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Austral Peace and Security Network (APSNet)

Bi-weekly report from the Nautilus Institute at RMIT, Australia.

Monday 31 July 2006

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Austral Policy Forum 06-25A: Crisis in Timor-Leste - Richard Curtain

1. Troops Could Go to Lebanon, Laura Tingle, AFR*, 2006-07-31Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has foreshadowed the possibility of Australia making a very limited contribution to an international intervention force in southern Lebanon, despite saying last week any early contribution could be a "suicide mission".

* Subscription required.
- Middle East Conflict (2006): Jurist Legal News Archive [regularly updated]
- Middle East Peace Vital to Australia, Anthony Bergin, AFR*, 2006-07-31
  * Subscription required.
- Hezbollah, ABC, Rear Vision, 2006-07-30 [audio]

2.
3. Aping the US on Israel, Geoffrey Barker, AFR*, 2006-07-31There is political opportunism and a policy vacuum at the heart of Australia's Middle East policy; both are dismally apparent in the responses to Israel's attacks on Lebanon. So too is Canberra's eagerness to echo US administration policy, which even conservative thinkers as pre-eminent as Owen Harries see as wrong and based on flawed - or faked - intelligence.
   * Subscription required.
4. Diggers Start Timor Withdrawal in Weeks, Mark Dodd, Australian, 2006-07-28Australian troops will begin leaving East Timor in coming weeks. Speaking at an ASEAN forum in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said it was time to start trimming the 1300-strong force in East Timor. Mr Downer said he had told his East Timor counterpart that it had to start taking responsibility for internal problems.
   - East Timor Asks for 800 International Police, Graeme Dobell, ABC, PM, 2006-07-27

5.
6. Canberra in Iraq Oil Grab Bid for BHP, Richard Baker, Age, 2006-07-31The Federal Government tried to secure Iraq oil deposits for Australian companies such as BHP Billiton and Tigris Petroleum, following Saddam Hussein's defeat. Documents released by the Cole inquiry reveal Deputy PM Mark Vaile and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, who both claim to know little about Tigris, wrote to the Iraqi oil minister in March 2004 to discuss "Australian oil interests in Iraq".
7. Guest Workers Here to Stay, Adrian Rollins, AFR*, 2006-07-31Treasurer Peter Costello has made an impassioned case against temporary guest workers. "Guest workers are not accorded full citizenship rights and are subject to eventual removal. This means they are vulnerable to exploitation". Despite these concerns, guest workers are playing a crucial and controversial role in one of the biggest influxes of skilled migrants in Australia's history.
   * Subscription required.
   - Oceans to Cross to Get a Grasp of Pacific Issues, Angela Gregory, NZH, 2006-07-28

8.
9. Unmanned Aircraft to Patrol NW Shelf, Christopher Jay, AFR*, 2006-07-28Australia plans to defend the vital North-West Shelf gas production platforms using world-leading, Australian-designed video technology deployed with unmanned observation aircraft. The digital video exploitation system, or D-VEX, allows streamed video material transmitted from airborne reconnaissance vehicles to be rapidly processed, analysed and distributed for immediate use.
   * Subscription required.
10. Hey, Big Spender, Editorial, SMH, 2006-07-31Australia's F-18 Hornets fighter jets are struggling to evade enemy fire and to identify and destroy targets. They will operate as Australia's only jet fighter from 2010 when the F-111s are grounded. The new US Joint Strike Fighters are delayed until 2020. Dr Nelson needs to move quickly to address the Hornet's shortcomings. Just as urgent is the dismantling of the dangerously complacent Defence culture that allowed matters to come to this.
    - We Can't Afford Tailor-Made Defence Systems, Alan Mitchell, AFR*, 2006-07-31

* Subscription required.

11.
12. 'Rapid Response' Targets Bird Flu, Marwaan Macan-Markar, Asia Times, 2006-07-28Thailand's record of remaining free of the H5N1 virus strain for more than 7 months has been shattered. The virus is spreading in rural communities in Southeast Asia. Vietnam has brought bird flu under control, but in Indonesia 31 of the country's 42 bird flu deaths have occurred this year. The WHO and the US-based Center for Disease Control (CDC) want "rapid response teams" in local communities.
    - Avian Influenza, WHO [updated regularly]
    - Bird Flu Outbreak Spreading, Bangkok Post, 2006-07-31

13.

Austral Policy Forum 06-25A: Crisis in Timor-Leste - Richard Curtain

Richard Curtain, a Melbourne-based policy advisor to UNICEF, argues that behind the recent violence in East Timor lay a misreading of key causal factors, including

> "the extent of the poverty experienced by the poor in Dili, the frustrations of young people, and the lack of response by the Government to the plight of the poor under extreme pressure from increasing costs and declining incomes".

The government's

> "narrow development strategy, ... supported by the World Bank, has been on getting the institutions of state established first and foremost, followed by the provision of basic services. The effect of this approach has been that the economy, expecially the agriculture sector, has been left to fend for itself".

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