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Afghanistan

Civil-Military Provincial Reconstruction Teams to provide additional security and reconstruction assistance across troubled spots in Afghanistan ahead of elections
Following a series of recent attacks against the UN and NGO aid workers in the southern and eastern parts of the country, US-led coalition forces are considering expanding the civil-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) across additional trouble spots across Afghanistan to enhance security and to further reconstruction efforts. In an interview to the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), Colonel Darrel Branhagen, director of the US-led coalition civil-military coordination center in Kabul, said additional PRTs were to be deployed in troubled provinces of the country by June this year, in time for scheduled nationwide general elections. Branhagen said currently there were eight PRTs that were officially running Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Parwan, Gardez, Bamian, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad. He added that three more PRTs were planned to be deployed in Khost, Ghazni and Asadabad in the near future. He further added that PRTs were just a temporary vehicle for security and that the Afghan government would eventually take over responsibility for long-term security. Persistent insecurity across the country continues to be a problem for the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai who has little influence, if any, beyond the capital Kabul. In his report to the UN Security Council on Tuesday (January 6), UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that the continued insecurity in the country could derail the June elections. He also noted that unless there was an environment of political freedom and freedom of expression, as many as 10 million Afghan could be disenfranchised, suggesting that the outcome of such an election would not be free and fair.

India

Medicins sans Frontieres (MSF) continues work in Indian-controlled Kashmir (IcK)
The UK-based The Guardian today reported that the France-based NGO, Medecins San Frontieres (MSF) is one of only 2 foreign NGOs working in Indian-controlled Kashmir (IcK). The other foreign NGO is the International Red Cross. Information on and activities of foreign as well as domestic NGOs in IcK, including relief agencies and human rights groups, have been highly restricted by the Indian government. MSF was authorized to work in IcK by the Indian
government since only 2000. MSF is reportedly working mainly to treat thousands of cases of mental trauma caused by years of separatism in the restive region. There are at least 63,000 mental trauma cases in the summer capital of Srinagar alone. Civilians, especially young men, have been mostly targeted by both Indian security forces and militants, leaving about 15,000 women without husbands since the 1989 separatist revolution in IcK. At least 65,000 people have died since the separatist revolution.

http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,1118039,00.html

Myanmar

Indian rebels on Myanmar-India border say they have fought off Myanmar military

According to reports yesterday, Indian rebels holding illegal bases in Myanmar say they have successfully repelled a crackdown by the Myanmar military in Myanmar’s northwestern Sagaing region on the India-Myanmar border. The Myanmar military earlier this week launched the crackdown in order to evict the rebel Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which operates in the neighboring northeastern Indian state of Nagaland. The self-appointed “minister” of the Khaplang faction, Khunje Ngaimong, told BBC that the rebels had encircled Myanmar troops early yesterday. “This will not be as easy as Bhutan. We have tough fighters who can survive in jungles for months,” he said. Last month, the nearby country of Bhutan launched a similar crackdown on Indian rebels illegally based on its territory, saying that it had successfully destroyed 30 rebel camps. The Myanmar military has refused to comment on the crackdown. Indian army officials said that while the operations may be more difficult than in Bhutan, the Indian army plans to cooperate with the Myanmar
military in trapping the rebels. Analysts say that the difficult terrain in the region could make operations difficult for both the Myanmar military as well the rebels. Rebels have been reportedly active on the India-Myanmar border for more than 40 years. The NSCN Khaplang faction has had a ceasefire with India since 2001, but has maintained camps in Myanmar across the porous 1019-mile long (1640 km) India-Myanmar border. A rival faction, NSCN Isak-Muviah, has entered recent peace talks with New Delhi.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3375629.stm

Nepal

Teacher, student rallies continue in Nepal
Kantipur Online (KOL) reports that police have detained hundreds of protesting teachers of the Nepal National Teachers’ Association (NNTA) today. The teachers were participating in a sit-in protest at the Education Ministry in Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu. The Joint Struggle Committee says that at least 800 teachers had been detained. Police had earlier detained over 150 teachers at a sit-in protest at the Ministry yesterday. KOL says that the teachers have been staging various protest programs for the past nine months. In a statement, the Ministry said that it had reached agreements regarding the demands put forth by the teachers. Meanwhile, hundreds of students in the capital continued their protest against “regression.” Reports from the Kathmandu Post say that over a dozen students were injured in clashes with police during protests yesterday. Students yesterday said they would protest police actions in protests today. The Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Studies in Nepal issued a statement yesterday warning that the situation could get worse if the government failed to take “proper measures.” “Such an action has directly challenged the Constitution and attacked the internationally accepted norms of human rights,” the centre said. Student protests across the country began in mid-December after three student leaders were detained by police. The three student leaders were eventually released, but vowed that protests would go on until the “regressive government” was overthrown.

http://www.kantipuronline.com/php/kolnews.php?&nid=5799
http://www.kantipuronline.com/php/kolnews.php?&nid=5790
http://www.kantipuronline.com/php/kolnews.php?&nid=5804

South Asia

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf assures Kashmiris on peace talks
Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf today assured government-appointed leaders in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (PcK) that Kashmir would not be ignored in peace talks with India. The statement came after a landmark agreement between the two countries to hold peace talks, despite their decades-long dispute over Kashmir. Kashmiri militants in Indian-controlled Kashmir (IcK) had reacted angrily to the agreement, while members of the moderate separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) in IcK warned against the omission of Kashmiris from any talks with India. Pakistan had insisted on a UN-established plebiscite for Kashmiris to choose independence, Pakistan or India, while India had considered Kashmir an internal issue in the decades-long dispute. Pakistani
Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri told the United Arab Emirates-based Gulf News that Pakistan is willing to look at alternatives to UN resolutions to solve the issue as part of a recent turnaround in policy. However, he insisted that “we have no plans to abandon Kashmir. Indeed, we have made sure it is part of the declaration, that it is part of the composite dialogue [with India].” Kashmir, where India controls over two-thirds of the Muslim-majority region, has long been an emotional issue for Muslim Pakistan. Sardar Anwar Khan, president of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, welcomed the statement. According to the Pakistan-based The Dawn today, Musharraf has called for a meeting of PcK leaders today to brief them about his talks with Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee. Aside from Sardar Anwar Khan, PcK Prime Minister, Sardar Sikander Hayat Khan, and leaders of the PcK chapter of the APHC are expected to attend. The IcK chapter of the APHC today cautioned that militants may attempt to sabotage the peace process. In December 2001, militants attacked the Indian parliament, which brought both countries to the brink of war after India blamed Pakistani-backed militants for the attack. India is reportedly expecting more militant attacks, possibly around Republic Day on January 26. In the latest violence, at least 4 militants were killed today in IcK by Indian security personnel.

http://www.asia.news.yahoo.com/040107/ap/d7vu6u4g0.html
http://www.kashmirtimes.com/news2.htm
http://www.dawn.com/2004/01/18/top3.htm
http://www.gulf-news.com/Articles/print.asp?ArticleID=107391
http://asia.news.yahoo.com/040108/ap/d7vuhkg0.html

Thailand

Rebels fire grenades at police in continuing violence in southern Thailand, while Thailand alleges group with foreign militant links is responsible

Suspected Muslim rebels threw grenades at a police station in Muslim-dominated southern Thailand in the latest in a sudden outbreak of violence which began earlier this week. However, police said that the attackers fled after police fought back and there were no casualties in the attack. The government’s new national security adviser, General Kitt Rattanachaya, yesterday said that separatists with links to foreign terrorist groups were responsible for the attacks, in a turnaround of past government policy that local bandits have been responsible. In the last two years, there have been a revival of low-level attacks in the region which has killed over 50 policemen and soldiers. The Thai government had successfully neutralized a Muslim separatist movement in the region in the 1980’s through government amnesty. Kitti, a former army commander in the south, said that Southeast Asian militants fought together against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and then returned home to set up local groups. “Indonesians formed the Jemaah Islamiah, Malaysia formed the KMM (Kampulan Mujahideen Malaysia). In Thailand they quietly formed the Mujahideen Pattani,” he said. “At present, international terrorists are linked together like a network, with al Qaeda at the core.” Kitti said this week’s attacks appeared to have been carried out with the cooperation of the KMM. Pallop Pinmanee, deputy chief of the Internal Security Operations Command, said that one of the group’s leaders, Jehbemae Buteh, is being hunted and is believed to have taken refuge across the border in Malaysia. Thailand has reportedly sought the aid of Malaysia and also asked Indonesia to monitor Thai Muslim students. Up to 30 suspects have been
reportedly arrested. Kitti also said that the government has been in denial about Mujahideen Pattani for too long. Later today, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who has long insisted on blaming bandits, reportedly barred all officials, except 4 senior ministers, from speaking to the media about the violence. Observers say Thailand fears the admission of separatists might hurt Thailand’s international image as well as its lucrative tourism industry. Shinawatra’s administration also recently disbanded a civil-military agency in the South, which is believed to have successfully dealt with Islamic insurgency in the 1980’s.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/asia-pacific/3379079.stm
http://asia.news.yahoo.com/040108/apd7vurddc00.html
http://abcnews.go.com/wire/World/reuters20040208_188.html

Other World News

United Nations

World Health Organization and World Bank warn that millennium health goals not on track
The UN’s World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank today warned that many developing countries will not reach health goals set by the UN Millennium Summit, such as slashing maternal and infant death rates, unless clear action is taken immediately. At the Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 States committed to 8 Millenium Development Goals, for improving the health and well-being of hundreds of millions of people in the developing world by 2015. Half of the goals are related to health: reduce maternal mortality by some 75%, cut in half the number who suffer from hunger, improve access to essential drugs and safe drinking water, and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases. “When these kinds of targets are set, it seems too soon to take urgent action, and then, after a few short years, it seems too late. Where the targets are the product of a large consensus there is also the hazard of everyone waiting for everyone else to risk making the first move. We still have time to avoid these pitfalls with the targets for 2015, but to do so we have to act now,” says WHO Director-General Lee Jong-wook. Government representatives, UN agencies and donor and development agencies are meeting in Geneva today and tomorrow to assess progress towards meeting the Summit's health goals and to discuss what needs to be done in order for member countries to reach them. The World Bank estimates that only some 40 percent of developing countries are on track to reach the malnutrition goal, while only 17 percent of developing countries could possibly meet the maternal mortality goal.