everyone to pursue political solutions and peaceful protests and a stop to the shedding of Iraqi blood". Mr Maliki earlier vowed that he would continue the fight against the militias for as long as was necessary. "We have made up our minds to enter this battle and we will continue until the end. No retreat," Mr Maliki said in a speech broadcast on Iraqi state television. The prime minister has personally overseen the operation in Basra, which involves some 30,000 troops and police. But Mehdi Army fighters remain in control of

some densely-populated areas. Speaking at a US Air Force museum in Dayton, Ohio, Mr Bush said "normalcy" was returning to Iraq. "As we speak Iraqis are waging a tough battle against militia fighters and criminals in Basra, many of whom have received arms and training and funding from Iran," he said. Mr Maliki's move against Basra's militias underlined "his leadership and his commitment to enforce the law in an even-handed manner", the US president added.

[International Zone under curfew as attacks continue](#)

CNN – 28 March 2008

Iraq's government imposed a weekend curfew in Baghdad on Thursday amid clashes between government troops and Shiite militia fighters, and U.S. Embassy staff were told to remain indoors after days of rocket attacks left two U.S. government employees dead. The curfew, which took effect at 11 p.m. Thursday (4 p.m. ET), bans pedestrian, motorcycle and vehicle traffic through 5 p.m. Sunday, said Gen. Qassim Atta, an Iraqi military spokesman. Sixteen rockets were fired Wednesday and 12 on Tuesday. U.S. Embassy workers in Iraq were told to remain in secure buildings and wear protective clothing as rockets continued to rain down on Baghdad's International Zone. Also called the Green Zone, the International Zone is a heavily fortified central Baghdad district housing the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi government offices. A senior U.S. official says the insurgents may have had recent training allowing them to conduct more precise targeting of the rockets, believed to be made in Iran. Meanwhile, the name of the U.S. government official killed in the attacks Thursday has not been released, an Embassy spokesman said. Another U.S. employee, Paul Converse, died Wednesday from wounds he sustained Sunday, officials said. And a U.S. soldier was killed by a roadside bomb in eastern Baghdad on Thursday, the U.S. military reported.

TERRORISM & COUNTER-TERRORISM

[Four FBI agents were wounded in Pakistan bombing](#)

Reuters – 16 March 2008

FBI agents were among those wounded in a bomb attack on an Italian restaurant in Islamabad during the weekend, the FBI said on Sunday. "Four FBI personnel were slightly injured in the bombing attack in Pakistan. The FBI is providing the necessary assistance to our employees and their families," FBI spokesman Richard Kolko said. Kolko provided no further details. The U.S. State Department had no addition comment. A bomb planted in the garden dining area of the Luna Caprese restaurant on Saturday killed a Turkish woman and wounded 11 people, including five Americans. The restaurant is a popular spot with foreigners in Islamabad. ABC News, citing unnamed sources, reported that an investigation was under way to determine whether the attack was based on whether terrorists had learned in advance the agents would be at the restaurant.

Detained Terrorists Reveal Al Qaeda Recruiting Process

American Forces Press Service – 18 March 2008

Information culled from 48 foreign fighters in custody of Multinational Force Iraq yields a profile for al Qaeda foreign terrorists, a senior military official said yesterday. When analyzed, officials found that foreign terrorists had comparable recruitment stories, including why they joined al Qaeda and what they did once they were smuggled into Iraq, said Air Force Col. Donald Bacon, chief of special operations and intelligence information for Multinational Force Iraq. Bacon spoke with online journalists and “bloggers” during a conference call. All of the captured or surrendered foreign terrorists were single men, and they averaged 22 years of age. Most worked blue-collar jobs and had little-to-no education or military experience, Bacon said. All the foreign terrorists came from large families, and standing out was a prime motivator for joining al Qaeda. However, Bacon said, interrogators were interested to find that while foreign fighters said they joined al Qaeda to “make their mark,” most were reluctant to tell their families for fear of disapproval. Multinational Force Iraq interrogators also discovered that al Qaeda misled recruits about the situation in Iraq. “The overwhelming point from the 48 (foreign terrorists in custody) is they came to Iraq expecting to see Americans get killed, yet what they primarily saw was Iraqis getting killed, and it bothered them,” Bacon said. “They did not come to kill Iraqis.” He said the foreign fighters were discouraged to find the expectations al Qaeda instilled in them were not reality upon arriving in Iraq. They came to Iraq expecting to see al Qaeda victorious instead of being defeated, he said. Multinational Force Iraq officials learned from the foreign terrorists that al Qaeda recruiters prey on young men they deem to be impressionable and lonely, Bacon said. They target recruits at mosques or at their jobs. “In all cases, the recruiter offered friendship and also offered to teach the future foreign terrorist the basics of Islam ... and that’s how the relationship started,” he explained. The foreign fighters revealed that they are usually flown into the airport in Damascus, Syria, and then they are smuggled into Iraq in a process that could take months, he said. The fighters described their treatment from fellow al Qaeda members and Iraqis as harsh upon their arrival in Iraq. They felt looked down upon by the Iraqis and feared revealing their foreign identity to locals, he said. Additionally, he said, officials found out that most of the foreign terrorists had signed up to be fighters but were pressured by al Qaeda to become suicide bombers. “They were told, ‘This is your duty. This is what we need you to do for the Jihad. You could be more useful as a suicide bomber than you could be a fighter. You’ll be a martyr and this is what we need you to do to win,’” he said. Ninety percent of suicide bombings in Iraq are carried out by foreign terrorists, Bacon said, making them the most lethal of all insurgents. “They produce the most destruction and cause the most civilian casualties,” he said. Coalition forces are working with the Iraqi government to tighten border controls, and the number of foreign terrorists entering the country has been reduced to between 40 and 50 a month, compared to an estimated 120 entries in June, he explained.

[China says plane incident plotted from abroad](#)

Reuters – 19 March 2008

Chinese authorities believe a March 7 incident when a flight to Beijing from the restive Xinjiang region cut short its journey was a failed attack by separatists based abroad, state media reported. China Southern flight CZ6901 originated in Urumqi, capital of the far western region where militant Uighurs have agitated for an independent 'East Turkestan' for their largely Muslim people. 'We have concluded from investigations that the attempt to cause an air disaster on the Southern Airlines flight on March 7 was a grave act of sabotage instigated and carried out by Eastern Turkestan separatists from abroad,' said the Communist Party chief of Xinjiang, Mr Wang Lequan, according to an official Xinjiang news website (<http://www.tianshannet.com>). Exiled Uighurs campaigning for an independent country have said China concocted the case to justify intense controls on Uighurs within China. The plane landed in the city of Lanzhou after crew members found what Xinhua news agency at the time called a 'planned terrorist attack'. Local newspaper reports said the incident apparently involved containers of flammable liquid brought on board. Mr Wang said that a suspect or suspects had already confessed to planning, directing and initiating the failed attack. He did not specify what country they operated from. Xinjiang is home to 8 million Muslim Uighurs, many of whom resent the growing presence and economic grip of Han Chinese. The oil-rich region borders Pakistan and Afghanistan. A senior Chinese official said recently extremist Uighurs - a Turkic people who share linguistic and cultural bonds with central Asia - were plotting attacks on the Beijing Olympics. China has said its police shot dead two members of a 'terrorist gang' and rounded up 15 others in a raid in January in Xinjiang. Mr Wang said separatist militants 'have never halted their separatist sabotage activities'.

[Progress being made in global fight against terrorism, UN official says](#)

UN News Centre – 19 March 2008

Considerable progress has been made worldwide in the fight against terrorism, including the endorsement of important treaties and the sharing of information between law enforcement agencies, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council today. Although resolution 1373 is as relevant today as it was when it was adopted in the wake of the September 2001 attacks against the United States, "most countries in the world have now criminalized terrorism," Mike Smith, Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), told the Council in an open debate today. Since the adoption of the landmark resolution, Mr. Smith said that there have been hundreds of new ratifications of the key counter-terrorism pacts. "There has been an almost unprecedented level of international exchange of information and cooperation among relevant agencies across borders, with the purpose of disrupting planned terrorist attacks and enabling the arrest and prosecution of those engaged in terrorism," he observed. Thus, the focus has shifted now to ensuring that nations have the capacity and expertise to implement the measures of resolution 1373, which calls for countries to enhance their ability to counter terrorist activities nationally, regionally and globally. Updating the Council on CTED's work, Mr. Smith said that the body is close to finalizing 192 Preliminary Implementation Assessments – one for every UN member –

which boosts dialogue with countries on putting resolution 1373 into effect. In addition, the Directorate will shortly finish revising a worldwide survey of the resolution's implementation, which assesses how countries in different regions and sub-regions are proceeding with the counter-terrorism efforts and identifies gaps that need to be addressed. Last December's attack in Algiers, Algeria, which claimed the lives of 17 UN staff members, is a "sober reminder that, notwithstanding the positive efforts we have collectively made, terrorism continues to be a serious threat to us all and it continues to evolve and manifest itself in new and dangerous ways," Mr. Smith noted at the meeting, which heard from over two dozen speakers. Established as a special political mission in 2004, the CTED assists the Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee in monitoring 1373's implementation.

[New 'bin Laden tape' threatens EU](#)

BBC – 20 March 2008

In a new audio message purportedly from Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leader threatens the EU over the re-printing of a cartoon offensive to Muslims. The voice on it says the cartoon, re-published recently in all major Danish newspapers, was part of a crusade involving Pope Benedict XVI. The drawing, first published in 2005, depicts the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban. The voice on the audio has not yet been verified as belonging to bin Laden. The message comes on the fifth anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq. But the BBC's Jonathan Beale in Washington says that the message was probably released to not to mark that anniversary, but rather the anniversary of the birth of Prophet Muhammad, which Sunni Muslims mark on Thursday. It appeared on a Islamist website that has carried al-Qaeda messages in the past. Over the audio is a graphic with a still image of bin Laden holding an AK-47 and bearing the logo of al-Sahab, the media wing of al-Qaeda. There is a written translation of the message in English. John Pike, director of the defence think tank GlobalSecurity.org, said bin Laden had chosen to talk about the cartoon in an effort to remain relevant and provide direction to followers. "His judgement is that it's a consistent crowd-pleaser, and that if he has any hope of getting people stirred up, this is probably a good way to try to do it." Last month, Denmark's leading newspapers reprinted one of 12 cartoons that first angered many Muslims when they were originally published in September 2005. Anger in the Muslim world peaked in 2006 as newspapers in other countries published the cartoons. Some of the protests turned violent and led to the torching of Danish diplomatic offices in Damascus and Beirut and dozens of deaths in Nigeria, Libya and Pakistan. The Danish newspapers decided to republish the most controversial drawing after Danish intelligence said it had uncovered a plot to kill the cartoonist. The re-printed drawing shows the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban. Islamic law forbids any representation of the Prophet. The message attributed to bin Laden says the attacks of Europeans on women and children "paled [in comparison] when you went overboard in your unbelief and... went to the extent of publishing these insulting drawings. "This is the greatest misfortune and the most dangerous," the voice says. "If there is no check on the freedom of your words, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions". It is not clear when the message was recorded. The last audio message attributed to bin Laden appeared

in November but he has not been seen on video since October 2004. He is believed to be in hiding on the rugged border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

DIPLOMACY & DEFENCE STRATEGY

[Russia's turn to move on missile shield: Pentagon](#)

Reuters – 16 March 2008

The United States wants Russia to make the next move in missile defense negotiations and will offer no new American proposals when top officials meet in Moscow on Monday, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on Sunday. "We've put a lot on the table and now it's time for them to reciprocate," Gates told reporters en route to Moscow. Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will meet with their Russian counterparts and President Vladimir Putin on a U.S. plan to put a radar installation in the Czech Republic and missile interceptors in Poland. Washington says the system is designed to protect against attacks from what it calls "rogue" states, specifically Iran. Moscow strongly opposes the system and says it could be directed at Russia. Gates and Rice offered late last year to grant Russian officials access to the sites that would be used for the system and to keep the system non-operational until Iran's long-range missile threat was demonstrated. There has been no subsequent progress, according to U.S. defense officials. Asked if he thought a deal could be close, Gates said, "that would be an overstatement." "I wouldn't get too enthusiastic at this point. We're here to make an effort and we'll see what we can do, but we're going to have to see some give on the Russian side at some point," Gates said. Unlike previously scheduled meetings of U.S. and Russian officials, the upcoming session in Moscow came suddenly after a telephone call between Putin and President George W. Bush. It should have been held in the United States, based on the rotation, but Gates said he and Rice hoped meeting in Moscow might facilitate an agreement.

[UN envoy disappointed after latest visit to Myanmar](#)

Reuters – 19 March 2008

A UN envoy said on Tuesday he was disappointed his latest visit to Myanmar yielded no tangible results but said it was important for the United Nations to keep engaging with authorities there. Ibrahim Gambari, special adviser on Myanmar to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, was reporting to the UN Security Council on a March 6-10 visit during which he met detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi twice but made no major progress in convincing the military junta to implement democratic reforms. Prof Gambari said he never expected his job to be smooth sailing. 'Indeed, over time, my engagement with my interlocutors has been difficult, complex, frustrating, but nevertheless incremental and continuing,' he said. He said during the visit he was not able to meet senior government leadership figures or opposition groups such as the '88 Generation' or representatives of ethnic groups. 'It is a source of disappointment that this latest visit did not yield any immediate tangible outcome,' he said. Prof Gambari's visit was this third to the former Burma since authorities crushed pro-democracy marches in September in a

crackdown that sparked worldwide outrage and a major diplomatic push for political reform in the former British colony, which has been under military rule since 1962. He told reporters after the meeting no date had been set for his return but he might meet officials from the Myanmar government in a third country to prepare for such a visit.

[Japan's navy chief sacked over accident scandal](#)

AFP – 21 March 2008

Japan's defence minister on Friday dismissed the navy chief and punished nearly 90 officials in the biggest house-cleaning in years after a string of scandals including a fatal naval accident. Japan's largest and most advanced destroyer, Atago, last month rammed into a small tuna fishing boat near Tokyo Bay, killing a fisherman and his adult son and triggering a public uproar. 'We deeply apologise to the people. We will promptly and continually carry out effective measures to prevent a recurrence,' Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters as he announced the punishments. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said separately: 'We have to rebuild the system so that such incidents will never be repeated.' 'We have to take a hard look at how the Self-Defence Forces and the defence ministry should operate,' he said. Japan, pacifist since defeat in World War II, calls its troops the Self-Defence Forces. The dismissal of Admiral Eiji Yoshikawa will take effect on Monday. He will be replaced by Admiral Keiji Akahoshi, who currently heads the naval force's Sasebo district in southern Japan. The ministry also punished 88 officials over the crash and two other scandals, including leakage of information on the functioning of the US-developed Aegis radar combat system. Two people were sacked, and the others faced either suspensions or had their salaries docked. But no sailors aboard the Atago were immediately punished, as the investigation into the accident is still ongoing. Ishiba will also voluntarily return part of his salary to state coffers, giving back 320,000 yen (\$4,439) for two months.

[U.S. jets escort Russian bombers off Alaska coast](#)

CNN – 26 March 2008

Two U.S. Air Force F-15s escorted two Russian Bear long-range bombers out of an air exclusion zone off the coast of Alaska, U.S. military officials said Wednesday. U.S. radar picked up the Russian turbo-prop Tupolev-95 planes about 500 miles off the Alaska coast. The U.S. fighters from Elmendorf Air Force Base were dispatched to meet the bombers and escorted them out of the area without incident, the officials said. The United States maintains the air exclusion zone off the coast of Alaska, barring unidentified aircraft or aircraft that don't file flight plans inside that area. The last case of Russian aircraft approaching the U.S. coastline or ships in the Pacific was in February. Then, four Bear bombers flew near the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, with one of them flying about 2,000 feet from the Nimitz's deck. Russia's Defense Ministry said at the time there was no violation of flight regulations during the incident. A ministry official described the flights as standard operating procedure for air force training. Meanwhile, U.S. military officials say the incidents are not a concern. They say it's the Russian military flexing its ability and presence.

[South Korea to take harder line on North](#)

IHT – 26 March 2008

The new, conservative South Korean government signaled a tougher line on North Korea on Wednesday, warning that it will speak out against human rights abuses in the Communist North and that it will not improve economic ties unless the North abandons its nuclear weapons programs. The new policy, outlined by the new president, Lee Myung Bak, means at least a temporary halt to generous South Korean economic aid at a dire time for the North. In recent weeks, relief experts have warned that high global commodity prices, flood damage and reluctance on the part of aid donors in light of Pyongyang's nuclear wrangling with Washington will worsen food shortages in the North. Kim said Seoul would not push for any joint economic programs with the North, barring progress in the nuclear disarmament talks. He also pledged to prioritize the return of South Korean citizens kidnapped by the North, an issue that has largely been skirted by previous governments. With the new approach, some analysts said, Lee risks alienating Pyongyang and losing Seoul's biggest leverage with its neighbor: the North's dependency on its aid, which had increased under the South Korean liberal governments of the past 10 years. Under the liberal governments of Lee's predecessors, Roh Moo Hyun and Kim Dae Jung, Seoul was reluctant to criticize the North publicly out of concern that doing so might hurt ties and efforts to resolve the international standoff over the North's nuclear program. Since 2003, South Korea has voted only once for a UN resolution criticizing the North's human rights record: after the North conducted a nuclear arms test in October 2006. Lee, who took office last month, has accused his predecessors of making too many concessions to the North in the name of reconciliation and has vowed not to shy away from criticizing the North on human rights.

[Iran threatens legal action over UN sanctions](#)

AP – 27 March 2008

Iran plans to take legal action and seek compensation for what it says are unlawful UN resolutions imposing sanctions on Teheran for refusing to suspend uranium enrichment, the foreign minister said in a letter obtained by The Associated Press on Wednesday. In the 20-page letter, Mr Manouchehr Mottaki said Iran will not implement the sanctions resolutions because the UN Security Council went beyond its powers, and its actions are inconsistent with the UN Charter. The United States, the European Union, Israel and others suspect Iran's goal is to produce nuclear weapons. But Iran insists its programme is aimed solely at producing nuclear energy and has defied the council by stepping up its enrichment activities. In the letter, Mr Mottaki said repeatedly that Teheran has answered all outstanding questions from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the IAEA 'has repeatedly stated that there is no evidence to prove any diversion of the Iranian nuclear program towards military purposes.' IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said in a Feb 22 report that his team made good progress in clarifying Iran's past nuclear activities but Teheran had not responded properly to intelligence forwarded by the US and its allies purportedly showing nuclear weapons technology. Foreign ministers of the six countries that have been in the forefront of efforts to ensure that Iran's nuclear intentions are peaceful - the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany - issued a joint statement

to coincide with the council's adoption of a third sanctions resolution on March 3 reaffirming their dual-track approach. They offered to improve a package of political, security and economic incentives they put on the table in June 2006 if Iran suspends enrichment - but said continued defiance will lead to further measures.

[N. Korea expels South's workers from factory zone](#)

Reuters – 27 March 2008

North Korea has expelled most of the South Korean managers working in a joint factory park just north of their heavily armed border, a government official said on Thursday. The move is one of the most aggressive shows made by the North against the South in years and comes as South Korea's new president has pledged to take a tougher line on North Korea for its widely condemned human rights abuses. An official from the South's Unification Ministry said 11 South Korean managers out of 13 at the Kaesong industrial park, located about a few hundred metres north of the border, were ordered to leave by North Korean officials. No reason was given for the expulsion.

[Georgia says NATO delay would fuel conflicts](#)

Reuters – 27 March 2008

NATO's failure to offer Georgia a membership plan at a summit next week would be seen as a victory in Russia and fuel separatist conflicts in the former Soviet state, Georgia's foreign minister said on Wednesday. David Bakradze said before meeting NATO officials in Brussels he understood some NATO countries were sceptical about offering the Membership Action Plan at the April 2-4 summit in Bucharest but urged them to be firm with Moscow. "Of course I cannot be confident, because it is a political decision of all 26 member states," he told a news briefing. "But I do hope this decision will be positive." US President George W. Bush said this month he would urge NATO allies to begin the membership process for Georgia at the summit, but he faces west European resistance in the face of strong Russian opposition. On Tuesday, Russian president-elect Dmitry Medvedev maintained pressure on NATO not to grant membership to Georgia, or another former Soviet state, Ukraine, saying this would undermine European security. Russia sees an extension of the NATO alliance to its borders as an infringement on its sphere of influence. When NATO foreign ministers met earlier this month, 11 west European countries including France, Germany, Italy, Norway and Portugal spoke against giving Kiev and Tbilisi membership plans at this time. Bakradze said a "no" to Georgia would show Moscow it could exercise indirect veto rights over which countries can join NATO and show the success of encouraging so-called frozen conflicts in two Russian-backed breakaway Georgian regions. "A no in Bucharest will have very, very threatening and negative implications for conflict resolution," he said. "It will be very clearly seen that this policy of creating problems works... and then we will have zero chances to resolve those conflicts peacefully and it will encourage those in Moscow who think it is better to maintain those conflicts." He rejected concerns that granting Georgia a membership plan could inflame relations between Russia and the West. He argued that the period of transition in the Russian presidency between Vladimir Putin and Medvedev presented a "window of opportunity". "Now it a unique time when there is no longer an

old president and not yet the new president, so there is no personality in Russia who can take NATO's enlargement as his personal failure."

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[Pilot killed in F-16 combat training](#)

CNN – 15 March 2008

The pilot of an F-16C fighter jet that crashed in a rugged area of western Arizona was killed when his plane went down, Air Force officials confirmed Saturday. The student pilot was practicing air-to-air combat with another F-16 from Luke Air Force Base about noon Friday when his plane crashed, base spokeswoman Mary Jo May said. Aircraft from the Air Force, Marines, Civil Air Patrol and Arizona Department of Public Safety spent hours trying to find the wreckage, which was spotted late Friday in a remote area about 80 miles northwest of Phoenix. Rescuers could reach the site only by helicopter and arrived at daybreak Saturday, May said. They found the pilot's parachute and some of his gear about 150 feet from an impact crater. It took several hours for the Air Force to confirm that he had died in the crash. The pilot, whose identity hasn't been released pending notification of relatives, was part of the 62nd Fighter Squadron, one of eight squadrons at the base. The base is in the Phoenix suburb of Glendale and is the world's largest F-16 training base with about 185 F-16s. There have been 17 other crashes of Luke-based F-16s since 1998, and only one of those resulted in a fatality, May said. That crash happened in May 2004, when a pilot with the Singapore air force died after his jet went down during a training mission at an Air Force bombing range in southwest Arizona. The most recent crashes came in 2006. A pilot ejected safely from an F-16 in April 2006 after the lone engine on the jet exploded just after takeoff from the base. The aircraft came down in a cornfield. Nearly nine months later, a two-seat F-16 crashed during a training mission at the same range where the Singapore pilot died. The pilot and instructor bailed out safely.

[IAF grounds all F-16I jets over carcinogenic material in cockpit](#)

Haaretz – 21 March 2008

The Israel Air Force ordered all F-16I fighter jets grounded Friday, after a carcinogenic material was found in the cockpit. IAF Commander Eliezer Shkedy ordered an examination of strong smells in the cockpit following several complaints by pilots. The Medical Corps examination found that the material in question was formaldehyde, which was recently recognized as a carcinogenic substance in high levels of exposure. Although the substance was only found in one of the planes' cockpits, Shkedy grounded all F-16I jets pending a thorough examination. The IAF informed the planes' manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, and the examination is being carried out in cooperation with the United States-based company.

[US, Russia, China in fierce battle to sell fighter jets in Asia](#)

AFP – 23 March 2008

The United States is bracing for tough competition from Russia and China as cash-flush Asian economies look up to the trio for a new breed of fighter jets to beef up their air forces, experts say. Japan, India, Australia and South Korea are keen to have the most modern, fifth generation, jet fighters while South-east Asian nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia are reportedly eyeing fourth generation fighters from China. With Asia powering ahead with military modernisation and capability growth, the United States wants to maintain leadership in defence sales in the region attracted by low cost offerings from Russia and China, experts said. The United States is currently the sole producer of fifth generation fighters - the F-22s and F-35s. Export of F-22s is barred by law while the lower cost F35s have just started flight testing ahead of deployment around 2012. Russia and China's fifth generation fighter offerings could well be on the market between 2015 and 2020, a time frame experts say is not very far away in terms of defence planning. 'I don't want to get into the numbers because they were given to me in confidence but the price the Russians are estimating for their fifth generation fighter is substantially less than the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) and substantially less than F-22,' US aviation expert Reuben Johnson told a Washington forum last week on 'challenges to the Asian air power balance'. He said the Russian arms industry was grappling with high production costs. Russian weapon exports to China have also plunged as Beijing became more wary over Moscow's sales of its most advanced weaponry to neighbour India. Russia had already teamed up with India to co-develop and co-produce a version of Moscow's fifth generation fighter, but given the Indian preference of diversifying its weapons sources, it was possible New Delhi could purchase a US fifth generation fighter at some point. The United States is also vying with Russia and others for a US\$12-billion (\$\$17-billion) contract to sell 126 fourth generation fighter jets to the Indian air force. The competition from Russia could prod the Americans to lift an export ban on F-22s, eyed by Australia and Japan, top US allies in the region, experts said. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates hinted during a recent Australian visit that Congress may be asked to reconsider the ban. Japan and another key US ally, South Korea, have indigenous fifth generation fighter programs but their transition to full scale development is uncertain. Australia is also in the midst of a debate over the future of its fighter force. Canberra recently said it would go ahead with the previous government's decision to acquire 24 US F/A-18 fighter jets for US\$5.6 billion. It also may review whether to purchase all of the F-35s the previous government committed to, or include F-22s in the package as well, experts said. Singapore, with one of the most powerful air forces in the region, is seen as probably a good potential customer for the F-35s. The US-Russia competition for the fourth generation fighters is expected to be intense - but China is emerging as a wild card. Pakistan, for example, is co-developing a very low cost fourth generation FC-1 fighter with China and is very likely going to be the first export customer for China's larger J-10 fighter as well, experts said. China is expected to 'market aggressively' to Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar the same two fighters as well as the KJ-200 AWACS aircraft to the South-east Asian region. Malaysia and Indonesia have purchased a relatively small number of advanced Russian Sukhoi fighters.

[Pentagon mistakenly shipped ballistic missile parts to Taiwan](#)

AP – 26 March 2008

The US military's mistaken delivery to Taiwan of electrical fuses for an intercontinental ballistic missile is raising questions over US relations with China and has triggered a broad investigation into the security of Pentagon weapons. The shipment did not include nuclear materials, but the error is particularly sensitive because China vehemently opposes US arms sales to Taiwan. Four of the cone-shaped fuses were shipped to Taiwanese officials in late 2006 instead of helicopter batteries that they had ordered. Despite quarterly checks of the inventory, defence officials said they never knew the fuses were gone. Only after months of discussions with Taiwan about the missing batteries did the Pentagon finally realise, late last week, the gravity of what had happened. On Taiwan, officials of the American Institute in Taiwan, which serves as the US government's official presence on the island, discussed the mistake with appropriate Taiwan authorities and expressed appreciation for their help in bringing the problem to US attention, the State Department said on Tuesday in a statement. It also said the officials explained US efforts to resolve the situation. Once the error was discovered, the military quickly recovered the four fuses. How it happened, and whether the incident constitutes a violation of any treaty or agreement governing international sales of missile technology, were lingering questions. It was the second nuclear-related mistake involving the US Air Force in recent months. Last August an Air Force B-52 bomber flew across several US states carrying six cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads. After the flight from an Air Force base near Canada landed at one near the Gulf of Mexico, the deadly missiles were discovered. Even the pilot and crew had been unaware they had nuclear arms aboard.

[Pentagon orders nuclear inventory](#)

BBC – 28 March 2008

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has ordered a full inventory of US nuclear arms after parts of ballistic missiles were mistakenly sent to Taiwan. He said a report, that would also include checks of related materials, should be completed within 60 days. The US sent nuclear fuse triggers to Taiwan instead of helicopter batteries in 2006. The mistake was only discovered last week. The arms issue is sensitive as China regards Taiwan as a renegade province. Beijing vehemently opposes US arms sales to Taiwan and has threatened to attack the island if it declares independence. On Thursday, Mr Gates also directed a senior navy officer to carry out an investigation into the mistaken delivery of the fuses. Earlier this week, the Pentagon said no nuclear materials had been shipped and the parts had been returned to the US. Taiwan had pointed out the error, but owing to a two-year miscommunication the US administration remained unaware of it until last week. The shipment had been sent from a US airbase in Wyoming. It has caused a major embarrassment to the Pentagon, says the BBC's Jonathan Beale in Washington. China has expressed its "strong displeasure". Detail of the mistaken shipment is the second blunder to emerge in recent months. Last August, a B-52 bomber flew across several US states mistakenly armed with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

[TB killed 1.7 million globally in 2006, WHO says](#)

Reuters – 18 March 2008

The rate of tuberculosis incidence fell slightly worldwide for a second straight year in 2006, but there were still 9.2 million new cases and the disease killed 1.7 million people, the United Nations health agency said. The rate decline of 0.6 per cent in 2006 compared to 2005 was so modest that the increase in the world's population meant there were actually more TB cases globally, the World Health Organisation said in its annual report on tuberculosis on Monday. And WHO officials cited worrisome trends suggesting that recent progress was stalling, while saying more money is needed to fight TB, which trails only Aids as the world's leading killer among infectious diseases. By region, Africa had the highest TB rates while Asia had the most cases. By nation, India had the most cases, followed by China, Indonesia, South Africa and Nigeria, according to the report based on data from 202 countries and territories. 'We're really in a very uncertain situation, so I don't feel happy at all, actually, that it is really getting controlled,' Dr Mario Raviglione, who heads WHO efforts against TB, told reporters in a conference call. 'The major concern is that there is a slowdown here, rather than an acceleration, in TB control efforts,' he said. The data came out a month after another WHO report showed that TB cases that defy existing drugs were occurring globally at the highest rates ever, with nearly 490,000 cases in 2006. Parts of the former Soviet Union were particularly vulnerable. TB is an infectious bacterial disease typically attacking the lungs. The emergence and spread of drug-resistant germs makes treating it much harder and could make it even deadlier. WHO officials said they had hoped for a bigger decline in the TB rate in 2006 after seeing the milestone of a first TB rate decline in 2005. They also noted that the rate at which people were diagnosed with new cases in countries was lower in 2006 than the rate seen between 2001 to 2005. All told, an estimated 14.4 million people had TB in 2006, the WHO said. Among those, there were 9.2 million new cases - including 700,000 people who also are HIV-infected - up from 9.1 million cases in 2005. Worldwide death rates from TB fell by 2.6 per cent in 2006 compared to 2005, the WHO said. About 230,000 of the 1.7 million people killed by TB in 2006 were infected with the Aids virus. WHO officials said there is a shortfall in funding to combat TB around the world, saying US\$4.8 billion (S\$6.6 billion) is needed this year while only US\$2.7 billion has been made available by nations where the disease is common and by international donors. 'This data should serve as a warning to the global community that we must do more and be more aggressive in supporting TB programs or face a continued erosion of progress,' Ms Joanne Carter of the Results anti-poverty advocacy organisation. 'And while there has been notable progress in recent years, we are starting to see the needle move in the wrong direction. And on top of last month's data on high rates of drug resistance, we should take this very seriously and act with urgency,' Ms Carter added.

[Israeli kidnapping risk grows](#)

AFP – 21 March 2008

Israel has warned its citizens of what it termed a "high risk" of being kidnapped when travelling outside the country. The warning comes after the February killing of a top leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, a death it blames on Israel. "The Counter-Terrorism Bureau warns over kidnappings of Israelis abroad, particularly businessmen and above all those who work with Arabs or Muslims," the agency said on its Internet site. The bureau urged Israelis not to travel abroad in organised tours to avoid being targeted. "It is a high risk," the warning states, saying the threat is particularly high after the conclusion of the traditional 40-day mourning period following the killing of senior Hezbollah commander Imad Mughnieh. The Lebanese Shiite militia accused Israel of carrying out the February 12 car bomb assassination in Damascus. Authorities in the Jewish state have denied any involvement but welcomed the killing of Mughnieh, who was wanted for a string of attacks in the 1980s and 1990s on US and Israeli targets. "Hezbollah continues to blame Israel for the death of Mughnieh, which increases the risk of attacks conducted by Hezbollah on Israeli targets," the internet site says. "Hezbollah would have liked to kidnap or assassinate former Israeli senior military officials, or target a tour group," General Nitzan Nuriel, who heads the Counter-Terrorism Bureau, told armed forces radio. The mass circulation Yediot Aharonot daily said Israelis travelling to Cyprus faced particularly high risks of being attacked or kidnapped.

[HIV cases could jump in Asia by 2020: UN](#)

Reuters – 27 March 2008

The number of people in Asia infected with HIV could jump by more than 150 per cent, or 8 million, by 2020 unless more is done to combat the spread of the virus that causes Aids, a report presented to the UN secretary-general said on Wednesday. That increase could be kept to 3 million if a response program is adopted immediately, according to the report from The Commission on Aids in Asia, which called for more involvement from political leaders, greater resources and stronger prevention programs to quell the epidemic. Nearly 5 million people are infected with HIV in Asia now, with 440,000 dying annually, the report said. The annual death toll will rise to almost 500,000 by 2020 without a scaled-up response, according to the report, entitled 'Redefining Aids in Asia - Crafting an Effective Response.' 'By implementing the recommendations of the commission, Asian countries can avert massive increases in infections and death, prevent economic losses and save millions of people from poverty,' UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said in a statement. The HIV epidemic in Asia is characterized by risky behaviour among three groups, the commission found: commercial sex workers and their customers, injectable drug users and men who have sex with men. These groups should be the focus of prevention efforts to control HIV, Commission Chairman Chakravarthi Rangarajan told reporters at a briefing. Aids is the most likely cause of death and work days lost among 15-to-44-year-olds in Asia, according to the commission, which worked on the report for 18 months. Asia ranks second regionally in HIV cases behind Sub-Saharan Africa, which has an estimated 22.5 million people living with HIV. Although prevalence rates are low in Asian countries, the large populations drive up the overall numbers, said

Rangarajan, who is also chief economic adviser to India's prime minister. The commission recommended a minimum annual investment of 30 US cents (42 Singapore cents) to 50 US cents per capita on focused prevention programmes. By spending US\$1 per person, the countries can implement a broader approach including treatment. Government heads of state should directly become involved in HIV control efforts to show leadership, Rangarajan said, which has generally not occurred. Prevention programs should take steps to ensure more extensive use of condoms, Mr Rangarajan said. The commission said efforts to develop policies to combat HIV also must directly include the communities most affected by the disease. Governments also need to repeal or change laws that foment HIV-related discrimination, the report said. 'It shows clearly that the response to the epidemic has to be tailored to Asian realities,' Peter Piot, Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/Aids, said at the briefing. 'There is not one Asian reality, there are many. The time is gone that with a blueprint for the whole world we can stop this epidemic.'

MILITARY / PEACEKEEPING / HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

[China sends troops to tackle Tibetan unrest](#)

Reuters – 16 March 2008

Chinese troops moved to tackle more unrest in ethnic Tibetan enclaves on Monday, as a deadline loomed for "troublemakers" who took part in protests against Chinese rule in Lhasa that some say killed up to 80 people. Lhasa, capital of the remote, mountainous region, was under tight police watch, but reports and officials said demonstrations by ethnic Tibetans flared in at least two Chinese provinces at the weekend, piling pressure on the Communist authorities. "We are completely capable of protecting the security of the Tibet people. Right now the overall situation in Tibet is very good," the mayor of Lhasa, Doje Cezhug, said from Beijing, in remarks posted on the Tibet government's Web site. But protests hit ethnic Tibetan areas in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan and Gansu on Sunday, reducing the chances of an early end to the instability that is a major challenge to China's leaders just months before it hosts the Olympic Games. In the Sichuan region of Aba, two ethnic Tibetans said hundreds of People's Liberation Army vehicles moved in overnight, after unrest in which police said a crowd of Tibetans hurled petrol bombs and set a police station and a market on fire. "They've been driving through all night. It's just tailing off now," the man said, adding that word had spread of protests in other parts of the region as well. In Gansu's Machu town, a crowd of 300-400 carried pictures of Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and shouted slogans as they marched on government buildings, breaking windows and doors and setting fire to Chinese shops and businesses, the Free Tibet Campaign said. The London-based group said 100 Tibetan students staged a sit-in at Northwest Minority University in Gansu's capital, Lanzhou, a worry for a country with a history of student unrest, notably the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 that ended in a bloody military crackdown.

[Relief agencies: Somalia too dangerous for us to work](#)

CNN – 25 March 2008

Nearly 40 relief agencies serving Somalia said Tuesday they can't help millions of Somalis, blaming the existence of too many checkpoints, danger that aid workers face and "a lack of respect for international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict." "The crisis engulfing Somalia has deteriorated dramatically, while access to people in need continues to decrease," said a statement signed by organizations including World Vision, Oxfam International and Cooperative Assistance for Relief Everywhere, among others. The statement was timed to coincide with a scheduled U.N. Security Council meeting this week to discuss a report issued on Somalia by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon earlier this month. The organizations want the humanitarian situation to be part of any discussion or decision on the situation in the African nation. Since the NGOs warned of "an impending humanitarian catastrophe" in October, some 360,000 people in Somalia have been displaced, the statement said, and an additional 500,000 rely on humanitarian assistance. "There are now more than 1 million internally displaced people in Somalia," the statement said. "Intense conflict in Mogadishu continues to force an average of 20,000 people from their homes each month. This, combined with record high food prices, hyperinflation and drought in large parts of the country, is leaving communities struggling to survive." In Ban's report, issued March 14, he noted that Somalia's security situation remains "volatile"; that kidnappings and acts of piracy continue to take place, particularly in the northern part of the country; and that there are indications international terrorists have sought safe haven in at least two districts. A 15-kilometer (9-mile) stretch of road between Mogadishu and the town of Afgooye is now home to some 250,000 displaced people, according to World Vision, and has been described by the United Nations as "probably the single largest IDP [internally displaced persons] gathering in the world today." The organization said "numerous obstacles" prevent humanitarian aid from reaching all those in need. They include "administrative delays, restrictions or delays in movement of goods, targeting of humanitarian workers and assets including the looting of aid and carjackings, piracy [and] negative perception of humanitarian workers," among others. Six aid workers have been killed in Somalia since January 2008, World Vision said, triggering some agencies to pull their personnel from the country. As of Tuesday, the number of checkpoints and roadblocks was 396 -- a huge increase from the 147 reported in January 2007, the organization said. The statement implores the international community, as well as parties to the Somali conflict, to focus on the humanitarian situation there. Last week, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the U.N. special representative for Somalia, pleaded with the Security Council not to turn its back on the nation. "Please don't abandon Somalia," he said in a meeting Thursday. "Please don't punish them, especially those who were not born then, or were not responsible during the early '90s when their elders made mistakes against the international community." Meanwhile, Somali refugees have affected neighboring countries. Authorities in Djibouti estimate about 100 refugees cross the border daily, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. One Somali, Faizo Ibrahim Ali, told the UNHCR, "There was no choice but to flee, because of there is war there -- and a woman alone is in great danger of being raped." The Djibouti government says it is overwhelmed by the influx of refugees. So far this year, more than 2,000 refugees have

been registered by the UNHCR -- that's more than double the number recorded in all of last year. "This is an urgent situation and it's necessary to intervene as soon as possible, so that we can accommodate these people in a dignified manner," Hassan Omar Mohammed, secretary general of Djibouti's interior ministry, told the UNHCR. "Otherwise it will be a catastrophe." Djibouti will keep its borders open for now, the U.N. reported, but added that the nation's officials are worried that without adequate support, they will have no choice but to close them.

[U.S. ship fires warning shots at boat in Suez Canal](#)

CNN – 25 March 2008

The United States is working with the Egyptian government to figure out the details of a shooting incident in the Suez Canal involving a cargo vessel contracted by the U.S. military. Egypt's state-run news agency and other media reports say one person was killed and at least two others wounded on Monday when the U.S. security team aboard the vessel fired on a small boat that approached it. But the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and a military spokeswoman said they had no reports of casualties, noting that they had accounted for all warning shots fired at the small boat. When asked about the discrepancy, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack was vague, calling it an "incident" involving "a cargo ship that was contracted by the U.S. Department of Defense to transit U.S. Department of Defense materials ... through the Suez Canal." An embassy statement said the incident is being investigated by the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet Command and Egyptian authorities, including the Suez Canal Authority and other local officials, as well as the national authorities through the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. According to the embassy statement and a senior U.S. military official, several small boats approached the *Global Patriot*, a cargo vessel contracted by the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command. The incident happened as the ship prepared to cross the Suez Canal, a 100-mile long waterway that crosses through Egypt and connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. "The boats were hailed and warned by a native Arabic speaker using a bullhorn to warn them to turn away," the embassy statement said. After a warning flare was fired, one of the small boats continued to approach the ship, prompting the U.S. forces on board to fire two sets of warning shots which landed in the water, about 20 yards to 30 yards in front of the boat. "All shots were accounted for as they entered the water," the statement said. The senior U.S. military official said an armed military security team was on board for the canal transit, but it was not clear if the team was made up of U.S. Marines or sailors. The military official said the security team fired six warning shots with small caliber weapons. The shots hit the water, prompting the boat to veer off, he said. When asked about reports of a fatality, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain said they had no indications of any casualties in the incident. But an Egyptian security official told *The Associated Press* that after the warning shots, further gunfire killed one man in the small boat and wounded three others. Abbas al-Amrikani, the head of the Suez seaman's union, told AP the dead man was Mohammed Fouad, a 27-year-old father of three. "We are praying over his the body right now," al-Amrikani told the AP by telephone. Prayers could be heard in the background as he spoke, AP reported. The Egyptian security official, speaking to AP on condition of anonymity, said merchants often use small boats to try to sell cigarettes and other items to ships transiting the Suez

Canal. The merchants know not to approach military vessels, he told AP, but the fact that the Global Patriot was a civilian vessel may have led to confusion.

[Comoros military oust rebels from island capital](#)

CNN – 25 March 2008

The Comoros government captured the capital of the rebel-held island of Anjouan on Tuesday, just hours after an African Union-backed military operation got under way to oust a renegade colonel who took power in May, a defense official said. Explosions and gunfire started ringing out before dawn as hundreds of troops moved in as part of a long-threatened invasion. There was no immediate word on casualties. "We have now taken the Anjouan capital," Defense Chief of Staff Mohamed Dosara said by telephone from the main island of Grand Comore. "We have met a small amount of resistance." Anjouan island's seaport was under the control of AU troops, according to an Associated Press reporter at the scene. However, about a dozen armed men, who identified themselves as loyalists to renegade Col. Mohamed Bacar, appeared in control just over a mile outside the capital, Mutsamudu, and awaiting an attack. The Comoros, an archipelago of three main islands 250 miles off Africa's southeast coast with a population of about 750,000, has been caught up in a series of coups and political upheavals since gaining independence from France in 1975. The late Bob Denard, a notorious French mercenary, controlled the Comoros behind a figurehead leader for most of the 1980s following a coup he led. Bacar's takeover of Anjouan island drew increasingly strident warnings from the central government. Dosara said troops were searching for Bacar, a former president of Anjouan who has said he is seeking the island's independence. Mohamed Kassim Adong, a resident of the coastal Anjouan town of Domoni, said he saw soldiers going house-to-house conducting searches. Several hundred soldiers, including at least 80 AU troops from Tanzania, were among the initial landing force that arrived aboard four ships, authorities said. About 100 Comoros military reinforcements later arrived by sea, along with six pickup trucks mounted with machine guns, and began fanning out on the island. On Monday, the country's president said the army would invade Anjouan and helicopters dropped leaflets over the island urging residents to avoid the pending fighting. Each of the three main islands of Comoros has a regional president under the country's main leader, President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, who is based in Moroni on Grand Comore.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[France calls for treaty banning short, medium range missiles](#)

AFP – 21 March 2008

French President Nicolas Sarkozy called on Friday for talks on a new international treaty banning short and medium range ground-to-ground missiles. 'I propose the opening of negotiations on a treaty banning ground-to-ground missiles of short and medium range,' he said in a major defence policy speech as he inaugurated a new generation nuclear submarine named The Terrible. He also proposed talks on a new treaty banning the

production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and an immediate moratorium on its production. The United States in 2006 proposed a similar treaty.

[France to reduce nuclear warheads](#)

BBC – 21 March 2008

President Nicolas Sarkozy has said France will reduce its number of airborne nuclear weapons by one third. Mr Sarkozy said the reduction to fewer than 300 missiles would leave France with "half the maximum number of warheads we had during the Cold War". But he also insisted he was committed to France's nuclear deterrent, saying it was its "life-insurance policy". He made the comments in a major defence policy speech after inaugurating a new nuclear-armed submarine, the *Terrible*. France is believed to have 348 deployed nuclear weapons, including 288 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, 50 air-launched cruise missiles and 10 airborne bombs, according to the Federation of American Scientists. In his first major speech on France's nuclear deterrent since being elected president last May, Mr Sarkozy said military spending needed to be re-examined. The cuts would reduce France's airborne force of nuclear weapons by a third, he said, leaving fewer than 300 warheads, mostly on board submarines. "By giving this information, France is fully transparent since it has no other weapons than those in its operational stocks," he told an audience at the northern port of Cherbourg. "Moreover, I confirm that none of our weapons are targeted at anybody." Nevertheless, Mr Sarkozy insisted he remained committed to France's independent nuclear "strike force" and said those who threatened the country's vital interests could expect a "severe riposte". He said that while France no longer faced a realistic threat of invasion, it now faced new threats from the Middle East and Asia. "The security of Europe is at stake," he said, singling out Iran's development of ballistic missiles and its controversial nuclear programme. At the same time, Mr Sarkozy appealed for other nations to scale back their nuclear arsenals and called on China and the US to finally ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, which they signed in 1996. He also called for an international treaty banning short and medium range ground-to-ground missiles and another banning the manufacture of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

[S. Korean FM says N. Korea running out of time to break nuclear deadlock](#)

AP – 22 March 2008

South Korea's top diplomat warned North Korea on Saturday that time was running short for the communist nation to make progress in stalled negotiations over its nuclear programs, a news reports said. Foreign Minister Yu Myung Hwan said the North should address the stalemate over its requirement to fully declare its nuclear programmes quickly because the US government does not have much time to focus on the issue, according to Yonhap news agency. 'Looking at the schedule of US domestic politics, (Washington) would virtually take its hands off (the issue) once the vacation season starts in early August,' Mr Yu told reporters in Beijing at the end of his three-day visit there, Yonhap said. 'We have to start negotiations anew from scratch if a new administration comes in the United States. Therefore, we have to make progress in the declaration issue so as to prepare momentum' for further negotiations, he said of the US presidential election. Mr

Yu also said he asked China to help speed up the process. Beijing is host for the six-nation nuclear talks that also involve the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Russia. Foreign Ministry officials in Seoul were not immediately available to confirm Mr Yu's comments in Beijing. Differences over the North's promised nuclear declaration have held up the negotiations, as Washington accused Pyongyang of failing to fully account for all its nuclear programs by the end of 2007 under a six-party agreement. The North says it gave Washington a nuclear programs' list in November, but the US says Pyongyang never produced a 'complete and correct' declaration. Mr Yu, who held talks with China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Friday, said that South Korea's new President Lee Myung Bak would visit China as early as early May. China agreed in principle that its President Hu Jintao would visit Seoul later this year, according to Yonhap.

[US-Bahraini deal on nuclear power](#)

Gulf News – 25 March 2008

Bahrain has signed a deal with the United States to cooperate on civilian nuclear power. Eager to continue applying regional pressure on Iran, the State Department said such cooperation was a model for Middle Eastern nations to follow. Bahrain, a huge oil and gas exporter, said it would not be seeking sensitive nuclear fuel technologies and would buy fuel on the international market. The State Department described the agreement as "a tangible expression of the United States' desire to cooperate with states in the Middle East, and elsewhere, that want to develop peaceful nuclear power in a manner consistent with the highest standards of safety, security and non-proliferation." Bahrain also endorsed the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, a joint US-Russian backed effort to prevent militant groups from obtaining nuclear weapons.

[India rejects US timeline for nuclear deal](#)

AFP – 26 March 2008

India said it could not commit to any United States timeline for finalisation of a landmark nuclear deal caught in a deadlock among its ruling coalition partners. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee said on Tuesday New Delhi needed 'more time' to forge an agreement on the deal despite a tight 2008 US legislative calendar ahead of the November presidential polls. US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed more than two years ago on the deal, in which Washington would provide India with nuclear fuel and technology even though the Asian nation has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But the agreement had failed to win the support of the Indian ruling Congress-led coalition's Communist allies, who feared the sovereignty of the nuclear armed nation would be compromised and New Delhi might ally more closely with the United States. The Bush administration and the US Congress has warned India about the limited time available for the civil nuclear deal to be approved by the legislature before Mr Bush leaves the White House in January 2009. Senator Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, had said the agreement had to come before the Senate for approval no later than July. The communist parties, who prop up the minority government in Parliament, have threatened to withdraw their support of

the government and force early elections if Indian leaders move to implement the deal. The government had defended the pact as critical for providing new fuel sources to keep the energy-hungry nation's economy growing strongly. Aside from resolving the political problem, India also needs approval from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to place its civilian nuclear reactors under United Nations safeguards as part of the atomic deal. In addition, it also needs the green light from the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which regulates global civilian nuclear trade. The minister also said that Prime Minister Singh's administration would have to continue finding common ground on the nuclear deal.