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1. Defence Department Defies Kevin Rudd on White Paper, Patrick Walters, Australian 2008-11-14

Australia's defence white paper faces further delays, possibly into late next year, as defence chiefs and senior bureaucrats revolt over Kevin Rudd's demands for early decisions. The core argument from the Defence Department and the central agencies is that next year's budget outlook is unclear. The Rudd Government has promised to increase defence spending by at least 3 per cent a year in real terms to 2018, but this goal could be difficult to achieve in the face of a sharp economic downturn.

2. Australia and China to Speed up Free Trade Deal Talks, Matthew Franklin, Australian, 2008-11-17

Australia and China will accelerate negotiations to clinch a free trade agreement to stimulate their economies in the face of the global economic crisis. "I don't wish to mislead people by giving a

completion date, but there is political will on both of our parts to get this thing done," Mr Rudd said.

3. Allies Form Plan to Divide and Conquer Taliban, Daniel Flitton, Age, 2008-11-15

Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon will join key allies in Canada to discuss a controversial plan to split wavering Afghan fighters away from the hardline group. Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai has made similar attempts to reconcile Taliban defectors for several years, with mixed results. The coming defence ministers meeting of nations engaged in Afghanistan's volatile south will [most likely] centre on finding political solutions to the conflict.

- Time to Opt Out of an Unwinnable War, Brian Toohey, AFR*, 2008-11-15
  * Subscription required.
- Air Force Report Confirms Rising Civilian Toll, Hans-Jürgen Schlamp, Spiegel, 2008-11-13

4. Iraqi Cabinet Approves Security Pact with US, Mary Beth Sheridan, Washington Post, 2008-11-16

After months of painstaking negotiations between Baghdad and Washington, the Iraqi Cabinet on Sunday approved a bilateral agreement allowing U.S. troops to remain in this country for three more years. The accord still needs approval by Iraq's parliament, but the Cabinet vote indicated that most major Iraqi parties supported it. The Iraqi government spokesman portrayed the pact as closing the book on the occupation that began with the U.S.-led 2003 invasion.
* Subscription required.

5. East Timor Budget Ruled Unconstitutional, ABC, 2008-11-14

East Timor's Court of Appeal has ruled that the country's $US400 million mid year budget is unconstitutional. The court says the budget was seeking $US290 million more from the nation's petroleum fund than it considered to be sustainable.

- Woodside Chief Threatens to Take Gas Plant to East Timor, Stephanie Peatling, SMH, 2008-11-17

6. India Concerned at Nuclear Weapons Falling in Wrong Hands, Press Trust of India, 2008-11-13

India has expressed concerns over nuclear weapons falling in wrong hands, due to the "fragile and unstable governments" possessing those capabilities. "There are continued concerns about the safety of these (nuclear) weapons in some nuclear weapon states, given the political instability and fragility of the governing regimes," Minister of State for Defence M M Pallam Raju told the National Defence College, without naming Pakistan. Referring to India's "no first use" policy, the minister said the country's strategic interests required effective, credible nuclear deterrence and adequate retaliatory capability, should deterrence fail.

7. We Don't Need IMF: Indonesia, Angus Grigg, AFR*, 2008-11-17

Indonesia is refusing help from the International Monetary Fund despite the rupiah coming under renewed pressure, as the government fears meddling by the agency could compromise its economic independence. The IMF is deeply unpopular in Indonesia after it imposed draconian loan conditions during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, forcing the economy to contract sharply and pushing millions

back into poverty.
* Subscription required.

8. Dengue Screening Begins in New Caledonia, ABC, 2008-11-17

New Caledonia has begun screening tourists from surrounding countries for dengue fever. New Caledonia is currently facing a dengue type 1 epidemic, with over one thousand cases reported. Visitors from Fiji will be especially monitored, as more than two and a half thousand cases of type 4 dengue have been reported in recent months.

- Briefing Note: Climate Change, Security and Infectious Disease: Dengue Fever in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Richard Tanter, Nautilus Institute, 2007-08-02

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