APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, December 3, 2009

Recommended Citation

"APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, December 3, 2009", APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, December 03, 2009, https://nautilus.org/apsnet/apsnet-03-december-2009/

APSNet 03 December 2009

1. Tough battle of the budget bottom line
2. Libs call for debate on nuclear power
3. Obama adds troops, but maps exit plan
4. UN head in Afghanistan condemns US move to bypass Hamid Karzai
5. Pakistan at odds with Obama's vision
6. 'Balibo' Ban Wins Rave Reviews From Indonesian Military
7. Indonesian police arrest Papuan activists, Amnesty calls for investigation
8. Pressure on Fiji fails as China lends hand
9. Indonesia: timber corruption's high costs

1. Tough battle of the budget bottom line, Geoffrey Barker, AFR*, 2009-12-03

The Australian Defence Force is entering the second decade of the 21st century facing a question it has faced throughout most of its 110-year life: will it have enough money to meet the defence needs and ambitious of the current and future national governments? Judging by the Defence budget audit, the so-called Pappas review, the answer is, not unless Defence continues to implement far-reaching and radical cost and productivity reforms – and only then with good luck, good management, cultural change and a reasonably stable global environment.
*[Subscription required]

- Defence funding and planning: promises and secrets, Mark Thomson, Security Challenges, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 89-96, Winter 2009 [PDF, 42 Kb]

2. Libs call for debate on nuclear power, Samantha Maiden, Australian, 2009-12-03

Tony Abbott has moved to turbocharge the Coalition's climate change policy, calling for a new debate on nuclear power. The new Liberal leader made his remarks after the Senate formally rejected the emissions trading scheme for a second time, delivering a potential double-dissolution election trigger to Kevin Rudd. It also emerged there was cross-factional support for a debate on nuclear power, with rebel Liberal senators who crossed the floor to vote with Labor on an ETS also using their speeches to parliament to urge debate on the nuclear option.

- Reviewing nuclear capability, IAEA-led missions evaluate nuclear power preparedness in Indonesia and Viet Nam, IAEA, 2009-12-02

3. Obama adds troops, but maps exit plan, Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Helene Cooper, NYT, 2009-12-01

President Obama announced that he would speed 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in coming months, but he vowed to start bringing American forces home in the middle of 2011, saying the United States could not afford and should not have to shoulder an open-ended commitment. Promising that he could “bring this war to a successful conclusion,” Mr. Obama set out a strategy that would seek to reverse Taliban gains in large parts of Afghanistan, better protect the Afghan people, increase the pressure on Afghanistan to build its own military capacity and a more effective government and step up attacks on Al Qaeda in Pakistan.

- Afghanistan and Pakistan rattled by plan for drawdown, Sabrina Tavernise and Carlotta Gall, NYT, 2009-12-03

4. UN head in Afghanistan condemns US move to bypass Hamid Karzai, Jon Boone, Guardian, 2009-12-01

The UN's top diplomat in Afghanistan attacked proposals to install a powerful high representative in Kabul to deal with President Hamid Karzai, saying the idea flew in the face of the current strategy to strengthen the Afghan government. Speaking hours before Barack Obama was due to announce his revised strategy in Afghanistan, Kai Eide said state institutions needed to be strengthened rather than "bypassed" by foreigners. "We shouldn't try to construct international solutions that will bypass the president or bypass the government on a phase when our basic approach is exactly the opposite," he said.

5. Pakistan at odds with Obama's vision, Syed Saleem Shahzad, Asia Times, 2009-12-02

While United States President Barack Obama, after months of deliberation, has finally laid out his strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Washington's most important ally in the region, is charting a new course that will place it at odds with the United States. In a recent letter to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Obama offered Pakistan an expanded strategic partnership, including the carrot of additional military and economic cooperation, along with the stick of a warning with unusual bluntness that Pakistan's use of insurgent groups to pursue its policy goals would not be tolerated. Herein lies the rub: Pakistan, increasingly driven by the military establishment, is bent on looking after its own interests, regardless of the damage it might cause to the US's plans. Pakistan is most worried of a spillover of the Afghan war into its territory - it is already fighting militants in the tribal

areas.

- Between the lines, an expansion in Pakistan, David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt, NYT, 2009-12-01

- Pakistanis voice concerns about Obama's new Afghanistan plan, Pamela Constable and Joshua Partlow, Washington Post, 2009-12-03

6. 'Balibo' ban wins rave reviews from Indonesian military, Markus Junianto Sihaloho and Putri Prameshwari, Jakarta Globe, 2009-12-03

The banning of Australian film "Balibo" showed that there was no real democracy in Indonesia, film activists said, although government and military officials welcomed the ban. Film director Riri Riza said that even though it was predictable, the ban showed that censorship was still rife in the nation despite its claims to democracy. "We have never moved away from [Suharto's] New Order era," he said. "At least in the context of film censorship." Riri said that unless something was done, the National Film Censorship Board (LSF) would continue restricting films considered too controversial or critical.

7. Indonesian police arrest Papuan activists, Amnesty calls for investigation, Karon Snowdon, ANN, 2009-12-01

Police have arrested 13 Papuans as activists demonstrated in support of sovereignty at rallies across Indonesia. An Indonesian police spokesman says riot police made the arrests as they dispersed up to 40 activists who had gathered in the main Papuan town of Jayapura carrying posters with banned separatist symbols. He says police are questioning 13 people on allegations that they broke Indonesian laws by holding a protest without a permit. Pro-independence Papuans celebrate December 1 as a national day commemorating former colonial power The Netherlands' 1961 recognition of Papua's right to self-rule. Indonesia has never recognised Papuan sovereignty.

8. Pressure on Fiji fails as China lends hand, Paul McGeough, SMH, 2009-1--01

Bainimarama turned to Beijing for support after he was spurned by Canberra and Wellington. But despite the surge in Chinese aid, a Western diplomat in Suva told the Herald: "China is not undercutting the policies of other countries and it's not propping up a regime that otherwise would collapse." Beijing insists that its foreign aid is given with no strings attached. But it is driven by a need to shore up Fiji's vote at the United Nations for its one-China policy - a sensitive issue because of the presence in Suva of a Taiwanese trade office. Local claims that China wished to base some of its naval fleet in Fiji and had initiated talks with the regime were dismissed by a senior Western diplomat as ''fanciful''.

9. Indonesia: timber corruption's high costs, HRW, 2009-11-30

Corruption in Indonesia's lucrative forestry industry costs the government US$2 billion annually, detracting from the resources available to meet its obligations on economic and social rights, Human Rights Watch said in a report. Inadequate oversight and conflicts of interest also raise a red flag over whether Indonesia can be a reliable carbon-trading partner. Carbon trading schemes are likely to be an important topic at the United Nation's Climate Change Conference, which begins December 7, 2009, in Copenhagen.

- "Wild money": the human rights consequences of illegal logging and corruption in Indonesia's

forestry sector, HRW, 2009-11-30, [PDF, 1.22 MB]

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