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Nuclear Issues

1. Pakistan: Nuclear Safety

The U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told a press conference in New Delhi, India, that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are secure. However, General Richard Myers, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed his concerns about the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons while appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Speaking at a press conference in Islamabad, Pakistan's Chief military spokesman Major-General Rashid Qureshi refuted reports that Pakistan has shifted its nuclear weapons to China. At an earlier press briefing, Qureshi had rejected allegations by some Pakistani politicians that the government had handed over security of nuclear installations to the United States. He also described reports that two former members of Pakistan's nuclear program had leaked secrets to the Taliban as "trash, fictitious and baseless".
"US not given security of N-plants: Rashid"

Writing in Asia Times, Mushahid Hussian, a Pakistani journalist, concurs with a recent report by the International Atomic Energy Agency that termed the possibility of terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons as "the most unlikely scenario". He goes on to present a different explanation for "media hullabaloo" about threats to the safety of Pakistani nuclear weapons.
"Media off target with Pakistan nuclear scare"

2. Related News

Russia has agreed to help India build two nuclear power reactors.

President George W. Bush has accused Al-Qaeda of "seeking chemical, biological and nuclear weapons."

Afghanistan

1. Afghanistan: Current Situation

The U.S. Air Force has intensified its bombing campaign against Taliban frontline positions in Northern Afghanistan.
"Heaviest bombing on Taliban frontlines"

Afghan Islamic Press and Pakistani newspapers have reported Taliban and civilian causalities.

A Pakistani reporter in Kandahar has noted that the city "remains quite normal here with no emergency situation in effect."

The Taliban intelligence chief, Qari Ahmadullah, claimed that an opposition commander has now joined the Taliban militia.
"Taliban claim opposition commander's defection"

Reports from Kandahar have suggested that Arab fighters are controlling parts of the country and fighting major battles on the frontlines.

On October 24th, the Taliban captured, and later executed, Commander Abdul Haq, a respected anti-Taliban Pashtun leader. According to a report in The Friday Times, Abdul Haq's execution "has sent a shockwave and frightened everyone."

The military chief of the Northern Alliance, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, has announced that his forces are ready to march to Kabul.

The Taliban claimed capturing 25 Pakhtoon supporters of Zahir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan.

2. Afghanistan: Future Prospects

Afghanistan's ousted president Burhanuddin Rabbani is scheduled to meet Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in Tajikistan. The two are expected to discuss the formation of a 120-member Supreme Council of National Unity of Afghanistan.

3. Humanitarian Crisis

A survey conducted in Pakistan estimated that over 3 million Afghan refugees are now in Pakistan.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees has estimated that some 65,000 displaced Afghans have entered the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan since September 11th.

Nigel Fisher, Regional Director of UNICEF, has warned that as many as "100,000 children will die this winter inside Afghanistan if aid does not reach them in sufficient quantity in the next few weeks". Echoing Mr. Fisher's remark, World Food Program spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume told journalists that "if law and order is not re-established as swiftly as possible, a task that is already very difficult at the moment could easily turn out to be impossible."

Peter Kessler, spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has indicated the U.N.'s willingness to establish refugee camps inside Afghanistan if the safety of the refugees as well as the aid workers is ensured. Kessler has described the unfolding humanitarian crisis as "one of the most complex and difficult situations we have faced in recent years."

Rasul Baksh Rais, Director of the Area Study Centre at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, examines the situation of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran and suggests measures that may mitigate the crisis.

4. Pakistan

Pakistan's Chief military spokesman Major-General Rashid Qureshi stated that "there is no difference of opinion between the United States and Pakistan on the operation in Afghanistan."

The Pakistani press has reported that volunteers are crossing into Afghanistan to join the Taliban. Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Office has denied reports that the government is secretly supplying arms to the Taliban militia in Afghanistan.
"Another 800 volunteers enter Kunar for Jihad"
"More fighters cross into Afghanistan"

A report in The Washington Post that President Pervez Musharraf offered the United States use of three additional airbases in western Pakistan was widely noted in the Pakistani press.

US Attorney General John Ashcroft has recommended to the State Department that two Pakistani militant Islamic organizations be declared "terrorist organizations." The Pakistani government has since froze the bank accounts of the organizations.

5. India

During his visit to Russia, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee discussed India's role in post-Taliban Afghanistan with Russian President Vladimir Putin.
"Vajpayee, Putin to discuss post-Taliban setup"

6. Regional Developments

Saudi Arabia has called for a halt in air strikes against Afghanistan during the month of Ramadan. A report in the Asia Times suggested that the Saudi pressure has "torn" Islamabad over whether or not to join in the call.
"Saudis raise the Ramadan stakes"

7. General Assessments

Palestinian intellectual Edward Said writes that it would be a mistake to treat the Palestinian question as "tangential to the altogether more urgent events in Central Asia". He argues that "our defence against unjust policies is a moral one, and we must first occupy the moral high ground and then promote understanding of that position in Israel and the US."
"Middle East impasse"

Pepe Escobar offers a different perspective on the debate in the U.S. and British media about the emerging world order. He argues that the U.S. has fully stretched its global power and "when you reach Absolute Power, the only way is down."
"The New Imperialism"

In an exclusive interview with Far Eastern Economic Review, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, noted that the Bush administration's war on terrorism and missile defense plans are shaping a new security environment in Asia.

Writing in Asia Times, Francesco Sisci notes that "every expert on Islam, every analyst of what is happening in the Muslim world, agrees that Osama bin Laden has gained the initial advantage in the propaganda struggle by arguing that this is a war against Islam." Sisci offers a set of arguments to explain the phenomenon.
"The propaganda war, and why bin Laden is winning it"

Pakistan

1. Pakistan Domestic Situation

Newspapers in Pakistan have reported continued protests against the government's decision to align itself with the U.S.

Several hundred thousand followers of the "Tableeghi Jamaat" (Group of Preachers) begged God's forgiveness on Friday while keeping themselves strictly aloof from the bombings in Afghanistan or the protests on the streets of Pakistan.

Dr Abdul Samad fears that "misconceived American policy and the ignorant despotism in the Islamic world is going to lead us to a holocaust." He argues that moderate Muslims need to focus their energies toward reviving their own societies and creating a "peaceful, democratic and free world".

2. India-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan's Foreign Office has denied Indian allegations about Pakistan's military build-up along its border with India.
"FO denies Indian claim of military build-up"

3. U.S. - Pakistan Relations

According to Pakistan's defense spokesman, Pakistan and the U.S. have reached a "broad agreement" on defense purchases and exchanges. The spokesman, however, denied reports that Pakistan has given the U.S. a "defense shopping list".

India

1. India Foreign Policy

Writer C.K. Lal argues that it would be in India's long-term interests to follow an independent foreign policy based on the Ghandian principles of "truth and non-violence".

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Indian and Pakistani newspapers reported more violence in Kashmir.
"Thirty-five killed in Kashmir"
"Twelve injured in anti-US protests in J&K"

2. United States and India

During his visit to India, the U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld expressed his understanding of the Indian concerns regarding cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. He also urged India not to take any military actions against Pakistan.

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