

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES: THE WEEK IN REVIEW**

*Destabilizing Threats, Stabilizing Policies, and Global Powers at a Glance*

**Threat Summary**

<p><b>Environment.</b> See the full section—climate change and conflict, top ten toxic places.  <b>Inter-State Conflict.</b> Christian evangelists angering Afghans. Palestine shifts to rockets.  <b>Proliferation.</b> US without a clue, seeks to “seize and hold” Pakistani nuclear sites. See terrorism.</p>
<p><b>Poverty.</b> Poverty root “evil” (caused by corruption). Bolivia setting example for moral balance.  <b>Infectious Disease.</b> CDC finds US agencies inept—15 minute call back runs from 63 m to 17 h.  <b>Civil War.</b> Global flash points tour. Lebanon. Somalia, Darfur. Kenya.  <b>Genocide.</b> Kenya is more politicide than genocide.  <b>Transnational Crime.</b> Piracy thrives off West Africa, USN call home. Afghan opium study.</p>
<p><b>Other Atrocities.</b> Not reported, editorial observation: Dick Cheney needs to be impeached <i>now</i>.  <b>Terrorism.</b> Bioterrorism will cause pandemics—US not ready. India sane and balanced.</p>

**Policy Summary**

<p><b>Diplomacy.</b> US Department of State being down-sized, has no clue on working South America.  <b>Security.</b> Environment is the ultimate security environment. DHS flails away, wasting billions.  <b>Society.</b> Economy trumps Iraq for 2008. US very low on privacy. Lack critical thinking skills.  <b>Water.</b> Shale oil recovery with water is sheer idiocy—will consume 100% of Colorado River.</p>
<p><b>Economy.</b> Unemployment close to stalling economy. Rumors of covert war from Israel/Russia.  <b>Education.</b> US education in the basement—only half of people of color graduate high school.  <b>Energy.</b> Pond scum and bacteria energy hot. Biofuels idiocy. Useful overviews.  <b>Health.</b> UK pioneers end of junk food advertising to under sixteen audience.  <b>Immigration.</b> UK rolling back ease of entry. Europe (and Singapore) attracting top talents.</p>
<p><b>Agriculture.</b> Could go ORANGE soon. Food crisis and shortages, diseases, all converging.  <b>Family.</b> Sweden pioneers parenting classes for average parents. Caretakers for old a growth area.  <b>Justice.</b> Not to be found in US. Photo of Rumsfeld and Hussein in black tie. Approved torture.</p>

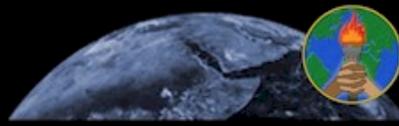
**Major Player Summary**

<p><b>Brazil.</b> Exploring micro-credit initiatives. Deep sea oil not a panacea, never been done.  <b>China.</b> China sweeping across Central America at same time that it swarms Southern Hemisphere.  <b>India.</b> Complex as always. Private education set to explode. Home-grown jihadists of concern.  <b>Indonesia.</b> ICG flags communal tensions caused by transmigration, and most severe threat.  <b>Iran.</b> Running circles around the US on all fronts. Israel briefing Bush 43 on nuclear options.  <b>Russia.</b> Gaining on the US across multiple fronts. British Council confrontation on closures.  <b>Venezuela.</b> Chavez plays middle class card, pardons coup folks. 50 UK ministers sign for him.  <b>Wild Cards.</b> Malaysia unique; Balkans fit to explode; Pakistan could become a failed state.</p>
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**World Crises - monthly assessment by [International Crisis Group](#) - 01 December 2007**

<p><b>Alert:</b> DR Congo</p>
<p><b>Deteriorated:</b> <b>Algeria</b>, Basque Country (Spain), <b>Chad</b>, <b>Kenya</b>, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, <b>Pakistan</b></p>
<p><b>Improved:</b> Nepal</p>
<p>• <b>Unchanged:</b> Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chechnya (Russia), Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Georgia, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, India (non-Kashmir), Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel/Occupied Territories, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liberia, Macedonia, Mali, Mauritania, Moldova, Morocco, Myanmar/Burma, Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan), Niger, Nigeria, North Caucasus (non-Chechnya), Northern Ireland (UK), North Korea, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somaliland (Somalia), Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Western Sahara, Zimbabwe</p>

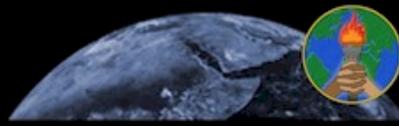
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**Threats** see *daily items with links to full stories on the web at [PDB-Threats](#)*

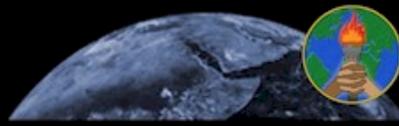
<p><b>Poverty</b>  <a href="#">news list forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Poverty is the root-cause of a network of evils -- "stagnant pools left behind by floodwaters and contaminated wells were breeding grounds for disease, and may have contributed to the rise in polio ..."</i> -- <i>Number of polio cases more than double in impoverished eastern India, health officials say.</i></li> <li>• <i>Politics and graft undermine African health care</i> -- several sad examples from across Africa..</li> <li>• <i>Bolivia as a generic example of "the effort to use the state to retake and redistribute resources ceded to private economic interests under globalization ... to narrow the appalling gap between the haves and have-nots ... will no doubt provide lessons for the rest of the world"</i> -- <i>Why Bolivia matters.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Infectious Disease</b>  <a href="#">news list forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"The new [US] study found an average response time of 63 minutes, and some agencies took nearly 17 hours to call back"</i> -- against a target <b>CDC</b> response time of <u>15 minutes</u> -- <i>Health agencies slow to respond to possible bioterrorism.</i></li> <li>• <i>see: Poverty (Number of polio cases more than double in impoverished eastern India)</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Environment</b>  <a href="#">news list forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It's world's worst practice in the Solomon Islands -- forest logging "is an abject lesson in world's worst practice.... Some ministers have previously been accused or convicted of corruption and several are known to have financial interests in logging."</i></li> <li>• <i>World's top 10 most polluted places</i> -- a toxic list.</li> <li>• <i>Climate Change &amp; Energy - Review of the Year 2007</i> -- notes on the main events.</li> <li>• <i>100 percent of people carry at least 1 type of pesticide</i> -- a University of Granada study has found at least one of six highly toxic <i>persistent organic compounds</i> in <u>all</u> of those studied.</li> <li>• <i>"Foreign policy-makers are waking up to the impact of climate change on conflict zones worldwide ..."</i> -- <i>Climate change is a security issue</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Inter-State Conflict</b>  <a href="#">news list forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fanatical Christian evangelicals behind cover of aid groups in Afghanistan and elsewhere do nothing to lessen charges of Crusaderism from Islamic nations -- Afghan clerics warn Karzai against missionaries.</i></li> <li>• <i>The nature of the Palestinian Intifada is changing</i> -- there was only <u>one suicide bombing</u> in 2007, but there were <u>1,200 Qassam rocket attacks</u> -- <i>2007: Shin Bet sees drop in terror attacks but more use of rockets.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Civil War</b>  <a href="#">news list forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Arab League foreign ministers have approved a new proposal to end the political stalemate that has left Lebanon without a president for more than six weeks"</i> -- <i>Arab League approves plan to end Lebanese political crisis.</i></li> <li>• <i>"Three days after declaring Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki the winner of the nation's presidential poll, the country's elections chief has cast doubt on his re-election win"</i> -- <i>'I'm not sure who won': Kenyan election chief.</i> Also: <i>Kenya's Kalenjin tribe calls for blood</i> -- five days on and more than <u>300 dead</u>, thousands of <i>Kikuyus</i>, the dominant tribe since 1963 independence, are fleeing murderous gangs supporting a change. <i>Kenya's unrest takes violent toll</i> -- <i>"Kenya's 42 tribes have coexisted for most of the country's history since independence decades ago. But angry and desperate youths supporting rival political factions are being manipulated by power-hungry leaders"</i>.</li> </ul>

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	<p><i>see: <b>Genocide</b> (Why <b>Kenya</b> isn't <b>Rwanda</b>)</i></p> <p>With a <i>truce</i> (which was truce in name only) now officially abrogated by the <b>Sri Lankan</b> government, <b>Norwegian peace monitors</b> threaten to leave; "They will have to come back to the <b>negotiating table</b> sooner or later. Unfortunately many people may die in the meantime" -- <i>Norway says Sri Lanka monitors likely to leave.</i></p> <p><i><b>Food security at risk in Somali region, UN warns</b> -- "there are strong reasons to believe such a <b>catastrophe</b> could occur in the next few months if all the necessary action to avert it is not taken."</i></p> <p><i>"Colonel Farah Abdulle <b>Ga'al</b> and his bodyguard died when a <b>landmine concealed under the colonel's chair</b> exploded after he arrived at work" -- <b>Islamists blow up Somali colonel.</b></i></p> <p>Too little, too late, too incompetently put together ... too bad for the victims; <i><b>New Darfur peacekeeping force takes over</b> -- "but many are already warning that its <b>prospects are grim</b> and that if it fails, it will only worsen the 4 1/2-year conflict, which has already <b>killed more than 200,000 people</b> and driven <b>2.5 million</b> from their homes."</i></p> <p><i><b>Global flash points: How to spot signs of peace</b> -- a lightning tour of conflicts around the world.</i></p>
<p><b>Genocide</b>  <a href="#">news list</a><a href="#">forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i><b>Why Kenya isn't Rwanda</b> -- a confused item with useful facts arguing Kenya's killing, with all the indicators of genocide, is "<b>political</b>" rather than genocidal.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>see: <b>Civil War</b> ([various <b>Kenya</b> items])</i></p>
<p><b>Other Atrocities</b>  <a href="#">news list</a><a href="#">forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [nothing significant to summarize -- see <i>News List</i>]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Proliferation</b>  <a href="#">news list</a><a href="#">forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In the style of <b>24</b> and <b>The Unit</b>, <b>US</b> teams are said to be poised to seize [and hold?] <b>Pakistan's nuclear</b> assets ... "<i>troops, augmented by volunteer scientists from America's <b>Nuclear Emergency Search Team</b> organisation are already believed to be in neighbouring <b>Afghanistan</b>" -- <b>Special forces on standby over nuclear threat.</b></i></i></li> </ul> <p><i>see: <b>Wild Cards</b> ([various <b>Pakistan</b> items])</i></p>
<p><b>Terrorism</b>  <a href="#">news list</a><a href="#">forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i><b>France</b> cancels the annual <b>Dakar Rally</b> on the day it is due to start -- "<i>French authorities have overstated what was previously known as the <b>Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat</b> (GSPC)" -- <b>French expert: France cancelled Dakar Rally because of foreign pressures.</b> Also: '<i>Rally's cancellation a coup for <b>Al-Qaeda</b>' -- "the murder on December 24 [2007] of four French tourists in <b>Mauritania</b> was stark testimony to the seriousness of the threat ..."</i></i></i></li> </ul> <p><i><b>India's</b> assessment: "<i>The possibility of <b>Pakistan's nuclear weapons</b> falling into wrong hands are <b>very low</b>. The only way it could happen is if the state itself willingly gives it to <b>extremist groups</b>" -- '<i>A jihadi dirty bomb will be of <b>Pak origin</b>'.</i></i></i></p> <p><i>The latest <b>al-Qaida media product</b> ... <b>Al-Qaida videos now on cell phones.</b></i></p> <p><i><b>Russia</b> thwarted more than <b>120 attempts</b> to <b>smuggle "highly radioactive"</b> material out of the country last year; but how many were <b>not halted</b>? -- <i>Russia foils atomic smugglers.</i></i></p> <p><i>see: <b>Infectious Disease</b> (<i>Health agencies slow to respond to possible <b>bioterrorism</b></i>)</i></p>
<p><b>Transnational Crime</b>  <a href="#">news list</a><a href="#">forecast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i><b>Piracy remained serious in 2007 and may get worse</b> -- waters off <b>Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania</b> and <b>Nigeria</b> are all considered to be 'hot spots' with particular escalation with respect to the use of <b>firearms</b> and <b>rocket-propelled grenades</b>.</i></li> </ul>

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***Mexican drug cartels threaten elections*** -- "we have evidence, complaints from candidates who were **kidnapped** or **intimidated**, or who received threats intended to influence the results of an election and the behavior of candidates".

A very detailed report on the **Afghan opium industry** -- **British on front line of new Afghan Poppy War**.

**Policy**

see **daily items with links to full stories on the web at PDB-Policy**

**Agriculture**  
news list|forecast

- ***Ag secretary sticks with farm bill veto threat*** -- actually, there will be two **farm bills**, [Sen. Tim **Johnson**, D-S.D.] said. "**The energy bill** passed in December [2007] is as important to South Dakota **corn** producers as the farm bill."

They think they can make a buck, but they don't get it -- "you should be there for it fully-hedged by having access to those stocks that benefit from rising **food prices**" -- **Forget oil, the new global crisis is food**.

As predicted, **high-rise urban market gardens** are coming; logic makes it happen ... **Las Vegas to build world's first 30 story vertical farm** -- "the \$200 million dollar project is designed to be a functional and profitable working farm growing enough food to feed 72,000 people ..."

**International Society for Infectious Diseases** reports **wheat stem rust strain Ug99**, **rice viruses** and their **insect vectors**, **soybean rust**, and many other diseases increasingly threaten the **food supply** -- **Plant disease outbreaks caused crop losses in 2007**.

**Diplomacy**  
news list|forecast

- ***'Washington Consensus' on Latin America rebranded*** -- a critical look at the **Washington Office on Latin America** and its "fresh approach".

**Economy**  
news list|forecast

↓ ***Saudi Arabia says market determines oil prices*** -- [true, but suppliers are major market players ...] "**OPEC** ... decided to keep output steady at its last meeting in December [2007], rejecting calls from consumer countries for more supply to ease high prices".

**[US] Unemployment sounds warning about economy** -- "The risk of a vicious cycle setting in now is very high. The **job market's** operating at stall speed. Either it picks up soon or it quickly unravels".

**New world order: The U.S. faces a new reality** -- a brief but far-ranging review of a new reality at home and in **global power balances**.

There are rumors of a **covert war** in which Russian, Israeli, and US Special Forces are carrying out violent and fatal actions against individuals. A major financial catastrophe may be in the offing for March timeframe.

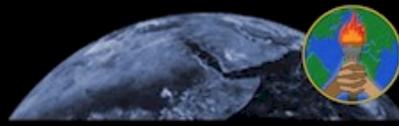
**Education**  
news list|forecast

- ***Should No Child Left Behind Act be reauthorized? - YES*** -- "Congress urgently needs to respond to the fact that our nation's public high schools are graduating only about half of their African American and American Indian students and slightly more than 50 percent of **Hispanic students**".

**UN floats new guidelines for usage of ICT in education** -- "... just having a computer in classroom is not enough for imparting quality education.... These standards ... will help trainers prioritise their needs and design training curricula adapted to specific requirements and resources ..."

**Energy**  
news list|forecast

↑ ***Latin American energy in 2007 [Analysis]*** -- a brief, useful review.  
**Japan, U.S., EU eye new energy-saving body: report** -- "the new organization would make **suggestions on energy conservation measures for countries such as the G8** ... ,



as well as *China and India ...*"

*UK govt scientist sees few benefits from biofuels* -- "Rising production of biofuels has distorted government budgets, helped to drive up food prices and led to deforestation in south-east Asia ..."

↑ *A Promising Oil Alternative: Algae Energy* -- *pond scum* is smarter than the entire grain ethanol industry -- working with Nature's processes will provide the only real answers.

**Family**  
[news list|forecast](#)

• *Kid-friendly Sweden aims to better record with parenting classes* -- "Perfect" Sweden now tries to do even better -- "Swedish municipalities are offering classes aimed at average parents with average problems".

*Caring for aging parents from a distance: a growing problem* -- a new industry of intermediaries, "care managers", emerges. [Comment: The internet is mentioned but not emphasised as a possible key information hub for each senior's family.]

**Health**  
[news list|forecast](#)

↑ The UK has introduced a ban on advertising junk food to under-16s -- *Junk food ad ban comes into force in Britain.*

**Immigration**  
[news list|forecast](#)

• *New York is different* -- "... 46% of the city's workforce is foreign-born, compared with 15% of the nation's ..." -- *Anti-immigration fervor casts city out.*

*Guarding British soil* -- "from March [2008], Britain's government will begin to roll out its own "Australian-style" points-based immigration system for workers from outside the European Union, looking at education, earnings, age, command of English and other factors".

*The U.S. could lose top talent* -- "EU politicians served notice that they are serious about competing with the US and Asia to attract the world's top talent to live, work, and innovate in Europe".

**Justice**  
[news list|forecast](#)

• *Did Saddam's execution serve justice?* -- "they argue that Saddam's case was closed prematurely and quickly so as to cover up Washington's help and support for the former Iraqi regime in the 1980s ..."



*CIA tapes probe could spotlight torture issue* -- at the whim of the jurists, the tape destruction investigation may -- or may not -- concern itself with the acts allegedly recorded on the tapes.

*California to review use of death penalty in state* -- apart from the absurd basis of capital punishment as "deterrent" or "punishment", California counties have produced an ad hoc patchwork of legal rules with an absurdity of their own.

*Padilla sues ex-Justice official over torture* -- "[former deputy assistant Attorney General] John Yoo is the first person in American history to provide the legal authorization for the institution of torture in the U.S.".

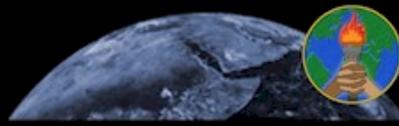
**Security**  
[news list|forecast](#)

↓ *Passenger jets get anti-missile devices* -- "three American Airlines Boeing 767-200s that fly daily round-trip routes between New York and California will receive the anti-missile laser jammers this spring ...".

*Ammonium nitrate regulated -- sort of* -- "the law, which the fertilizer industry supported, leaves the U.S. with weaker controls on ammonium nitrate than Britain, Germany, Australia, Israel, Saudi Arabia and many other nations".

see: **Environment** (Climate change is a security issue)

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**Society**  
 news list|forecast

- *Internet's impact on democracy* -- an enlightened discussion -- the internet "**gives us power but not direction**"; "**the accumulation of knowledge requires training in the art of critical thinking.**" The proliferation of self-enforcing one-eyed forums is in no-one's interest.
- *War? What war? Economy trumps Iraq in US election* -- as with politics everywhere, the bottom-line is hearth and home.
- *US Near Bottom of Global Privacy Index* -- **Privacy International** [UK] says "**Malaysia, Russia and China ranked worst, but Great Britain and the United States also fell into the lowest-performing group of 'endemic surveillance societies'.**"

**Water**  
 news list|forecast

- *Big oil casts big shadow over Colorado's water future* -- **shale oil** recovery is a **water-waster** of biblical proportions -- "... oil shale, if it is developed, would consume 100 percent of the remaining water in the **Colorado River system**".

**Challengers** see daily items with links to full stories on the web at **PDB-Challengers**

**Brazil**  
 news list|forecast

- *How Brazil has learned Bangladesh's microcredit lesson* -- a look at what a **Bangladeshi-style microcredit** system can -- and can not -- achieve in countries like Brazil.
- *Brazil's oil 'blessing' is no energy panacea* -- "although **Petrobras** is a world leader in **deep sea exploration**, securing oil from such depths has never been done before".

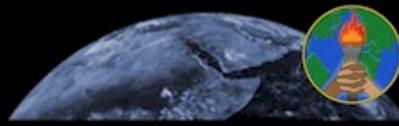
**China**  
 news list|forecast

- *China says its advance on Central America is "irreversible"* -- "the Chinese government has ties with political parties in **Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama**, and noted that **Panama** is the Central American country with which China trades most".
- *Beijing hits 'blue sky' target, but just barely* -- "the **Olympic** host city is aiming for at least 256 "**blue sky**" days, in 2008, or 70 percent of the days of the year ..."
- *China's ability to sustain war [Analysis]* -- hence a 1970s war would be played out on a 21st century battlefield".

**India**  
 news list|forecast

- India's relatively new **private education sector** is set to explode within India and beyond -- *Business of education catches on with India Inc.*
- *Indian firms to set up venture deal with Iranian firm* -- "State-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp. [Iran] plans to partner with Hinduja Group [India] to develop **oil and gas fields in Iran ...**"
- *India to set up solar power plants* "aimed at developing and demonstrating technical performance of **megawatt-sized grid interactive solar power generation**".
- India's score on **Privacy International's** "Surveillance Society" scale is surprisingly [and probably incorrectly] high because **PI**, reasons that India has no explicit **right to privacy** -- '*India lacks funds to be an extensive surveillance society*'.
- *'India disfavors integration of Maoists with Nepal Army'* -- "... India, which is facing **Maoist** threat from within, wants the '**downfall of Maoists in Nepal**', as 'now there are concrete proofs that the Nepal Maoists are indulged in aiding their Indian counterparts'. Also: India's influence on **Nepal** [as well as **Bhutan** and **Sikkim**] is hard to ignore -- *When India was legible.*
- *Kerala frames policy to rein in land mafia* -- "the policy would also impose a **ceiling** on land that families and individuals can possess in the urban areas. This is intended to ensure availability of land to the urban dwellers for shelter".
- *UP [Uttar Pradesh] attack: Rise of the homegrown jihadi?* -- "... [**Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami**] possibly now has an Indian branch with operatives, capable of carrying

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out terrorist strikes *autonomously* ...".

*India to counter Tamil rebels [Analysis]* -- "it has become imperative to be prepared for the threat emanating to the country's security from its vast southern coastline and sea-borne intrusions [from Sri Lanka]".

*CRPF [Central Reserve Police Force] attack is just the tip of the iceberg* -- "The blame has to go to Manmohan Singh Government and their perpetual failure to control the **ISI** operations within India".

Some of the numerous *insurgent groups* throughout India have a "gentleman's arrangement" with the government: *Centre extends ceasefire with Dima Haram Daogah* -- "suspension of Operations (SOO) agreement between the security forces and the **Dima Haram Daogah (DHD)**, a militant outfit operating in Assam, has been extended for a further period of six months ... "

*India to double cruise missile output* -- "... the increased manufacturing capacity will allow the number of cruise missiles being produced to rise from 25 a year to 50 a year ..."

**Indonesia**  
[news list|forecast](#)

- Sensible observation from **International Crisis Group**: "*The biggest danger lies not in terrorism, separatism, election disputes, or any external threat, but in poorly managed communal tensions ...*" -- "*Communal Tension a Prime Security Threat*". [Comment: Most "communal tension" in Indonesia results from the **transmigrasi** program – resettlement of populations from overcrowded areas to sparsely-populated areas.]

**Iran**  
[news list|forecast](#)

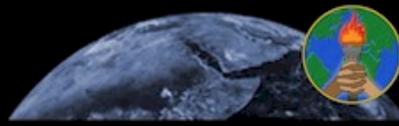
- *Iran, Vietnam to bolster agro ties* -- "joint ventures in the fields of rice and tea production, animal husbandry, and fishery".  
 Iran's Prosecutor General **Najafabadi** warns **Argentina** to desist from "unfounded" allegations of Iran's role in the bombing of the Jewish center in Buenos Aires in 1992 -- *Iran warns Argentina to take legal action with ICJ*.  
*Iran offers nuclear co-op with Egypt* -- "**Tehran** is ready to cooperate with **Egypt** and other Arab states on guaranteeing security and stability in the Arab world, especially in Iraq and Lebanon".  
*Israel to brief George Bush on options for Iran strike* -- President **Bush** will get the good word from the only *intelligence source* he trusts.

**Russia**  
[news list|forecast](#)

- *British Council defies Russia over closures* -- **The British Council** [which has deployed trusted British chaps in strange places since 1934] is clenching its buttocks again Rus petulance.  
 Another fresh piece by *International Analyst Network* : *Great powers brinkmanship & Kosovo* -- "As long as USA policy seems to be stuck in a sentimental and non-scientific manner of conducting international relations, its 'Opponents' will gain further ground"; in Serbia, **Russian energy politics** play a role in the *South Stream gas corridor*.

**Venezuela**  
[news list|forecast](#)

- ↑ President **Chavez** widens his base: *Chavez reshuffles cabinet after defeat* -- "We are not *extremists* and we cannot be. We have to look for alliances with the **middle classes**".  
*British MPs commend Venezuelan democracy* -- over fifty **UK** Members of Parliament sign a *petition* supporting Chavez and his **social program** in Venezuela.  
*Chavez pardons accused coup backers* -- President **Chavez** has granted **amnesty** to many accused of supporting a failed 2002 *Opus Dei coup* that briefly drove him from



**Wild Cards**  
 news list|forecast

power -- *"It's a matter of turning the page"*.

↓ Somewhat baffling from "moderate" **Malaysia**: *Malaysian cabinet forbids use of Allah for gods of other religions* -- "the government has maintained it practises moderate Islamic law, and is opposed to **extremism**". [Comment: Being an **Arabic** word, **Allah** could be claimed to have exclusively a **Qur'anic** context, but like "God" it is not a "name" -- such as *Sky Thunderer*, or *Mistress of the South Seas* -- and means no more or less than "the god". Presumably the Malaysian Cabinet are not venturing an opinion on whether the god of **Abraham**, **Moses**, **Mohammed** (pbuh) is the same deity.]

**Cuba**, against some pretty tough obstacles, makes it to 50 -- *Castro's New Year's message read on TV*.

The new **Balkan** crisis waits in the wings: *EU and Kosovo deepen Serbian coalition rift* -- "the **EU** will ... have to choose whether it would sign a **Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia** or send its **civil mission to Kosovo**".

*Khans of Central Asia* -- *Backgrounder*: "... after the **Soviet Union** broke up in December 1991, former **Communist Party** officials took charge and the authoritarian systems they established closely resembled the old khanates."

**PAKISTAN**

*Pakistan may not make it* -- an unnecessarily pessimistic view by a former **US** ambassador to **Croatia**, but usefully highlights the **Punjabi** vs. **Sindhi** dichotomy, one of several.

The indictments commence: "... during her second tenure as **PM**, **Bhutto** lied brazenly to Washington about the extent to which **Pakistan**, with her approval, was covertly arming and funding the **Taliban**" -- *Bhutto helped create Taliban monster*.

*Pakistan election postponed due to civil unrest* -- **Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party** insist **elections** proceed on 08 Jan 2008 -- the government says even the imported **ballot boxes** have been torched in recent violence.

A strange report falling just short of 'the Martians did it [Russian humor perhaps]: *Benazir shot by three sniper teams* -- "... a **secret** report presented to **Russian** President **Vladimir Putin** by top **Russian** military analysts on the assassination of **Benazir** reveals that the attack was carried out by a **sophisticated sniper team**".

*Scotland Yard team to assist probe into Benazir's killing* -- **Scotland Yard** said it would send a five-member team of officers from the **Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command** to **Pakistan**.

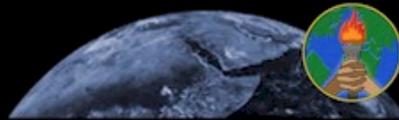
**Murdoch's** down-market **London Times** also puts in the boot: *A failed state groping for a way back from the brink* -- **Pakistan** will survive if the **urban middle class** can end "the long and disastrous period of power-sharing by the country's **landowners** and their **military cousins**".

*Musharraf blames Bhutto for her own death* -- one thing President **Musharraf** can't be blamed for is fundamentally poor **security** on Ms **Bhutto's** part.

*Pakistan rejects US plans to strike terrorists on its soil* -- "... the [terse] statements from **Pakistani** officials follow a **U.S. media report** that the **Bush** administration has considered expanding **U.S. military and intelligence operations** in **Pakistan's** tribal regions ...".

see: **Proliferation** (*Special forces on standby over nuclear threat*)

see: **Terrorism** (*A jihadi dirty bomb will be of Pak origin*)



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