

Contemporary Conflict

[Petraeus casts doubt on 2014 Afghanistan timeline](#)
[South Korea reshuffles military after North Korean attack](#)
[Germany: pullout from Afghanistan to start in 2011](#)
[North Korea threatens to retaliate against exercise](#)
[Enemy 'is losing' in Afghanistan, Mullen says](#)

Terrorism & Political Violence

[India to deepen cooperation with EU in counter-terrorism: PM](#)
[WikiLeaks cables: US proposed Barcelona counter-terrorism centre](#)
[Police probe Stockholm blasts as act of terrorism](#)

Diplomacy & Defence Strategy

[India, China tackle border dispute](#)
[Japan labels China's military a global concern](#)

Defence Acquisition & Technology

[France ready to transfer warship technology to Russia: PM](#)
[US Army to deploy iPhones in combat](#)
[Economy squeezes armies worldwide: Jane's](#)

Non-Traditional Security/ Asymmetrical Threats

[Countering climate change calls for concerted cooperation](#)

Military / Peacekeeping / Humanitarian Operations

[UN makes record aid appeal of \\$7.4 billion for 2011](#)
[Red Cross says Afghan conditions worst in 30 years](#)

Nuclear Issues/ Biological and Chemical Weapons/ & Missile Technology

[US not helping Taiwan produce cruise missiles](#)
[India's test of nuclear-capable missile fails](#)
[Japan to deploy missile interceptors nationwide on North Korea threat](#)
[US missile intercept test fails](#)

Contemporary Conflict

[Petraeus casts doubt on 2014 Afghanistan timeline](#)

AFP, 6 December

WASHINGTON: US war commander General David Petraeus expressed doubts Monday about the prospect of a victory in Afghanistan by 2014, admitting that a "resilient" Taliban, squeezed out of some areas, simply pops up in others.

In an interview with ABC television, Petraeus would not say he was confident that an Afghan government and its security forces would be stable and competent enough to take over from the US-led coalition four years from now, as envisaged by Washington.

"I don't know that you say confident. I think no commander ever is going to come out and say 'I'm confident that we can do this,'" Petraeus said in the interview in Afghanistan.

"I think that we say you assess, we believe this is, you know, a reasonable prospect," and that US forces were doing "everything we can to increase the chances of that prospect.

"But, again, I don't think there's any sure things in this kind of endeavour, and I wouldn't be honest with you or the viewers if I didn't convey that."

Petraeus's moment of candor comes in the wake of US President Barack Obama's unannounced trip Friday to Afghanistan – his second since taking office nearly two years ago – where he reassured US troops that they were winning the war against Taliban insurgents.

It also came as a new poll reflected a faltering faith among Afghans in the ability of US forces and its allies to provide sufficient security there, with 73 percent of respondents saying the Kabul government should negotiate a settlement with the Taliban.

That figure is up eight points from one year ago, when Obama announced he was sending 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan.

The United States and NATO now have nearly 150,000 troops fighting a Taliban-led insurgency now in its 10th year after their regime was overthrown in a US-led invasion in 2001.

The poll showed that the image of US work in Afghanistan has suffered a blow, with just 32 percent of respondents saying the United States was doing excellent or good work there, compared with 38 percent last December and 68 percent in 2005.

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26/2010

6 December – 19 December

The poll, by the Washington Post, ABC News, the BBC and Germany's ARD television, was conducted in person across Afghanistan's 34 provinces by a research centre in Afghanistan that is subsidiary of a US-based firm.

While Obama warned troops in Afghanistan that there would be "difficult days ahead" in the fight, Petraeus suggested those days would be filled with a struggle to flush out a mobile enemy.

"Certainly in each operation you will kill or capture some (insurgents) and some others will run off or wiggle out. And that is why you do have to continue to go after them," Petraeus said.

"This is actually true of the overall fight against Al-Qaeda and transnational extremists. As you put pressure on them in one location, they'll seek safe haven and sanctuaries in other areas."

Petraeus said it was "hard to say" how much of the country the insurgents control, but acknowledged that "the Taliban is resilient," and the war against them is no conventional fight, he stressed.

"This is not a case where you see the hill that you have to take, you take it, you plant the flag and you go home to a victory parade," he said.

"This is a much more complex endeavour than that."

The general pointed to particular successes around Kandahar city, citing key military operations on what he described as Taliban leader Mullah Omar's "home turf."

The poll also noted rises in optimism about the security situation among Afghans in Helmand province, neighbouring Kandahar, where US and NATO troops have engaged recently in a major offensive.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[South Korea reshuffles military after North Korean attack](#)

AFP, 16 December

SEOUL: South Korea Thursday announced a major reshuffle to strengthen and reform its military against threats from North Korea, after fierce domestic criticism over its response to last month's shelling attack.

The defence ministry announced promotions for 111 officers – 75 from the army, 14 from the navy and 22 from the air force.

It said they are part of a reform drive by President Lee Myung-Bak following the sinking of a South Korean warship in March with the loss of 46 lives, which the South blamed on a North Korean torpedo – a charge Pyongyang denies.

Calls for reform grew louder after the deadly North Korean artillery attack on a South Korean border island last month, its first shelling of a civilian area since the 1950-53 Korean War.

"With this reshuffle, the military will strive to build strong armed forces that can fight and win and ensure firm combat-readiness," the ministry said in a statement.

A new army commander, General Kim Sang-Ki, was also due to take office later Thursday after his predecessor General Hwang Eui-Don quit over a controversial property investment.

Tensions remain high after the island bombardment, which killed four people including civilians and was the first attack on a civilian area in the South since the 1950-53 war.

Marines on the island fired back at the North's artillery batteries but did not call in air strikes.

New Defence Minister Kim Kwan-Jin has vowed to use air power if the North attacks again, after his predecessor resigned amid a barrage of criticism from the media and opposition that the response to the shelling was too weak.

The South Wednesday staged its largest-ever civil defence drill, briefly halting city traffic and ordering tens of thousands of people to take shelter, while regional diplomatic efforts are under way to ease tensions.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Germany: pullout from Afghanistan to start in 2011](#)

Washington Post, 16 December

BERLIN: Germany's foreign minister played down the country's expectations for Afghanistan's future Thursday while reiterating that German troops will start their withdrawal by the end of next year as planned.

After nearly a decade in Afghanistan, Guido Westerwelle told parliament, Germany now has "more realistic expectations" for the country.

"Good governance remains an important benchmark, but if we are more realistic then good-enough governance - which we can reach in the foreseeable future in Afghanistan - is satisfactorily good," Westerwelle said.

Germany currently has some 4,600 troops in Afghanistan, responsible for a large swath of the country's north including the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz, and helped command the International Security Assistance Force in 2003.

German troops will now start withdrawing as planned in late 2011 after beginning to hand over responsibility to Afghan authorities by the middle of next year, Westerwelle said.

"In Afghanistan, we are defending our own security. That is why this mission is right, but it is also right that it cannot go on forever," he added.

Westerwelle's statement was based on a 100-page progress report issued earlier this week assessing achievements and failures of Germany's engagement in Afghanistan since it first sent troops in December 2001.

Westerwelle reiterated the government's position that the Afghan conflict cannot be solved by military means alone, and that negotiations with insurgent groups are necessary.

Still, he said, insurgents must commit themselves to respecting Afghanistan's constitution, renounce violence and cut their ties with international terrorist leaders.

Germany's parliament has to renew authorization for the country's commitment of troops to the Afghan war in January but it is not expected to meet serious opposition. Currently parliament has approved a maximum deployment of 5,350 German soldiers to Afghanistan.

Westerwelle said the last of Germany's troops are to leave by 2014, adding that the withdrawal must not endanger allied troops or leave the country in the hands of the Taliban.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[N. Korea threatens to retaliate against exercise](#)

Defensenews, 17 December

SEOUL: North Korea threatened Dec. 17 to retaliate with force if South Korea goes ahead with a planned live-fire exercise on an island near the disputed sea border in the western waters of the Korean Peninsula.

The latest threat came one day after Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and US Forces Korea (USFK) announced a plan to hold a one-day drill on Yeonpyeong Island, which North Korea shelled with artillery last month, sometime between Dec. 18 and 21, in a show of strength against further provocation by the communist North.

The Nov. 23 artillery attack killed four South Koreans - two Marines and two civilians. Since the attack, the South Korean military has vowed that it would immediately hit back with all possible means, including air strikes, should Pyongyang attack the South again.

US officials have repeatedly pledged to support South Korea, calling it a sovereign nation with the right to defend itself.

A North Korean official threatened to retaliate against the exercise.

"The strike will play out a more serious situation than on Nov. 23 in terms of strength and scope of the strike," an unnamed head of the North Korean general-level military delegation was quoted by the North's official Korean Central News Agency as saying. "The puppet military warmongers should take a prompt measure to stop the planned provocative maritime shelling from the island."

Seoul's Ministry of National Defense dismissed the threat, making it clear that the exercise will be held as scheduled.

"We do not need to respond to every threat and unreasonable argument by the North," the ministry said in a statement.

The planned drill will involve some 20 US personnel to provide command and control, medical, communication and intelligence support, according to the JCS and USFK. Members of the United Nations Command (UNC) will also join the drill to observe the exercise's compliance to the Korean Armistice Agreement, it said in a Dec. 16 statement.

The UNC supervises the armistice pact on the peninsula after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, not a permanent peace treaty.

"We'll hold the exercise at routine sites and with routine methods legally within our territory," JCS spokesman Col. Lee Bung-woo said in a news briefing.

A navigation ban for the waters off Yeonpyeong will be issued before the exercise, he said.

A secretariat of the Military Armistice Commission of the UNC said, "This is a routine training and it is a routine observation that the United Nations Command provides to ensure the armistice compliance. It is normally scheduled by request of the United Nations Command for the areas being observed."

The UNC officer, however, refused to comment whether the South could conduct immediate counterattacks of its own, including air strikes, if the North launches an attack, or should observe the rules of engagement controlled by the UNC.

In the planned exercise, South Korean Marines will fire shells from various types of artillery guns, including K-9 self-propelled howitzers, 105mm towed howitzers and 81mm mortar systems, toward a designated firing zone southwest of the island, JCS officials said.

The shelling of Yeonpyeong, one of the five islands in the volatile western waters, marked the first time since the Korean War that the North indiscriminately fired on South Korean territory and killed civilians.

The North has never recognized the West Sea border, the Northern Limit Line, which was drawn up by the US-led United Nations Command at the end of the Korean War.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Enemy 'is losing' in Afghanistan, Mullen says](#)

Washington Post, 18 December

KABUL: The top US military officer said Friday that "the enemy is losing" in Afghanistan, but conceded that the Taliban will continue to have a sanctuary in Pakistan until that nation decides to fully tackle Islamist insurgents on its soil.

"The enemy is being pushed out of population centres, is being denied sanctuary, is losing leaders by the score," said Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during a visit to Kabul. "His scare tactics are being rejected by citizens."

Mullen and other US officials in the region provided an upbeat assessment of the war effort while echoing President Obama's statements on Thursday on the importance of securing meaningful cooperation from Pakistan to build on what the administration calls "fragile" security gains in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The White House this week completed a review of the state of the war a year after Obama authorized a 30,000-troop surge.

NATO announced Friday the deaths of two service members in attacks in southern and eastern Afghanistan, adding to the toll of what has been by far the deadliest year for foreign troops since the war began in late 2001.

US officials remain frustrated by Pakistan's failure to attack militants from the so-called Haqqani network who have sought refuge in a religious school in the dangerous tribal areas.

Mullen said he has conveyed to Pakistani leaders the United States' sense of urgency on eliminating sanctuaries and added that a relationship that has for years been strained by duplicity is increasingly anchored in trust.

"But trust takes time to form, and that is not made any easier by the frenetic pace of war," he said.

Speaking to reporters in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, US Ambassador Cameron Munter said Pakistani military officials have assured the United States that they will crack down on the militant-riddled border area of North Waziristan.

"It's not a question of if they will do so; it is a question of when they will do so. And they will do so at their own pace," Munter said.

Pakistan has repeatedly rebuffed US pleas to launch a ground operation in North Waziristan, the stronghold of an alphabet soup of militant organizations that includes al-Qaeda and Afghan insurgents such as the Haqqani network.



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26/2010

6 December – 19 December

The Pakistani military says its troops are already overstretched battling militants in other parts of the lawless borderlands. But US officials privately complain that the Pakistani forces are overly focused on the eastern border with arch-enemy India and say the military continues to support some North Waziristan-based insurgents as proxies for influence in Afghanistan.

Munter, however, insisted that US officials accept Pakistan's arguments about its troop limitations and its determination to combat Islamist insurgents.

"We understand they're telling us honestly about the capacity of the military, and when they are able, we are convinced they will move in."

[<< Return to the contents page](#)

Terrorism & Political Violence

[India to deepen cooperation with EU in counter-terrorism: PM](#)

Times of India, 9 December

NEW DELHI: Looking to expand India's engagement with the EU, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today said he will work with the European leadership to deepen strategic cooperation in counter-terrorism and other "non-traditional" threats to security.

In a pre-departure statement before leaving for Brussels to attend the 11th annual India-European Union summit, Singh said India's partnership with the 27-nation bloc has evolved from economic and development cooperation to a broader strategic engagement. The one-day summit is to held tomorrow.

"I will seek to deepen our political and strategic cooperation, including in the area of counter-terrorism and other non-traditional threats to security," Singh said.

The prime minister will be in Brussels on the first leg of his two-nation European tour that will also take him to Germany for talks with German leaders including Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday. He is due to return home on Sunday.

Singh also noted that there is a high degree of convergence of India's views on global issues with that of the EU.

The Friday meet in the Belgian capital will be the first India-EU Summit since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty of the EU which recast its structures for strengthening the economic bloc's external relations.

Singh said India welcomed the enhanced role that the EU seeks to play in global affairs pursuant to this Treaty.

The Summit jointly hosted by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso will also review the progress in the negotiations on a comprehensive Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement.

Finishing touches were reportedly being given in the hope of wrapping up the agreement which will help increase bilateral trade by 40 per cent to 100 billion Euros.

In Brussels, Singh will also hold a bilateral meeting with his Belgian counterpart Yves Leterme.

Acknowledging that Belgium has been supportive of India on issues of importance to it, the prime minister said the summit talks will explore ways of diversifying of bilateral trade basket and promoting cooperation in high-technology sectors.

révolutionnaire

26/2010

6 December – 19 December

Singh will fly to Berlin on Saturday for a working visit to Germany at the invitation of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The prime minister said he is looking forward to reviewing the progress in bilateral cooperation in areas of high technology, trade and energy.

UN Security Council reforms are also expected to be on the agenda of Singh-Merkel meeting. Germany and India will serve together on the Council as non-permanent members for two years from January 2011 next.

Singh said that during his talks with European leaders the situation in Afghanistan and Climate Change, the state of the global economy and the role of the G-20 in the recovery process will also come up for discussions.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Police probe Stockholm blasts as act of terrorism](#)

Reuters, 12 December

STOCKHOLM: Police said on Sunday they were treating bomb blasts in Stockholm as an act of terrorism by a lone attacker that followed an emailed threat referring to Sweden's troops in Afghanistan and to cartoons of Mohammad.

Police stopped short of calling Saturday afternoon's blasts, which killed the suspected bomber and wounded two people, a suicide attack. A car blew up in a busy shopping area, followed minutes later by a second explosion nearby.

Shortly before the blasts, Swedish news agency TT received a threatening letter referring to Sweden's presence in Afghanistan and caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad drawn by a Swedish cartoonist. The letter included digital sound files with a recording in broken Swedish and in Arabic.

The incident follows several nervous months in Europe after a US travel alert about possible attacks by militants and a failed bid by a Yemen-based al Qaeda group to use air cargo to send parcel bombs via Europe to America.

German authorities last month said they were on guard against threats of armed attack on civilians of the kind that killed 166 in the Indian city of Mumbai in 2008, but Germany said on Sunday it saw no link with the Swedish attack.

TT said the letter promised attacks over Sweden's presence in Afghanistan, where it has 500 troops with the US-led NATO force, and the cartoons drawn three years ago by Lars Vilks.

"This is a very serious incident, which is being investigated as an act of terrorism," Anders Thornberg, director of operations at the Security Police, said in a statement.

"As far as we know, it looks like he was working for himself, but we have to be really sure so we are investigating whether there could be more perpetrators," he told Reuters.

The police declined to go into further details about the dead man's motives or identity.

US-based SITE intelligence group, which monitors Islamist websites, said a member of Shumukh al-Islam posted a message on Sunday identifying the alleged bomber as Taymour Abdulwahab and cited media reports naming him as Taymour Abdulwahab Al-Abdaly.

A post on a Muslim dating website showed Abdaly was married with two young daughters and looking for a second wife.

In the post he wrote that he was born in Baghdad and moved to Sweden in 1992 and that he studied at the University of Bedfordshire in Luton, which has a large Muslim community.

US terrorism expert Evan Kohlmann told Reuters the suspect had been identified on online forums normally used by militant groups, including al Qaeda, as "holy warrior" Taimur Abdelwahab.

A Facebook page entitled "RIP (rest in peace) Taimour Abdulwahab our brother and friend" has also been set up.

Swedish broadcaster SVT, citing unidentified sources, said the dead man was thought to be a 29-year-old from the small town of Tranås, about 200 km (124 miles) southwest of Stockholm.

Newspaper Expressen said it had found the man's entry on Facebook and that it had a profile picture of two men waving a black flag with Arabic writing on it and Islamic martyr videos.

Police would not comment on a report in daily Aftonbladet on Saturday which quoted a source as saying the man was carrying six pipebombs, of which one exploded, and a rucksack full of nails and suspected explosive material.

"Sweden is panicking of course because this has never been the case before that you have an act of terrorism directed toward the public, and this will of course create fear in Sweden," Vilks told Reuters in an interview.

Worried Europe

Sweden did not raise its security threat level - currently at "elevated," two notches below the top level - but police stepped up their presence in Stockholm.

Britain, which has suffered similar attacks, said it was in touch with Sweden.

Kohlmann said he suspected the attack was by "a home-grown local extremist who may or may not have connections to any actual terrorist organization."

Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt urged Swedes to remain calm and not let their belief in tolerance and openness be shaken.

Police arrested a man seen getting out of a car brandishing an axe near Reinfeldt's office just before the premier spoke.

The Islamic Association in Sweden condemned the blasts. "The attack is a shock to us all, and strikes at our joint peace and security," Chairman Omar Mustafa said in statement.

The incident began when a car burst into flames near a busy shopping street in the city centre, followed by explosions inside the car which police said were caused by gas canisters.



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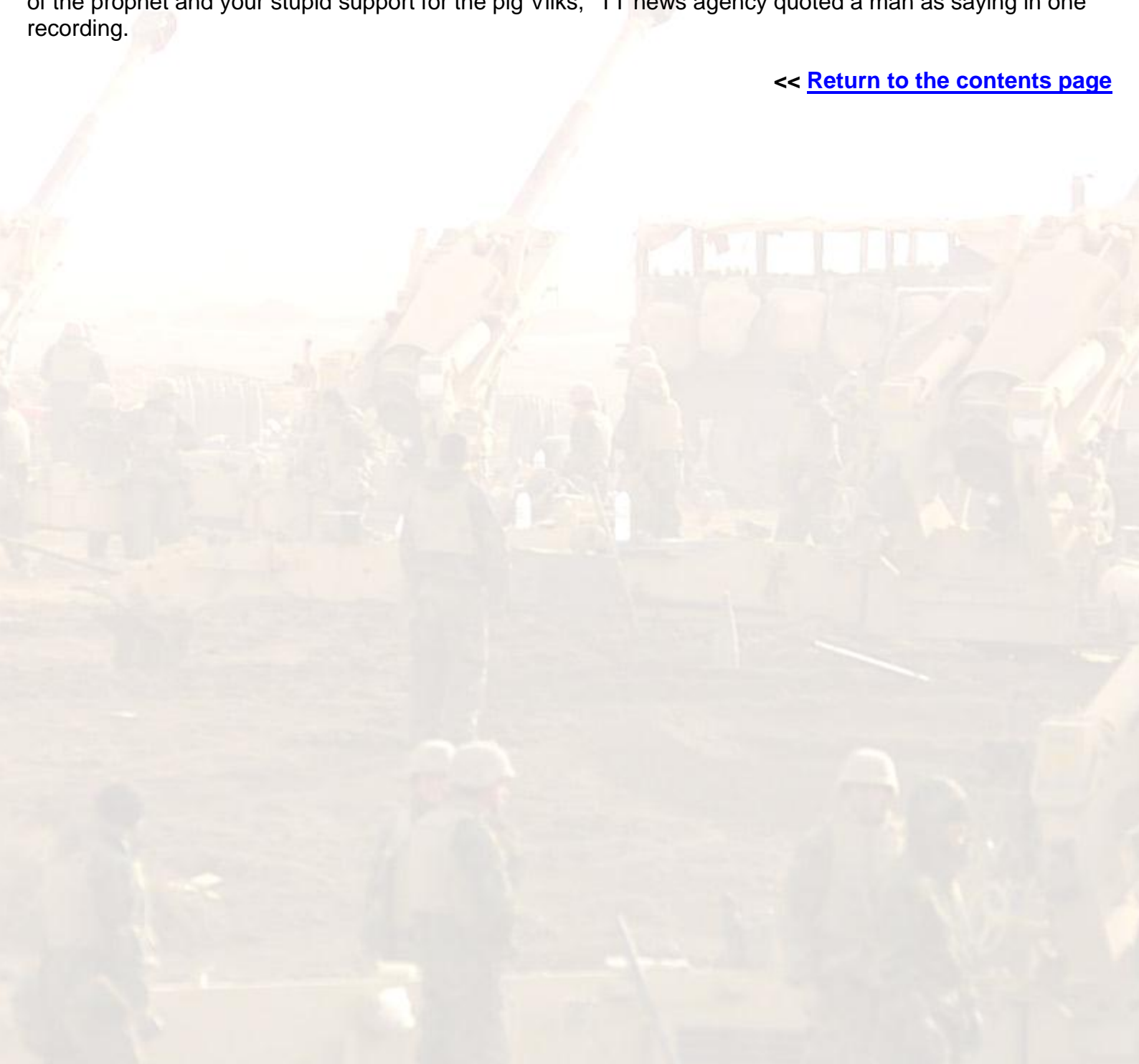
26/2010

6 December – 19 December

The second explosion, about 300 meters (yards) away and 10-15 minutes later, killed one man and wounded two people.

"Our actions will speak for themselves, as long as you do not end your war against Islam and humiliation of the prophet and your stupid support for the pig Vilks," TT news agency quoted a man as saying in one recording.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)



[WikiLeaks cables: US proposed Barcelona counter-terrorism centre](#)

Today online, 13 December

The United States grew so concerned about the possibility of an Islamist terrorist attack in Spain in 2007 that it proposed setting up a counter-terrorism centre in the country's second-largest city, according to leaked US Embassy cables.

The three cables said the US planned the "counterterrorism, anti-crime and intelligence centre" at its consulate in Barcelona.

The goal was to "combat the target-rich environment of terrorist and criminal activities centred in the region," which has a "presence of over 1 million Muslims," according to a 2007 cable.

One cable from 2005 set the scene, saying that "Spain is both a significant target of Islamic terrorist groups and a major logistical hub for Islamic extremist groups operating across the globe."

The 2007 cable said Spain "is a past and current Al Qaeda target" and a critical player in US-European Union counterterrorism efforts.

It said Barcelona has a large Muslim population "susceptible to jihadist recruitment" and added that "Spanish and US authorities have identified Catalonia as a major Mediterranean centre of radical Islamist activity".

According to the cable, legal and illegal immigration from North Africa, Pakistan and Bangladesh had made the region "a magnet for terrorist recruiters".

The plans for the proposed centre said 13 agents would be strategically situated to monitor who and what was passing through the area from places such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and the south of France.

It is not clear whether the centre was ever created and the US Embassy in Madrid declined to comment about the leaked cables. Guardian

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

Diplomacy & Defence Strategy

[India, China tackle border dispute](#)

Defensenews, December 16

NEW DELHI: India and China, which fought a brief battle in 1962 over a territory dispute, have reiterated their resolve to sort out the border problem through dialogue.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Dec. 16 signed a joint statement after Wen's Dec. 15-16 visit here supporting resolution of the issue through talks.

China has said it supports India's aspirations to play a greater role in the UN Security Council, but has not given a statement backing India's membership.

China and India also committed to increase trade to \$100 billion a year by 2015 from the current level of about \$60 billion.

Indian defence planners consider China to be a potential threat because of its close ties with rival Pakistan, which China has militarily supported, including supplying missile technology.

The dispute between India and China involves the longest contested boundary in the world. China claims 92,000 square kilometres of Indian territory.

The border is defined by a 4,056-kilometer Line of Actual Control (LAC) that is neither marked on the ground nor on mutually acceptable maps. Efforts to have a recognized LAC since the mid-1980s have made little headway.

India has begun improving infrastructure along the border with China and is building new roads and airports. Special troops are being raised for deployment at the border and weapons are being purchased for deployment in the higher reaches.

New Delhi also has voiced its concern over increased defence spending by China.

An Indian Defence Ministry report, issued in early July 2009, says China's military modernization needs to be "monitored carefully" for implications on India's defence and security.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Japan labels China's military a global concern](#)

AFP, 17 December

TOKYO: Japan on Friday labelled the military build-up of rival China a global "concern" and said it would strengthen missile defences against the threat from North Korea, as part of a major strategic review.

The changes would also see Tokyo boost its southern forces and submarine fleet and upgrade its fighter jets as part of a shift in its defence focus from the Soviet Cold War threat to southern islands nearer China.

The cabinet of officially pacifist Japan approved the National Defence Programme Guidelines months after a territorial row flared up with China and weeks after North Korea launched a deadly artillery strike against South Korea.

Beijing called Japan's stance "irresponsible".

"No country has the right to appoint themselves the representative of the international community and make irresponsible comments on China's development," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said in a statement.

The new guidelines labelled North Korea – which in recent years has fired missiles over Japan, staged two nuclear tests and last month unveiled a new uranium enrichment plant – an "urgent, grave factor for instability".

Japan, like its top security ally the United States, again voiced concern over China's recent military build-up and increased assertiveness in what Beijing sees as its ancestral waters in the East China and South China seas.

"China is rapidly modernising its military force and expanding activities in its neighbouring waters," said the guidelines.

"Together with the lack of transparency on China's military and security issues, the trend is a concern for the region and the international community," said the paper, which sets out strategic planning for the coming decade.

Security analyst Akira Kato, a professor at Tokyo's Oberlin University, said "the guidelines underline Japan's clear shift of focus to counteracting China's growing naval power, which is a major threat to Japan and the United States."

Japan will increase its submarine fleet from 16 to 22 and modernise its fighter jets, but scrap more than 200 tanks and 200 artillery pieces, it said.

It also plans to double from three to six its land-based Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor missile systems, and increase from four to six the number of sea-based Standard Missile-3 interceptors on its Aegis destroyers.

Pledging a more nimble defence capability, it said: "We will build a dynamic defence force backed by sophisticated technologies and intelligence, with readiness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability and multiple disciplines."

The outlook moves away from the perceived Cold War threat of a Soviet invasion and calls for drawing down troop strength on northern Hokkaido island.

Instead it says Japan will boost its ground, air and naval forces on the far-southern Nansei islands that take in Okinawa, a major base for US forces, and are closer to remote flashpoint islands near Taiwan.

The guidelines called the Japan-US alliance "indispensable".

They also say Japan will enhance security ties with South Korea, Australia, Southeast Asia and India and "promote confidence and cooperation with China and Russia" while also enhancing ties with the European Union and NATO.

The defence guidelines are usually revised every five years but came a year late following Japan's 2009 power shift in which the centre-left Democratic Party ended a half-century of almost unbroken conservative rule.

Japan's new leaders initially quarrelled with the United States about the 50,000-strong US troop presence in the country – but that row subsided as tensions grew sharply this year between Tokyo and Beijing.

The Asian giants argued early in the year over what Japan regarded as provocative Chinese naval manoeuvres off its far-southern islands.

Then in September, the war of words escalated when Japan's coastguard arrested a Chinese trawler captain after two collisions in disputed waters, a row that for months plunged diplomatic ties to their lowest point in years.

"Regarding China ... annually its defence budget has increased in a non-transparent manner and we have experienced multiple situations in one year over which we had to lodge protests," said top government spokesman Yoshito Sengoku. "These are matters of concerns to us."

Regional tensions spiked again after North Korea's November 23 shelling that killed four South Koreans. China has since then resisted calls by the United States, South Korea and Japan to publicly condemn its North Korea.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

Defence Acquisition & Technology

[France ready to transfer warship technology to Russia: PM](#)

AFP, 9 December

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said on a visit to Moscow on Thursday that France was ready to transfer military technology if it won a tender to supply Russia with Mistral warships.

"There is no question about the technology transfer, no problem regarding technology transfers," Fillon said at a joint news conference with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Russia had been in exclusive talks with France to buy two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships but in August the defence ministry announced an international tender.

Putin stressed that the price and the possibility of technology transfer to allow Russia to subsequently learn to build its own warships of the same class, would be key criteria in Russia's choice.

"The price is important. Russia is also interested in technology transfers. This is important for our ship building," Putin said.

Fillon complained jokingly that Putin was a hard bargainer in price negotiations.

"We are discussing the price and Vladimir Putin is not the easiest person to talk to about this question," he said.

Over several months, talks with Moscow have stalled on the question of technology transfer.

France has been negotiating with Russia since 2009 on a possible deal to sell Moscow the Mistral, a powerful warship capable of carrying helicopters and tanks, costing around 500 million euros.

If agreed, the deal would be the first sale to Russia of such technology by a NATO country and France's NATO allies have expressed concern about arming Russia with modern Western weaponry

[Army to deploy iPhones in combat](#)

ABC news, 15 December

For many Americans, the smartphone is a constant source of intel on daily life, from tracking the whereabouts of friends and family to navigating city streets and finding the best price at the mall.

"This is a profound and fundamental change about how soldiers will be able to access and share information," said Michael McCarthy, director of the mission command complex of the Army's Future Force Integration Directorate at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Troops with smartphones will be able to use text messages to more closely coordinate with their peers in the field and commanders at remote locations. They'll also be able to stream real-time surveillance video from overhead drones to more effectively target the enemy, among other advantages, McCarthy said.

While the Army is still ironing out the details of a budget for the program, the benefits are expected to come at a relatively low cost to the military -- and taxpayers -- since the technology is commercially available and doesn't require significant investment for research and development.

The "Connecting Soldiers with Digital Applications" initiative began more than a year ago but is now several months ahead of schedule, officials say. Tactical field tests with the smartphone technology have moved to advanced stages.

In the most recent exercise last week, a company-size Army unit used iPhones while running a simulated checkpoint, conducting tactical raids, and practicing local security sweeps.

"When the soldiers didn't have a handheld, there wasn't a lot of recording or reporting going on. But when they were given a phone, they could take pictures of leaflets that were in the house where they conducted the raid, capture images of writings on the wall that indicated it was an IED cell, and gather biometric data for the opponents they killed," said Col. Marisa Tanner, Future Force Integration Directorate Mission Command Capabilities division chief.

"There was a huge jump in the descriptive reporting and amount of reporting that the soldiers conducted as a team."

Tanner said the enhanced connectivity meant commanders at a remote location could also provide real-time coaching to troops as they navigated tricky situations on the ground.

Still, the technology faces complex logistical, financial and security questions that officials must resolve before there can be widespread distribution of smartphones to all 1.2 million soldiers in the future.

Military smartphones could self-destruct

WikiLeaks' ongoing publication of secret government documents leaked by an Army private has heightened concerns over how to keep classified information on smartphones protected from electronic interception or capture during an ambush or kidnapping, Tanner said.

"We're very concerned about the security, and we're exploring all solutions," she said. "It's not going to be one silver bullet that's going to fix it, but we are serious about addressing that."

The military has the capacity to set up its own, secure wireless cellular networks and could encrypt data sent from the field, Tanner said. Individual phones could be password-protected or require biometric features - such as a thumbprint - to log in.

Other possible safeguards include a feature that would allow phones only to send and receive information from a "cloud," meaning no data would be actually stored on the phone's hard drive itself. "It would just be a brick if you were captured or ambushed," she said.

For phones which need to contain sensitive information, McCarthy said, the military could rig them to self-destruct or be remotely erased if they were to fall into enemy hands.

McCarthy insists the technology the Army is testing - a broad mix of devices running Apple, Windows, Android and Blackberry operating systems -- is no different from that available to average consumers.

But he acknowledged the military might have to "ruggedize" the devices to withstand often harsh conditions in the field and deploy portable fuel cells or backpack solar panels to help recharge batteries on the fly.

"We're not committing to one phone model or one solution. We want to be adaptable," he said. "Our approach has been to be device-agnostic and operating system-agnostic."

The first units could begin deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan with the smartphone technologies this spring.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Economy squeezes armies worldwide: Jane's](#)

UPI, 20 December

LONDON: The economic situation is forcing militaries around the world to cut back, Jane's Defence Weekly reports in its annual year-end survey.

Ambitious procurement projects are being scrapped and modernization programs postponed. Many countries will be unable even to maintain current weaponry levels, the report said.

In Britain, drastic cuts recommended in the Strategic Defense and Security Review will spell "nothing less than a substantial degrading of the nation's ability to act upon the world stage," Jane's said. The Royal Navy is mothballing or selling one of two carriers it ordered, and maritime reconnaissance aircraft will be cancelled before they can even enter service.

Not all nations are reducing arms spending, however. In Asia, North Korea's aggressive moves and China's expansion are leading neighbours to boost their forces.

With the United States officially ending Iraq combat operations, the Afghan war was the world's largest active armed conflict in 2010.

The Pentagon is undergoing a major budget overhaul after Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced an initiative to streamline spending and transfer funding from overhead to war-fighting. Gates is looking for \$100 billion in savings over the next five years.

Whole units like the Joint Forces Command, which is charged with developing operating concepts, have been recommended for abolition.

Meanwhile, financial pressures forced the US Navy to largely scale back its goal of a 313-ship fleet.

In the fiscal year 2011 budget, it is recommending a 30-year shipbuilding plan averaging \$15.9 billion a year. The fleet would meet the 313-ship target between 2020 and 2026 but then fall to 288 vessels in 2032.

In Europe, Germany, Spain, Norway and the Czech Republic are joining Britain in various cutbacks, and NATO's Lisbon summit focused on cost savings.

NATO is reducing the number of headquarters in its command structure from 11 to seven, and personnel from more than 13,000 to 8,950. Russia is boosting cooperation with the alliance on both missile defense and Afghanistan.

With conflict zones from Israel-Palestine to Korea, Jane's termed Asia "the world's most eventful region."



révolutionnaire

26/2010

6 December – 19 December

India improved its ties with the United States in 2010 but saw relations with Pakistan and China deteriorate. And it faces persistent internal security crises from a widespread Maoist insurgency and a renewed campaign of resistance in Kashmir.

As for China, "a territorial row with Japan, obstruction over North Korea and sabre-rattling over its 'sovereignty' of the East China and South China seas saw the Communist Party's carefully choreographed narrative of 'peaceful rise' take a series of hits to its credibility," Jane's said.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

Non-Traditional Security/ Asymmetrical Threats

[Countering climate change calls for concerted cooperation](#)

Xinhua, 12 December

CANCUN: The latest UN climate change conference ended here Saturday after over 190 parties endorsed a package crafted to shore up their collective campaign against global warming.

"This is a new era of international cooperation on climate change," Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa said at the closing of the two-week meeting, which Mexican President Felipe Calderon hailed as "a thoroughgoing success."

As senior Chinese delegate Huang Huikang stressed during the gathering, climate change is "an undisputable fact" and "the gravest challenge to humanity in the 21st century."

Along with worldwide socio-economic development, climate change has afflicted increasingly visible damage to humans in such fields as the environment, water resources, food and energy. And obviously, developing countries are the biggest victims of this formidable problem.

Meanwhile, developed countries are the main contributors to the current climatic troubles, as scientific research has revealed that the runaway climate results largely from the gargantuan quantity of greenhouse gases emitted during the past 200 years of their industrialization.

In addition, developed countries are still running on high-carbon tracks, accounting for 80 percent of the over 10 billion tonnes of hazardous gases discharged annually across the globe.

However, due to the impact of the global economic restructuring and the international financial crisis, developed countries lack a strong political will to shoulder their responsibility, even as climate change has put human existence in danger.

During the Cancun conference, for example, a few industrialized nations attempted to shirk their obligations articulated in the Kyoto Protocol. Japanese delegates also publicly smeared the legitimacy of the international accord, which was initially adopted in their country in 1997.

The Kyoto Protocol is a legally binding agreement that must be applied in the global efforts to tame climate change. As top Chinese delegate Xie Zhenhua has stressed, the deal bears the efforts of all parties and has played an active role, and it should not be repudiated.

Adding to the noise at the Cancun meeting, the United States, which did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol and has refused to raise its emission reduction target, accused others of not doing enough and hindered the formulation of agreements on some key issues.

In contrast, large developing countries are performing their shares of international obligations. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requires developing countries to carry out practical emission reduction programs after obtaining financial and technological support from developed countries, but China and some other peers have already put large green projects in place using their own resources.

During climate change negotiations, major developing countries, particularly China, have played a very positive and constructive role.

From the beginning, China emphasized the conference's success hinged on whether to fulfil the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

The Japanese delegation advocated scrapping the protocol, but opposition by China and nearly all other participating countries forced it to back off.

Su Wei, chief negotiator of the Chinese delegation, said, "We realize time is very precious. We hope all concerned parties should consider issues from a bigger picture of fighting climate change and protecting human beings' interests, make some compromise, keep a relevant balance and ensure the success of the Cancun conference."

Greenpeace chief Kumi Naidoo said, "We are encouraged by the positive attitudes shown by the Chinese delegation during the Cancun conference, and what's more exciting is China's pragmatic actions at home to fight carbon emissions."

Due to the efforts of China and other major developing countries, the conference has ensured the continuation of the dual-track mechanism, achieved balanced progress within the mechanism, and made a stride in highlighting the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. The dual-track mechanism refers to sticking to both the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

The conference has boosted the international community's confidence toward the multilateral negotiation mechanism within the UN framework, and laid a good foundation for the next climate conference, scheduled to be held in South Africa's Durban next year.

"From the atmosphere of this conference, delegates from all countries are very confident of the South African climate conference," Xie said.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

Military / Peacekeeping / Humanitarian Operations

[UN makes record aid appeal of \\$7.4 billion for 2011](#)

AFP, 30 November

GENEVA: The United Nations on Tuesday launched its biggest appeal for relief funds, saying it needed 7.4 billion dollars in 2011 to provide urgent humanitarian aid to over 50 million people in 28 countries.

"On behalf of the millions of people needing urgent help and the hundreds of organisations that have come together to devise these plans, I appeal for 7.4 billion dollars to help some of the most vulnerable people in the world survive the effects of disaster and conflict," said UN chief Ban Ki-moon in the foreword of the aid appeal.

The biggest share of the appeal - 1.7 billion dollars - will go to Sudan, where millions have been displaced from troubled Darfur alone.

Much of the funds are budgeted for food and livelihoods, and the UN pointed out that aid efforts will continue "life-saving assistance," but also help the country to strengthen its preparedness against future shocks.

The massive 2010 natural catastrophes in Pakistan and Haiti will also require close to two billion dollars in total.

In Pakistan, where homes for millions of people have been washed away by historic floods, funds are needed to build shelter, as well as provide access to clean drinking water, food, sanitation and healthcare.

"The overarching goal of this plan is to prevent excess morbidity and mortality and to enable flood-affected communities to return to their normal lives," said the UN.

In earthquake-ravaged Haiti, where a cholera epidemic since mid-October has killed at least 1,721 people, the lion's share of the funds would go towards water and sanitation.

"The pace at which the current cholera epidemic has spread underlines the fact that too many people are still vulnerable to water-borne infection, nearly a year after the earthquake," the UN said.

Other countries or regions covered in the appeal include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, Somalia, Kenya, Chad, Zimbabwe, West Africa, Yemen, Niger, Central African Republic, Kyrgyzstan and Djibouti.

"Humanitarian action is no substitute for development that alleviates poverty; but it is unconscionable to fail to act to save lives and to help people regain decent living conditions in any cases, whether the root



révolutionnaire

26/2010

6 December – 19 December

causes of a crisis come from extreme chronic vulnerabilities and accumulated stresses or a sudden extraordinary event," stressed the UN.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)



[Red Cross says Afghan conditions worst in 30 years](#)

Reuters, 15 December

KABUL: Spreading violence in Afghanistan is preventing aid organizations from providing help, with access to those in need at its worst level in three decades, the Red Cross said on Wednesday.

"The proliferation of armed groups threatens the ability of humanitarian organizations to access those in need. Access for the ICRC has over the last 30 years never been as poor," said Reto Stocker, Afghanistan head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which rarely makes public comments.

"The sheer fact the ICRC has organized a press conference... is an expression of us being extremely concerned of yet another year of fighting with dramatic consequences for an ever-growing number of people in by now almost the entire country."

The comments came a day before US President Barack Obama was due to deliver the results of his Afghanistan war strategy, and were the second warning in two weeks by the ICRC.

With more than 30 years of experience working in Afghanistan, the ICRC operates under a mandate whereby it tries to help anyone affected by the war -- including insurgents -- often giving it privileged access to many volatile parts of the country.

But Stocker said many areas of the country, particularly in the once peaceful north, were now inaccessible not only for the ICRC but for the hundreds of other aid groups in Afghanistan.

Earlier this month the ICRC in Geneva warned the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was likely to deteriorate further in 2011.

Violence in Afghanistan is at its worst since the Taliban were overthrown more than nine years ago, with record casualties on all sides of the conflict. Almost 700 foreign troops have died in 2010 alone, by far the bloodiest year of the war.

But ordinary Afghans have borne the brunt of the fighting. According to UN figures, 1,271 civilians were killed in the first six months of this year, 21 percent more than in the same period in 2009. Most of those deaths were blamed on insurgents.

The ICRC has also reported a spike this year in the number of patients with war wounds admitted at the main hospital it supports in southern Kandahar.

More than 2,650 patients with weapons-related injuries were admitted to Mirwais Hospital in 2010 compared to 2,110 in 2009, the ICRC says. A further 1,000 war wounded were treated but not admitted at the hospital over the past two years.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

Nuclear Issues/ Biological and Chemical Weapons/ & Missile Technology

[US not helping Taiwan produce cruise missiles](#)

AFP, 10 December

WASHINGTON: The United States has not provided any help to Taiwan in its bid to mass produce cruise missiles, a Pentagon spokesman said Dec. 10, as a Chinese military delegation held talks here.

Taiwan's Deputy Defense Minister Chao Shih-chang confirmed to parliament for the first time Dec. 8 that the island was mass-producing cruise missiles.

"Mass production of indigenous weapons like the ones under the code names of Chichun [Lance Hawk] and Chuifeng [Chasing Wind] is very smooth," Chao said.

Asked whether the United States had provided any assistance to the island in its program, Pentagon spokesman David Lapan said: "Don't believe so."

Chao declined to specify the range of the missiles or the number to be put into service.

The Chichun project refers to the Hsiungfeng 2E cruise missile, Taiwan's answer to the US-made Tomahawk. Chuifeng is a project to develop the island's long-anticipated supersonic anti-ship missile.

At the start of the year, Beijing cut military contacts with Washington when the United States announced a \$6 billion arms contract with Taiwan that set out the sale of missiles, helicopters and equipment for F-16 fighter jets.

But ties have resumed, and a Chinese military delegation led by Gen. Ma Xiaotian held talks at the Pentagon on Friday with Michele Flournoy, the undersecretary of defence for policy.

US Joint Chiefs chairman Adm. Mike Mullen, has indicated that Pentagon chief Robert Gates will visit China next month in a sign of thawing in the strained ties between the countries' militaries.

Taiwanese experts estimate China's People's Liberation Army currently has more than 1,600 missiles aimed at the island.

Tensions across the Taiwan Strait have eased since Ma Ying-jeou of the China-friendly Kuomintang came to power in 2008 on a platform of beefing up trade links and allowing more Chinese tourists to visit.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[India's test of nuclear-capable missile fails](#)

AFP, 10 December

BHUBANESWAR: India's maiden test of an upgraded version of its nuclear-capable, medium-range Agni-II ballistic missile ended in failure Friday, when the missile dropped into the Bay of Bengal.

The surface-to-surface "Agni-II plus" was fired from a mobile rail launcher on Wheeler Island off the coast of the western state of Orissa.

"Shortly after initial take off, it deviated from its course and fell into the sea," an official with the Defence Research and Development Organisation said.

"The data and details are being studied to see exactly what went wrong" the official told AFP.

The missile has two stages, both fuelled by solid propellants.

Capable of carrying a one-tonne conventional or nuclear warhead, Agni-II is one of a series of missiles being developed as a deterrent strategy against India's nuclear-armed neighbours China and Pakistan.

It has a normal range of 2,000-2,500 kilometres (1,250-1,500 miles) and India has already successfully tested an Agni-III variant with a reach of up to 3,000-3,500 kilometres.

The upgraded "Agni-II plus" has an improved navigation system and is aimed at bridging the gap between the two with a range of around 2,500-3,000 kilometres.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)

[Japan to deploy missile interceptors nationwide on North Korea threat](#)

Mainichi Daily News, 11 December

TOKYO: The Japanese government plans to boost its deployment of Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor missiles at air bases across Japan to counter the threat of North Korea's ballistic missiles under new defense policy guidelines to be approved later this month, officials said Friday.

A draft appendix to the guidelines to be updated as early as next week covering the five years from April 2011 also stipulates equipping all six Aegis destroyers with Standard Missile-3 interceptors while cutting tanks and artillery by about 200 each to 400, the government and Self-Defense Forces officials said.

Along with a plan to increase the number of submarines from 16 to 22 for enhanced vigilance around the Nansei chain of islands in the southwest centering on Okinawa, the planned defence posture is apparently aimed at dealing with North Korea and deterring China.

The move comes amid heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula following North Korea's artillery attack on a South Korean island last month, and China's rapid military buildup and increasing naval activity.

The PAC-3 missile system, which is designed to shoot down an incoming missile from the ground before it lands, will be deployed to all six of the Air Self-Defense Force's air defence missile groups from three at present, according to the officials.

The three groups are located at Iruma base in Saitama Prefecture, which covers the Tokyo metropolitan area, Kasuga base in Fukuoka Prefecture, which is responsible for security in the southwestern Kyushu region, and Gifu base aimed at defending Nagoya in central Japan and Osaka in western Japan.

The remaining three ASDF bases in Chitose in Hokkaido, Misawa in Aomori Prefecture and Naha in Okinawa Prefecture are currently equipped with PAC-2 missiles designed to shoot down enemy aircraft.

The government is eyeing transferring some PAC-3 missiles to Chitose and Misawa in the country's north from the bases at which they are currently deployed, while introducing new PAC-3s to Naha in southwestern Japan under the fiscal 2011 budget.

As for the SM-3 sea-launched interceptors, four of the Maritime Self-Defense Force's six Aegis destroyers are equipped at present with the missiles designed to intercept an enemy missile before it enters the Earth's atmosphere.

The increase in MSDF submarines, meanwhile, is planned as no SDF units are deployed west of Miyako Island near Taiwan and China, making it what the Defense Ministry calls a defence "vacuum."

The draft appendix also includes details such as the ministry's list of equipment and number of troop units, the officials said.



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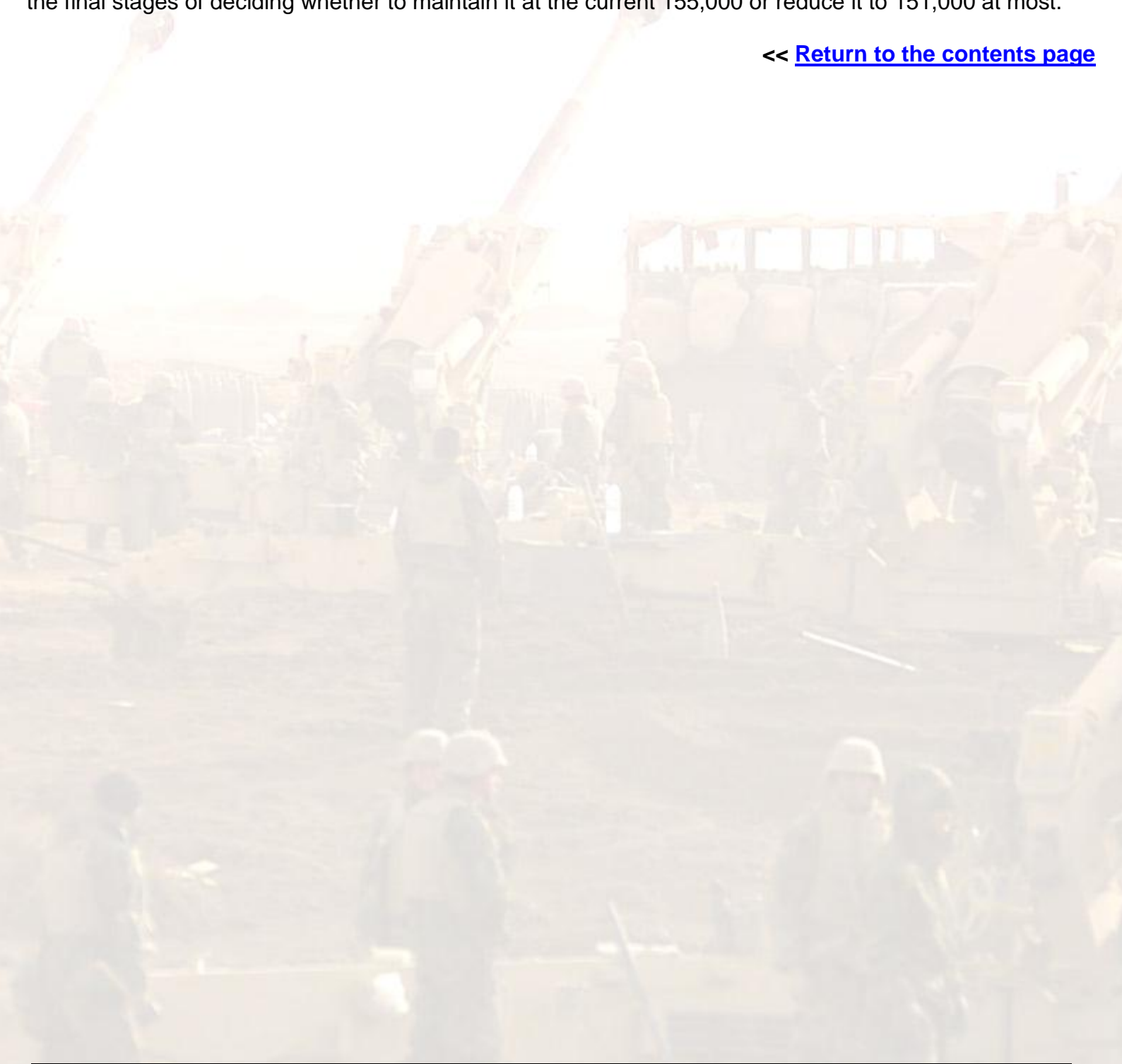
26/2010

6 December – 19 December

The number of MSDF escort ships will be increased from 47 to 48 while major operational aircraft will be trimmed from 350 to 340 due in part to the larger size of transport planes, according to the appendix.

As for the closely watched issue of the Ground Self-Defense Force's troop strength, the government is in the final stages of deciding whether to maintain it at the current 155,000 or reduce it to 151,000 at most.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)



[US missile intercept test fails](#)

Associated Press, 15 December

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE: An interceptor missile launched from California on Wednesday failed to hit a target fired from a Pacific atoll 4,000 miles away during a test of an anti-ballistic missile defence system, the Air Force announced.

The missile, called a ground-based interceptor, lifted off from coastal Vandenberg Air Force Base at 12:03 a.m. and released a device called an Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle, or EKV, that was to plow into a target missile fired from the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

The interceptor's sensors worked and the EKV was deployed, but it missed, according to a statement from Rick Lehner, a spokesman for the US Missile Defense Agency.

The cause of the failure will be investigated before another test is scheduled, Lehner said.

It was the fourth launch of a fully operational interceptor from Vandenberg, 130 miles northwest of Los Angeles. The \$100 million launch originally was planned for Tuesday, but it was delayed by poor weather.

The missile agency noted that the Sea-Based X-Band Radar, a critical component of the system, performed as planned. The radar, which cost more than \$800 million, is mounted on an oceangoing-platform that can sail to any point where the military needs to track missiles. The 280-foot-tall radar can identify baseball-size objects thousands of miles away. It was built by Raytheon Co. for the Boeing Co., the prime contractor on the project.

Ground-based interceptors are in place at Fort Greeley, Alaska, in addition to Vandenberg.

In recent years the military has held a series of tests of technologies to defend against long-range ballistic missiles that might be fired from countries such as North Korea.

Other components of the missile shield could include sea-launched missiles and lasers mounted in planes.

<< [Return to the contents page](#)