

G4S Global Risks Ltd.

# Weekly Intelligence Report

Commencing 02 March 2007

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## US Anti-Terror Pressured Put Spotlight on Musharraf

With the Democrats now controlling the US Congress there is increasing pressure coming from the US towards Pakistan to increase its activities against al-Qaida and Taliban terrorists as the US looks to see improved returns on its counter-terrorism investments. With an annual investment of USD \$300 million in Pakistani counter-terrorism efforts, Washington is becoming increasingly concerned over the perceived failure on the part of the Pakistani government to curb the tide of radical Sunni extremism adding to the fears that al-Qaida is heartily replenishing its stocks of fighters. Following last year's unexpected Taliban resurgence, 2007 is viewed as a key year in the battle to stabilise Afghanistan and as far as the US is concerned Pakistan's importance in this mission has never been more important, or more under scrutiny.

US Vice-President Dick Cheney made explicit accusations that Pakistan was not fulfilling its terrorism obligations during a recent tour of Afghanistan and Pakistan, during which he was the target of a suicide bomb attack on the Bagram Airbase north of Kabul in which 23 people were killed. Elsewhere in the US, accusations have come to the forefront once again with claims emerging that Pakistan is playing host to a number of al-Qaida training camps in the country's remote tribal regions. President General Pervez Musharraf acknowledged the claims made by US intelligence chief Mike McConnell, however, Pakistani Interior Minister Aftab Khan Sherpao categorically denied the accusations. In addition to increasingly heated rhetoric from both sides Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, Mehmud Ali Durrani, warned that US policy regarding the war on terror could

undermine the legitimacy of the Pakistani president and potentially destabilise an already fragile domestic political situation in Pakistan. Durrani's comments acknowledge the political tightrope that Musharraf has been walking in recent years with a need to appease US and international pressures juxtaposed with the need to maintain domestic support amongst a population increasingly opposed to Pakistan's alignment with the US.

In almost direct response to the comments of Cheney and McConnell in late February and early March Pakistani security forces launched a series of raids on suspected terrorists hideouts on their territory. Pakistani security forces seized a senior Taliban commander

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along with several insurgents from the turbulent province of Baluchistan. Pakistani authorities identified the Taliban leader as Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, who is deputy to the Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Two other significant figures were also detained; they are thought to be Amir Khan Haqqani, a Taliban commander from Zabul province in southern Afghanistan, and Abdul Bari, the former governor of Afghanistan's turbulent Helmand province. In a further raid Pakistani police targeted a hotel in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan and netted five Afghans suspected of being members of the Taliban.

As the Taliban's suspected Spring offensive begins to take shape NATO-led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) have launched a fierce campaign in the key and volatile southern Afghan province of Helmand that is an epicentre for the narcotics trade and is susceptible to Taliban dominance. The NATO operation that

is now under way will involve 4,500 NATO troops from the 33,000 the alliance maintains in Afghanistan alongside 1,000 Afghan troops and will focus on the northern districts of Helmand, including the potentially vital district of Musa Qala that has fallen back into Taliban hands after ISAF reached a deal with tribal elders in late 2006 to clear the district of Taliban fighters. While the Taliban anticipated offensive has been well documented, the resurgence of al-Qaida is evoking serious concern in Washington and amongst the international community. A report from the Council on Foreign Relations asserts that bin Laden is actively replenishing Al-Qaida's capabilities and a plethora of new training camps have sprung up in the tribal region of North Waziristan; reports directly linked to the fresh US outburst against Pakistan.

The reports of al-Qaida resurgence conflict heavily with President Bush's declaration late last year that al-Qaida is on the run but coincide with Michael McConnell's assessment that al-Qaida still poses the gravest threat to US interests. The al-Qaida franchise, as it's rapidly becoming, has new branches in North Africa where the GSPC has continued to commit atrocities in the name of al-Qaida. The forthcoming months will be critical in assessing the extent of the resurgence and capabilities of both the Taliban and al-Qaida in South Asia and other targeted hotspots around the world including north and east Africa. Should the tide of global radical Sunni terrorism continue to rise then the finger will unquestionably fall heavily on Pakistan.

## Africa

**Algeria – 04.03.2007:** A roadside attack on a bus near Kaadat Souane village killed three Algerians and a Russian worker on their way from work for the Russian gas pipeline construction company Stroitransgaz. The incident, the second bomb attack on oil and gas workers since December last year, happened late Saturday. Back then the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) declared it would carry out more attacks on foreigners and warned Muslims to stay away from the "interests of the infidels" in order to avoid harm. The group also claimed responsibility for seven deadly bomb attacks killing six on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February in two neighbouring provinces east of Algiers. In general there is still a high threat from terrorism in Algeria.

**Algeria – 06.03.2007:** The two weekend attacks that killed seven security officers and four gas pipeline workers in separate incidents were claimed by the newly dubbed Al-Qaida Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb, formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, a French acronym). In a statement posted on a militant website on March 5, read: "Our [fighters] conducted an attack on the municipal guard in Tizi Ouzou and killed a number of infidels." The statement was further corroborated by an alleged GSPC spokesman identified as Abu Abdallah Ahmad, who called Al Jazeera's offices in Morocco to confirm the claims while threatening to carry out more attacks against foreign companies. On February 3, the GSPC detonated a roadside bomb that killed one Russian oil worker and three Algerians about 80 miles southwest of Algiers, near the town of Ain Defla. The workers were all employed with Russian company Stroitrangaz. The following day, the GSPC ambushed a police patrol killing seven Algerian police officers in the eastern Kabylie region, near Beni Yeni. The attack on the Russian oil firm was the second such incident since December in which the GSPC has targeted foreign oil companies. Since ostensibly ending almost a decade of insurgency activity during the 1990's, there has been resurgence in militant activity. The success of recent attacks, mostly directed at security forces, demonstrates a lack of adequate capacity and capability of the Algerian intelligence and security services to deal with this re-emerging threat.

**Algeria – 05.03.2007:** In the country's Kabylie region, east of Algiers, suspected Islamic rebels attacked a police checkpoint killing five security personnel and wounding another three. The attack followed Saturday's bus bombing which killed a Russian and three Algerians who worked for the Russian company Stroitransgaz. There were no claims of responsibility for the weekend attacks, but the incidents are causing an increasingly dire security concern as Algeria continues to witness an upsurge in terrorist attacks in recent months. Algeria is seemingly reverting back to the turbulent 1990's, which were characterized by a decade of insurgency activity which claimed the lives of about 15,000 people. Although most attacks are directed at the government, rebel groups have increasingly targeted civilians and foreign business interests.

**Angola – 08.03.2007:** Controversy erupted between the government and the country's opposition over an alleged assassination attempt. The UNITA movement that waged a prolonged insurgency against the government but has now disarmed and is a prominent opposition political party accused the government of attempting to assassinate its leader Isaias Samakuva. The government denied the allegations that pertain to a shooting incident in the Kwanza Norte province directed at a lodging where Samakuva was staying. UNITA is demanding talks with the ruling MPLA on the matter. Analysts are hoping that the two sides can come to a reasonably amicable understanding on the matter; no-one wants to see the restoration of the deadly 27 year civil war between the two sides that led to the deaths of over half a million people.

**Central African Republic (CAR) – 04.03.2007:** Rebel forces entered Biaro on Saturday whilst government and French soldiers remained in the town according to the French Defence Ministry. The French troops have been in the country since December when special forces were sent to the former colony to dislodge rebel fighters from Biaro. Rebel spokesman Ahmat Amadine said the UFDR took control of Birao and its airport early on Sunday, a day after entering the isolated northeastern town. The CAR has seen years of coups, mutinies and uprisings and the situation in the country has been particu-

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larily unstable over the last 18 months. Government troops are fighting rebels who in turn are opposed to President Francois Bozize raiding their suspected strongholds and supportive villages. Analysts link the violence in the border regions of CAR, Chad and Sudan's western Darfur region and warn of a complex conflict that could trigger a far more dangerous war.

**Central African Republic (CAR) – 08.03.2007:** The Central African Republic remains in a state of extreme political and security tension as French troops came to the rescue of the beleaguered armed forces to aid in the recapture of an airport in the provincial capital Birao in the north-east of the country. Birao has been the focus of the rebel movement that has caused major concern in the country. French paratroopers were amongst 100 troops involved in the mission to secure Birao and the move comes just two days after the French and the rebel movement were engaged in violent clashes in the region. Without continued French assistance the government would face considerable difficulty maintaining control of its territory; estimates from the diplomatic community cited in the New York Times suggest that the government army controls only 2 percent of the country.

**Chad – 08.03.2007:** Displaying its flagrant rejection of a UN peacekeeping force to secure the rebel-plagued eastern regions of Chad the government of President Idriss Deby blocked the proposed advanced mission that would have seen 70 military liaison officers land in late March to prepare the groundwork for an 11,000 strong peacekeeping force. President Deby remains adamant that he will not speak with the rebels and analysts believe it is a fear that the UN force will ensure he changes his mind that is driving his rejection of the deployment. The situation on Chad's eastern border with the Darfur regions of Sudan remains one of the foremost humanitarian and security disasters in the world with both governments apparently refusing to address the situation.

**Chad – 06.03.2007:** Former rebel leader Mahamat Nour Abdelkarim who headed the United Front for Democratic Change was appointed to the senior post of Defence Minister in the government of President Idriss Deby.

Nour's appointment comes two months after the United Front for Democratic Change agreed to give up its insurgent struggle against the government. Despite the UFDC truce, other rebel movements have not ended their campaigns. And with the government refusing the 11,000-strong proposed UN peace-keeping deployment the east of the country remains racked by insecurity. Chad is still considered a "no-go" country for all non-essential travellers. The capital, N'Djamena, is witnessing a growing crime rate perpetrated by street gangs loosely connected to former rebel groups or operating independently.

**Djibouti – 06.03.2007:** Following the abductions of five Britons in the remote Afar in the regional state of Ethiopia, the US government placed travel restrictions upon its personnel in neighbouring Djibouti. The travel restrictions mean that embassy staff must obtain permission from the security officer before travelling north of Randa and Obock. While these travel restrictions are intended as a precautionary measure they reflect the ongoing concern over rebel and criminal activity around the boundary tri-point connecting Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

**Egypt – 02.03.2007:** Tensions between the venerated Muslim Brotherhood and the government have ratcheted up a notch following a Cairo courts decision to uphold the freezing of assets of 29 members of the Islamic organisation. The government decided to take punitive financial measures after it was alleged that the Muslim Brotherhood had been engaging in money laundering to finance what the court deemed as "wicked activities". To date the extensive crackdown on the banned organisation has left up to 126 of its members in police custody. There are concerns that simmering tensions could boil over into a violent response by the Brotherhood or their sympathisers.

**Ethiopia – 03.03.2007:** According to the state-run news agency ENA, a group of European tourists, including at least five Britons and more French, were captured by unidentified separatist rebels in the remote and desolate Afar region. Diplomatic sources confirmed the kidnappings but are unsure of the location of the hostages and

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who is responsible. There has been no contact with the group for more than 48 hours whilst Foreign Office officials have arrived in Ethiopia to help investigate the kidnapping. thirteen Ethiopians, acting as tour guides and drivers were also reported missing. Unconfirmed reports have indicated that up to 20 Western tourists may have been abducted in the Afar. The Afar, spanning across Ethiopian, Eritrean and the Djibouti border areas, is widely known to be a hostile and desolate place with various rebel groups moving freely throughout the region. Kidnappings are not uncommon in the Afar.

**Ethiopia / Eritrea – 07.03.2007:** The ongoing saga over the missing Britons kidnapped from the Afar region of Ethiopia took further turns on Tuesday. Following vehement denials of any implication in the rapidly escalating diplomatic incident, Eritrea now faces fresh claims from Ethiopian security forces and Afar populations that the captors were wearing Eritrean military uniforms. This led investigators to assert that the abductees may be located over the border in the desolate Danakil region of Eritrea. Analysts fear that the rhetoric and counter-rhetoric between Ethiopia and Eritrea could ignite the latent animosity that characterises their bilateral relationship and cause a re-escalation of the conflict that claimed 70,000 lives between 1998 and 2000 and has been simmering in a state of virtual cold war since Ethiopia rejected a boundary demarcation in 2003. For its part Eritrea has mooted the possibility that the abductions were carried out by Somali Islamists seeking to destabilise Ethiopia.

**Ivory Coast – 05.03.2007:** The beleaguered Ivorian government reportedly agreed to a new peace deal with the rebel movement that has divided the country. According to the latest deal a power sharing agreement will be enacted within five weeks in an attempt to bring political stability to the West African nation that has been wracked with insurgency and insurrection for the past years. The two sides met in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso that has served as a mediator in the ongoing conflict. The deal was signed by President Laurent Gbagbo and rebel leader Guillaume Soro. The accord comes after a month of negotiations between the two sides. However, despite the regional positivity that is

emanating from these talks, some regional analysts believe that there remain significant obstacles towards lasting peace in this violence plagued state.

**Kenya – 07.03.2007:** With Kenya witnessing a concerning upsurge in criminality and exposed to heightened terrorist threat levels resulting from regional insecurity in the Horn of Africa, new fears have arisen over a potentially specific terrorist threat targeting the World Cross Country Athletics Championships in Mombassa. The event is scheduled to kick off in the Kenyan city of Mombassa on March 24 and will make a prominent target for the active terrorist cells in Kenya, many of whom may have fled the recent defeat of the Islamists in Somalia bearing heightened grievances against several members of the international community. The event may also prove an attractive target for specific protests by disadvantaged populations in the Coastal Province of Kenyan which is predominantly Muslim.

**Malawi – 08.03.2007:** A private passenger jet carrying a senior executive with Australian mining company Paladin has crashed near the town of Dowa, located 25 miles northwest of the capital. Authorities identified the executive as Garnet Halliday, executive general manager for operations and development, for the Perth-based firm. Authorities said that the plane appeared to be trying to make an emergency landing on a road before it struck a tree and crashed in a field. Investigators have ruled out foul play and suspect that inclement weather conditions were responsible for the pilots deciding to land the plane.

**Mauritania – 06.03.2007:** The country is preparing for presidential elections scheduled to begin on March 11 with 19 candidates vying for the highest office in the West African country. The upcoming elections will be another litmus test for peace and democracy in a region seemingly unable to ensure either. UN election monitors will be on hand to ensure that the elections will be transparent, but political representation among the country's various ethnicities still remains a contentious issue as evidenced in the ethnic make-up of the 19 candidates. Of the presidential hopefuls, 16 are light-skinned Moors who have dominated Mauritania's political establishment

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for decades. According to some observers, the lighter-skinned Moors represent less than one third of the country's 3.2 million inhabitants who are either black Moors or black African. Although, most international observers feel that the racial issue will not play a decisive role in the upcoming elections, there still remain a sizeable Mauritanian diaspora, some 20,000, across the Senegalese border, which were expelled by the government during the 1980's. A major concern among ordinary Mauritians is the power of the military who have led several coups and counter-coups with the most recent occurring in August 2005. Political stability is gaining momentum which is likely to reduce any adverse risk to foreign investment in the country.

**Niger – 05.03.2007:** Clashes erupted between government forces and "armed bandits" in a remote desert region, some 800 miles (1,200 km) northeast of Niamey, last Thursday (March 1). Government forces seized three vehicles and various arms after killing five of the bandits. The incident occurred near Ouraren in Arlit province, a desolate region characterized by lawlessness, and what some observers believe is a renewed insurgency from Tuareg rebel groups. Meanwhile, in a separate and unconnected incident, a group of armed gunmen stormed two passenger buses and took several people hostage during a heist on a road between Arlit and Agadez late on Thursday. The hostages were let go with only minor injuries. A group calling themselves the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) consisting of the nomadic Tuareg ethnic group claimed responsibility for the bus attacks. Northern Niger could witness the kind of militancy taking place in the Niger Delta, as the region rich in oil and uranium is characterized by the same socio-economic conditions that currently plague its neighbours to the south. Foreign investors should be on alert as the MNJ has issued stark warnings to international companies not to operate in the region. The MNJ has gone on record threatening to use force against employees of the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) who are currently prospecting in the area. During the early 1990s, Niger witnessed a five-year insurgency in the desolate north by the Tuareg. A 1995 peace agreement with some rebel factions curtailed

some of the insurgency, but remnants of the insurgency still remain. Some observers have noted that the rebel groups have actually proliferated in the north due to the lack of any adequate security infrastructure.

**Nigeria – 08.03.2007:** Security preparations for next month's presidential elections are gathering pace with the federal government making 80,000 weapons and 32 million rounds of ammunition available to the police force in anticipation of potential outbreaks of the violence that have characterised previous Nigerian election processes. The announcement was met with accusations from some commentators that certain politicians are enabling weapons smuggling into the country, leading to the Nigerian Customs Service being placed on alert. The weapons issue and increasing protests from presidential candidate General Muhammadu Buhari, representing the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), claims that his campaign is being stifled by police and security forces are heightening tensions ahead of the ballot. Tensions could be set to rise even further.

**Somalia – 06.03.2007:** A second contingent of Ugandan forces arrived in Mogadishu on Tuesday raising scant hopes that peace and stability will finally return to the strife-torn country. However, with the African Union (AU) unable to provide the proposed 8,000 troops needed, concerns are mounting that the force could be under-strength and under-resourced to fight a seemingly growing insurgency. Burundi, Nigeria, Malawi, and Ghana have yet to deploy troops to region.

**Somalia – 07.03.2007:** The deployment of UN peacekeepers from the Ugandan People's Defence Forces was greeted with a violent reception at the airport of the Somali capital Mogadishu when they landed on Tuesday. The Ugandan troops bearing the insignia of the African Union were attacked with eight rounds of mortar fire in the first and instantaneous indication of the violent challenges that lay ahead for any foreign peace-keeping force in Somalia.

**Somalia – 08.03.2007:** African Union (AU) peacekeepers came under fire after arriving in Mogadishu. The fight against the peacekeepers was promised by ele-

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ments of the ousted Islamic Courts to protest the presence of foreign armies on Somali soil and thus far the promises have held true. In Wednesday's violence rocket fire again greeted the arrival of the peacekeepers in the vicinity of Mogadishu airport. This time they specifically targeted an armoured AU car and its Ethiopian military escort; none of the peacekeepers were reportedly injured but one civilian was killed and four others injured. Masked gunmen repeatedly opened fire on Ethiopian and Somali troops conducting a search of a bus in the Shirkole neighbourhood of south-east Mogadishu, killing two and injuring 14 others.

**Somalia – 08.03.2007:** A rocket-propelled grenade attack allegedly targeting African Union peacekeepers accidentally struck a restaurant killing nine people. The recent arrival of Ugandan peacekeepers has seemingly incited further attacks in the coastal capital worsening an already volatile environment. Security looks likely to deteriorate as the rest of Somalia waits for the arrival of more AU peacekeepers. Insurgent attacks against the Ethiopian military presence, the nascent Transitional Government and now against AU peacekeepers appear set to continue in the immediate future and pose a significant security threat to Mogadishu and its airport environs

**South Africa – 03.03.2007:** Highlighting the country's notorious crime problem is the latest case of a home robbery in the south-eastern region of KwaZulu Natal in which a 100-year old South African man was stabbed to death. The criminals took a television set and some clothes. South Africa is witnessing a shocking crime wave with a string of brutal murders in recent months, but so far most occurred in townships and isolated areas away from tourist destinations. The country known for one of the highest crime rates in the world is currently preparing for hosting the football World Cup in 2010.

**Sudan – 07.03.2007:** Further signs that the hostilities in Darfur are worsening manifested yesterday when two African Union (AU) peacekeepers were killed and another wounded after being abducted by some 30 gunmen from the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) on Monday. The incident occurred in the town of Gereida and has

brought the number of AU peacekeepers killed to 11 since their mission began in 2004. The incident triggered fears that the SLA, who had signed the May peace accord with Khartoum, could abrogate the agreement, which would further destabilise an already hostile environment.

**Tunisia – 06.03.2007:** The country's *TAP* news agency reported on February 6 that a joint Tunisian-Algerian counter-terrorism accord was signed by Tunisian defence minister Kamal Marjan and his Algerian counterpart Abdel Malik Qanziya in an effort to curb the rising tide of militancy perpetrated along their shared border. Under the agreement, the two Tunis and Algiers agreed to boost military cooperation, share intelligence and increase border patrols. The main threats cited by both governments has been the Algerian-based Organisation of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (a.k.a. Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, GSPC) who often infiltrate the porous Tunisian-Algerian border to launch attacks against the Algerian government and more recently Western oil firms. Bilateral relations between the two North African countries is considered good and with this recent accord it is hoped that the two governments will be able to stem militant groups determined to destabilise the region. Although, terrorists pose a significant threat to the oil sector in Algeria, they also remain a continual threat to the Tunisia's vibrant tourism industry.

**Uganda – 06.03.2007:** Senior figures from Uganda's judiciary have led a strike by judges and lawyers alike in protest at alleged government and military intervention in the independence of Uganda's judiciary. The protests come after armed forces launched a raid on the High Court in Kampala last Thursday in which suspects from the People's Redemption Army (PRA) were hauled out of court and into government vehicles. The PRA and its suspected front man Dr. Kizza Besigye are accused of attempting to orchestrate a coup from their bases in the north-eastern DR Congo. The latest incident resurfaced concerns that arose in 2005 when armed troops surrounded the court following a bail ruling freeing Dr. Besigye. International judicial commentators have condemned the government's moves.

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**Bolivia – 06.03.2007:** The government declared a state of emergency since devastating floods in its eastern Amazonian regions has led to outbreaks of tetanus, dengue fever and malaria. In Santa Cruz Department (province), authorities have reported 665 cases of dengue fever with an unconfirmed number feared to be of the deadlier hemorrhagic strain. Health Minister Nila Heredia announced that the government will embark upon an extensive and robust vaccination campaign and fumigation of high-risk areas to reduce the further spread of outbreaks.

**Brazil – 05.03.2007:** Retaliatory attacks by rival drug gangs over the weekend in Nova Iguacu claimed the lives of five, according to police investigator Fabio Pacifico Marques. The incident occurred in a poor residential area of the city located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, which has one of the highest homicide rates in the Western hemisphere. The weekend murders followed last Tuesday's contract killing of three French aid workers in Rio's Copacabana beach area.

**Brazil / Finland – 07.03.2007:** The occupation of two paper and pulp mills by some 500 activists from the Via Campesina farm workers group ended after police forcefully evicted them. The demonstrators stormed two mills owned by Finland's Stora Enso Oyj and Brazil's Votorantim Celulose e Papel SA in protest over environmental damage caused by the companies. A third plantation, Aracruz Celulose SA, was also raided in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. A statement by Via Campesina alleges that the companies' practice of deforestation followed by the planting of eucalyptus trees was creating a monoculture which diminishes biodiversity. Some 1,700 activists took part in the pre-dawn raids on the mills, but were quickly evicted after police dispersed the crowds and made several arrests. This was the second time that Via Campesino supporters made headlines with such acts. Last year, the group was widely condemned for raiding an Aracruz Cellulose SA plant located 750 miles south of Sao Paulo where they destroyed a laboratory and uprooted millions of eucalyptus saplings causing millions of dollars of damages. Yesterday's protests were reported to be peaceful and no damage to property was reported. The group

has vowed to stage more demonstrations which could lead to acts of sabotage that would prove detrimental to similar companies operating in Brazil.

**Brazil – 08.03.2007:** Security concerns were high in Sao Paulo ahead of demonstrations on Thursday March 8 that saw as many as 15,000 people descend upon the downtown area of the city in demonstrations marking both the visit of US President Bush and International Women's Day. The two unrelated demonstrations saw larger than expected crowds congregate and merge, especially around the Avenida Paulista, according to sources in Brazil. There were episodes of violent clashes between demonstrators and riot police that saw 20 people injured during the melee.

**Canada – 06.03.2007:** Safety concerns relating to ice falling have forced police in Toronto to close several major roads in the city centre. The developments have been caused by large slabs of ice dropping from skyscrapers presenting potentially lethal conditions. Sections of the Gardiner Expressway have been closed along with sections of King Street, which is home to the Toronto Stock Exchange. Slabs of ice as large as one metre squared have been reportedly ripped from the side of buildings such as the CN Tower. It is not yet known how long the closures will remain in effect with police citing concerns over public safety as paramount.

**Colombia – 02.03.2007:** Suspected FARC guerrillas injured eight people during an apparent assassination attempt on pro-government Mayor Cielo Gonzalez of Neiva. A car bomb exploded in the central part of the city destroying surrounding vehicles; including a passenger bus carry the eight victims. Col. Miguel Angel Bojaca of the Huila provincial police force suspected that FARC rebels were behind the attack and responding to the government's new hard-line stance in reining in the rebel group. Neiva is the capital of Huila province which is considered a FARC stronghold. The government's renewed impetus to clamp down on FARC activity has been met with an equal response by the guerrillas. A deterioration of the security situation is considered highly probable in the near future.

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**Colombia – 03.03.2007:** One woman was killed in a bomb explosion in the port of Buenaventura on Friday, in a region that has seen strong battles over control of drug smuggling routes between left-wing rebels, paramilitaries and criminals. Observers of the conflict fear that the blast could be retaliation for a security crackdown on the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Only a day earlier a car bomb was set off to kill the mayor of Neiva, who nevertheless escaped. Whilst President Alvaro Uribe's crackdown on the rebels has reduced violence from the four-decade-old conflict, guerrillas are still fighting in the more rural areas.

**Colombia – 03.03.2007:** Retired Sen. Alvaro Araujo Noguera was finally arrested by police on Friday after his recent indictment on charges of colluding with right-wing paramilitaries. The influential politician and father to former foreign minister Maria Consuelo Araujo was charged with co-orchestrating the kidnapping of political rivals in 2002 in his home constituency of Cesar. His son, Sen. Alvaro Araujo Castro, is already serving a jail sentence after being found guilty of the same crime. Colombia's paramilitary-politician nexus has long been a political tradition especially during the 1980s and 1990s when right-wing paramilitaries acted as enforcers for local politicians against leftist guerrillas and their sympathisers.

**Colombia – 04.03.2007:** A bomb blast killed four police officers and a civilian on Saturday in the southern city of Neiva. Only a few days earlier guerrillas had tried to assassinate the mayor of the city in a car bomb. Colombia is one of the foremost countries in the US fight against both the drug trade and rebels in the region and US President Bush is due to visit its close ally next week. Whilst President Alvaro Uribe's crackdown on the rebels has succeeded in reducing violence from the four-decade-old conflict, guerrillas are still fighting in the more rural areas. Only on Friday a woman was killed in a bomb explosion in the port of Buenaventura, in a region that has seen strong battles over control of drug smuggling routes between left-wing rebels, paramilitaries and criminals.

**Colombia – 06.03.2007:** The tide of violence continues

to rise in Central Colombia with heavy fighting between the army and gunmen from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leading to at least 18 deaths. The fighting on Sunday in the municipality of Puerto Rico in Meta province killed 11 rebels and seven soldiers and was the fiercest incidence of fighting in Colombia for months according to Colombian military spokesmen. Military campaigns in the area

**Ecuador – 03.03.2007:** An international conference aimed at eliminating foreign military bases worldwide will kicked off on March 5 and foreign delegates from various NGOs attended the 5-day meeting. The "World Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Bases" is scheduled for March 5 – 9 in Quito and Manta, site of a US military base. Organisers confirmed that about 2,000 people from Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas took part in the conference which will culminate in a mass rally outside the US air base in Manta in southwest Ecuador where the American military conducts vital anti-narcotics operations in the region. Event organisers plan on staging a rally at the Eloy Alfaro Manta Air Base, located some in the seaside coastal town of Manta, some 161 miles (260 km) from Quito. The base houses 220 US military personnel all engaged in some form or another in vital counter-narcotics operations in a region rife with drugs production and trafficking. Experts have noted that counter-narcotics operations originating from the Manta base which has eight A-3 AWACS and P-3 Orion accounted for about 60 percent of drug interdictions in the region. President Rafael Correa was scheduled to take part in the conference and has recently been quoted as saying that he would not renew the base agreement with the US when it comes up for renewal in 2009.

**French Guiana – 06.03.2007:** The disappearance of two French nationals in the dense jungles of the South American country triggered a search and rescue operation by the military on Monday. Col. Jean-Charles Yvon, chief of the Armed Forces in French Guiana, announced that Guilham Nayral and Loic Pillois went missing while hiking from the Grand Kanori rapids on the Approuague River to the village of Saul located in central French Guiana. It was reported that they were without a satellite

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phone or GPS device. No suspicion of foul play has been suggested.

**Guatemala – 03.03.2007:** After a recent surge of murders of politicians and policemen in a scandal that is gripping the nation and that has raised suspicions of links between high-level security forces and drug gangs, Javier Figueroa, Guatemala's top detective, quit his job on Friday. Figueroa was the supervisor of the 6 detectives suspected of the slaying of three lawmakers from El Salvador. The 6 policemen were later found in their prison cells with their throats slashed. Observers fear that shadowy armed groups within the police are involved in the killing and smuggling of people, drugs and weapons.

**Guatemala / US – 06.03.2007:** The Guatemalan government asked the US for assistance in combating the Central American's rampant drug crisis. The request by Guatemalan President Oscar Berger comes on the heels of the recent murders of three Salvadoran politicians and three Guatemalan police officers, who allegedly were ordered to kill the Salvadorans. Authorities believe that the incidents were closely tied to the drug culture that has permeated into every socio-political strata of Guatemalan society and has made the country one of the most dangerous and corrupt in the world.

**Guatemala – 07.03.2007:** Still reeling from the assassination of Salvadoran politicians by Guatemalan law enforcement officials from the organised crime unit last month, President Oscar Berger ordered the interior ministry to purge the national police force of corrupt officers. Guatemala's security, judicial and political institutions are widely known to be infiltrated by powerful drug cartels that use the Central American country as a vital trade route for South American narcotics to the lucrative US market. It was alleged that the Guatemalan officers who killed the Salvadoran legislators were connected to the drugs trade. The country has one of the highest violent crime rates globally which is exacerbated by a corrupt police force and inept judiciary. Public insecurity continues to worsen and threatens to plunge the country into the category of "failed state".

**Guatemala – 08.03.2007:** The daily *Colatino* published a report that alleges that five clandestine armed groups, directed by active and retired military personnel, are responsible for operating organised criminal activity in the Central American country. It also alleged that senior leaders within these groups have very influential political sway in the federal government. The report follows a series of murderous events that took place last month involving the deaths of senior Salvadoran politicians and corrupt police officials.

**Mexico – 08.03.2007:** President Felipe Calderon unveiled his new strategy to combat organised crime in a paper titled "Integral Strategy to Prevent Crime and Fight Delinquency". The president declared a war on crime and pledged "no truce" for organised criminal gangs. Under the strategy paper, two of the four general guidelines involve tackling corruption within the law enforcement and security infrastructures. Also unveiled was a new communications network dubbed the "Mexico Platform", which is aimed at improving communication channels between law enforcement and public security agencies.

**Paraguay – 02.03.2007:** An outbreak of dengue fever prompted the government to declare a 60-day state of emergency as an estimated 14,000 cases have been reported so far this year. Some believe the actual number of cases could be as high as 130,000. Health and environmental authorities have embarked upon mass fumigation of large swathes of the capital Asuncion to control the spread of mosquitoes, the main vector of transmission. One form of the mosquito-borne disease known as dengue hemorrhagic fever can cause death if not detected early. Forty people have succumbed to this form since the beginning of the year. Reports coming from other Latin American countries have indicated outbreaks in Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru. Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne virus, which causes high fever, headache, severe muscle and joint pain and, in its worst form, potentially fatal internal bleeding.

**Uruguay – 08.03.2007:** President George Bush's visit to Uruguay this coming Friday (March 9) is expected to draw significant protests. Anticipating potentially violent

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scenes the US military has reportedly already deployed significant military personnel, a move that has caused tensions between Uruguay's General Assembly and the Executive branch of the government that reportedly authorised the deployment without consulting its legislative arm. The US Embassy in Montevideo is warning of possible attacks against US interests in Uruguay surrounding the visit, potentially attacking US economic and diplomatic targets. Caution is advised for travellers in Uruguay on Friday.

**US – 02.03.2007:** A tornado struck the Alabama town of Enterprise on Thursday as multiple storm fronts wreaked havoc across several southern and mid-western US states. The tornado ripped through a high school trapping students and teachers under a pile of rubble killing 13 people. More twisters have been reported to have touched down in several other states across the south and midwest with more deaths reported in Kansas and Missouri.

**USA – 03.03.2007:** At least 20 people were killed by Tornadoes across the southern United States on Thursday. Whilst the height of the tornado season in the country does not begin until May, winter tornadoes are nevertheless common in years which experience the El Nino phenomenon.

**USA / North Korea – 06.03.2007:** The United States and North Korea held historic bilateral talks with a view to establishing diplomatic relations after over 50 years of antagonisms. The US agreed to the talks following North Korea's much welcomed decision to abandon its nuclear programme. The issue came to a head following nuclear tests last year that finally ended speculation about the North Korean regime's nuclear capability. North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill will meet late Monday and again Tuesday as part of Mr. Kim's tour. The first phase of North Korea's disarmament process under the February 13 Six-Party Talks deal calls on North Korea to shut down its main nuclear reactor and allow U.N. inspectors back into the country within 60 days.

**Venezuela / USA / Bolivia – 02.03.2007:** According to

a report released by the US Department of State, Venezuela is now a key figure in the regional narcotics trade. The report accuses Venezuela of taking an ambivalent approach towards stemming the flow of cocaine from Colombia towards the US and not engaging fully enough in regional counter-narcotics operations. Venezuela is accused of becoming a key route between Colombia, Haiti and the Dominican Republic from where the drugs are then smuggled into the US. Bolivia has also been accused of taking an unnecessarily lenient stand towards the cultivation of cocoa after it increased the number of legally permissible acres of cocoa cultivation by 67 percent. The US government maintains that this is now some 80 times more cocoa than is needed globally for industrial needs.

**Venezuela / Sweden – 06.03.2007:** A local media source in Sweden reported an alleged armed robbery on a group of Swedish tourists in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas. Reports indicated that some of the 12 tourists were assaulted with one girl being allegedly raped. Exact details of the incident were not made public. The Swedish consulate in the capital assisted the tourists in filing claims with local law enforcement officials and with medical assistance.

**Venezuela -- 06.03.2007:** The government of Venezuela agreed to compensate BP and Total some USD \$250 million after the government expropriated the Jusepin oil fields last year which were operated by the two European oil giants. The decision was made after President Hugo Chavez ordered the state-run Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) to take over operations of the fields after Total refused to sign an agreement to convert its contract into a joint venture. In January, Chavez who is continuing to ride his populist reform agendas ordered PDVAS to take over the majority shares of four foreign joint ventures in the Orinoco Belt, without indicating how the oil company was going to pay for the takeover.

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**Afghanistan – 06.03.2007:** Following March 5 car bomb attack on a US marine convoy that left ten civilians dead in the eastern province of Nangarhar, a second incident left nine more civilians dead which sparked heated anti-American protests. The latest incident saw a NATO air strike hit a civilian house during a fire fight between US troops and militants, following a militant attack on the NATO base in Kapisa province. Protests against the NATO forces and specifically the US component are continuing in the Shinwar district of Nangarhar which is only 30 miles (48 kms) from the Pakistani border.

**Afghanistan – 08.03.2007:** A scant sign of optimism for the security of the country manifested itself with the recent announcement made by rebel leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who said that his forces had severed all ties with the Taliban and was willing to open dialogue with President Hamid Karzai. In a recorded question and answer session by the *Associated Press*, Hekmatyar indicated that he was open to having dialogue with Karzai, but issued a stark warning to US President George Bush on the imminent failure of US forces in the country. Hekmatyar also reiterated an already well-known unknown that the Taliban were mounting one of its biggest offensives for the upcoming spring.

**Afghanistan – 08.03.2007:** The Taliban claimed the kidnapping for an experienced Italian journalist who had been missing in southern Afghanistan for over three days. The reporter Daniele Mastrogiacomo had been on assignment in the Taliban heartland of Kandahar and had reportedly been posing as a Briton working for the Italian daily *La Repubblica* when he was abducted alongside two Afghans in the district of Nad Ali in neighbouring Helmand province. Britain had deemed it unlikely that the abductee was a British national. Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi claimed that Mastrogiacomo was now being interrogated amid accusations that he is a British spy; senior Taliban commanders are likely to decide his fate. Northern Helmand is also currently the site of a fresh NATO military campaign against the Taliban with 4,500 NATO troops and 1,000 Afghan soldiers due to make up the full contingent there.

**Bangladesh – 08.03.2007:** Threats to western interests in Dhaka have risen with the Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) movement, which is banned in Bangladesh, campaigning against the execution of six of their senior figures who remain on death row. The JMB group has shown the capability in the past to launch significant numbers of simultaneous bomb attacks, including use of the suicide bomb technique. The current threat could potentially erupt at any given moment as the specific details regarding the planned executions have not been released.

**China – 02.03.2007:** The Chinese Communist Party, leaders of China's one-party system of rule, faces an embarrassing development in Shanghai where nine prominent members have been expelled from the Party on allegations of corruption. Amongst the officials and business leader evicted as part of the crackdown are the head of Shanghai's labour and pensions bureau and senior figures from the Shanghai Electric Group. All nine stand accused of the misuse of government pension funds where USD \$475 million were allegedly 'borrowed' for investment in major property and development initiatives. The government claimed the misappropriated funds had been recovered. China's National People's Congress was due to open major discussions on corruption at a meeting at its annual meeting in Beijing.

**China – 05.03.2007:** China's push to close dangerous and polluting mines is gathering pace as an official announcement made by the head of the State Administration of Work Safety, Li Yizhong, said that up to 4,000 coal mines will be shut this year alone. The country's mining industry is considered to be one of the most dangerous in the world as widespread flouting of safety regulations by mine owners has led to almost daily accidents.

**China – 07.03.2007:** Beijing authorities have stepped up their efforts in shutting down bars, hotels and restaurants that fail minimal safety standards after a fire broke out at an unlicensed karaoke bar killing two people. An inspection of 182 hotels, restaurants and bars resulted in the closure of 33 establishments who either failed safety standards or were operating without a business licence.

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As the nation's capital prepares for the 2008 Summer Olympics, authorities will engage in robust efforts to crack down on unlicensed entertainment venues and hotels.

**China / Tibet – 07.03.2007:** China's agricultural ministry confirmed that the H5N1 avian influenza strain has been detected in poultry in the Himalayan region of Tibet. Ministry officials detected the strain in poultry found at a market stall in Lhasa's Chengguan village prompting authorities to cull up to 7,000 chickens. Last year, outbreaks were discovered in Tibet and the neighbouring province of Qinghai which were caused by migratory birds. Authorities are still determining the cause of this year's outbreak, which is more likely to be the same as the previous year.

**China – 08.03.2007:** Former Shanghai mayor and now Vice Premier, Huang Ju, urged the government to crack down on rampant corruption during an address at a session of the National People's Congress in Beijing. Huang was quoted as saying, "We [the government] must strengthen supervision over leading officials, and root out all corrupt activities between officials and businessmen seeking personal profit and engaging other [crimes]." The Vice Premier's comments followed former Shanghai Communist Party leader Chen Liangyu indictment for misappropriating USD \$400 million in pension funds for real estate investment projects.

**East Timor – 04.03.2007:** Australian peacekeeping troops backed by helicopters took control of Same, the town in which rebel former army officer Major Alfredo Reinado and his troops have been under siege. The Major escaped whilst four of his men were killed. Earlier the Major had refused negotiations about the siege and his role in clashes with the government last May. The country is going through a phase of instability, caused by tensions between the east and west and economic difficulties. Over the last few weeks several people were killed in clashes. Whereas some observers see the capture of the Major as vital to bring relief and peace to the island it is also feared that the latest move could reignite violence and mar the presidential elections next month.

**East Timor – 05.03.2007:** Thousands of diehard supporters of former army major and now fugitive Alfredo Reinado descended on the streets of Dili on Monday to protest against the Australian-led raid on the rebel leader's hide-out over the weekend. The raids were ordered by President Xanana Gusmao after Reinado led a raid on a remote police outpost last month and made off with weapons and ammunition. The audacious act triggered fears that Reinado plans to engage in a low-level insurrection which could derail upcoming elections. His supporters plan to carry on with the protests until the president rescinds the arrests orders. Reinado's fugitive status poses a grave security concern as it could incite sporadic episodes of violence perpetrated by his supporters or anti-Australian agitators.

**India – 06.03.2007:** In the turbulent state of Orissa, more than 50 people were injured after three days of clashes between local villagers, who are opposed to the construction of a South Korean steel plant, and supporters, who believe the plant will bring much-needed development and jobs to one of India's most impoverished states. The opposition claim that the construction of the USD \$12-billion POSCO steel plant will displace about 20,000 villagers. Police from the state capital of Bhubaneswar were called in to bolster security in Jagasinghpur where the violence overwhelmed local law enforcement officials. The opposition began their protests shortly after it was announced that the state government was considering granting more land to POSCO, after the steel giant had asked for a further expansion of the original 1,135 acres granted to over 4,000 acres. Tensions are still running high in the town as police continue to calm a volatile situation. Further protests in the area cannot be ruled out. The Orissa government is undergoing a massive campaign to attract foreign investment into the country and potential investors should take into consideration the security risks posed by such demonstrations.

**Indonesia – 02.03.2007:** The US embassy in Jakarta confirmed to local media that it had received a bomb threat via a local authority on Friday making it the second threat to have occurred this week. The city's Traffic Management Centre (TMC) announced it received the threat from a source claiming to be al-Qaeda. According to the

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TMC, the message read: "We will blow up the US Embassy in 30 minutes time. Al-Qaeda." The message was received at 1120 Jakarta Time (0420 GMT). Bomb threats targeting Western businesses and foreign embassies are not uncommon in the Indonesian archipelago.

**Indonesia – 03.03.2007:** Fourteen people disembarking from a ship were injured by an apparently homemade nail bomb on Ambon island, part of the Moluccas islands. According to officials the bomb carried a high potential for casualties. The Moluccas islands were known for heavy fighting between Muslims and Christians in an insurgency that lasted from 1999 to 2002 and killed more than 5,000 people. Whereas the conflict involved Muslim militants from different groups such as the al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiah at different stages, a truce between Muslim and Christian communities since 2002 has halted sectarian violence until now.

**Indonesia – 06.03.2007:** A regional terrorism summit got under way in Jakarta with senior political and security figures from six south-east Asian states attending. Delegations from Indonesia, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia have gathered to discuss strengthening regional anti-terrorism co-operation and the prevention of militants acquiring unconventional weaponry. Foremost amongst concerns has been the Jemaah Islamiyah group, a regional Al-Qaida affiliated network that has targeted high profile western targets over the past five years and also the Abu Sayyaf network.

**Indonesia – 06.03.2007:** The latest death toll from Tuesday morning's earthquakes reached 70 according to Indonesian authorities. A powerful earthquake measuring 6.3 in magnitude struck the Indonesian island of Sumatra flattening hundreds buildings in the town of Solok, this was followed by a tremendous aftershock measuring 6.0 in magnitude that added to the catastrophe. Initial reports coming in from the Solok indicated that up to 200 people had been trapped in toppled buildings. The earthquake was felt across the Malacca Straits as far away as Singapore and the Malaysian city of Johor where office buildings were quickly evacuated.

Since it was a land-based earthquake, there was no tsunami warning issued. The archipelago is susceptible to earthquakes and tremors due its positioning along the edge of a major tectonic plate.

**Indonesia – 07.03.2007:** Indonesia's transportation woes continue as a Garuda airline passenger jet carrying 140 people burst into flames upon landing at Java's Yogyakarta airport on Wednesday. Authorities confirmed that 21 passengers died with the death toll likely to rise as two passengers were still unaccounted for. Today's incident marked the second major airline accident involving fatalities this year following the Adam Air crash on February 21 which killed all 102 passengers and crew. A third airline crash also occurred in late December killing dozens.

**Laos – 08.03.2007:** The country recorded its first confirmed human fatality from the virulent H5N1 avian influenza virus on Wednesday. A 15-year-old girl who was diagnosed with the disease last week died in hospital in Bangkok. It was alleged that she became infected through infected domestically-reared fowl in her hometown just outside the capital Vientiane. There were reports of another death involving a 42-year-old woman who succumbed to the disease last week, although tests have not confirmed the whether the H5N1 strain was the cause. Analysts believe that compared to neighbouring countries which have exhibited a high occurrence of breakout of the H5N1 strain, Laos still remains to be at moderate risk for an outbreak due its geography and sparse population.

**Malaysia – 06.03.2007:** Malaysia has been hit by a fresh corruption scandal with police investigating allegations that a government minister received money in exchange for the release of three members of the organised crime world. Deputy Minister for Internal Security Johari Baharom is accused of accepting USD \$1.5 million in bribes in exchange for the release of three key figures from the criminal underworld who were being held on measures of Emergency Ordinance, which allows the state to detain suspects without trial. The latest scandal adds to a growing list of embarrassing high-profile corruption cases in Malaysia including the case of the anti-corruption tsar

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accused of malpractice in property acquisition, and the arrest of a cabinet member and the head of the parastatal steel company in the run up to the 2004 elections.

**Myanmar – 03.03.2007:** The deadly H5N1 bird flu virus seems to be spreading in the commercial capital Yangon according to officials. Transport and sale of poultry has been banned and more than 2,000 chickens and ducks have been culled. So far there has been no immediate evidence of human infections according to the military that runs the country.

**Nepal – 08.03.2007:** The general strike across southern areas of the country being led by the increasingly disgruntled and politically active Madheshi community saw out a second day of causing chaos and disruption across affected regions of the southern Terai region of Nepal. There was an outbreak of violence in the town of Biratnagar where demonstrators caused damage to an ambulance and a truck. The strike itself over Madheshi demands for a federalisation of Nepal is creating divisions within the community with some sources stating that the government has acquiesced to demands and the strike is just damaging relations and the economy.

**North Korea – 03.03.2007:** Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is scheduled to visit North Korea to revive inspections of its nuclear facilities as part of a confidence-building measure to ensure that Pyongyang is serious about suspending its nuclear development programme. Under a February 13 agreement reached at the Six Party Talks, Pyongyang agreed to halt its nuclear reactor at the Yongbyon plant within 60 days in exchange for massive energy aid. The IAEA has not had an active presence in the Stalinist regime since 2002 when they were expelled.

**North Korea / Japan / Vietnam – 08.03.2007:** Bilateral negotiations between North Korea and Japan resumed in Hanoi, Vietnam on Thursday after almost collapsing the day before. As part of last month's Six Party negotiations, the North and Japan agreed to resume normalisation talks. However, North Korean officials apparently became incensed over Japan's insistence that Pyongyang has not fully disclosed information on the abduction

of Japanese nationals during the 1970s and 80s by North Korean spies. The highly controversial topic has damaged ties between the two. For its part, Pyongyang would like Tokyo to fully atone for war crimes during Japan's annexation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

**Philippines – 06.03.2007:** Clashes erupted between rebels from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and government forces in the insurgency-hit region of North Cotabato, located 960 km south of Manila, on Monday evening resulting in the deaths of four guerrillas and two soldiers. According to the government the gun battles were triggered when MILF rebels raided two military outposts in the Lumupog and Kadigasan. Hostilities in the region continue to escalate since clashes in Midsayap at the beginning of the year erupted over a land dispute between Muslims and Christians. The government has since stepped up its efforts in reining in suspected MILF rebels. The latest clashes could hamper renewed peace talks between the two.

**South Korea – 08.03.2007:** A seventh outbreak of the H5 strain of the bird flu virus was confirmed at a poultry farm in Chonan, located about 55 miles (90 km) south of Seoul. Authorities have yet to confirm whether or not it is the highly virulent H5N1 strain. The last outbreak on February 10 was detected 9 miles (15 km) north of Chonan in Anseong. Since November 25, the government has culled more than two million birds at commercial poultry farms.

**Taiwan – 05.03.2007:** Embattled President Chen Shui-bian is likely to cause another diplomatic stir with Sunday's announcement that the island nation must seek independence from China. Chen made the announcement during a speech at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs. His pronouncement is likely to cause a stern response from Beijing, which views Taiwan as a renegade province. Critics have pointed out that Chen's ploy was designed to garner support for his party for the upcoming 2008 presidential elections.

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**Thailand / Australia – 08.03.2007:** The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs issued a second travel alert to all Australian nationals in Thailand warning of a “high threat” of an extremist bomb attack on tourist areas and other places frequented by foreign travellers. The alert noted the increased militancy in Muslim-dominated southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla as places of high risk for terrorist attacks.

**Vanuatu – 06.03.2007:** Following violent tribal clashes in Port Vila involving up to 200 residents of the islands of Tanna and Ambrym the government declared a state of emergency after two people were killed, ten more injured and houses were torched. The clashes were caused by allegations of witchcraft in connection with the recent death of a woman and at least 140 people were arrested after the incidents on Saturday. The state of emergency has been brought in to restore order and calm and will last until Sunday March 18. During this time public gatherings are outlawed although the government has stopped short of imposing a curfew; Vanuatu's National Council of Chiefs has said that the government has overreacted in declaring a state of emergency and will damage the country's economy.

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**Abkhazia / Georgia – 02.03.2007:** Clashes erupted between pro-independence Abkhaz gunmen and Georgian police during an anti-Abkhaz media outing held by a Georgian NGO. The brief gun battle occurred days before the March 4<sup>th</sup> Abkhaz parliamentary elections which is itself heating up as opposition MPs have accused Abkhaz President Sergey Bagapsh of interfering in the election process. Sporadic clashes are not uncommon between the two countries especially along their de facto border—the Kodori Gorge—making for a hazardous region.

**Armenia – 07.03.2007:** Armenia announced plans to invoke sweeping reforms to its security and law enforcement processes to bring them closer into line with accepted European standards. Controversial pre-trial interrogations will no longer be permissible by prosecutors and will now only be able to be conducted by the National Security Service. The aim is in part to eradicate the corruption that has been fostered by the unnecessary level of power invested in the Office of the Prosecutor-General. Critics of the existing system believe that many suspects escape punitive measures by bribing their way past low level prosecutors. Pressure will now mount on the Armenian police service to prove its competence in handling criminal investigations with some analysts indicating that in general the prosecutor's office and National Security Service are much more able in the act of law enforcement.

**Denmark – 03.03.2007:** On Saturday Danish police fought night battles with radical leftist agitators which were originally triggered by the forced eviction of squatters from the Ungdomshuset youth house in the Norebro district on Thursday. According to witnesses police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators, who fought back with Molotov cocktails and stones. A local school was also trashed by demonstrators. About 220 people were arrested and 25 people were taken to hospital for the treatment of injuries sustained during the violent protests.

**Denmark – 04.03.2007:** In another night of clashes between Danish police and rioters almost 600 people were arrested in Copenhagen. The protests over the eviction

of squatters from a youth centre started on Thursday, and according to eyewitnesses Copenhagen city centre resembles a war zone with barricades and burnt-out cars. Despite the violence only two people were injured during the protests. A heavy police presence seemed to have prevented any serious violence. Demonstrators have announced they intend to keep up the protests until the dispute over the Ungdomshuset Youth House building is resolved.

**Denmark – 05.03.2007:** In what is likely to provoke a further violent response by leftist activists and anarchist, a demolition crew has tore down the contentious Youth House (Ungdomshuset) in the Norebro district of Copenhagen. Six rioters were arrested for trespassing into the demolition site which had been cordoned off by riot police. In three days of violent protests over the eviction of squatters from the youth house more than 650 arrests were made and at least 25 injuries reported. Local media broadcast scenes of utter carnage taking place in the Norebro and Christiania districts where activists set cars ablaze while hurling stones at riot police. Observers have noted that it had been the worst riots Copenhagen has seen in the past 14 years. Demonstrators have announced they intend to keep up the protests for jailed comrades currently remanded in custody at a city jail.

**Denmark / Italy / Norway – 07.03.2007:** Following the controversial Danish government's decision to bulldoze down the Ungdomshuset youth house in Copenhagen protests of solidarity have spread across Europe with Danish diplomatic facilities targeted for protests and vandalism across the continent. In Italy the Danish Consulate in Venice received a group of around 40 members of a youth solidarity group who protested for the release of the dozens of youths detained after unrest triggered by their eviction. Elsewhere in Italy the protests spread with the Danish Consulate in Milan seeing a similar scale protest, commentators believe the show of solidarity in Italy has been so strong due to the prevalence of similar social institutions for left-wing youth groups in the country. In Norway the protests also spread and took a more violent form with up to 150 demonstrators targeting the Danish Embassy in Oslo with stones and paint packages forcing police to use tear gas to disperse the protests; one po-

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liceman was injured. Elsewhere in Norway the protests spread to the Danish Consulates in Bergen, where demonstrators briefly occupied the building, and in Kristiansand, where vandals targeted the facility with graffiti. In Norway the protests also spread and took a more violent form with up to 150 demonstrators targeting the Danish Embassy in Oslo with stones and paint packages forcing police into the use of tear gas to disperse the protests; one policeman was injured. Elsewhere in Norway the protests spread to the Danish Consulates in Bergen, where demonstrators briefly occupied the building, and in Kristiansand, where vandals targeted the facility with graffiti.

**Estonia – 05.03.2007:** Prime Minister Andrus Ansip retained his incumbency following Sunday's elections in the Baltic nation. Prime Minister Ansip now looks set to form a new coalition government that could turn the political tide in Estonia distinctly in his favour and in that of the more right-wing elements in his existing broad coalition. Ansip's party's majority in parliament however may prove to be slim, with most of the votes counted Prime Minister Ansip's party appears took 31 seats, with their nearest rivals taking 29 and the third place party taking 19 out of the 101 seat parliament. Ansip's immediately post-election rhetoric indicates that he plans to pursue a solidly right-wing agenda.

**France / Spain – 08.03.2007:** Speculation appears to be mounting within the French intelligence community that the remilitarised Basque separatist group ETA may transfer its terrorist activities to France. The fears arose following statements delivered at the trial of five ETA militants who have been jailed in France for periods ranging from seven to 14 years for terrorist affiliation. In what some have perceived as a thinly veiled threat to France, the jailed militants' spokesman Manex Zubiaga Bravo stated that: "As long as France does not alter its position, we will seek the political acceptance of the Basque country through our struggle, and we say it very clearly: France will have us to deal with us." With the ETA cease-fire firmly defunct these developments will cause heightened tensions on both sides of the Pyrenees.

**Georgia – 04.03.2007:** Abkhazia, Georgia's Black Sea rebel region, held parliamentary elections on Sunday which were condemned as illegal by Tbilisi. Whereas Georgia's government has vowed to regain control over the region, people in Abkhazia have been trying to break away from Georgia since the 1990 conflict. Back then Georgia's troops were forced to leave the province and Russian-backed Abkhazia has since declared independence. Georgia is struggling with its two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and claims that the conflicts are being artificially sustained by Russia in order to maintain its influence in the Caucasus region, whilst Georgia itself is seeking closer ties with the west. Georgia's ambitions to join NATO, a step clearly unwanted by the Russians, will stay on hold as long as its domestic conflicts remain unresolved. Meanwhile tension in the Gali region in particular remains high and violence and shootouts are still frequent. However, the situation stayed calm on Sunday during the polling. The results of this election are unlikely to bring a peace settlement any closer.

**Georgia / Abkhazia – 06.03.2007:** In a blow to the separatist region's aims Sunday's parliamentary elections failed to form a full parliament by a decisive majority. In fact only 18 out of the 35 seats were filled, with the other 17 being too closely contested to reveal a decisive winner. Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh however was optimistic, at least in rhetoric, and stated that "Our people have made their choice and will not stray from the path [of independence]." Election officials have said that turnout was over 40 percent significantly above a stated threshold. There will be a second round of voting in a few weeks to decide the remaining seats, though Georgia maintains that the elections and the displacement of 500,000 Georgians from Abkhazia remain illegal acts.

**Kosovo / Serbia – 03.03.2007:** On Saturday Kosovo Albanians demanding immediate independence from Serbia rallied in the capital Pristina. The rally came three weeks after a violent demonstration in which two were killed. With no signs of a compromise in sight after final round talks held by United Nations envoy Martti Ahtisaari and Serb and Kosovo Albanian negotiators in Vienna on Friday more demonstrations can be expected. Serbia

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rejects independence for Kosovo whilst Kosovo Albanian hardliner reject the plan put forward by Ahtisaari because it does not specifically grant independence to Kosovo but provides for an open-ended period of European Union supervision once the U.N. leaves later this year.

**Kosovo – 06.03.2007:** Former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj is now undergoing trial in The Hague on charges of war crimes pertaining to his time as a guerrilla leader fighting against Serbian forces in 1998-1999. As a regional commander for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) Haradinaj was overseeing men who stand accused of murder, rape and torture. When the indictment was confirmed in 2005 Haradinaj resigned his post as Prime Minister. Haradinaj is the most senior former KLA fighter to be charged over the war against the Serbs and the first serving head of government to be indicted since former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

**Russia – 03.03.2007:** According to the Moscow-based human rights organisation Sova, 53 people were killed in xenophobic attacks throughout Russia in 2006 and 15 having died in hate crimes so far this year. Galina Kozhevnikova, head of the organisation, said: "Violence will be rising, there is no doubt about it, because it meets with almost no resistance." Since 2005, Russia has witnessed a surge in racially-motivated attacks against non-whites or people of Asian descent with most crimes often occurring in major urban centres such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.

**Russia – 04.03.2007:** St. Petersburg witnessed a very rare protest of several thousand opposition supporters that was subsequently broken up by Russian riot police using batons. The demonstrators are opposed to what they see as President Vladimir Putin's prolonged and undemocratic grip on power. The supporters were led amongst others by former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and chess champion Gary Kasparov. The Russian government has only recently approved laws that will make it more difficult for the opposition to gain power in the next national elections scheduled for 2008. Some analysts fear that Putin is trying to establish a

similar opposition model to the one used in the former East Germany by using his own people to form opposition. It is also feared that Putin will keep his firm grip on power by pre-deciding his succession and stage managing the victory.

**Russia – 06.03.2007:** A retired army colonel and journalist for the business daily *Kommersant* plummeted to his death from his fifth-story apartment in Moscow on Friday in an apparent suicide attempt. Ivan Safranov, who covered military affairs, on more than one occasion, ruffled the feathers of the military and government establishment for his critical reporting of Russia's Federal Security Services (FSB). *Kommersant* published an article on Monday expressing doubt that Safranov's death was a suicide. The US-based Committee to Protect Journalist said in January that 44 Russian journalists have been killed since 1992, making the country one of the most deadly for journalists. Thirteen journalists have been killed in contract-style killings since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000.

**Switzerland / Turkey – 07.03.2007:** The controversial issue of Armenian genocide denial may be opening potential chasms in Turko-Swiss relations as leading nationalist figure Dogu Perincek begins trial in Lausanne with prosecutors aiming for a six month jail term for the crime. The issue was at the heart of recent bilateral difficulties between France and Turkey after France passed a law outlawing Armenian genocide denial. Perincek is the head of the nationalist Turkish Worker's Party and made the alleged comments during a speech he made on a visit to Lausanne in 2005. Perincek's defence very much reflects Turkey's official line that Armenian genocide denial cannot be a crime because it did not happen.

**Turkey – 07.03.2007:** Reports in the pro-Kurdish sections of the Turkish media have carried stories indicating that the feared terrorist group the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) is planning a renewed spate of attacks after several high profile bomb attacks on Turkish tourist resorts in the past two years. According to the Hirat news agency the TAK have cited the arrest last month of 15 suspected Kurdish militants in France and Belgium as incendiary acts highlighting the ongoing persecution of

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**Iran / UN – 02.03.2007:** The divisive issue of how to tackle Iran over its nuclear weapons programme reportedly received a boost with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany apparently reaching an agreement during a conference call. However the pace of any proposed punitive measures may remain slow, with the discussion building up to the content of a further resolution. Iran has belligerently ignored two previous deadlines for uranium enrichment suspension. Further discussions were due to be held via conference call at the weekend with negotiation over the drafting of the text of a resolution possible by the end of next week.

**Iran – 04.03.2007:** In a move that seems to be directed at intimidating women intending to protest during the International Women's Day on the 8th of March, Iran's authorities arrested more than 25 women activists protesting outside a courthouse in Tehran. The arrested women were showing their solidarity with five women currently on trial for endangering national security, propaganda against the state and taking part in an illegal gathering after they protested against laws they claimed discriminated against women in June 2006.

**Iran – 06.03.2007:** "Would air strikes work?", a new report written by a leading British weapons scientist has indicated that if the US and the international community pursue pre-emptive military strikes against Iran then the ramifications could be dire. Primarily Dr. Frank Barnaby suggests that the intelligence on Iran's capabilities and the location of these unknown resources means it is highly unlikely that strikes would be effective in eradicating Iran's nuclear facilities. Dr. Barnaby also reports that such a strike would most likely force Iran into an acceleration of its programme and may make it capable of cobbling together a less sophisticated but lethal weapon in a matter of months.

**Iran – 07.03.2007:** Thirty-five people in the western town of Doroud, Lorestan province, were injured during an earthquake measuring 4.8 in magnitude. Doroud Governor Nasrollah Reshnoou told state-run new agency *IRNA* that only moderate structural damage was done to buildings and homes in the town. Iran is prone to fre-

quent seismic tremors and earthquakes as the country straddles across several tectonic fault lines.

**Iran – 08.03.2007:** International Women's Day celebrations were marred by clashes between security forces and activists in Tehran on Thursday. A gathering of some 700 activists had gathered outside parliament building for peaceful demonstrations before baton-wielding police dispersed the crowds. There were no reported injuries or arrests. Today's protests followed a similar event on Sunday when dozens of activists had congregated outside a Tehran court and several of them were subsequently hauled away by security forces. The protestors were against the indictment of five women's rights activists who were on trial for criminal offences stemming from a 2006 demonstration. Women's rights are strictly curtailed in the Islamic country where Sharia law imposes tight restrictions on social conduct.

**Iraq – 02.03.2007:** Earlier today it was reported that the international aid agency, Save the Children, decided to pull out of the country citing the rising levels of insecurity making it impossible to protect staff members. The charity was one of the few to have remained in the country since the 2003 invasion. Larger aid agencies such as Oxfam and Care International had already withdrawn staff with only the International Committee of the Red Cross being one of the last Western aid agencies to still be active in the war-torn country. Meanwhile, a group closely associated with al-Qaida announced that 14 police officers working for the Interior Ministry were abducted in Diyala province north of Baghdad on Friday. The group announced the kidnappings via a message posted on a militant website. The unidentified group claimed that the actions were taken in response to the rape of Sunni women by Shia police officers. Following the rape allegations, radical Sunni clerics along with prominent al-Qaeda members urged their followers to take action against the Iraqi police force.

**Iraq – 03.03.2007:** The sectarian violence continues unabated as the 14 police officers earlier reported to have been abducted by suspected Sunni militants were discovered executed near Baquba, north of Baghdad on Friday. A group closely affiliated to al-Qaida, the Sunni

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Islamic State of Iraq Movement, earlier claimed responsibility for the abductions and subsequent murders. The group said that it had kidnapped 18 Iraq Interior Ministry officials in retaliation for the rape of a Sunni woman by members of the Shi'ite-dominated security forces.

**Iraq – 04.03.2007:** An Iraqi journalist was shot dead outside his home in a Sunni neighbourhood in western Baghdad on Sunday. Only last week another journalist, Jamal al-Zubeidi, editor-in-chief of the al-Safeer newspaper, was found dead in a Shi'ite area of Baghdad. According to the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists, Iraq was by far the deadliest country for journalists in 2006, with 32 killed.

**Iraq – 06.03.2007:** Two suicide bombers killed up to 90 people, mainly Shi'ites, in Baghdad earlier today. The incidents occurred during a procession of Shi'ite pilgrims heading towards a shrine in Hillah, some 60 miles south of the capital. Local authorities reported that as many as 150 were also injured during the attacks. Meanwhile, yesterday marked the deadliest day for American forces since February 11, when 11 troops were killed, as a series of attacks claimed the lives of nine troops. Authorities have noted a renewed interest by insurgents in focusing attacks outside the capital since the joint US-Iraqi security crackdown in Baghdad has gained momentum and entered its third week.

**Iraq – 07.03.2007:** The second day of attacks against Shi'ite pilgrims heading to a religious festival in southern Baghdad claimed the lives of five and injured 10 more. The attacks followed Tuesday's devastating roadside bombing in the Doura area that killed up to 150 people, mainly Shi'ite pilgrims. An upsurge in retaliatory attacks against the Sunni community and insurgents are likely to occur in Baghdad and surrounding municipalities in the near future.

**Israel – 02.03.2007:** A controversial storm is brewing over Israel's entry into the 2007 Eurovision Song Contest, an annual trans-European event which is typified by the questionable standards of entries and fervently political voting patterns. Israelis voted overwhelmingly in favour of a song by the band Teapacks which focuses

on the perceived threat of nuclear armageddon hovering over Israel. The Eurovision committee is to decide whether or not the song contains an improper political message for entry in the competition. The level of support for the song indicates the rising levels of fear amongst ordinary Israelis over Iran's intentions towards them. The band Teapacks themselves come from the southern Israeli town of Sderot, which is often the target for Palestinian rocket attacks out of the north of the Gaza Strip.

**Israel / Palestinian Authority – 06.03.2007:** Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his counterpart Mahmoud Abbas have been scheduled to meet next week on March 11 (Sunday) for bilateral talks. Next week's meeting will mark the second time the two leaders have met in the past month with the principle aim of the meeting focused on addressing specific humanitarian issues. Last month's tripartite summit, that included US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, resulted in little positive outcome on addressing core issues surrounding the Middle East peace process.

**Jordan / US – 08.03.2007:** Speaking to the US Congress King Abdullah of Jordan made an urgent request to the United States to throw its considerable weight behind a renewed and impassioned Middle East peace process as the Iraq, Iran and Palestinian issues continue to hover over the region menacingly. King Abdullah gave particular weight to the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue declaring it to be more significant than Iraq in the wider Middle East peace picture.

**Kuwait – 02.03.2007:** Seven new cases of the deadly H5N1 avian influenza virus were discovered in domestic poultry and wild fowl by the Kuwaiti health ministry on Friday. The total number of cases has now reached 46 since the beginning of the year. Although no human cases were reported, health officials have taken precautionary measures by shutting down poultry shops in residential areas and establishing quarantine zones in areas affected by the disease. Out of the 46 new cases, 20 of them were discovered among a falcon population at a municipal zoo, which has been closed since the discovery of the outbreak.

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**Kuwait – 05.03.2007:** Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah accepted the government's resignation and will ask Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser to form a new cabinet. National Assembly Speaker Jassem al-Kharafi has said that this development means that the vote of confidence against Health Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al-Sabah on Monday had to be called off. There were indications that the government resigned in order to save any embarrassment on the part of the ruling dynasty, of which the Health Minister is a member.

**Palestinian Territories – 08.03.2007:** One man died and seven more were injured as several thousand people tried to ram their way through the newly opened border crossing at Rafah. Eyewitnesses described scenes of mayhem when an estimated 5,000 Palestinians had gathered at the border checkpoint before it was scheduled to open. Border guards quickly lost control of the crowd as they began pushing through the unopened gate. Shots were unwittingly fired in a vain effort to regain control of the crowd but only triggered a stampede which trampled several people. There were reports that two of the injured were struck by gunfire. The Rafah crossing is one of the main entry points into Egypt from the Gaza Strip it is often closed as a security measure, which makes it attracts huge crowds when there is a scheduled opening.

**Palestinian Territories / Israel – 07.03.2007:** The possibility of a wider ceasefire among Palestinian groups will be discussed at a meeting led by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh on Wednesday. An extension of the current ceasefire agreement would be viewed as a precursor for the establishment of a unity government, but more importantly restoring confidence in Western governments who are holding back much-needed financial aid. However, worrying signs that the Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah to form a unity government may be disintegrating as fresh fighting broke out in Gaza City prompting fears of a re-ignition of the factional conflict that threatens to engulf the Palestinian Territories in civil war. The latest outbreak of fighting is likely to further delay the creation of the new Palestinian government. The Israeli Defence Forces entered the Beit Hanoun

area of the north of the Gaza Strip. The sources also indicated that the soldiers backed by warplanes entered the eastern side of the town and assumed occupancy of at least two houses. The move is likely to dash any hopes of Palestinian militants acquiescing to any further extension on a ceasefire accord, which Abbas and Haniyeh are hoping.

**Saudi Arabia – 07.03.2007:** Following security advice from its Embassy in Riyadh in line with a Saudi government announcement the US issued travel advice warning its citizens and expatriates to avoid travelling to northern regions of the country. The advice pertains specifically to areas of desert north of the holy city of Medina between Medina and al-Qurayyat near the Jordanian border and primarily affects the provinces of al-Madinah, Tabuk and al-Jawf. The tourist attraction of Madain Saleh is also covered by the advice. In addition the advice reiterates concerns over the safety of travel outside of Riyadh, Jeddah, and the Dhahran/Dammam/Khobar region. Three French tourists were killed near Madain Saleh in late February renewing fears over terrorist activity in the north-west of Saudi Arabia.

## Calendar

*Every week we highlight important security-related and political events around the world that could affect future decisions regarding travel and business.*

**March 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>**

**11<sup>th</sup>**

**Latin America:** US President George Bush will be touring Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico from March 8 to 14. Large demonstrations are expected to take place in these countries and potentially other Latin American nations.

**Mauritania:** First round of Presidential elections.

**13<sup>th</sup>**

**North Korea:** Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed ElBaradei will visit Pyongyang for two days for preliminary discussions on decommissioning its nuclear programme.

**14<sup>th</sup>**

**Latin America:** US President George Bush is expected to wrap up his five-nation tour of South and Central America.

**15<sup>th</sup>**

**Austria:** OPEC meeting in Vienna. Possible demonstrations expected from environmental and anti-globalisation activists.

**Hungary:** National day of commemoration for the 1848 failed revolution against the Hapsburg Empire. Right-wing extremist groups and hooligans have previously announced their intentions to disrupt the celebrations with demonstration possibly leading to riots in Budapest. Counter-demonstrations could also occur.

**17<sup>th</sup>**

**US:** 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1967 anti-war march on the Pentagon. Several thousands of demonstrators are expected to rally and march in Washington and Northern Virginia.

## Travel Advice

*We update the latest countries to watch as provided by the Australian, UK and US foreign offices as published on their respective websites.*

**The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:** <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>

**UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office:** [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

Antigua and Barbuda / Ascension Island / Australia / Bangladesh / Brazil / Chile / Colombia / Indonesia / Kenya / Lesotho / Libya / Nauru / Pakistan / South Korea / Tuvalu

**The US Department of State:** <http://travel.state.gov/>

Public Announcements: Fiji / Laos / Senegal

Travel Warnings: Central African Republic / East Timor

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