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Nuclear Issues

1. Pakistan Nuclear Safety

Physicists from an Italian Arms Control Center are visiting Pakistan to prepare a report on the status of nuclear security.

2. Related News and Analysis

According to U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the United States government has no knowledge whether or not Al-Qaeda has been able to acquire plans or material to make nuclear weapons. Kenton Kieth, a spokesman for the U.S. led Coalition, has stated that it is "beyond imagination" that the Coalition will use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons in Afghanistan. An unconfirmed report in The Frontier Post, a Peshawar based Pakistani daily, has noted that al-Qaeda fighters in Tora Bora mountains might have twenty Russian-made Oragan missiles.

Le Monde, France, published an article that discussed "mininuke" - and the possibility of their use in Afghanistan. The essay referred to the work of the Nautilus Institute's disarmament specialist Hans Kristensen. An English translation of the essay has been posted on the Institute's website.

Writing for the Pakistani daily The Dawn, Yasmin Mustafa argues that regional or national conflicts around the globe now have the potential to escalate into much larger wars involving nuclear weapons. She stresses the need for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

Afghanistan War and Implications

1. Afghanistan: Current Situation

The Coalition spokesman Kenneth Keith has rejected calls by humanitarian agencies for the investigation of the killing of war prisoners in a fort near Marzar-e-Sharif. Meanwhile, reports in the Pakistani media indicate that the Taliban forces in Kandhar are collapsing as intense ground fighting and air bombardment of the city continues. A misguided bombing by the U.S. air force killed three U.S. soldiers and might have injured Hamid Karzai, the newly elected head of the interim Afghan cabinet. Another report from southeast Kandahar indicates that British Special Forces operatives might have missed finding Osama bin Laden by a few hours.

2. Afghanistan: Bonn Accord

After nine days of intense negotiations, the meeting of the delegates of the Afghan factions ended in a signed agreement to set up an interim cabinet as a first step towards establishing a representative government in Kabul. The newly appointed head of the interim cabinet Hamid Karzai has declared amnesty for all surrendering Taliban. There have been reports of negotiations between the Taliban defending Kandhar and Karzai for a peaceful surrender of the city. Several Pakistani newspapers have profiled Hamid Karzai.

According to Rahimnullah Yusufzai's report in the Pakistani daily The News, the boycott of the UN-sponsored Bonn conference by a former mujahideen commander and Nangarhar province governor Haji Abdul Qadeer to protest the inadequate Pushtun representation may be an indication of problems faced by the interim government. Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hikmatyar has called the Bonn agreement an imposition of the U.S. will over Afghanistan. A group of Pushtun elders meeting in Peshawar has also stated its displeasure with the Bonn Accord.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the head of the Northern Alliance, has been skeptical of the Bonn process.

His statements about the process, issued before the accord was finalized in Bonn, appeared in various Pakistani newspapers.

3. Humanitarian Crisis

Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for human rights, has asked the United States and Britain to investigate the massacre of Taliban prisoners at Qala-i-Jangi. Sidney Jones, Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, has urged for steps to prevent massacres at other prisons holding the defeated Taliban fighters.

Aid agencies have reported that the worsening security condition in Afghanistan is hampering their relief work.

World Food Program's spokesperson Lindsey Davies has expressed concern about the well being of 238,000 people living in Kandahar, the last Taliban stronghold and scene of intense air bombardment and ground war. The United Kingdom based charity organization, Save the Children, has warned that babies and infants of Afghan families stranded in sub-zero temperatures in northern Afghanistan are dying because of a serious shortage of food and other essentials.

The Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, Syed Asif Shah has denied reports of ethnic tensions in Afghan refugee camps. Local residents of Dir in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province reportedly beat some Afghan refugees. According to some unconfirmed reports, the fighters of the Northern Alliance have attacked Pushtun refugees traveling towards Afghanistan's border with Pakistan. Despite the sealing of the border with Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan refugees are coming into Chaman, a Pakistani border town close to Kandahar.

4. Pakistan

According to a report in The News, Pakistan, Professor Abdur Rab Rasool Sayyaf, a Northern Alliance leader will escort a large number of Pakistanis detained in Afghanistan back to Pakistan.

President General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has welcomed the Bonn agreement.

5. Russia

Russia's envoy in Kabul Alexander Oblov issued a statement indicating that the Russian embassy in Kabul is now functioning. The Russian foreign ministry, however, has not issued an announcement declaring the embassy open.

6. United States

The United States has reportedly been pressuring the Russians to break off their close relationship with the Northern Alliance. George J. Tenet, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, met with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad. According to press reports, George Tenet asked for Pakistan's help in locating Osama bin Laden. The Dawn, Pakistani newspaper, reported that two U.S. gun ships have landed at the Jalalabad airport. John Stufflebeem, a spokesman for the Pentagon, has expressed concerns that the Taliban may still have portable surface to air missiles.

Writing for the Asia Times, Syed Saleem Shahzad suggests that Pakistan and the United States may have sought help of a convicted Pakistani drug baron with influence among Afghan warlords.

Unnamed energy experts in Pakistan have suggested that the U.S. might eventually have control over \$5 trillion worth of oil and gas reserves in the Central Asian republics

7. Regional Developments

The Asia Times published an interview with an unnamed Saudi who is "very close to Saudi scholars, (and) some members of the Saudi royal family." Another report in the Asia Times looks at the effects of the war in Afghanistan on Kuwait.

8. General Assessments

In an essay published in the Asia Times, Richard Perle has argued that Iraq should be the next phase in the U.S. war against terrorism.

Writing from Afghanistan for the Asia Times, Pepe Escobar describes the situation in Afghanistan. The first four parts of his story were included in the last SANDnet newsletter.

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

The Pakistani government has initiated a campaign to control Islamic militants and their institutions. In his essay for the Asia Times, Muddasir Rizvi suggests that "the religious parties appear to be taking advantage of the lack of democracy and social cover to get back into the political mainstream." The influx of the Taliban fighters has caused concern in Pakistan.

Writing for the Dawn, a Pakistani daily, Syed Talat Hussain argues that "the more long term and durable solution to the problem of extremism will have to integrate the madressahs (Islamic schools) into the mainstream education system." Masooda Bano's essays in the News, Pakistan, argues that the "ruling elite of this country, particularly the military elite" and not "religious extremism" is responsible for the country's economic and social problems.

Frederic Grare's essay in The Economic and Political Weekly of India argues that Pakistan's powerful religious political party the Jamaat-i-Islami is finding itself "isolated".

Groups of established politician along with some non-governmental organizations have launched a new political party in Pakistan.

2. Iran-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan and Iran have been moving towards closer bilateral relations. In his essay for the Dawn, Pakistan, political commentator Dr Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti argues that a strong relationship between Pakistan and Iran would provide political stability in Asia.

3. U.S. - Pakistan Relations

According to a report in the News, Pakistan, the United States is pressuring the People's Republic of China to stop supporting Pakistan's missile development program. The U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has stated that military-to-military linkages between Pakistan and the U.S. should be maintained.

Pakistan political commentator Nasim Zehra believes that the "possibility of the geographical expansion of the United States' military operation in Afghanistan cannot be ruled out."

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - a Hindu nationalist party - has declared that it is "more interested in building a grand temple in Ayodhya than worrying about the stability of the government." Another Hindu nationalist party, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has reiterated its intentions of building a temple at Ayodhya. The Indian government, however, has indicated that it will oppose attempts at any new constructions at the controversial site.

Invoking provisions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTO), the Indian government banned two political groups. The Amnesty International has called POTO a "draconian law". As a result of immense pressure from the opposition political parties, media, and human rights organizations the Indian government has decided to amend the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance by curtailing its operational period from five to three years and deleting a provision affecting freedom of the press.

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Indian and Pakistani newspapers have reported violence and political demonstrations in Kashmir.

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