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1. Joint effort to curtail first-strike policy
2. Budget cuts a tough target
3. How a guilty plea from Stern Hu could be good news for Rio and the government
4. Israel expects Canberra to expel diplomat over forged passports used in murder
5. Building bridges over Afghanistan's troubled waters
6. Insurgent faction presents Afghan peace plan
7. Washington's Indonesian bully boys
8. The ticking TB time bomb

1. Joint effort to curtail first-strike policy, Kyodo News, Japan Times, 2010-0--25

Japan and Australia will jointly seek to reinforce assurances against the use of nuclear weapons on nonnuclear states at the upcoming Nuclear NonProliferation Treaty review conference. Under a package of proposals on disarmament and nonproliferation, nuclear-armed states are called on to take, such measures as providing "stronger negative security assurances" of not using atomic weapons against nonnuclear states that comply with the NPT.

- Report slip hits nuclear hopes, Daniel Flitton, Age, 2010-03-25
- Australia-Japan joint package on nuclear disarmament, Media release, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2010-03-24
- Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2009-12

2. Budget cuts a tough target, John Kerin, AFR*, 2010-03-25

Defence is in for some lean spending years as the Rudd government demands fiscal restraint to hasten the return of the overall budget to surplus and fund more urgent priorities in an election year.
*[Subscription required]

3. How a guilty plea from Stern Hu could be good news for Rio and the government, Malcolm Maiden, SMH, 2010-03-24

The interests of Stern Hu, the Australian government, Rio Tinto and other companies looking to establish links with China have never been perfectly aligned. Political concerns for the government, Rio and other companies raised by the arrest of Hu and his three co-workers were best addressed if Hu and his colleagues were found to have acted as rogue traders.

- China gas deal to add $14b to Queensland economy, Fidelis Rego, Sam Burgess, and Francis Tapim, ABC News, 2010-03-25

4. Israel expects Canberra to expel diplomat over forged passports used in murder, John Lyons and Peter Wilson, Australian, 2010-03-25

Israel is bracing itself for the possibility that Australia will follow Britain and expel an Israeli diplomat in response to the use of four forged Australian passports in the assassination of a Hamas commander.

5. Building bridges over Afghanistan's troubled waters, John Kerin, AFR*, 2010-03-25

Australia Defence Association executive director Neil James claimed it was now an open secret in Canberra that the Americans were angry at Australia's reluctance to send extra troops to Afghanistan. Defence Minister John Faulkner, while maintaining Australia is not prepared to send any extra troops, says it is prepared to change the makeup of the existing force.
*[Subscription required]

6. Insurgent faction presents Afghan peace plan, Carlotta Gall, NYT, 2010-0--23

Representatives of a major insurgent faction have presented a formal 15-point peace plan to the Afghan government, the first concrete proposal to end hostilities since President Hamid Karzai said he would make reconciliation a priority after his re-election last year.

- Afghan warlord Hekmatyar talks peace, but brings little to table, Ben Arnoldy, csmonitor, 2010-0--22

7. Washington's Indonesian bully boys, Allan Nairn, Nation, 2010-03-22

According to senior Indonesian officials, police and details from government files, the US-backed Indonesian armed forces (TNI), now due for fresh American aid, assassinated a series of civilian activists during 2009. The killings were part of a secret government program, and were coordinated

in part by an active-duty, US-trained general in the special forces unit called Kopassus.

8. The ticking TB time bomb, David Wroe, SMH, 2010-03-25

A disease many people thought was conquered more than half a century ago is thriving. Worryingly for Australia, a study published in 2008 in the Medical Journal of Australia found that drug-resistant tuberculosis was a looming problem in Papua New Guinea and could spread via the Torres Strait to northern Queensland, sparking ''a major public health crisis''.

- High hopes for drug to kill off TB, Amy Corderoy, SMH, 2010-03-25
- Regional health issues jointly affecting Australia and the South Pacific, Report of the Australian Parliamentary Committee Delegation to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, 2010-03-18 [PDF, 8.5MB]

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org