APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, January 21, 2010

Recommended Citation

"APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, January 21, 2010", APSNet Semi-Weekly Bulletin, January 21, 2010, https://nautilus.org/apsnet/apsnet-21-january-2010/

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1. Troops' welfare is government's 'top funding priority', Sean Parnell, Australian, 2010-01-21

The growing list of Australian casualties from a decade of conflict justified the Rudd government's increased health and rehabilitation funding and did not reflect an overstretched defence force, ministers said. After The Australian revealed data showing 3884 personnel who served in East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, or multiple conflicts, had reported 9542 conditions for which the government had accepted liability, Labor was at pains to demonstrate those servicemen and women were not forgotten.

- 4000 Diggers on war sick list, Sean Parnell, Australian, 2010-01-20
- Health and wellbeing of ADF members a priority, Hon. Greg Combet, Minister for Defence

Personnel, Materiel and Science, Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2010-01-20

- Casualties – ADF, Australia in Afghanistan, Nautilus Institute

2. UN report claims bribes equal to quarter of GDP, Matthias Gebauer and Carsten Volkery, 2010-01-19

Need a driver's license in Kabul? $180 will get you one within hours. $60,000 will get you out of jail in Afghanistan. A new UN study shows just how rampant corruption has become in the war-torn country. Indeed, bribery is equal to a quarter of the Afghan GDP. Afghanistan's leading anti-corruption crusader wears a broad smile and speaks perfect German. Mohammed Eshaq Aloko, the attorney general of Afghanistan, spent years in Hamburg -- indeed, his wife still lives in Germany. But Aloko elected to return to his homeland. "The country was lawless for decades," Aloko is fond of telling visitors from the West, "which is why one can't expect a law-based society to appear out of nowhere." First, he points out, one must make a reliable diagnosis before a therapy can be decided upon.

- Corruption in Afghanistan: bribery as reported by the victims, UNODC, 2010-01

3. McChrystal's plan takes a Taliban hit, Abubakar Siddique, Asia Times, 2010-01-21

The brazen attack on January 18, in which just seven Taliban militants managed to detonate suicide bombs that destroyed a shopping center and wage a lengthy gun battle with Afghan forces, has raised serious questions about the state of security even in areas thought to be relatively secure. The attack - which left three Afghan soldiers and two civilians dead and another 70 people wounded - also exhibited the Taliban's ability to strike at the heart of a key US strategy being launched by US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commander, General Stanley McChrystal. The plan focuses on securing urban areas, with the intention of turning the Afghan public against the Taliban while raising Afghans' confidence in the ability of their own forces to protect them.

- Kabul gets the Baghdad treatment from Taliban bombers, Juan Cole, Informed Comment, 2010-0--18

4. Gates: Al-Qaeda has assembled a 'syndicate' of terror groups, Craig Whitlock, Washington Post, 2010-01-20

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said that al-Qaeda was using proxy terrorist groups to orchestrate attacks in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of a broader strategy to destabilize the region. Gates said all of the factions were working under the umbrella of al-Qaeda, which he accused of "orchestrating" attacks throughout the region. He said al-Qaeda's approach was intended not just to destabilize the Afghan and Pakistani governments but also to provoke a conflict between India and Pakistan. The two countries have already fought four wars since declaring independence in 1947 and have since become nuclear powers.

5. China vents anger with missile test, Peter J Brown, Asia Times, 2010-01-20

China has conducted a successful "defensive" anti-missile test with the intent of sending the United States a stern message of disapproval over Washington's latest arms sales to Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu described the January 11 event as a test of "ground-based midcourse missile interception technology" conducted "within its territory". It was defensive in

nature and targeted at no country, she said

- Beidou Update, Geoffrey Forden, Arms Control Wonk, 2010-01-18

6. Korea raises its arms, John Kerin, AFR*, 2010-01-20

Seoul has raised concerns that the Rudd government is overlooking South Korea's military hardware in Australia's big defence purchases, frustrating efforts to forge closer defence and security ties between the two countries. The concerns raised at ministerial level have been reinforced by protracted delays for the Department of Defence's proposed $600 million purchase of heavy-tracked field guns for the Australian army.
*[Subscription required]

- K9 thunder, Samsung techwin defense program
- K9 155mm self-propelled howitzer, Global Security.org
- PzH 2000 155mm Self-Propelled Howitzer, Germany, Army-technology.com

7. South Korea warns North on a first nuclear strike, Choe Sang-Hun, NYT, 2010-01-20

South Korea would launch a pre-emptive conventional strike against the North if there were clear indications of an impending nuclear attack, the South Korean defense minister said in Seoul, even as both countries were holding talks about improvements at their jointly operated industrial park. The comment by the defense minister, Kim Tae-young, reconfirmed the South Korean military's stance on the possibility of a nuclear strike by the North, ministry officials said.

8. One Year Later: did Obama win the Iraq war?, Juan Cole, Informed Comment, 2010-01-20

Contrary to the consensus at Washington think tanks, Obama is ahead of schedule in his Iraq withdrawal, to which he is committed, and which will probably unfold pretty much as he has outlined in his speeches. The attention of the US public has turned away from Iraq so decisively that Obama's achievement in facing down the Pentagon on this issue and supporting Iraq's desire for practical steps toward sovereignty has largely been missed in this country.

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