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Articles from subscriber only sites are available on request. Révolutionnaire is edited by Samuel Chan, with contributions from Bernard Loo and Joshua Ho. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) is a key research component of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). It focuses on security research to serve national needs. IDSS' faculty and research staff conduct both academic and policy-oriented research on security-related issues and developments affecting Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Its research agenda presently comprises the following programmes: Maritime Security, the Revolution in Military Affairs, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Contemporary Islam, Indonesia and China.

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT

[Palestinians agree Israel truce](#)

BBC – 30 April 2008

Twelve Palestinian factions have agreed to proposals for a truce with Israel, starting in the Gaza Strip, Egypt's state news agency Mena says. It says the proposed ceasefire will be a "comprehensive, reciprocal and simultaneous truce", and will later be extended to the West Bank. Fatah and Hamas, the two main rival Palestinian groups, did not attend the talks in the Egyptian capital, Cairo. Israel on Friday rejected proposals by Hamas for such a truce. Israeli officials described the offer by Hamas as a ploy to gain time to prepare for more fighting. But responding to news of Wednesday's agreement in Cairo Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said: "Israel wants quiet in the South. For quiet to be sustainable, it must contain three vital elements: an end to all hostile fire from Gaza into Israel, an end to terror attacks and an end to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. If this were to happen we could have quiet tomorrow." The 12 smaller Palestinian factions backed the ceasefire proposed by Hamas after a series of meetings with senior Egyptian officials in Cairo. Mena quoted an unnamed high-ranking Egyptian official as saying that the proposal included a "comprehensive, reciprocal and simultaneous truce". The official added that it would be "implemented in a graduated framework starting in the Gaza Strip and then subsequently moving to the West Bank". Egypt has been working to broker a deal that would include a six-month ceasefire between Israel and the factions in the Gaza Strip, an exchange of prisoners and the opening of Gaza's border crossing. But the Palestinian groups want the truce to also include the West Bank. "We are in favour of the truce, on the condition that it be balanced, reciprocal, equal and comprehensive, to include Gaza and the West Bank as well," Talal Nagy of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command was quoted as saying by Reuters. Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but it still controls the borders of the territory where Hamas seized control last year.

[Gates says U.S. could eye expanded Afghanistan role](#)

Reuters – 2 May 2008

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on Friday the United States could consider taking over NATO's command in southern Afghanistan, where some NATO allies have been reluctant to provide combat forces. But Gates said the Pentagon would consult closely with NATO allies, particularly those countries with combat forces in the southern region, before making any decision to alter its military role in the country. Southern Afghanistan, which has seen the worst of a rising tide of Taliban violence, is now under NATO command. Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia all have forces in the region. "This is a matter that's going to be looked at over probably some period of time primarily because it requires consultation with our allies," Gates told reporters when asked to comment on discussion at the Pentagon about the possibility of taking over command in southern Afghanistan. "It certainly is worth taking a look at," he added. The United States has 34,000 troops in Afghanistan under two commands. About 16,000 soldiers under U.S. European Command serve as part of a 47,000-strong NATO force. A

further 18,000 U.S. troops are in the country separately under U.S. Central Command. Gates was speaking during a visit to the Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, where the U.S. Army refurbishes and re-equips fighting vehicles for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Violence in Afghanistan has risen sharply over the past two years to the highest level since U.S.-led forces invaded the country in 2001 and toppled the Taliban government in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. The United States has begun to increase its troop presence in the south where some NATO countries have been reluctant to send forces. Canada threatened briefly to withdraw its 2,500 soldiers from southern Afghanistan unless more NATO troops were sent to the region. The Canadians relented last month when France offered several hundred additional soldiers. But the French forces will go to eastern Afghanistan, allowing some of the U.S. troops deployed there to reinforce the Canadians in the south. About 2,000 of 3,200 U.S. Marines the Pentagon decided to send to Afghanistan earlier this year on a temporary deployment are also assigned to combat duties in the southern region.

[U.S. puts faith in new roads to build Afghan security](#)

Reuters – 4 May 2008

On the face of it, there are not many similarities between battling cocaine kingpins in South America and fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. But for Major Dan Morgan, who runs U.S. military operations in a large swathe of east Afghanistan and once worked in drug enforcement in Colombia, there is one unifying factor -- roads. In Colombia, when his team tried to wean locals away from coca leaves to grow crops like bananas instead, they realized it was only going to work if they built roads linking the banana plantations to local towns so the produce could be sold. In Afghanistan, where so much of the country is semi-lawless and inaccessible, trying to draw communities away from the influence of the Taliban again depends on building roads, so that locals can easily reach markets and join the economy. "When it comes down to it, roads are very, very significant," Morgan, the brigade operations officer for a task force of the 101st Airborne Division, said in an interview. "If you have a paved road here, you have fewer IEDs," he said, referring to the deadly roadside bombs the Taliban and other militants use to target U.S. and Afghan convoys. "Once you have a road you can also get Afghan forces to where they need to be more quickly, which improves security. As some have said: where a road ends, instability begins." The problem is, building roads takes time and costs huge amounts of money, up to \$250,000 per kilometer for asphalt, according to U.S. engineers. And U.S. or Afghan forces need to impose security in an area before construction can begin. In the remote regions of eastern Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan, where the Taliban have traditionally been strong, linking isolated goat-herding communities with larger towns by road could take years -- not to mention the difficulty of building at altitudes of up to 12,000 feet. And all the time the Taliban are vying for the loyalty of the community, trying to shut out the influence of the Americans and the slowly improving Afghan National Army. "It's not quick, that's for sure," said Morgan. "It takes vision and it takes tactical patience. At the end of the day, 99 percent of the operations our brigade is working on are non-lethal."

[Two Georgian spy drones 'shot down'](#)

CNN – 4 May 2008

Two unmanned Georgian spy planes were shot down Sunday over the country's breakaway region of Abkhazia, an Abkhazian official said. Ruslan Kishmaria, a representative of Abkhazia's president, said the two planes were shot down by Abkhazian anti-aircraft forces. Authorities were searching for fragments of the planes, he said. A Georgian Foreign Ministry official, Maka Gigauri, dismissed the claims as "completely absurd disinformation" aimed at increasing tension in the area. The tension between Georgia and Russia, which has close ties to Abkhazia, has escalated since Georgia accused Moscow of shooting down its pilotless reconnaissance plane over the region two weeks ago. Russia denied involvement and separatist Abkhazian officials said their forces shot down the plane. Russia is strengthening its support for Abkhazia and another Georgian separatist region, South Ossetia, as Georgia's U.S.-allied President Mikhail Saakashvili pushes for NATO membership for his country. Abkhazia and South Ossetia seek either independence from Georgia or absorption into Russia. Georgia is strategically located on an key Westward route for Caspian Sea oil and gas riches.

[Attack on Iraqi first lady's convoy wounds soldiers, civilians](#)

CNN – 4 May 2008

A bomb detonated near the Iraqi first lady's motorcade in downtown Baghdad on Sunday, wounding soldiers and at least two civilians, but the president's wife escaped without injury, officials said. Hiro Ibrahim Ahmed, the wife of President Jalal Talabani, was heading to the al-Mada cultural festival at Baghdad's National Theater when the bomb struck her motorcade in the central Karrada district. The bombing targeted an Iraqi army convoy, wounding four soldiers and two civilians, an Interior Ministry spokesman said. The bomb damaged one vehicle in the first lady's convoy and left four of her bodyguards with minor injuries, Talabani's office said. Also in Baghdad, a double roadside bombing Sunday killed a police officer and wounded eight others, an Interior Ministry official said. The first bomb exploded near a traffic police patrol. Several people were outside a nearby passport office. When they rushed to the scene of the explosion, a second bomb went off, the ministry official said. The wounded included four police officers and four civilians, the official said. Hours later, a drive-by shooting in western Baghdad killed the deputy head of Baghdad University, Ayad Hamza, as he stood outside his house with his two sons, who were wounded in the attack, an Interior Ministry official said. Attacks in Iraq have claimed the lives of numerous academics and intellectuals, prompting many to flee the country.

[Iran: No talks until U.S. stops Iraq attacks](#)

CNN – 5 May 2008

An Iranian official says the government wants the United States to stop its "savage attacks" in Iraq before its envoys hold more talks with U.S. and Iraqi officials, Iran's Fars News Agency reported. "Under the current circumstances and given the U.S. widespread attacks against Iraqi people in different cities, Iran does not feel these negotiations are

necessary," an unnamed official told Fars. The official -- described as a senior member of Iran's negotiating team -- delivered the remarks as U.S. and Iraqi troops have been fighting Shiite militants in Baghdad and in Basra. The Bush administration says many of these fighters have backing from Iranian agents. Iran and the United States held three meetings in Baghdad last year to discuss improving security in Iraq. Two meetings were at the ambassadorial level and one was at the expert level. Iraqi officials hosted the meetings. The report noted that an Iranian delegation went to Baghdad in March for a fourth round of talks. But U.S. officials said at the time that no meeting had been planned and the delegation returned to Iran. U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker said last month that the United States was ready for another session. But the Iranian official told Fars that "if U.S. savage attacks against the Iraqi people are stopped, we will examine the U.S. request for a fourth round of talks." This came after a five-member Iraqi delegation confronted Iranian officials in Tehran last week with evidence that Iran is smuggling weapons into Iraq and training Iraqi militants. The Iranians vehemently denied the charges, according to one member of the delegation, Haidar al-Abadi. Al-Abadi, a lawmaker and member of al-Maliki's Dawa Party, did not explain what the "evidence" was, but said "the Iranian side was hurt" by the allegations. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will form a committee to document what it calls Iranian "interference" in Iraqi affairs. Iran has long-standing ties to Iraq's Shiite parties, including the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which is the dominant party in the United Iraqi Alliance, a coalition of several parties. The Islamic Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq dominates the country's security forces.

[Gun battles erupt in Sadr City](#)

al-Jazeera – 8 May 2008

Fresh gun battles between Shia fighters and US forces in Baghdad's Sadr City have killed seven people and wounded 20 others, security and medical officials have said. A security official said the clashes erupted before midnight and continued until Thursday morning. A medic at Al-Sadr hospital, one of the main medical facilities in the impoverished Shia district of some two million people, said seven bodies had been brought in. The US military was not immediately available for comment. Since March 25, US and Iraqi forces have been battling anti-government fighters, mostly those belonging to Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Hundreds of people have since been killed.

[Russia warns Georgia over Abkhazia](#)

al-Jazeera – 8 May 2008

Russia has threatened to send more troops to the Georgian separatist province of Abkhazia if Georgia adds to its own military presence in the region, Russian news agencies have quoted the defence ministry as saying. The threat to send almost 500 more soldiers came despite an outcry from Georgia and its allies over earlier deployments. "Further steps by Georgia's military structures adding to the deployment of troops in the conflict zone can only lead to necessary and adequate measures by the Russian side to raise the peacekeeping contingent to the maximum number allowed," the ministry said in a statement. A statement quoted by Interfax and RIA Novosti on Thursday said the

current Russian troop level was 2,542 servicemen and that the maximum allowed under accords ending fighting between Georgia and Abkhaz rebels in the 1990s was 3,000. The latest deployment of reinforcements was announced last week. The total number of Russian troops in Abkhazia, whose separatist government is backed by Moscow, is not open to outside monitoring. On Sunday, a defence ministry spokesman had told AFP that the number was already 3,000. Russia accuses ex-Soviet Georgia of preparing a military operation to recover control over Abkhazia, which lies on the Black Sea just across the mountainous border from Russia. Georgia, run by Mikheil Saakashvili, the reformist pro-Western president, rejects the charge and accuses Russia of annexing the territory. Tensions over Abkhazia sparked expressions of concern from the United Nations, the European Union and the United States. On Tuesday the United States bluntly urged Russia to "cease from further provocations" in Abkhazia and another Georgian rebel region, South Ossetia.

TERRORISM & COUNTER-TERRORISM

[Somali militants vow to avenge deadly U.S. airstrike](#)

CNN – 2 May 2008

Islamist fighters in Somalia threatened Friday to avenge the death of a reputed al Qaeda commander killed in a U.S. airstrike and warned Americans to stay out of the Horn of Africa nation. U.S. missiles destroyed the house of Adan Hashi Ayro in the central Somali town of Dusamareeb on Thursday in the first major success in a string of such U.S. military attacks over the past year. "This will not deter us from prosecuting our holy war against Allah's enemy," said Sheik Muqtar Robow, a spokesman for the al-Shabab militia that Ayro led. "We know our enemy. It is impossible to hit missiles on our people, and we let your citizens come to our country," he said. "We warn them to stay out of our country," he added. The warning also applies to citizens of countries friendly to the United States and to neighboring Ethiopia, which has sent troops to fight Somalia's Islamist insurgency, he said. Ten other people were killed in the attack, five of them civilians who were sleeping in houses near Ayro's, according to local elder Ahmed Mumin Jama. Four civilians were being treated for wounds, he said. Robow said another senior al-Shabab leader, Sheik Muhidin Mohamud Omar, was killed in the attack. Ayro's assassination comes amid escalating fighting and a spiraling humanitarian crisis in the country that has killed thousands of civilians and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes in the past year. Al-Shabab is the armed wing of the Council of Islamic Courts movement, which seized control of much of southern Somalia, including the capital, Mogadishu, in 2006. Ethiopian troops allied with Somalia's shaky U.N.-backed interim government invaded to drive the movement from power in December 2006. Since then, al-Shabab has pursued an Iraqi-style insurgency, with roadside and suicide bombings and assassinations. In recent months, the militia has briefly taken several towns, freeing prisoners and seizing weapons from government forces. The insurgents usually withdraw after a few hours but continue to target Ethiopian and Somali forces. The U.S. State Department considers al-Shabab a terrorist organization. Analysts say Thursday's attack could torpedo U.N.-backed peace talks scheduled to start May 10, which were slated to

be more inclusive than previous rounds and offered a slim hope of bringing together the disparate groups in the armed opposition, including some Islamists.

[Deadly blast strikes Yemen mosque](#)

BBC – 2 May 2008

At least 15 people have been killed and 55 hurt in a bombing at a mosque in north Yemen, security sources say. The blast occurred as Friday prayers ended at the Ben Salman mosque, often used by members of the security services, in Saada city. Local officials have been cited as saying the bomb was hidden in a car or a motorcycle. Abdulmalik al-Houthi, the leader of a Shia rebellion in the area, denied responsibility for the blast. "We criticise and condemn this regrettable incident," he said in an interview with al-Jazeera television. "We deny completely any role in this incident. It is not part of our ethics to target any mosque or any worshippers at all." Hundreds of people have been killed in clashes in the region since a conflict between pro-government forces and rebels loyal to Mr Houthi broke out in 2004. A BBC correspondent in Yemen says the mosque is often used by members of the security forces, which might have made it a target. The region is a Shia stronghold, while most Yemenis are Sunni Muslims. The Yemeni government says Mr al-Houthi's rebels want to overthrow it and impose Shia religious law. The rebels say they are defending their community against discrimination and what they call aggressive acts by the government. Groups affiliated with al Qaeda have also staged attacks in Yemen.

[Chechnya bomb kills five police](#)

BBC – 5 May 2008

Five police officers have been killed by a roadside bomb in Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, officials have said. The officers were working on security ahead of the inauguration of Russia's president-elect Dmitry Medvedev. Major fighting between Chechen rebels and Russian forces has died down in recent years but hit and run attacks on security forces have continued. The attack, late on Sunday, is the most lethal in many months. Police officials said the bomb was detonated by remote control at a police checkpoint. "According to provisional information, the device was home-made, as nuts, bolts and ball bearings were found at the scene," Grozny police spokesman Ramzan Edilov told AFP news agency. "The search for the criminals is under way, they will be found and liquidated," he said. Russian forces stormed into Chechnya to crush a separatist revolt in December 1994. Large-scale military operations were resumed in 1999, when Vladimir Putin was prime minister, but in recent years large-scale fighting has died down. Mr Medvedev won a landslide victory to succeed Vladimir Putin as Russian president in March, and is due to be sworn in on Wednesday.

[Pentagon: Ex-detainees returning to fight](#)

CNN – 7 May 2008

A Kuwaiti man released from U.S. custody at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in 2005 blew himself up in a suicide attack in Iraq last month, Pentagon officials said Wednesday.

Abdullah Saleh al-Ajmi was one of two Kuwaitis who took part in a suicide attack in Mosul on April 26, the officials said. Records show that an attack in Mosul that day targeted an Iraqi police patrol and left six people dead, including two police officers. An announcement on a jihadist Web site earlier this month declared that al-Ajmi was one of the "heroes" who carried out the Mosul operation. A second man from Kuwait also took part in the suicide attack, the Web site said. Pentagon officials who had been keeping track of al-Ajmi said they were aware he had left Kuwait for Syria, a launching ground for terrorists into Iraq. A video posted on various jihadist Web sites shows a number of images of al-Ajmi, followed by text reading, "May God have mercy on you Abdullah al-Ajmi. I send you a warm greeting O you martyr, O you hero, O you, a man in a time where only few men are left." U.S. military records of Guantanamo detainees indicate that a man with the same name and nationality was held at the Cuban prison. Those records said al-Ajmi, 29, was picked up in Afghanistan as he tried to enter Pakistan after the 2001 U.S. invasion. He claimed to have fought for the Taliban, the records show, and said he fought in a number of battles against the Northern Alliance. Though he was never charged with any crime, al-Ajmi was held at Guantanamo through 2005. Military documents show he later claimed that his statements about fighting for the Taliban were made after he was threatened while in U.S. custody. He asserted that he was in Afghanistan to study the Quran. Al-Ajmi was transferred to the custody of Kuwaiti authorities in November 2005, with four other Kuwaitis, and was released after a trial there, according to Pentagon officials. Al-Ajmi is not the first former Guantanamo detainee to reportedly return to the battlefield after being released. Pentagon officials say there are more than 10 people once held by the U.S. at Guantanamo who have been killed or captured in fighting after being released from the detention facility. "Our reports indicate that a number of former [Guantanamo Bay] detainees have taken part in anti-coalition militant activities after leaving U.S. detention. Some have subsequently been killed in combat," said Cmdr. Jeff Gordon, a Pentagon spokesman. Documents provided by the Pentagon show other former detainees returning to the battlefield, including Abdullah Mahsud, who was released from Guantanamo in 2004. He returned to Afghanistan, where he became a militant leader in the Mahsud tribe in southern Waziristan, the documents said. "We have since discovered that he had been associated with the Taliban since his teen years and has been described as an al Qaeda-linked facilitator. "In mid-October 2004, Mahsud directed the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers in Pakistan. During rescue operations by Pakistani forces, a kidnapper shot one of the hostages. Five of the kidnappers were killed. Mahsud was not among them," the documents provided by the Pentagon said. "As these facts illustrate, there is an implied future risk to U.S. and allied interests with every detainee who is released or transferred from Guantanamo," Gordon said. Reports of former detainees returning to the battlefield show they are dedicated to their cause and have been trained to be deceptive, the Pentagon officials said, but such factors will not prevent the release of other detainees from Guantanamo Bay. Of the more than 500 detainees released from Guantanamo since the detention camp was opened in 2002, 38 have been stripped of their "enemy combatant" status and determined to pose no future threat to the United States. The remaining 462 were repatriated to home countries or resettled to third-party countries and still considered a threat, Pentagon records show. Some countries have since released those detainees back into the public, according to various reports. The United States is

still holding about 65 detainees scheduled to be released to their home governments. But before that can happen, the United States has to get assurances the detainees will not be persecuted or harmed when they arrive home, Pentagon officials have said. "We have no desire to be the world's jailer, which is why the 500 were allowed to depart," Gordon said. There are about 270 detainees still held at the U.S. prison camp in Cuba.

[Shiraz mosque blast was act of sabotage: Minister](#)

IRNA – 8 May 2008

Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi said blast in a Shiraz mosque on April 11, 2008 was an act of sabotage. He said, "The explosion was a conspiracy by Iran's enemies and the monarchists and with the support of countries which claim defending human rights and anti terrorist measures." In an explosion in a mosque in southern city of Shiraz, Fars province, on April 11 more than 190 people were injured and 12 killed.

DIPLOMACY & DEFENCE STRATEGY

[China's new South Pacific influence](#)

BBC – 3 May 2008

As China extends its economic and political potential in the world, nowhere is too remote or too small to merit Beijing's interest, not even the tiny nations which slumber in the South Pacific. If you were ever fortunate enough to venture to the palm-fringed islands of the South Pacific, you would probably look forward to tucking into some tropical fruit and freshly caught fish. These days, though, you might be disappointed. While mangoes and marlin are certainly available in the tourist resorts, in towns and villages it is more likely to be fried rice and springs rolls you would be dining on. Chinese restaurants have sprung up all over the region, some of them big and grand, most little more than shacks with corrugated-iron roofs. Often they are next door to Chinese-run trade stores, where shopkeepers hunker down behind iron-bar grilles and sell everything from candles to corned beef. The shops and restaurants are the most visible sign of a growing Chinese presence in the South Pacific. Beijing is boosting its political and economic influence in a region which was long dominated by European powers such as France and Britain. Gallic pretensions to world power status ensure it retains three colonies - including New Caledonia and French Polynesia - but Britain's commitment has long since waned. China is the new kid on the block. But why the Chinese interest in a region regarded by most of the world as an obscure backwater? Well, for a start, the Chinese are looking to satisfy their voracious appetite for natural resources. Copper, zinc and nickel from Papua New Guinea, timber from the Solomon Islands, manganese and cobalt from the sea-bed are all vital to feed China's extraordinary pace of development. But it is politics - not business - that is really turning the gaze of the Chinese dragon towards these pearls of the South Seas. Pacific nations may be miniscule and little known - the likes of Palau and Kiribati (pronounced Kiribass) are hardly household names - but they are vitally important in the diplomatic war between Beijing and Taiwan (which China regards as a breakaway province).

[U.S. diplomats leave Belarus as tensions heighten](#)

CNN – 3 May 2008

Eleven U.S. diplomats left Belarus on Saturday after being declared persona non grata amid escalating diplomatic tensions between Washington and the former Soviet nation, an embassy official said. On Wednesday, Belarus ordered 10 of the embassy's 11 diplomats to leave the country, giving them 72 hours to comply. All 11 left Saturday, a U.S. Embassy official said on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media. The departures leave the U.S. Embassy with just four U.S. staffers, down from 35 at the start of the year. The U.S. ambassador left in March after Belarus pulled its ambassador from Washington. The State Department has warned Belarus that it may order the Belarusian Embassy in Washington and the country's consulate in New York closed and that it may shut down the U.S. Embassy in Minsk. Washington is one of the fiercest critics of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko and is pressuring Belarus to release political prisoners or face punitive sanctions. Relations have worsened in recent months, mainly because of U.S. sanctions imposed on a state-controlled oil-processing and chemicals company, Belneftkhim, as well as travel restrictions on Lukashenko and top government officials. The sanctions are designed to punish Lukashenko, routinely described as "Europe's last dictator," and his government for its heavy-handed treatment of critics.

[Pakistanis compromise on reinstating justices](#)

IHT – 3 May 2008

Pakistan's governing coalition intends to reinstate the ousted justices of the Supreme Court on May 12, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Friday. The agreement enabled the coalition partners to soothe tensions that had the potential to splinter them, and it reopened the possibility of a challenge to the continued rule of President Pervez Musharraf, who ousted the justices in November before they could rule on the constitutionality of his election. Aides to Musharraf threatened legal action to block a parliamentary resolution to restore the judges, Pakistani newspapers reported, but news agencies quoted a spokesman for his political party Saturday as saying that he may accept the move if the new government amends the Constitution instead. Sharif, who is the leader of Pakistan Muslim League-N, made the announcement in Lahore after two long days of negotiation in Dubai with Asif Ali Zardari, the leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party, which heads the government. "I want to inform the entire nation that on Monday, May 12, 2008, all deposed judges will be restored," Sharif said. "The National Assembly will approve a resolution, followed the same day by the notification of the restoration of the judges sacked unconstitutionally on Nov. 3." The announcement has diminished immediate fears of a collapse of the month-old coalition between Pakistan's two largest political parties. But the wrangling is far from over, and restoring the Supreme Court judges remains an extremely divisive political issue. The return of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and other members of the Supreme Court would probably reopen challenges to Musharraf's position as president and questions about the legality of his imposition of emergency rule in November. A member of the Pakistan Peoples Party criticized Sharif for pushing his own populist agenda at the expense of more important

constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening the institutions of Parliament and an independent judiciary. Sharif said a five-member committee would be formed to draft the resolution; two committees have already tried and failed to draft one. Negotiations will also continue on constitutional amendments that will be proposed along with the resolution. The Pakistan Peoples Party is pressing to curtail the tenure of the chief justice from five years to two, among other things, and has argued that there are more pressing matters facing the nation. Farooq Naek, the law minister, told reporters that the resolution and a constitutional package would be introduced simultaneously in Parliament. Sharif, who pledged in his election campaign to restore the 60 or so judges whom Musharraf fired nationwide, said he had reluctantly agreed to let Musharraf's justices remain on the Supreme Court. He said that, in their negotiations in Dubai, Zardari had insisted that the present members be retained. Zardari has delayed reinstating the Supreme Court judges, saying that he thought fundamental changes in the judiciary were more important. Sharif, whose government was toppled by Musharraf in 1999, has pushed hard for the restoration of the deposed judges. Sharif had indicated that his party would quit the cabinet if the government did not fulfill its promise to bring back the ousted judges.

[Russians see power leaving Kremlin with Putin](#)

AFP – 4 May 2008

Since the fall of the tsars, Russians have known the Kremlin as the seat of ultimate power. From Wednesday, they won't be so sure. Mr Vladimir Putin is to hand control of the fabled fortress to president-elect Dmitry Medvedev in a solemn ceremony before assuming the less august position of prime minister the following day. But despite the apparent demotion, Mr Putin is widely expected to take much of his power with him to his new office in the White House, a hulking Soviet building four kilometres from the Kremlin. As the country's top bureaucrat, Russia's prime minister has always been subservient to the president, who has the power to dismiss the government on a whim. But two-thirds of Russians believe prime minister Putin and his allies will instead control president Medvedev, turning the traditional power structure on its head, according to an April poll by the Levada Centre. Even the best-connected Kremlinologists have been left guessing how the two old friends might split power, said Masha Lipman, a Russia expert with the US-funded Carnegie Centre. 'All we can be certain of is that Putin will be more powerful than any prime minister before him,' she said. 'Beyond that, no one knows what is going to happen. It's a matter between the two men.' In a February speech, Mr Putin described the prime minister's office as the 'highest executive power in the country.' The presidency, he indicated, was a more symbolic post as 'guarantor of the constitution.' The remark was widely seen as preparing the ground for a change of definition for the presidency, in which Mr Putin took on unprecedented powers over the last eight years. Last month Mr Putin bolstered his base by taking control of the country's dominant party, United Russia, whose two-thirds majority in parliament gives it the power to change the constitution. This would allow Mr Putin to 'redistribute powers and transform Russia into a parliamentary republic' if there was a stand-off with the presidency, said Mr Sergei Markov, a member of parliament for United Russia and a pro-Putin political analyst. In recent weeks Mr Putin has moved to transform the prime minister's office, boosting its staff by 50 per cent, bringing in close allies from the Kremlin and reducing the technical

issues that clog up the cabinet agenda. In a sign of his attachment to the presidential lifestyle, Mr Putin has been allowed to keep his Novo-Ogaryovo residence in an elite suburb west of Moscow. While pundits agree that a major shift of influence to the prime minister's office is underway, not everyone sees a simple power-grab by Mr Putin, who was barred by the constitution from running for a third presidential term in March.

[China seeking "positive outcome" from Tibet talks](#)

Reuters – 4 May 2008

China's president said he was hoping for a "positive outcome" from talks with envoys of the Dalai Lama, which were due to open on Sunday, but state media kept up a barrage of attacks on Tibet's exiled spiritual leader. "I hope that the contacts with the Dalai Lama's side from today will yield a positive outcome," Hu Jintao told Japanese reporters in Beijing, Japan's Kyodo news agency reported. The fence-mending talks between Chinese officials and the two aides of the Dalai Lama, the first since an eruption of Tibetan protests and deadly riots in March, were scheduled to start on Sunday in the city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. The unrest, the most serious challenge to Chinese rule in the mountainous region for nearly two decades, prompted anti-China protests around the world that disrupted the international leg of the Olympic torch relay and led to calls for Western leaders to boycott August's Beijing Games. Security was tight outside the Shenzhen state guest house where the talks were to be held, and reporters were not allowed into the compound. The official news agency Xinhua identified the Chinese negotiators as Zhu Weiqun and Sitar, both vice-ministers of the Communist Party's United Front Work and responsible for winning over religious leaders and ethnic minorities. Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltzen, the Dalai Lama's representatives in Washington and Switzerland respectively, arrived in China on Saturday. A commentary in the Tibet Daily, mouthpiece of the Tibet regional government, accused the Dalai Lama of being a "loyal tool of international anti-Chinese forces".

[Putin defends missiles at parade](#)

BBC – 5 May 2008

Russia's display of heavy weapons in this year's Victory Day parade in Moscow is "not sabre-rattling", President Vladimir Putin insists. Tanks and intercontinental missiles are to be paraded for the first time since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The outgoing Russian leader said that Friday's parade to mark the end of World War II would demonstrate Russia's growing defence capabilities. "We do not threaten anyone and do not intend to do so," he said. A dress rehearsal for the parade was conducted on Monday. Mr Putin is stepping down as president on 7 May to be replaced by Dmitry Medvedev. "For the first time in many years combat equipment will be involved in the parade," Mr Putin told government officials. "It's a demonstration of our growing capabilities in the defence sphere. "We are capable of protecting our people, citizens, our state and our wealth." Last year, Mr Putin announced the resumption of bomber patrols in international airspace and ordered the navy back into the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. High oil and gas prices means that Russian can afford to bolster its military capability, correspondents say. But they say it is nothing like as large as it was during the Soviet times.

[US asks Pakistan to live up to 'war on terror' commitment](#)

AFP – 6 May 2008

The United States said Monday it wanted Pakistan to live up to its commitment of urgently bringing security under control in its remote tribal areas allegedly used as a safe haven by Al-Qaeda and Taleban militants. The call came amid worries in Washington that the new coalition government led by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, which is negotiating with a Taliban commander, may strike a deal with militants and undermine a long 'war on terror' partnership. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said Islamabad recognised that bringing the mountainous and unpoliced Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) under control was an urgent priority for Pakistan's own sake. 'But let me be clear: we will not be satisfied until all the violent extremism emanating from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas is brought under control,' he said at a forum of the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy. 'It is unacceptable for extremists to use those areas to plan, train for, or execute attacks against Afghanistan, Pakistan, or the wider world,' he said. 'Their ongoing ability to do so is a barrier to lasting security, both regionally and internationally.' Mr Negroponte said Pakistan's government 'must bring the frontier area under its control as quickly as possible,' pointing out that Washington was prepared to provide 'appropriate assistance' in order to achieve that objective. Mr Gilani's government, formed after the backers of key war on terror ally President Pervez Musharraf were defeated in elections in February, has pledged to completely overhaul Islamabad's counter terrorism pursuit. It has been trying to reach a peace deal with a Taleban commander Baitullah Mehsud accused of masterminding the slaying of former premier Benazir Bhutto in December. Warlord Mehsud declared a unilateral truce with security forces in the lawless tribal regions last month after officials said the government had drafted a peace agreement with Islamic militants. But the militant halted talks last week because the government refused to withdraw its troops from his area. Mr Negroponte warned that Americans 'don't want to see the tribal area being used as a platform for plotting and executing international terrorist activity against the West. 'So any kind of agreement or understanding which might be negotiated, we would have to look at in the light of those imperatives for United States policies,' he said. The administration of US President George W. Bush has warned that Al-Qaeda was rebuilding itself in Pakistan's Fata and North West Frontier Province, both on the border with Afghanistan. The Fata is also seen by Washington as a staging area for Al-Qaeda attacks in support of the Taleban in Afghanistan, where US and Nato troops have suffered heavy casualties battling a long drawn insurgency. Mr Negroponte said the United States expected Pakistan's civilian and military leadership to be 'strong partners against violent extremists in Pakistan's frontier areas.' To help extend the Pakistani government's authority into those regions, he said, the United States was implementing a multi-year programme to expand, equip, and train local security forces in the tribal areas. A successful strategy in the tribal areas, he said, must include not only the possibility of military operations but also a serious and sustained economic development program and improvements in education and governance.

[Israel, 60 years regret for Arabs](#)

IRNA – 7 May 2008

As Israel toasts its 60th anniversary in the coming weeks, the Arabs who make up 20 percent of its citizens will not be celebrating. Israel's 1.3 million Arab citizens are still far less well off than Israeli Jews and feel increasingly unwanted. On emergence anniversary Day, thousands of Israeli Arabs will gather in their former villages to protest the nakba, or catastrophe, meaning Israel's birth. For most Israelis, Jewish identity is central to the state, the link they feel with history. But Israeli Arabs, including the most successfully integrated ones, say a new identity must be found for the Israel's long-term survival. The clash between the cherished heritage of the majority and the hopes of the minority is more than friction. Most say that while an end to its Jewish identity would mean an end to Israel, equally, failure to instill in Arab citizens a sense of belonging is dangerous because many Arabs promote the idea that, 60 years or no 60 years, Israel is a passing phenomenon. "I want to convince the Jewish people that having a Jewish state is bad for them," said Abir Kopty, a Tel Aviv-based Arab citizen. Land is an especially sore point. Across Israel, especially in the north, the remains of dozens of Palestinian villages sit partly unused, scars on the landscape from the conflict that gave birth to Israel in 1948. Yet some of the original Arab inhabitants and their descendants, all Israeli citizens, live in packed towns and villages often next door and remain barred from resettling the vacant areas, while Jewish communities around them are urged to expand. One recent warm afternoon, Jamal Abdulhadi Mahameed drove past kibbutz fields of wheat and watermelon, up a dirt road surrounded by pine trees and cactus, and climbed the worn remains of a set of stairs, declaring in the open air: "This was my house. This is where I was born." He said what he most wanted now, at age 69, was to leave the crowded town next door, come back to this piece of uncultivated land with the pomegranate bushes planted by his father and work it, as generations have before him. He has gone to court to get it. Mahameed is no revolutionary and, by nearly any measure, a solid and successful citizen. His children include a doctor, two lawyers and an engineer. Yet, as an Arab, his quest for a return to his land challenges longstanding Israeli policy. "We are prohibited from using our own land," Mahameed said as he stood in the former village of Lajoun, now a mix of overgrown scrub and pine trees surrounded by the fields of Kibbutz Megiddo. "They want to keep it available for Jews. My daughter makes no distinction between Jewish and Arab patients. Why should I be treated differently?" The answer has to do with the very essence of Zionism - the movement of Jewish rebirth and control over Palestine. "Land is presence," said Clinton Bailey, an Israeli scholar who has focused on Bedouin culture. "If you want to be present here you have to have land. The country is not that big. What you cede to Arabs can no longer be used for Jews who may still want to come. Israel is here as a haven for them." A Palestinian state is widely seen as a potential solution to tensions with the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank, but any deep conflict with Israel's own Arab citizens could prove much more complex. Antagonism runs both ways. Many Israeli Arabs express solidarity with their Palestinian brethren under Israeli occupation, while others praise Hezbollah, the anti-Israel group in Lebanon, and some Arabs in the Parliament routinely accuse Israel of Nazism.

[Israel marks its 60th anniversary](#)

BBC – 8 May 2008

Celebrations are taking place across Israel to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the state. Fireworks, concerts and an aerial display were among the events laid on, while Israeli families prepared picnics and barbecues for the national holiday. Israel declared itself an independent state on 14 May 1948, three years after the end of World War II and the death of six million Jews in the Holocaust. But Palestinians know the foundation day as al-Nakba, or "the Catastrophe". They were holding solemn marches in the West Bank, meant to symbolise the hope of Palestinian refugees to return to villages in what is now Israel. The Israeli festivities began amid tight security at sunset on Wednesday at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl memorial, named after the founder of modern Zionism. Soldiers raised the Israeli flag from half to full mast as Memorial Day - when Israelis honour soldiers killed since the state was founded - gave way to anniversary celebrations. The speaker of parliament, Dalia Itzik, addressed the crowd and expressed her sympathy for the families of those who had died defending Israel since 1948. "The state of Israel is an unusual success story, a wonder by any historical standard," she added. "There are flaws and we still have things to do, but behind these flaws is a great country." Fireworks displays later lit up the sky across the country, where tens of thousands of people attended performances by local artists and musicians. On Thursday, the anniversary celebrations continued with beach parties and sports tournaments.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

[A look at combat rifles](#)

AP – 20 April 2008

One of the biggest differences between Colt's M4 carbine and its competitors is the way the bullets are fed through the rifles. The HK416, XM8 and SCAR use a gas piston system to cycle the bullets automatically. The M4 uses "gas impingement," a method that uses a tube to push hot gas through key parts of the gun. This leaves residue behind, detractors say, and makes the M4 more prone to jamming. But Army officials and Colt executives say they've received no significant complaints from troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- M4: Colt Defense's M4 carbine is a direct descendant of the company's M16 first used during the Vietnam War. At 33.6 inches long and weighing 7 1/2 pounds when loaded, it is shorter and lighter than the M16 but shoots the same 5.56 mm round. (The round is about the size of an AAA battery.) The M4's compact design makes it ideal for troops traveling in Humvees or fighting in confined areas. An M4 costs about \$1,500. The weapon is used by all the U.S. military branches.
- HK416: Designed by Germany's Heckler & Koch, the HK 416 carbine is slightly heavier than the M4, but otherwise similar in appearance and feel. Heckler & Koch advertises its weapon as more rugged and accurate than the M4. At \$1,425 each (2007 prices), the HK416 costs about the same as the M4. It also shoots a 5.56 round. Elite

U.S. military units such as the anti-terrorist Delta Force are using the HK416. Norway selected the rifle last year for its military forces.

- XM8: Also designed by Heckler & Koch, the XM8 weighs 8.3 pounds and fires 5.56 mm ammunition. Several years ago it was being pursued as a replacement for the M4s in the U.S. military's inventory. The project was halted in 2005, however, due to questions over how the program was being handled. No pricing data is available.
- SCAR: The acronym stands for Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle. Made by Belgium's FN Herstal, two versions of the weapon — one fires the 5.56 round and another shoots a heavier 7.62 mm cartridge — are being purchased by U.S. Special Operations Command in Tampa, Fla. The lighter SCAR weighs 8.5 pounds loaded. The command, which has its own budget for unique gear, says the SCARs are more durable and accurate than the M4. The command and FN Herstal are negotiating costs, but they expect the light model SCAR to cost about the same as an M4.

[BAE technology may have been 'compromised', says Pentagon](#)

The Independent – 3 May 2008

A war of words has broken out between BAE Systems and the US government after a report by the Pentagon inspector general found that sensitive weapons technology linked to a major fighter jet programme may have been "compromised" due to allegedly lax oversight by the UK defence company. The report didn't cite a single instance of leaks from the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) programme, the largest defence project in the world. It is being led by Lockheed Martin, the US defence giant, along with several foreign groups, including BAE. But the report said: "The advanced aviation and weapons technology for the JSF programme may have been compromised by unauthorised access at facilities and in computers at BAE Systems, and incomplete contractor oversight may have increased the risk of unintended or deliberate release of information to foreign competitors." Access to military technology has been a sticking point throughout the project, especially given that BAE is developing a rival jet, the Eurofighter Typhoon. The report was published after the Project on Government Oversight, a watchdog, got access to it through a Freedom of Information Act request. BAE reacted angrily to the report's findings, which pointed to the possibility of leaks but provided no evidence that any had actually occurred. In a statement, BAE said: "BAE Systems strongly disagrees with the suggestion that we did not perform required audits and fully comply with our Special Security Agreement. That suggestion is simply false." It added: "The [Department of Defence] inspector general explicitly found no instances of unauthorised access to classified or export control information on the JSF programme. We strongly disagree with the IG's suggestion that, nonetheless, such information may have been compromised in some unidentified way by unauthorised access at BAE Systems. There is no basis whatsoever for that conclusion."

[UAE pursued daring plans to modernise forces says Mohammad Bin Zayed](#)

Gulf News – 5 May 2008

The decision to unify the Armed Forces of the United Arab Emirates was never a transient event or routine procedure, but a historic juncture in the march of the Armed

Forces toward self fulfillment and performance and competence upgrading, said General Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Shaikh Mohammad said the UAE pursued "daring plans and ambitious programmes to modernise, develop and supply our forces with the latest weapons and equipment, expand the base of national cadres capable of accommodating advanced military technology until our military formations have become an effective force and an indispensable number in the regional and international security, peace and stability equation." Shaikh Mohammad made his remarks in a speech carried by Dira' Al Watan (Shield of the Nation) magazine on the 32nd Anniversary of the Unification of the Armed Forces. "The on-going regional developments and world transformations testify the validity of the criteria on which the UAE defensive military strategy was based. High on top on the agenda of this strategy are self dependency, optimal utilisation of available resources, and a clear-cut leading role for the citizen," he said.

[DRS Technologies wins \\$51 million in new thermal weapon sights orders from U.S. Army](#)

Military & Aerospace Electronics – 5 May 2008

DRS Technologies Inc. won new contract orders totaling more than \$51 million to produce Thermal Weapon Sights II (TWS II). The contracts were awarded by the U.S. Army's Research, Development & Engineering Command's (RDECOM) Acquisition Center at the U.S. Army Garrison Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland, acting on behalf of Program Executive Office Soldier at Fort Belvoir, Va. Contract work will be performed by two of the DRS Sensors & Targeting Systems divisions – the Optronics Division in Palm Bay and Melbourne, Fla., and the Infrared Technologies Division in Dallas, Texas. These new orders are part of a five-year, \$2.3-billion indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (ID/IQ) TWS II Bridge contract awarded to DRS in 2007. Additional ID/IQ contracts are expected as funding is available enabling the Army to order up to 150,000 TWS II systems to support fielding needs. "The Warfighter demand for night vision equipment remains robust, and the requirement for thermal weapon sights continues to increase," says James M. Baird, president of DRS' Reconnaissance, Surveillance & Target Acquisition (RSTA) Segment. "We're committed to supporting our nation's front-line warfighters with increased production to meet that demand, and it's an honor to be helping them to accomplish their missions safely and effectively."

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

[UN urges biofuel investment halt](#)

BBC – 2 May 2008

The UN's new top adviser on food has urged a freeze on biofuel investment, saying the blind pursuit of the policy is "irresponsible". Olivier de Schutter also wants curbs on investors whose speculation is, he says, driving food prices higher. UN officials liken the rise in food prices to a silent tsunami, threatening 100 million of the world's poorest. The

use of food crops for alternative sources of energy like ethanol is one factor behind the price hike. Mr de Schutter did not go quite as far as his predecessor in the job, Jean Ziegler, the BBC's Laura Trevelyan reports from New York. Mr Ziegler had condemned biofuels as a "crime against humanity" and called for an immediate ban on their use. But the new special rapporteur on the right to food did insist the American and European goals for biofuel production were unrealistic. "The ambitious goals for biofuel production set by the United States and the European Union are irresponsible," he said in an interview for France's Le Monde newspaper. "I am calling for a freeze on all investment in this sector." The biofuel rush was, he argued, a "scandal that only serves the interests of a tiny lobby". Calling for a special session of the UN Human Rights Council to discuss the food crisis, Mr de Schutter also said he wanted to find ways to limit the impact of speculative investments in food commodities like wheat, which had further driven up prices. And the rapporteur, a Belgian professor of international law, said it was "unforgivable" that the international community had failed to anticipate the riots sparked last month by soaring food prices. "Nothing was done to prevent speculation in raw materials, though it was predictable investors would turn to these markets following the stock market slowdown," the UN official said. "We are paying for 20 years of mistakes."

[Death toll from China virus outbreak hits 24](#)

AP – 4 May 2008

The death toll from a highly infectious virus that preys on children rose to 24 on Sunday as it spread to a new province amid heightened efforts by China's Health Ministry to contain it. The official Xinhua News Agency said an 18-month old boy who died in Foshan city in Guangdong province Friday had enterovirus 71, known as EV-71. Another child who died in the same district on April 25 also tested positive, it said. The deaths follow 22 already reported in central Anhui province, 1,700km to the north. The outbreak of enterovirus 71 - a type of hand, foot and mouth disease that children are susceptible to - is another headache for China as it prepares for the Olympic Games, already tarnished by unrest among Tibetans in western China and an international torch relay disrupted by protests. Stepped up vigilance by health bureaus and hospitals to prevent the spread of infectious diseases was necessary 'to guarantee the smooth staging of the Beijing Olympics and Paralympics and to practically preserve social stability', the ministry said in an order posted on its website on Saturday. What prompted the government to act was an unusual jump in cases of the enterovirus in Fuyang, a fast-growing city set amid the rural heartland of central China. As of early Saturday, 3,736 cases of EV-71 were reported in Fuyang's rural outskirts, a rise of 415 in about 24 hours, health officials said. Besides the 22 deaths, 1,115 people remain hospitalised, 42 of them in a serious or critical condition, said the health department of Anhui province. The ministry sent expert teams to Anhui to coordinate treatment of the disease and prevent its spread. State-run television showed workers spraying disinfectant around houses in rural areas outside Fuyang and medical teams visiting families with small children. Meanwhile, nearly 800 other cases were reported elsewhere in Anhui, the health department said in a statement on its website. Cases of hand, foot and mouth outbreaks, but not necessarily the EV-71 strain, have been reported in at least two other provinces, Xinhua said. Hand, foot and mouth viruses cause fever, mouth sores and rashes with blisters and are easily spread by

sneezing or coughing. The viruses mainly strike children aged 10 and younger. Some cases can lead to fatal brain swelling.

[Burma declares cyclone disaster](#)

BBC – 4 May 2008

Burma has declared five disaster areas, including the main city Rangoon, after a large tropical cyclone hit the country, state media report. The military-run Myaddy television station said Irrawaddy, Bago, Karen and Mon states were also hit hard by winds of about 190km/h (120mph). The storm is reported to have killed at least four people in Rangoon. The city is without power and water, and the streets are full of debris from fallen trees and damaged buildings. Internet and phone connections have been down since the storm neared the former Burmese capital, making it difficult to confirm the extent of the damage. In the Irrawaddy river delta, more than half of the buildings had been damaged or had collapsed, official newspapers reported. Official media also reported that four vessels had sunk in the Rangoon harbour. A UN regional official told Reuters news agency it would take several days to assess the scale of the damage.

[Somalis riot over food prices](#)

CNN – 5 May 2008

Thousands of people rioted in the streets of the Somali capital on Monday to protest rising food prices and shops' refusal to accept Somali currency. Witnesses said two protesters were shot dead by Somali soldiers who were guarding buildings that were attacked by demonstrators. Abdi Ud, a journalist with Somalia's Shabelle Media Network, said the protesters were angry because Mogadishu shopkeepers refused to accept Somali shillings and instead demanded payment in U.S. dollars. Shops throughout the city closed down in fear of the demonstrations, he said. The United Nations recently warned of "a deteriorating humanitarian situation" in Somalia as a result of soaring food prices and a worsening drought. "About 2.6 million Somalis now need assistance -- more than a third of the country's population, representing a rise of 40 percent since January," according to a May 2 U.N. news release. The problem in Mogadishu has been compounded by heavy fighting between Somali government forces, backed by Ethiopian troops, and Islamist fighters. Parts of the Somali capital have been described as ghost towns because of the exodus of thousands of residents due to the fighting, which has surged in recent weeks. The U.N. says 7,000 people fled the capital after bloody battles last month, joining a population of displaced Somalis that aid groups estimate tops 1 million.

[Myanmar: Death toll more than 15,000](#)

CNN – 5 May 2008

The death toll from the Myanmar cyclone is more than 15,000 people, Myanmar's government has said. Survivors were facing their third night without electricity in the aftermath of the historic cyclone that also clogged roads with thousands of downed trees. Diplomats were summoned to a government briefing Monday as the reclusive southeast

Asian country's ruling military junta issued a rare appeal for international assistance in the face of an escalating humanitarian crisis. A state of emergency was declared across much of the country following the 10-hour storm that left swathes of destruction in its wake. The death toll of more than 15,000, official sources told the Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua, makes the weekend cyclone the deadliest natural disaster to hit Myanmar in recent history, according to figures compiled by a U.N.-funded disaster database. More than 10,000 were killed in the township of Bogalay alone, according to Xinhua news agency. The toll eclipses that from a 1926 wind storm the killed about 2,700 people in the country, according to the database. The government of neighboring Thailand said Myanmar's leaders had already requested food, medical supplies and construction equipment, AP reported. The first plane-load of supplies was due to arrive Tuesday, a Thai spokesman said. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement he was "deeply saddened by the loss of life and the destruction suffered by the people of Myanmar" and pledged to mobilize international aid and assistance as needed. A United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team is on stand-by to assist the government in responding to humanitarian needs if required, the statement said. Scenes of the destruction showed extensive flooding, boats on their sides in Yangon harbor, roofs ripped off buildings, uprooted trees and downed power lines after cyclone Nargis battered the Irrawaddy delta with 150 mile (240 km/h) an hour winds throughout Friday night and Saturday morning, dumping 20 inches of rain. Residents of Yangon trudged through knee-deep swirling brown waters Monday as the delta city remained mostly without electricity and phone connections. The U.S. Embassy in Myanmar has issued a "disaster declaration" in the country and authorized the release of \$250,000 for cyclone relief efforts, Deputy State Department spokesman Tom Casey said Monday. A disaster relief team is standing by, Casey said, but the Myanmar government had not given permission for the team to enter the country.

[U.S. envoy: Myanmar deaths may top 100,000](#)

CNN – 7 May 2008

The death toll from the cyclone that ravaged the Irrawaddy delta in Myanmar may exceed 100,000, the senior U.S. diplomat in the military-ruled country said Wednesday. "The information we are receiving indicates over 100,000 deaths," said the U.S. charge d'affaires in Yangon, Shari Villarosa. The U.S. figure is almost five times the 22,000 the Myanmar government has estimated. The U.S. estimate is based on data from an international non-governmental organization, Villarosa said without naming the group. She called the situation in Myanmar "more and more horrendous." "I think most of the damage was caused by these 12-foot storm surges," she said. Villarosa also said that about 95 percent of the buildings in the delta region were destroyed when Cyclone Nargis battered the area late Friday into Saturday. On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice once again called on the junta to allow aid into the country and said she is speaking with leaders from other nations who may be able to help persuade Myanmar's leaders to do so. "It should be a simple matter," Rice said. "This is not a matter of politics; this is a matter of a humanitarian crisis, and it should be a matter that the government of Burma wants to see its people receive the help that is available to them, and so we are speaking with governments that might have influence with Burma." Myanmar is also

known as Burma. The United States has pledged \$3.25 million and offered to send Navy ships to the region to help relief efforts -- if Myanmar's government agrees. The U.S. military has flown six cargo helicopters onto a Thai airbase as Washington awaits permission to go into the south Asian country, two senior military officials told CNN's Barbara Starr. Villarosa said 70,000 people are missing in the Irrawaddy Delta, which has a population of nearly 6 million people. The official Myanmar government figure for the missing is 41,000. "I can only assume that the longer the delay, the more victims that are created," Villarosa said. Little aid has reached the area since Nargis hit, and on Wednesday, crowds of hungry survivors stormed reopened shops in the devastated Irrawaddy delta. The United Nations urged the military junta to grant visas to international relief workers amid estimates of 1 million homeless. A United Nations official said that nearly 2,000 square miles (5,000 square km) of the hard-hit delta are still underwater. Charity workers have gathered at Myanmar's embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, with vehicles, emergency food supplies and medicine, waiting for their visa requests to be approved. "We need this to move much faster," said John Holmes, U.N. humanitarian chief, after reading a statement from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. There were reports of "civil unrest" in the worst-hit areas where people are scrambling for limited food supplies, a U.N. spokesman said. In the flood-soaked Irrawaddy delta townships, U.N. assessment teams observed "large crowds gathering around shops -- the few that were open -- literally fighting over the chance to buy what food was available," World Food Program spokesman Paul Risley said Wednesday from Bangkok. There were also reports of price gouging in urban areas around Yangon, Myanmar's largest city and former capital. "There were long lines of people trying to buy what food was available, even at those higher prices," Risley said. The delta, Myanmar's rice-growing heartland, has been devastated by Cyclone Nargis, threatening long-term food shortages for survivors, experts said. "We can't delay on this; this is a huge disaster, and the longer [Myanmar] waits, the worse it's going to become," International Rescue Committee spokesman Gregory Beck said. The Rome, Italy-based U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that five states hit hardest by Saturday's cyclone produce 65 percent of the country's rice, The Associated Press reported. "There is likely going to be incredible shortages in the next 18 to 24 months," Sean Turnell, an economist specializing in Myanmar at Australia's Macquarie University, told AP. Holmes said 24 countries had pledged financial support, with a total of \$30 million expected in aid.

MILITARY / PEACEKEEPING / HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

[Call to Arabs on Palestinian aid](#)

BBC – 2 May 2008

The Quartet of major powers mediating in the Middle East peace process has called on Arab states to honour aid pledges to the Palestinians. The call was made after talks in London between the UN, US, EU and Russia. US officials say only about a fifth of money promised by Arab nations in December has been paid. The Quartet condemned recent violence, and called on Israel to end settlement activity and for Palestinians to "tackle terrorism". The violence it condemned included Palestinian rockets attacks on

Israeli towns, an attack on a Jewish seminary earlier this year, Palestinian civilian deaths in clashes in Gaza and a Palestinian attack on a fuel depot. The group welcomed "concrete steps by both sides", such as the removal of some Israeli roadblocks and Palestinian security improvements, but said "much more remained to be done", UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said at a news conference. The Quartet expressed "deep concern" over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, calling for provision of essential services to the Strip "without obstruction". Shortages of fuel and basic goods have created a stranglehold on the Gaza Strip's fragile economy since Israeli restrictions were imposed after Hamas seized control of the Strip last June and tightened in response to the firing of rockets into Israel. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed that pledges made at the Paris conference were for the Palestinian people, not the US. "Clearly when you make a pledge you ought to fulfil it," she said after the talks. US officials say that of \$717m promised by Arab League members, only \$153m of Arab pledges have been delivered, all from three countries: Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Algeria. Ms Rice is due to hold three-way talks with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. Mr Fayyad said the political process could become meaningless if Israel continues to build settlements in the occupied West Bank. "Israel has failed to meet any of its obligations under the roadmap which is extremely troubling, particularly as those obligations include a freeze on settlement activity," he said. BBC diplomatic correspondent Bridget Kendall said there was a sense of urgency at the talks, with one official warning that the Palestinian Authority was in danger of financial collapse. US sponsored peace talks launched between Israel and the Palestinian Authority - controlled by Hamas's rival Fatah - last year, aiming for a two-state solution by the end of 2008, have produced little tangible progress.

[Troops Conduct Operations in Afghanistan's Helmand, Khowst Provinces](#)

American Forces Press Service – 4 May 2008

Coalition forces killed an undetermined number of militants and detained 29 in Afghanistan's Helmand and Khowst provinces over the past two days. In Helmand province, coalition forces were conducting searches of several compounds in the Reg District yesterday when militants engaged them with small-arms fire. Coalition forces returned fire, killing an undetermined number of attackers and later detaining 22 militants accused of conducting anti-government operations. The soldiers also found several AK-47 rifles, ammunition vests, ammunition, mines, artillery shells, bomb-making materials and grenades. They were destroyed or removed. In Khowst, Afghan and coalition forces killed several militants and detained seven more during a joint operation May 2. Afghan and Coalition forces searched compounds in Sabari District targeting a Haqqani network militant cell building and planting improvised explosive devices. The targeted cell is known to have been involved in the March 3 car bomb attack against the Sabari District Center that killed two coalition soldiers and injured dozens. The forces discovered grenades, ammunition and ammunition vests in the compounds.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

[Iran to be offered new incentives](#)

BBC – 2 May 2008

Major world powers are to offer Iran updated incentives to stop enriching uranium and end fears it is seeking a nuclear arsenal. The agreement on a new package was announced by UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband after talks between foreign ministers in London. He said no details would be made public before the offer was made to Tehran. Iran, which says it is seeking civilian nuclear energy, is under UN sanctions for continuing to enrich uranium. Friday's deal was agreed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the US, Russia, China, the UK and France - plus Germany. All were represented by their foreign ministers except for China, which sent a deputy minister. "We are united in our belief that the threat posed by this enrichment programme to stability is very serious and it's one that we want to address directly," Mr Miliband said. "We very much hope that they [the Iranians] will recognise the seriousness and the sincerity with which we have approached this issue and that they will respond in a timely manner to the suggestions that we are making," he added. Incentives offered to Iran in June 2006 included civil nuclear cooperation and wider trade in civil aircraft, energy, high technology and agriculture. The incentives were rejected by Tehran. In March, the UN Security Council approved a third round of sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme. These included asset restrictions and travel bans on Iranian individuals and companies with connections to the nuclear industry, and a prohibition on the sale of "dual-use" technology to Iran. Earlier sanctions prohibited the supply to Iran of any items likely to assist uranium enrichment or the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems.

[No incentive can replace Iran's N-rights: Envoy](#)

IRNA – 7 May 2008

Iran's Ambassador to Russia Gholam-Reza Ansari said here Wednesday that no incentive can replace and be equal to Iran's nuclear rights. Ansari told Radio Echo Moscow, "We just want our rights in the field and principally we are not seeking any concessions in that connection." Asked about the G5+1 package of incentives proposed to Iran, Ansari said, "Though having no information about content of the Group's package, we hope that the incentives will in spirit be different from what has been offered to Iran over the past few years." He said that Iran has always been for dialogue on the nuclear issue and it should be said of course that talks on rights and sovereignty of a country is meaningless. On Iran's proposed package to the G5+1, the Iranian diplomat said that Undersecretary of Russia's Security Council had during his recent Iran visit been informed of the outlines of the package, which concerned Iran's constructive outlook to global issues on the basis of justice, cooperation and equal rights. As for Russia's stance towards Iran's nuclear case, Ansari said, "We do understand Russia's conditions as a result of the pressures exerted on the country, especially in connection with the resolutions thus far issued, though we are not satisfied with Russia's stances."