

G4S Global Risks Ltd.

Weekly Intelligence Report

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Algeria: Threat from Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb Explodes

This week's feature is from the G4S Global Risks' World Briefing April 2007 which is published monthly and part of our subscription service. If you would like a free sample copy of the report please contact us at researcher@g4sglobalrisks.com.

ALGERIA IS rapidly emerging as a crucial battleground in the war on terror and the government is responding to the threats posed by al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb with strong military counter-terrorism operations. On March 29 fierce gun battles pitting the al-Qaida linked Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and Algerian security forces in the Kabylie region resulted in the deaths of at least 18, including both soldiers and guerrillas. As part of an intensive hunt for the GSPC in the mountainous region, security checks and road blocks had been set up on all routes in the area as the Algerian military attempted to flush out the renegade terrorists. As the operation developed the GSPC killed three soldiers in a lightning raid on a road block in the Amizour district. What ensued was an intense pursuit of the militant group that ended up in a fierce gun battle that left 15 GSPC militants dead. This operation was just another part of the Algerian government's ongoing counter-terrorism campaigns that have steadily accelerated since the GSPC stepped its attacks against the government and foreign businesses, mainly in the oil industry.

In the latest clashes, on April 9, nine Algerian soldiers and at least six Islamist militants were killed in fighting after a military convoy was ambushed in a forested area west of Algiers. The Algerian army launched a search operation using helicopters and tanks, and artillery fire could be heard throughout the night in the Ain Defla region. Reports stated that GSPC militants ambushed a military patrol 95 miles (150 kms) south-west of Algiers; the attackers were believed to be marauding in a mob of around 50. The counter-terrorism campaigns are set to continue, particularly as recent attacks against workers in the country's lucrative hydrocarbon industry have elevated the issue internationally, as well as domestically.

The issue is taking on particular salience at the present juncture as Algeria gears up for elections. Candidates from both the Islamist underground and the mainstream opposition have cited concerns that restrictions placed by the government on candidates eligible to contest the elections are creating resentment amongst the population and de facto increasing support for radicalism. The leader of the main Islamist opposition party, El Islah, has been prevented from political activity and stands no chance of gaining any success at the

May 17 legislative elections. Abdallah Djaballah, El Islah's leader, emphasised his disgruntlement with the government's exclusionary policies in a recent interview with Reuters during which he commented that "When you prevent Djaballah from any political activity, you are sending a signal that there is no hope in changing things through peaceful political activity and that the regime concentrates all power in its hands."

In addition to his frustration Djaballah's thinly veiled threat that peaceful political activity is ceasing to be an option for Algeria's Islamists should serve as a warning to the government that its covert attempts to discredit Djaballah's legitimacy and question El Islah's legality could force supporters into more radical political expressions. With the documented ferocity of the newly reinvigorated GSPC fresh in the mind an explosion of the radical underground in Algeria could be a serious concern if the Islamist parties are denied mounting a serious challenge at the parliamentary polls. Precedents for the centrality of Islamist participation in elections to security and stability in Algeria are well-established; in 1992 the Islamist movement exploded after the military regime abolished assembly elections that the Islamists were set to win. The ensuing violence killed 200,000 people. Analysts are rightly concerned over the implications of contemporary Algerian government policy regarding Islamist exclusion, with recent history serving as a volatile reminder.

The fractious situation in Algeria was brought to the forefront of international attention on April 11 when the al-Qaida organisation in the Islamic Maghreb, as the GSPC is now known, detonated two devastating bomb explosions in central Algiers killing at least 24 people and leaving 220 people dead. Algerian Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem has defiantly announced that parliamentary elections scheduled to take place next month will go ahead as intended, and that the government will not bow to pressure from the Islamic movement, be they over ground political parties or underground terrorist organisations. What is clear at this stage is that the stakes in Algeria are currently riding high and the increased activity of al-Qaida in the country now poses an explicit threat to the civilian population. This latest blast is a substantial up scaling by al-Qaida's GSPC branch, whose typical tactics have historically been against Algerian military targets. The change in tact to civilian and governmental targets witnessed in late 2006 and early 2007 may well be attributable to its newfound explicit linkage to al-Qaida; a development which places Algeria at the frontline of global terrorism concerns.

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Algeria – 18.04.2007: Almost a week after Algiers was rocked by twin bombings that killed 30 people and wounded scores more, thousands of ordinary Algerians gathered in the Olympic stadium to condemn the attacks and show their support for national reconciliation to end a seemingly growing insurgency in the North African country. Last week's attacks were attributed to the al-Qaida Organisation of the Arab Maghreb which has renewed its insurgency in recent months since forging a closer alliance with the international terrorist network. The group is proving to be a formidable and persistent threat to domestic and regional security.

DR Congo – 14.04.2007: Security concerns were heightened after the country's main opposition party Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), whose leader Jean-Pierre Bemba left the country for Portugal on Wednesday after recent fighting in the capital, had suspended its participation in the lower house of parliament. The protest action was taken due to MLC members' complaints about persistent harassment and intimidation by security forces. Fighting in the country broke out last month when Bemba's bodyguards, numbering several hundred fighters, defied a government order to disarm. In the subsequent fighting hundreds of people were killed and Bemba is potentially facing prosecution over the violence. The latest developments show the continuing tension and insecurity in the country following the recent elections. The situation in Kinshasa remains tense and could deteriorate again at short notice.

Ethiopia – 13.04.2007: Ethiopia's second largest city Dire Dawa was hit by flash-flooding for the second time in the past eight months, forcing civilians from their homes. The rains struck on Thursday and quickly inundated swathes of the city, resurrecting memories of the devastating flood in August 2006. Over 5,000 people still remain camped out in the Mariam Sefer area of Dire Dawa following August's floods that left over 250 people dead. In the latest flooding the worst affected areas of the city were the suburbs of Addis Ketema and Decahtu.

Ivory Coast – 17.04.2007: Rival Ivory Coast leaders started dismantling a buffer zone that has divided the West African country for four years since a failed coup

sparked a civil war. President Laurent Gbagbo and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro have presided over ceremonies for the significant landmark event that is a major step in the country's UN-backed peace process. Thousands of UN troops manning the zone will be phased out gradually and replaced by soldiers from an amalgamated Ivorian army in a process expected to last several weeks. The end of the demilitarised zone will ease movement of people and goods between the north and south of this war-ravaged country.

Morocco – 14.04.2007: Following three suicide bombings on Tuesday, when bombers killed themselves in a poor neighbourhood of Casablanca after police raided a house and shot dead a fourth bomber, today two suicide bombers killed themselves in an attack on U.S. diplomatic offices in Morocco's commercial hub Casablanca. The first blast happened near an American cultural centre and the second blast only 60 metres away from the US consulate showing the clear intent of the terrorists to target the US buildings. According to police sources there were no other casualties and the bombers were only stopped by the security fortifications surrounding the buildings. The bombings were followed by three arrests. Whilst the government insists that the bombers were home-grown militants and belonged to the terrorist ring dismantled last month analysts see differences in intentions between the two incidents; The strategy of the latest bombings could demonstrate links with al-Qaida who in the past also focused on US targets. There remains a high threat from terrorism in the country whilst the security has been increased by the Moroccan authorities following these incidents.

Morocco – 16.04.2007: Following the April 15th bombings in Casablanca which targeted US facilities, the US consulate in the city shut down indefinitely in order to beef up security. Analysts see a worrying development in the latest attacks, displaying a growing threat from radical Islamism in North Africa. It seems most likely that the al-Qaida Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb, an affiliate of the global al-Qaida network of Osama bin Laden, was behind these latest attacks. The organization finds it seemingly easy to recruit followers from the country's poor. Moroccan security analysts estimate

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there could be up to 15 fugitive suicide bombers, possibly prepared to blow themselves up to stop police arresting them. Following the twin bombings in Algeria, the region looks likely to witness further attacks directed at governments, soft targets and Western interests.

Morocco – 19.04.2007: Following a spate of bombings the government placed the coastal city of Casablanca and other cities on high alert. Communications Minister Nabil Benabdellah told journalists yesterday, “Morocco is in a state of extreme alert and this situation prevails.” The minister added that security has been increased at foreign diplomatic missions, hotels, tourist sites and other places frequented by foreign tourists.

Niger – 18.04.2007: An off-duty soldier was lynched by high school students in Niamey on Tuesday marking the third such murder of security personnel in recent days. The pupils are part of a growing protest movement originally started by university students in the capital six months ago when university president Djibril Abarchi unilaterally made unpopular budget cuts. Since then the campus has been inundated by protest action which led to the deployment of security personnel who are increasingly being viewed as an occupying force.

Nigeria – 14.04.2007: The country’s outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo urged Nigerians to limit their travel during the election period which kicked off with state assembly elections on Saturday (Apr. 14) in order to reduce incidents of violence. There was mounting concern that election-motivated violence could escalate during the one-week election period which ends with parliamentary and presidential polls on April 21. The elections started with difficulties this morning after several polling stations failed to open on time whilst news spread of night-time attacks on police stations. According to reports six policemen were killed in an attack in Mini-Okoro, while one died at Elemenwo. In related news a Muslim cleric and former member of the Kano State government was slain inside a Mosque in the northern city of Kano prior to national elections. Ustaz Ja’afar Adam and one of his followers were killed after Friday prayers by two unidentified gunmen who have yet to be apprehended. The deaths were being viewed as politi-

cally-motivated and part of a string of violent attacks that have marred the election campaign season. According to *Human Rights Watch* more than one hundred people have died in election-related violence since November. With the death of Adam, potential retaliatory sectarian attacks are likely to be on the horizon. In addition the risk of serious attacks by armed militants in the Niger Delta region will increase further.

Nigeria – 15.04.2007: After the voting in state assembly elections on April 14th, incidents of irregularities sparked violence across Nigeria on Saturday. Whilst initial results were expected from the regional elections shortly, Saturday’s violence continued during the night. According to local newspapers at least 40 people were killed in fighting linked to intimidation and electoral fraud. The vote should lead to the first fully democratic transition of power in Africa’s most populous nation, however the first day of polling already saw eight people were killed in three different states when armed men stormed polling booths to steal ballot boxes, according to local media. There is mounting concern that election-motivated violence could escalate during the one-week election period which ends with parliamentary and presidential polls on April 21.

Nigeria – 16.04.2007: The highly-charged national elections for state governorships and assemblies were in complete disarray as charges of voter intimidation, ballot-box stuffing, fraud and violence continue to mount with the most damning of allegations being directed at the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Elections in four to six states were so comprised that they will have to be re-run according to independent and local observers. Weekend violence left up to 50 people dead and countless more wounded. Early results showed PDP victories in 26 out of 32 states. The latest development cast a worrying light on the upcoming presidential poll on the 21st of April.

Nigeria – 17.04.2007: The bedlam that continues to overshadow last weekend’s gubernatorial and state assembly elections threatens to derail the much-anticipated presidential polls scheduled for April 21 (Saturday). European Union observers described last

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weekend's polls as seriously flawed while cataloguing a litany of violations ranging from vote rigging to intimidation. So far election-related violence has claimed the lives of more than 50 people.

Nigeria – 17.04.2007: The Nigerian Supreme Court overruled a ban imposed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on Vice President Atiku Abubakar to run for the presidency. The ruling also applies to six gubernatorial candidates from Abubakar's Action Congress party who were previously barred from running for office. The picture emerging for the upcoming polls could be a carbon copy of last weekend's violence prompting security to remain at a high. Meanwhile in related developments it was reported that a mob killed 13 people in an attack on a police station in the northern Nigerian city of Kano. The latest attack comes only four days after unidentified gunmen shot dead a hard-line Muslim cleric. The killing was being viewed as politically-motivated and part of a string of violent attacks that have marred the election campaign season. With the death of the cleric, potential retaliatory sectarian attacks are likely to be on the horizon.

Nigeria – 19.04.2007: Nigeria's opposition parties threatened to boycott presidential elections this weekend. Eighteen opposition parties called for the disbanding of the national election commission and demanded that Saturday's presidential ballot be postponed until "transparency and fairness" could be ensured. The government of outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is stepping down after serving two terms, immediately rejected the demand for a postponement. The opposition parties also called for the annulment of last Saturday's regional polls, which were slammed as fraud-marred by international observers and triggered violence that left at least 20 people dead. In other developments Nigerian troops on Wednesday shot dead 25 heavily armed members of an Islamist group that had attacked a police station the previous day in the northern Muslim-majority city of Kano, killing 12 policemen and a civilian.

Somalia / Ethiopia / Eritrea – 14.04.2007: Delegates representing each of the countries making up the Horn of Africa or East African Bloc, minus Eritrea, decided to

side with Ethiopia and Somalia's claim, that Eritrea is undermining efforts to stabilise Somalia by supplying Islamist insurgents with arms. Eritrea has countered these claims by accusing the US and Ethiopia of fomenting instability in Somalia under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

Somalia – 15.04.2007: Sheikh Hassan Dhahir Aweys, fugitive from the law and a Somali Council of Islamic Courts leader, told the London-based *Asharq al-Aswat* daily that he saw no difference between Ugandan peacekeepers and Ethiopian troops and therefore both forces would be targeted in their attempt to oust all foreign soldiers from Somali land. Although maintaining his belligerent stance towards foreign troops, Aweys reiterated his willingness to work with the transitional government leader President Abdullahi Yusuf on national reconciliation with the caveat that such proceedings will only occur once all foreign elements were expelled from the country. With the transitional government's weak position, coupled with external pressure that is reluctant to see the Islamists re-take control of the country, Yusuf can ill-afford to ask Ethiopian and Ugandan forces to leave Somalia thus leading to one of the most probable logical conclusions: a protraction of hostilities. Meanwhile fighting has broken out again between the breakaway Somali enclave Somaliland and the neighbouring semi-autonomous Puntland. Fighting over a strip of desert flared for the second time in a week with the use of heavy weapons in clashes on Saturday. The disputed land has been the source of sporadic outbreaks of violence for years. Both areas have enjoyed a relative calm over the last years, whilst the south of the country has seen itself drawn into heavy fighting and lawlessness.

Somalia – 18.04.2007: Fresh clashes between Ethiopian troops and Islamist insurgents in southern and northern Mogadishu claimed the lives of eleven and wounded several more. Heavy artillery fire from Ethiopian tanks rained down on the coastal capital for nearly four hours last night prompting some residents to claim that it had been the most intense battles ever seen in the city. The most damaged section of the city was the insurgent stronghold of Tawfiq where tanks bombarded

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the area from the nearby hilltop of the presidential palace. According to eyewitnesses some of the shells missed their intended targets landing in the western and northern parts of Mogadishu destroying residences and local businesses. Mogadishu continues to experience wave after wave of hostilities that threatens to plunge the city further into chaos with some analysts fearing that the city could transform into a Somali "Baghdad".

Sudan – 16.04.2007: A breakthrough in negotiations that will pave the way for the deployment of the hybrid African Union-United Nations peacekeeping force was reached in Khartoum on Monday. Khartoum had reluctantly accepted to the deployment of the hybrid force which will be part of a three-phase plan to stabilise the war-torn Darfur region. Speaking from AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Sudanese Foreign Minister Lam Akol reiterated Khartoum's acceptance of the second phase which outlines the technical and logistical support provided by the UN to AU forces. With phase two, UN troop deployment will reach 10,000. While the breakthrough is welcome news, the turmoil still continues in the Darfur where the latest bouts of violence involved the death of an AU officer in Al-Fasher, north Darfur, adding to the rising death toll of AU personnel.

Sudan – 17.04.2007: Khartoum agreed to the deployment of 3,000 UN peacekeepers to bolster the 7,000-strong AU force in the violence-plagued Darfur as part of the initial steps of a UN-backed three-phase peacekeeping operation to the region. In addition to the deployment, AU forces will receive logistical and technical support including the use of six attack helicopters, which will be banned from offensive usage. Although the announcement bodes well for the improvement of security in the region, there has yet to be a firm commitment from donor nations on troop deployment.

Sudan – 19.04.2007: The United States said on Wednesday that Sudan has weeks to take concrete action to meet its obligations and avoid sanctions over the settlement of the Darfur crisis. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack placed the new wave of pressure squarely upon Sudanese President Bashir al-Assad, stating that "he [Bashir] has weeks in order to

fully meet the commitments that he signed on to. US President George W. Bush had threatened earlier on Wednesday to tighten the economic sanctions and impose new punishments if Sudan fails to ameliorate the Darfur situation.

Uganda – 13.04.2007: What was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration turned bloody when at least three people died and scores were injured in a rally against the proposed giveaway of part of the Mabira forest to a private family. The incident has been particularly alarming due to the explicitly racial nature of the attacks against Asian figures in the capital Kampala. Troops in armoured cars were deployed in central Kampala after police fired tear gas and bullets to stop rioters attacking Asian businesses and a Hindu temple, angered by moves to expand an Indian-owned company's sugar plantations.

Uganda – 17.04.2007: Following the collapse of the much coveted peace talks between the Ugandan government and the notorious Lords Resistance Army in December 2006, fresh hopes are arising for the peace process after the LRA indicated that they may be ready to return to the negotiating table. Under the terms of the renewed peace discussions the LRA has been given six weeks to move all their fighters to Ri-Kwangba, one of the assembly points in southern Sudan, while the truce has been extended to the end of July. In an unrelated development on Tuesday the Ugandan police used water cannons and batons to fight hundreds of opposition supporters. The supporters were demonstrating against the arrest of two MPs and 25 other people earlier this week over rioting in Kampala in protest against a government proposal to give an Indian-owned company almost one third of a rainforest reserve to grow sugar. During last week's protest shops were looted and an Indian man was stoned to death.

Zimbabwe – 17.04.2007: According to state radio all non-governmental organisations have been deregistered and told to submit new applications in a move by President Mugabe to weed out groups accused of supporting the opposition. The move comes only days after the government cancelled an agreement with the US

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Agency for International Development after it became public that it had been working with parliamentary commissions to discredit the government. In the past the regime has blamed NGOs of supporting the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and imposed tighter restrictions on food aid distribution. Observers fear that the poverty ridden country is facing food shortages especially after experts fear a huge shortfall of maize production this year due to severe-drought.

Zimbabwe – 19.04.2007: The European Union stepped up pressure on Zimbabwe on its independence day on , adding five names to a list of top officials banned from the EU bloc and expressing strong concerns about rights abuses. The EU added five deputy ministers to its list of more than a 100 top Zimbabwean officials, including Mugabe, who are forbidden to enter the EU and whose assets in the 27-nation bloc are frozen. Zimbabwe marked 27 years of independence on Wednesday, but for many the milestone was overshadowed by the country's economic meltdown and the political crisis over Mugabe's plans to remain in power.

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Brazil – 17.04.2007: The controversial Sao Francisco river-diversion project triggered a mass invasion onto government property in Pernambuco state by thousands of activists from the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) over the weekend. An estimated 7,500 activists stormed government plots near Petrolina, 1,360 miles (2,188 km) from Sao Paulo, in an effort to halt the project which they claim will divert water from the lands of destitute farmers. Brazil's environmental protection agency gave a green-light to the USD \$2 billion project recently which caused an upsurge in protest actions and could even provoke attempts of eco-terrorism in the foreseeable future.

Brazil – 18.04.2007: Deadly clashes between rival drug gangs in the Rio de Janeiro *favela* of Morro da Mineira claimed the lives of 13 before police intervened and cordoned off the area. Meanwhile in the abutting Rebu *favela* police killed six suspected members of a drug gang on Monday. Both incidents occurred one day after President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva agreed to deploy hundreds of federal police to the coastal city where violent crime is spiralling out of control.

Brazil – 19.04.2007: Gun battles between drug gangs and police left at least 20 suspected gang members dead in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday as rival gangs from the Mangueira and Alemão slums had tried to seize control of lucrative drug-dealing spots. At least 14 suspected drug gang members were killed in a morning battle that lasted several hours in the Mineira slum near Rio de Janeiro city centre. Police also killed six suspected drug gang members in Bangu, another Rio slum, in an unrelated incident.

Canada – 19.04.2007: Coast Guard icebreakers were smashing through a massive expanse of ice in a bid to free more than a hundred vessels stuck off Newfoundland's northeast coast. Many of the estimated 600 crew-members have been stuck on the ice for days and are running out of food and fuel. A shift in wind has tightened the ice pack in the region along Newfoundland's northeast coast and southern Labrador, endangering vessels off Fogo Island. Poor weather conditions have grounded rescue aircraft.

Colombia – 18.04.2007: A congressional probe into ties between right-wing paramilitaries and politicians threatens to tighten the noose around President Alvaro Uribe after documents allege that two properties owned by the Uribe family in Antioquia province were used as meeting venues for death squads from 1995 to 1997. Congressman Sen. Gustavo Petro unveiled the documents during a congressional hearing which alleged that a civilian self-defence programme, Convivir, was infiltrated by paramilitaries to the knowledge of Uribe while he was governor of the province. While championing Congress' attempts to clean up government, which has seen eight of the president's closest political allies jailed, Uribe has steadfastly denied the allegations brought against him.

Colombia – 18.04.2007: The chief negotiator of Colombia's second largest guerrilla group the National Liberation Army (ELN) announced that his group was ready to cease formal hostilities with the government with the implementation of a temporary ceasefire. On the eve of a sixth round of peace talks in Havana, Cuba, Pablo Betran expressed hope on ending its four-decade long insurgency but reiterated that the re-emergence of right-wing paramilitaries may derail these efforts.

Colombia – 19.04.2007: A long-dormant volcano surprised thousands of residents living near the Nevado del Huila mountain, located 170 miles (274 km) southwest of Bogota, after it erupted late Tuesday and Wednesday. An estimated 3,500 people were evacuated after floods and cascading avalanches buried houses and bridges near the Paez and Simbola rivers. Although there were no reported deaths or injuries, rescue and relief efforts were being hampered due to access routes being blockaded or buried by tonnes of rocks and debris. The region has been placed on alert for potentially another eruption. According to Mario Ballesteros, director of the government's Institute for Geology and Mining, "The seismic activity remains light but permanent, and we can't rule out another bigger event in the next hours or days."

Colombia – 19.04.2007: The government accepted to implement a temporary cease-fire with the National Liberation Army (ELN) insurgency. The ELN announced

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the proposal on Monday, saying the cease-fire would be extended if it succeeds in creating "an atmosphere of peace and of participation." The Havana meeting is the sixth round of negotiations since the government of President Alvaro Uribe and the ELN initiated peace talks in 2005.

Cuba – 17.04.2007: According to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, crime in Cuba is on the increase. The Office warns specifically of luggage theft during baggage handling at the airport, both on arrival and departure. It advises travellers to remove all valuables, lock suitcases and have them shrink-wrapped before check-in.

Ecuador – 16.04.2007: In the latest test for newly-elected President Rafael Correa's attempts to fundamentally overhaul the political system and to fight corruption, the people of Ecuador are voting in a referendum that seeks to rewrite the constitution. The referendum would give Correa the right to create a people's assembly and to bypass the congress, which in the opinion of many Ecuadorians stands for institutionalised corruption. Some reports from Quito put Correa's impending victory as high as 83% although official figures are yet to be fully corroborated. Correa is calling for an assembly to rewrite the constitution and strip powers from a Congress that he sees as tainted for appointing cronies to state firms and the courts. Whilst critics accuse Correa of being authoritarian, the majority of Ecuadorians seem to support his stance on the established elite. However it remains to be seen whether the country that has seen eight presidents in the last 10 years is stable enough to cope with such radical measures.

El Salvador – 14.04.2007: The El Salvador government is feeling the strain of its involvement in the Iraq war as increasing criticism from domestic political opposition parties and civil society gathers momentum. With the recent deaths of five Salvadoran soldiers in Iraq, the opposition, led by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, Salvadorian Coordinator of Solidarity with the Peoples, the Social Popular Bloc and the Catholic Church, sharply criticised the government's unwavering support in the US-led war. Currently El Salvador is the

only Latin American country to deploy its military to Iraq, with seven battalions, but mounting domestic pressure could see the gradual withdrawal of its troops.

Mexico – 13.04.2007: An earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter Scale has hit Mexico causing power outages in Mexico City and creating panic in several cities. The quake struck 40 miles north-west of Acapulco early on Friday. Thousands of tourists in the resort of Acapulco fled their hotels amid scenes of panic. In Mexico City's downtown district official estimate that around 20 percent of the homes in the area have had their power supplies disrupted.

Mexico / US – 17.04.2007: The US Department of Energy will provide radiation detectors to the Mexican government in an effort to prevent the smuggling of "dirty bombs" into Mexico's sea ports. Detection equipment will be installed at ports in Manzanillo, Lazaro, Cardenas, Altamira and Veracruz where 92 percent of Mexico's import-export good transit. Mexico has become increasingly aware that its oil installations may be targeted by international terrorist groups after the al-Qaida network made explicit threats in February.

Mexico – 19.04.2007: Police and soldiers battled with gunmen at a hospital in the border city of Tijuana on Wednesday, leaving at least three people dead before the authorities gained control of the situation. Shooting first erupted when seven masked gunmen entered the public hospital and were confronted by a group of state police. Two state police officers and one of the gunmen were killed in the clash. Mexican gangs have stormed several hospitals across the country in recent years to kill injured rivals or free prisoners. The incident is just the latest in a series of violent attacks in Mexico's drug-war plagued states; a phenomenon which has led President Calderon to deploy 24,000 troops to the afflicted areas.

Nicaragua / Mexico – 15.04.2007: A dozen people linked to one of Mexico's largest drug cartels, the Sinaloa, were seized on Saturday in Managua following the previous day's arrest of five more of their members. The arrests seem to confirm a widely held belief that

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Mexico's Sinaloa, and rival Gulf, cartels are trying to establish a stronger foothold in the Central American state. National Police Chief Carlos Palacios warned that his government is bracing for a protracted conflict with these financially-powerful and well-armed gangs as they expand their operational base beyond Mexico's borders. Recent successful drug interdiction operations have triggered fears that drug traffickers will begin retaliatory attacks against the government as a punitive measure as evidenced by the assassination attempt on Managua Police Chief Aminta Granera in January.

Peru – 19.04.2007: Peruvian police arrested the senior leader of the Shining Path rebel group, Jimmy Rodriguez, charging him with organizing anti-government protests against a coca eradication plan in the central province of Huanuco. According to reports in local daily El Comercio, Rodriguez was arrested with documents relating to the Shining Path's plans to build trenches and barricade roads. The police also found three pistols, Shining Path propaganda and a map of the blocked highways. Current protests in Huanuco are in their third day and protesters threatened to take stronger measures if the government does not halt coca eradication plans. Peru is the world's second-largest producer of cocaine.

US – 17.04.2007: At the forested university campus of Virginia Tech, located about 250 miles (402 km) southwest of Washington DC, a lone gunman went on a rampage and managed to kill 32 students and teachers during a shooting spree which lasted throughout the morning on Monday (April 16). According to authorities the killer first killed two students in a dormitory before storming a classroom in an engineering building across the campus where he killed 30 more followed by himself. The gunman was named by Police as Cho Seung-hui, a 23-year-old student from South Korea. The events marked the deadliest massacre to have occurred at an American educational institution.

US / Canada – 18.-4.2007: A severe windstorm swept through several states on the east coast on Sunday causing mass power outages in states stretching from the Carolinas to Maine in the US and affecting the Ca-

nadian city of Quebec. More than 1.3 million people and 250,000 homes and businesses were without electricity. In America, state of emergencies were declared in West Virginia and New Jersey after the powerful windstorm also brought heavy rains causing minor flooding in low-lying areas.

US / Australia – 19.04.2007: Australia and the United States have signed an agreement to exchange hundreds of refugees held in offshore detention camps in a bid by both countries to deter future asylum seekers. But critics say the plan will encourage a new wave of asylum seekers to brave the treacherous ocean voyage to Australia by presenting their destination as a back door to the United States. Australian Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, confronting critics of the plan, said the plan would not present Australia as a back door to the United States because refugees might also be sent to other countries and both the US and Australia retained a right of refusal.

Venezuela / US – 14.04.2007: President Hugo Chavez declared on Thursday (April 13) that any further provocation from the US would see Latin America's largest oil producer cease shipments of oil to the North American market. The leftist leader has repeatedly accused Washington of plotting a coup against him but regional analysts believe that Chavez's sabre rattling is designed to bolster domestic support in a country where, despite its massive potential for economic growth and prosperity, is showing signs of fragmenting as people are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their president.

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Afghanistan – 14.04.2007: A suicide bomber blew himself up outside police headquarters in Khost, eastern Afghanistan on Saturday, killing seven border policemen and one civilian. Six policemen were wounded. The attack came two days after US led coalition troops reportedly killed 35 Taliban insurgents.

Afghanistan – 17.04.2007: As the bloodshed in Afghanistan worsens, the Taliban are increasingly targeting civilians, the New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a new report on Monday. The group accuses the Taliban and other insurgents of war crimes in its latest report, *The Human Cost*. NATO says several hundred civilians have already died this year. Last year, more than 4,000 people died in fighting. Afghan officials say about a quarter of them were civilians. But Human Rights Watch said that while about 900 were killed by foreign, Afghan and militant forces, another 300 to 400 deaths could not be positively attributed to either side. In latest developments a remote-controlled bomb blew up a U.N. vehicle and killed four Nepalese contractors and an Afghan driver in the southern city of Kandahar. The attack was claimed by the Taliban as part of their spring campaign against foreign troops and anyone who supports them.

Bangladesh – 19.04.2007: Bangladesh's army-backed interim government effectively barred former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from returning to the country, whilst Hasina's arch-rival, Begum Khaleda Zia, is battling government efforts to drive her into exile. Hasina faces allegations of murder and extortion; the government has ordered security forces to arrest her when she returns from America. National politics in Bangladesh has been polarised for a decade between Hasina's Awami League and Khaleda's Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The military administration appears focussed on removing this destabilising polarity before the re-installation of democracy scheduled for the end of this year.

East Timor – 14.04.2007: The national election commission has indicated that some areas may have to hold another first-round voting session due to irregularities in ballot counts and negligence on the part of some polling officials. According to election commission chief, Mar-

tinho Gusmao, the number of valid ballots did not match the tally of votes declared for the eight candidates. He added that the problem would have to be resolved within a 72-hour window which at this point may be difficult to achieve, thus leading to the logical conclusion that some districts would have to hold a re-vote. Such an outcome could reverse an already accepted result that the two leading candidates, Jose Ramos-Horta and Francisco Guterres, would enter a second-round run-off vote.

India / Indonesia – 14.04.2007: India's recent ballistic missile tests brought up the issue of aviation safety as one Indonesian-based passenger jet was forced to abort its flight when it entered Indian airspace due to the tests. A Garuda flight carrying 400 Muslim pilgrims en route to Saudi Arabia was forced to return to Jakarta due to the danger of ballistic missiles being launched within the vicinity of its flight pattern. The incident caused a minor diplomatic row, with Jakarta considering lodging a formal letter of protest to the Indian government; New Delhi has denied any negligence on its part. One of India's flagship carriers, Air India, had one of its flights aborted and returned to Singapore because of the launch. The aviation industry and potential airline passengers should be concerned about future missile tests.

India – 16.04.2007: In the latest move of farmers opposed to government plans to establish special industrial zones throughout the country, villagers of Dhinkia in the eastern coastal state of Orissa have said they are prepared to make their children face off with police if necessary. South Korea's POSCO is planning to construct a USD \$12 billion plant in the state and already faces hefty opposition from farmers who reportedly erected bamboo fences to try to prevent police forcing them off their land. Clashes last month between farmers and police injured 50 people and observers say that a further showdown with police could take place any time.

Indonesia – 15.04.2007: A small bomb exploded in Poso, Sulawesi, an area of persistent ethnic and sectarian strife. Although no casualties were reported, the blast heightens tensions in an area already fraught with volatility. Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, is home to a mainly moderate Muslim majority; however,

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there seems to be a growing and increasingly active militant minority.

Indonesia – 18.04.2007: Thousands of miners at the Freeport-McMoRan's Gasberg mine walked off the job in protest over the lack of career advancement for native Papuan workers and better pensions. The miners marched from the mine in Timika to parliament demanding that the chairman of the US-based company, James Moffett, and president of Freeport Indonesia, Armando Mahler, to resolve the labour dispute personally. The mine has been at the centre of several disputes involving labour issues and allegations of environmental damage. However, Freeport officials were quick to reassure that the labour dispute would be settled soon and that mining production would not be severely hampered due to the protest action. According to the protest leaders the rally in the mining town of Timika is expected to continue for another three days.

Japan – 13.04.2007: A bill which set procedures to amend Japan's pacifist Constitution was approved on Thursday by a special committee of the country's lower house, the House of Representatives. The Special Committee for Research on the Constitution, which is made up of lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its minor coalition partner, the New Komeito party, approved the legislation, which was submitted to the Diet in May 2006, with a majority vote. Japan's war-renouncing Constitution has not been revised since coming into effect in 1947 and analysts regard a referendum before 2011 as almost impossible given all the complicated procedures required.

Japan – 15.04.2007: An earthquake measuring 5.4 in magnitude struck Mie prefecture in central Japan injuring two people and causing minor structural damage to homes and buildings. Japanese national broadcaster *NHK* reported that some residents felt that it was the largest earthquake ever experienced. The country is prone to frequent seismic tremors and earthquakes as it lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire"; it is estimated that the country accounts for some 20 percent of the global quakes of magnitude of 6.0 or greater.

Japan / North Korea – 16.04.2007: The Japanese government has urged North Korea to commit to its promises made under the February 13 agreement at the six-party talks to shut down its nuclear facilities. Tokyo stated that it is 'extremely regrettable' that Pyongyang failed to meet the April 14th deadline, which Pyongyang agreed to in February's meeting. North Korea was to shut down its nuclear reactor at the Yongbyon facility on Saturday and allowed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors back into the country in return for energy aid and the recent lifting of financial assets frozen by Washington. Pyongyang confirmed that the Macao-based Banco Delta Asia released the USD \$25 million. But the failure of the communist regime to keep its end of the bargain will likely lead to an intractable situation that may involve a more austere international response.

Japan – 18.04.2007: A rare shooting took place in the southern coastal city of Nagasaki involving a senior member of Japan's notorious Yamaguchi-gumi organised crime family killing Mayor Ichio Ito. Tetsuya Shirou, of the Yamaguchi-gumi, shot Ito at point-blank range outside a train station before being wrestled to the ground by the mayor's security detail. It is alleged that Shirou was enacting revenge after the city refused to compensate him after one of his vehicles was damaged at a public works construction site. Japan's organized crime groups commonly known as *yakuza* accounted for at least two-thirds of the country's 53 homicide shootings last year.

Kyrgyzstan – 15.04.2007: More than 1,000 demonstrators gathered during an anti-government march in Bishkek on Saturday to demand President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's resignation. It was the fourth day of protests in the capital and this time fighting broke out leaving more than 40 people injured. The former Soviet republic has found itself on the brink of crisis ever since Bakiyev came to power in 2005. Previous violent protests were responsible for toppling his long-serving predecessor, Askar Akayev. Kyrgyzstan is a strategically important player in the region by hosting U.S. and Russian military airbases. Observers fear that conflict in the country could affect neighbouring Central Asian States.

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Nepal – 16.04.2007: The peace process in the Himalayan state is under further threat with the pronouncement that the Communist Party of Nepal or Maoists are threatening to stage a nationwide protest if constituent assembly elections are not held by the previously-agreed upon date of June 20. Deputy leader of the rebel group, Baburam Bhattarai, said, “If elections can’t be held on time the interim parliament should declare a republic.” In the event that a republic is not declared then the Maoists threatened to mobilise the people into taking direct action according to Bhattarai. The announcement was made immediately after Maoist leader Prachanda, who still goes by his guerrilla name, demanded that Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala declare Nepal a republic. The holding of constituent assembly elections would seal the peace accord with the Maoists but there are mounting concerns any further disruptions would see the country revert back to civil war. Although the Maoists have promised not to undermine the peace, there still remains the issue of a growing insurrection in the southern Terai region and the fact that some 5,000 Maoist rebels still remain unaccounted for and presumably armed.

North Korea – 13.04.2007: It looks as though North Korea will be unable to meet a weekend deadline to shut down its main nuclear reactor at its Yongbyon plant as agreed to at last February’s six-party talks. There was mounting speculation, since Pyongyang gained access to frozen assets totalling USD \$25 million from the Macau-based Banco Delta Asia bank last week, that North Korea would renege on its agreement to start its denuclearization process. Members of the six-party talks and other regional observers wait with bated breath.

North Korea – 14.04.2007: Saturday (April 14) marks the 60-day deadline for North Korea to shut down its main nuclear reactor at the Yongbyon plant and invite UN inspectors for verification as promised by Pyongyang after February’s six-party talks on the North’s denuclearisation process. However, there are concerns that the communist regime might have reneged on the agreement as there have been no signs of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the ground. Pyongyang stated on Friday that once its

overseas financial assets are secured from a Macau-based bank, the target of a financial embargo that was recently lifted, it will begin the initial steps in decommissioning its nuclear plant.

Pakistan – 13.04.2007: In a surprising development Pakistan on Thursday threatened to quit the international coalition against terrorism if its partners, particularly the United States and its media, continued to accuse Islamabad of dragging its feet. President Gen. Pervez Musharraf warned that if the blame game continued, it would be impossible to defeat terrorism and extremism, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan. “The first sign of defeat is to blame each other,” the president said, calling upon the US and its media to realise the gravity of the situation facing Pakistan; at the same time, Musharraf made it clear that military means alone could not win the war against terrorism in Afghanistan and that political efforts were needed to restore peace and stability in the country. His comments come in the wake of deadly battles in South Waziristan pitting local tribal militias against foreign jihadists from Central Asia. In other developments at least 49 people were killed and 115 injured in week-long sectarian clashes in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas, although officials are claiming that a return to normalcy is fast approaching.

Pakistan – 14.04.2007: About 4,500 supporters of suspended Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudry rallied outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad in protest over the reconstitution of the five-member Supreme Judicial Council which will try the suspended judge on charges of abuse of power. Chaudry supporters have accused the government of filling the judicial council with suspect adjudicators which would compromise the trial. The crisis surrounding the Chaudry case has evoked calls for the removal of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who suspended the chief justice last month. Security was heightened in the capital, particularly in the area around the Supreme Court.

Pakistan – 16.04.2007: Tens of thousands of people went on the streets of Karachi on Sunday in protest against the radical religious school Lal Masjid which leading a Taliban-style campaign for morality in Islama-

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bad. Moderate voices in the country were shocked by the announcement of a school cleric earlier this month when he revealed that a religious shariat court had been set up and that any opposition to this regime by government forces would be met with suicide bombings. The country's moderates and liberals are watching the Taliban's latest moves fearfully in what appears to be the Taliban creeping into Pakistan's public life without the government taking a harder stance against it.

Philippines – 13.04.2007: A political rally turned into bedlam when unidentified gunmen fired shots into the crowd wounding six in Manila on Thursday. The incident occurred on April 10 during a rally for the Caloocan mayoral candidate Enrico Echeverri who is campaigning for next May's elections. Police have yet to identify the perpetrators. The nation is gearing up for the May 14 polls when 12 senators, 200 congressional representatives and thousands of local offices will be up for grabs. Election-related violence is not uncommon in the archipelago during the campaign season with this period registering 49 cases since January. In other developments police in north Mindanao have been placed on full alert with the terror threat level from at least three militant groups being classified as high. Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaida are all believed to be planning attacks in the southern Philippines according to Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Oscar Calderon. We advise against travel to the southern Filipino areas of Mindanao and Sulu.

Philippines – 14.04.2007: The Philippine National Police (PNP) heightened security in the southern island of Mindanao due to recent intelligence indicating that three terrorist groups were plotting attacks in the country. Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaida are the principle threats on the restive island according to the multi-agency Anti-Terrorism Task Force. Five of the six regions including Northern, Central, Western, Southern Mindanao and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) remain on a high alert status. Separately, according to latest reports, Muslim rebels have fired mortar bombs on a Philippines marine base in the southern island of Jolo, killing two soldiers and a child.

Philippines – 15.04.2007: Following recent announcements by security officials of an imminent attack from Islamist insurgents in the restive southern islands, Philippine marines overran a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) camp on Jolo Island early Sunday (April 15). Fifteen rebels were reported killed during the operation that involved mortar fire and helicopter gun ships. It was hoped that the raid would net MNLF leader Habier Malik, but the tenacious rebel was able to escape into the dense jungles surrounding Panamao town along with some of his cadres. The wily MNLF leader last year was able to detain a top military general and his senior aides for ransom which ultimately became fodder for the national press.

Philippines – 16.04.2007: Filipino soldiers overran a Muslim rebel camp in Sulu after the rebels broke a truce by shelling a Philippine marine outpost. The camp of Habier Malik, a commander of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), in Panamao town in Jolo was captured by troops with no casualties on the government side. The attack on Malik's camp came after he and his MNLF followers used mortars to shell a marine base near Panamao late Friday, killing two Marines and a civilian and triggering a fire fight. Commanders have said the Friday attack was proof that Malik's group was giving refuge to the leaders of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. On Sunday it was reported that fifteen rebels were killed during an operation that involved mortar fire and helicopter gun ships on Jolo Island. It was hoped that the raid would net MNLF leader Habier Malik, but the tenacious rebel was able to escape into the dense jungles surrounding Panamao town along with some of his cadres. The wily MNLF leader last year was able to detain a top military general and his senior aides for ransom which ultimately became fodder for the national press.

Philippines – 17.04.2007: As the army continued to sweep the jungles of Jolo Island in a move to hunt down members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), fighting between the two sides has spread leaving 17 rebels, three soldiers and one civilian dead. Hopes for peace as well as continued local support for the US-backed campaign to control the militants are shrinking with each day of fighting. Over 8,000 families fled the

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fighting and are relying on food rations from disaster agencies.

South / North Korea – 17.04.2007: The United States and South Korea expressed their strong hope that North Korea will start to shut down its nuclear weapons programme soon despite missing a weekend deadline. The North insists it will begin shutting down and sealing the Yongbyon facility and readmit UN atomic inspectors once it has retrieved 25 million US dollars in funds frozen in a Macau bank. The North insists it will begin shutting down and sealing Yongbyon, which produces the raw material for plutonium to make bombs, and readmit UN atomic inspectors once it has retrieved 25 million US dollars in funds frozen in a Macau bank.

Sri Lanka – 13.04.2007: Tamil Tiger rebels shot dead seven villagers of the majority Sinhalese community in northern Sri Lanka on the eve of the traditional New Year. Gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) raided the village of Avarantalawa in the district of Vavuniya where heavy fighting has raged between troops and the Tamil Tigers. Six women and a man were shot dead by the gunmen who escaped before constables reached the area. Security has been stepped-up across the country ahead of the New Year to guard against rebel attacks.

Thailand – 13.04.2007: As the Thai Songkran New Year's festival celebrations gather steam, a Thai newspaper has reported that 98 people were killed in road traffic accidents as alcoholism and erratic driving habits combine to create treacherous road safety conditions. As celebrations kicked off on Wednesday 41 people were killed and 514 injured in traffic accidents with the figures worsening on Thursday when 57 people were killed and 800 injured. Drink driving has been held accountable for approximately a third of the hundreds of incidents, as Thais travel homewards to celebrate Songkran with their families.

Thailand – 15.04.2007: About 35 Thai revellers celebrating the country's Songkran ("New Year's") festivities died due to flash floods caused by torrential rains in the southern province of Trang on Saturday (April 14).

Search and rescue authorities believe that another 30 may still be missing after being swept away by a sudden surge of water descending from waterfalls in the Bantad Hill Range. Trang governor Arnon Manasvanich said that several of the victims had been swimming along the cascading Sai Roong and Prai Sawan falls, an annual tradition for new year's holidaymakers, when flood waters swept them away. Persistent rain still continued to hamper rescue operations.

Thailand – 17.04.2007: The insurgency in the restive south continues to escalate as four people were shot dead and five schools were razed to the ground by suspected Muslim separatist guerrillas in Yala and Pattani provinces. Meanwhile earlier today, rail services on the main line through the Muslim-dominated provinces in the south to the Malaysian border were suspended due to shots being fired at a train that wounded three passengers. More than 2,000 people have died in three years of separatist violence in the provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla.

Thailand – 18.04.2007: Suspected Islamist insurgents managed to blackout 80 percent of the provincial capital in Narathiwat by detonating three bombs at electricity poles early Wednesday. A fourth bomb seriously injured Deputy Police chief Colonel Noppodol Pueksopol when he was inspecting one of the scenes of the pre-dawn blasts. Two more bombs were detonated in Pattani City, Pattani causing blackouts in the city.

Thailand – 18.04.2007: Two road construction workers were killed, including one beheading, in Thailand's troubled south. Analysts expect that the Islamist insurgents will spread and intensify the violence in the hope that it will trigger a stern military response which would strengthen local support amongst local Muslims.

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Belgium – 13.04.2007: Brussels International Airport were closed on Friday due to an unexpected wildcat strike by fire-fighters and security officials. The closure was due to the inadequate safety standards that would be left in the wake of the picketing workers. Runway safety was of paramount concern for the officials who declared the closure with no emergency fire-fighters standing by in the event of a disaster. The airport remains closed and officials will not re-open it in the immediate future. The airport handles 700 flights a day and the closure caused chaos for anyone attempting to fly into Brussels. An estimated 25,000 people were thought to be affected.

Belgium / Regional Dengue Fever Outbreak – 19.04.2007: The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in Brussels released its fourth assessment report on global warming a few weeks back with nearly 2,500 climate scientists contributing to the report that concluded with a dire forecast. According to the report nearly one-third of all flora and fauna would face extinction while billions of people would be affected by severe water shortages with Asian and African countries suffering the most. Malaria, diarrhoea, dengue fever, tick-borne diseases, heat-related deaths will rise with global warming. Mass migration due to resource depletion will further add to this proliferation of diseases. South and Southeast Asia along with Latin America are already currently at the beginning or in the midst of dengue fever outbreaks. In Mexico, health officials have recorded a 600 percent increase in cases since 2001 which they attribute to climate change and mass migration. Indonesia has recorded 40 deaths from the 11,000 cases reported since the beginning of the year. Officials in Jakarta noted that the number of cases in the first three months of the year has already surpassed half the total from 2006. Due to recent outbreaks in select global areas, travellers are strongly advised to consult a physician and / or travel health specialist prior to departing for countries considered to be at high risk to the aforementioned diseases.

Cyprus / UK – 13.04.2007: A Cypriot MEP was arrested by British military authorities for committing "alleged acts of criminal damage" on British military territory. The ar-

rest of Marios Matsakis, who has long been opposed to the presence of British troops on the island, prompted the Cypriot government to lodge an official protest to the UK government. There are fears that his arrest will lead to large-scale anti-UK protests as evidenced in 2000 when Matsakis was detained on similar charges.

France – 15.04.2007: The latest bombings in Algeria and Morocco have raised awareness in France of the terrorist threat in the country. Security measures in France are already high on the eve of the presidential elections next weekend and the country is on the red alert level, the third highest out of four, the highest being scarlet. Former interior minister and presidential contestant Nicolas Sarkozy said "the main terrorist threat in France comes from Algeria".

France – 17.04.2007: France's presidential campaign has entered its final week on Monday, with Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal struggling to stay in the race against right-wing favourite Nicolas Sarkozy. With at least a third of the electorate still undecided ahead of Sunday's first-round vote, the final stretch of rallies and debates is to play a crucial role in anchoring swing voters. France, and its undecided voters, will be very wary of the late charge made by far-right candidate Jean-Marie le Pen in 2002.

France – 19.04.2007: Twin bomb blasts shook residents in the southwestern towns of Ciboure and Saint-Jean-de-Luz on Wednesday evening with a third explosive device in Guethary failing to detonate. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the explosions that caused minor structural damage to an estate agent in Saint-Jean-de-Luz while the other utterly destroyed an apartment building in Ciboure. An hour prior to the explosions, authorities were alerted to the threats by an anonymous telephone caller, but questions as to who or why is still confounding local officials.

Italy – 13.04.2007: Italian riot police have clashed with hundreds of Chinese merchants in Milan, after scuffles broke out over traffic controls in the city's busy Chinatown district. 14 police were injured and two cars were destroyed as protesters threw plastic bottles and rubbish

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bins at police armed with batons. Officials said the protest started when traffic police, who want to tighten control of commercial traffic in the area full of wholesale clothing stores, fined a driver and took away his licence because he was carrying merchant goods in a private car. Protesters complained of police violence, with some saying one had been hit with the butt of a pistol. Milan's deputy mayor has denied this claim. The outburst sparked reaction from some political groups who called for tougher controls on immigration. The issue could become particularly inflammatory with emotive tensions rising on all sides.

Poland – 17.04.2007: In what is seen as a move to discipline his party and parliamentary allies, Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski warned them on Tuesday to close ranks by threatening potential early elections. Poland currently finds itself amidst a fierce debate over abortion, raising the prospect of deputies leaving the PM's party and depriving the government of its current parliamentary majority. With regular elections are scheduled for 2009 most observers have noted that Kaczynski has made similar threats in the past and point out the country's strong economic fundamentals.

Russia – 15.04.2007: St. Petersburg braced itself today for another mass gathering of the Other Russia movement, a loose coalition consisting of political groups from both sides of the political spectrum, following yesterday's "Dissenters' Rally" in Moscow where riot police *en masse* tried to prevent the throngs of opposition supporters from gathering in Moscow's Pushkin Square. Images plastered throughout the global media showed police beating protestors defying the banned rally. Garry Kasparov, an opposition leader for the United Civil Front and former world chess champion was shown on television being corralled into a police bus by riot police while shouting anti-government slogans. Some 9,000 police regulars and paramilitary OMON personnel were on hand to prevent the banned protest from taking place which led to the arrests of about 200 political activists. There were concerns that demonstrations in St. Petersburg may spiral out of control but although there was a huge display of police force surrounding the demonstration the actual turnout of protesters was not as large as

organisers had hoped. There were however clashes between smaller groups and police after the main rally finished and several opposition leaders were arrested.

Russia – 16.04.2007: Reports from St. Petersburg indicate that political protestors received beatings at the hands of riot police during a second day of heated political demonstrations by the Other Russia movement across the country. Riot police blocking the officially-permitted route moved into the crowd and beat demonstrators, whilst some participants tossed bottles and stones at police lines. The Other Russia opposition coalition, which includes liberals, nationalists and communists, is united by a disdain for Putin's rule. Activists have vowed to intensify street protests in advance of parliamentary and presidential elections over the next 12 months.

Russia – 18.04.2007: Moscow recorded another racially-motivated hate crime with the murder of a Tajik national who was stabbed to death by two unidentified assailants on Monday. Local Moscow press reported that the 27-year-old victim had over 35 stab wounds. The murder further substantiates claims made by human rights groups and security analysts that Russia is in the midst of a growing tide of xenophobic sentiments which can lead to fatal acts of hate crimes.

Russia – 19.04.2007: Prior to the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birthday (April 20), foreign students at Moscow's Sechenov Moscow Medical Academy were warned by officials to refrain from leaving campus over the weekend for fear of an attack by right-wing extremists. Students residing in dormitories were told to stock up on sustenance and warned that the university would be under lockdown until Sunday. Other universities were expected to follow similar procedures. According to the Moscow-based human rights group, Sova, 53 people were killed and 460 more injured in racially-motivated crimes.

Serbia / Kosovo – 18.04.2007: The UN has concluded its investigation into the deaths of two ethnic Albanian protestors who were killed as a result of being shot with rubber bullets that were used passed their use-by date. The incident occurred during pro-independence demon-

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strations on February 10 when the Romanian contingent of a UN police force tried to control the riotous crowd with rubber bullets and tear gas. A report released by the UN investigation team concluded that the bullets had hardened with age and that the soldiers could be liable for criminal prosecution. The deaths caused panic among UN security forces in Kosovo who feared of a possible backlash by the ethnic Albanian community in the breakaway province.

Serbia / Kosovo – 19.04.2007: In a thinly veiled threat issued on Wednesday Serbian President Boris Tadic stated that granting independence to Kosovo against Belgrade's wishes would bring instability to the Balkan region and the European continent. Serbia says it would never recognise any move to take away its territory in violation of international law, which could set a dangerous precedent, and that Kosovo could become a lawless state. Tadic was referring to the UN independence plan for Kosovo that is backed by the US and the EU but opposed by Russia.

Turkey / USA – 13.04.2007: The United States on Thursday urged Turkey not to resort to a cross-border military operation to crack down on separatist guerrillas in neighbouring Iraq. According to a spokesman from the US State Department "Turkey's army chief argued publicly earlier Thursday in favour of a military incursion into northern Iraq to crack down on Turkish Kurd rebels there. Certainly that's an option that everybody should work to avoid." Turkey's military has been engaged in increasingly hostile fighting with the outlawed PKK and the US clearly fears that pursuing the PKK into Iraqi Kurdistan will be detrimental to stability in northern Iraq.

Turkey – 14.04.2007: In protests in support of secularism, tens of thousands of people, according to some reports at least 100,000, gathered in the capital Ankara only two days before the presidential election process begins. The protesters are opposed to current PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan's potential standing for the presidential elections as they fear he will follow an Islamic agenda. In the past Erdogan has denied such charges. The protest is taking place near the mausoleum of the country's most revered leader, Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the

Turkish republic as a secular state. The current president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who steps down in May, only recently warned that the threat to Turkey of Islamic radicalism was stronger than ever.

Turkey – 16.04.2007: Clashes in southeast Turkey between Kurdish separatists and government forces left up to nine guerrillas dead and one soldier wounded. Fighting with rebels from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was reported in the provinces of Tunceli, Siirt and Hakkari where the Turkish military have stepped up their campaign to thwart another spring offensive. Up to 10,000 troops have taken part in counter-terrorism operations in the region in recent weeks. Turkey's military has been engaged in increasingly hostile fighting with the outlawed PKK and the US clearly fears that pursuing the PKK into Iraqi Kurdistan will be detrimental to stability in northern Iraq. Last week's Turkish military chief Gen. Yasar Buyukanit announced that his government would take preemptive measures to stifle any militant uprising by Kurdish separatists such as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and their shadowy brethren, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK). Buyukanit has been a strong advocate of invading northern Iraq to quash the Kurdish militancy much to the annoyance and opposition of the American and Iraqi governments. There are mounting concerns that Turkey will take unilateral measures by making an incursion into Iraq to flush out Kurdish guerrillas from their safe havens, but experts agree that such a move would contribute to the further destabilisation of a region that is already bogged down in seemingly insurmountable security dilemmas.

Turkey – 16.04.2007: The presidential campaigning kicks off today and the question on most Turkish citizens' minds is whether or not incumbent Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan of the of the Islamic-based AK Party will run for office. A large rally on Saturday (April 14) in Ankara involving an estimated 300,000 protested in favour of keeping the country a secular state and urged Erdogan not to run for the presidency. The registration period will end on April 25 and most analysts believe that the next president will come from Erdogan's AK Party which holds a massive majority in parliament. Turkey can count on further protests during the presidential registration pe-

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riod.

Turkey – 19.04.2007: Assailants tied up three people at a publishing house that distributes Bibles in Turkey and then slit their throats, adding to a string of attacks apparently targeting the country's tiny Christian minority. The killings occurred in Malatya, a city in central Turkey known as a hotbed of Turkish nationalism. Turkish police detained four suspects and were investigating whether another man who suffered head injuries when he jumped from the window of the publisher's office may have been involved in the attack. The German Embassy said one victim was German; another has been confirmed as Turkish while the nationality of the third victim remains undisclosed.

Ukraine – 13.04.2007: Adding to the climate of political uncertainty Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has said that his order to dissolve the parliament and hold new elections will stand. Yushchenko said his decree must be fulfilled, and described it as a legitimate response to an attempt by Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and his parliamentary majority to usurp power. However, Yushchenko has added that he could put off the election date from May 27 if there was sufficient political desire. Such a move could allow the parliament to return to work at least temporarily to pass necessary election law changes, and give all parties more time to prepare.

Ukraine – 19.04.2007: Thousands of opponents of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich blocked the entrances to Ukraine's Constitutional Court, delaying a second day of hearings into the legality of the president's decree to dissolve parliament. Both President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yanukovich have agreed to abide by the court's ruling, but the bloc of former premier Yulia Tymoshenko and political parties allied with Yushchenko have contended that the court is too corrupt to render a just decision.

Middle East

Gaza Strip – 16.04.2007: An e-mail on Sunday that claims that the BBC's missing correspondent Alan Johnston had been killed by Islamist kidnappers has caused deep concern within the broadcaster whilst government officials in the UK are investigating the unconfirmed news. Mr Johnston has not been heard from since March the 12th. The e-mail was signed in the name of the Tawhid and Jihad Brigades, names similar to ones used by movements affiliated to al-Qaeda Islamists.

Gaza Strip / Israel – 16.04.2007: According to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, he is to lead a concerted drive amongst his security forces in a bid to secure the borders in the volatile Gaza Strip. The move will aim to prevent the smuggling of weapons in through the Sinai Peninsula border with Egypt in the south and halt the flow of qassam rocket fire into Israel from the north. In response Israeli spokesmen declared that the news was clearly positive but they remain sceptical until actual improvements on the ground are witnessed.

Iran / US – 14.04.2007: *The Washington Post* reported in its Friday (April 12) edition that the US government had no intention of releasing five Iranian detainees captured in January in the northern enclave of Kirkuk any time soon. The five are senior members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which has repeatedly been accused by the American government of inciting instability in Iraq and supplying arms and training to Iraqi insurgents. The issue has caused much agitation between Washington and Tehran and has been enveloped in the Iranian nuclear standoff further adding to the complexities of regional security.

Iran – 16.04.2007: Iran on Sunday asked for bids to build two new nuclear power stations alongside a still unfinished facility in the south, despite increasing Western pressure over its atomic drive. The southern city of Bushehr is where Iran's first nuclear power plant is being built by a Russian contractor. But its completion, due this year, has been repeatedly delayed. Iran is launching two tenders for the construction of two nuclear power stations of between 1,000 and 1,600 megawatts capacity in Bushehr. Tehran has refused to give in to western

demands to cease its activities and has pressed ahead with its nuclear programme, saying uranium enrichment has now reached an "industrial phase."

Iran / USA – 19.04.2007: US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff with Iran over its nuclear program are "working." Gates made the optimistic comments during a stopover in Israel, the third leg of his current Middle East tour. Apparently re-emphasising the US' commitment to negotiations over pre-emptive strikes over Iran Gates said of current sanctions: "These things don't work overnight, but it seems to me clearly the preferable course to keep our focus on the diplomatic initiatives and particularly because of the united front of the international community at this point."

Iraq – 13.04.2007: The death toll from blast at parliament climbed to eight including two Sunni parliamentarians. Iraqi security sources revealed that the suicide bomber, who slipped through one of the tightest security measures in Baghdad to enter the parliamentary canteen, was believed to be a bodyguard of a Sunni legislator not present during the explosion. According to US officials, the audacious act bore all the hallmarks of al-Qaida in Iraq who oppose the US occupation and Sunni leaders siding with the American government. The bombing followed another suicide explosion at the al-Sarafiya bridge which demolished the bridge and killed ten people. As Baghdad enters its ninth week of the joint Iraq-US security clampdown, yesterday's events promises to usher in further spectacular attacks in the capital.

Iraq – 15.04.2007: At least 40 people were wounded and many more injured in a suicide attack near a Shi'ite shrine in the Iraqi holy city of Kerbala on Saturday. The latest car bomb could trigger a renewed wave of sectarian violence; attacks at or near shrines have proven highly provocative in the past. The bombing of a Shi'ite shrine in Samarra in February 2006 unleashed sectarian violence that pushed Iraq to the brink of civil war. In other events a suicide car bomber struck in Baghdad near a checkpoint at the southern Jadriyah bridge, killing 10 people. This was the second major attack on a bridge in the past three days.

Middle East

Iraq – 16.04.2007: The political movement of US critic, Shiite cleric and militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr said its six ministers would leave the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Monday. The influential cleric and militia leader announced that his bloc would leave the government over accusations that Maliki has failed to set a timetable for the departure of foreign troops from the country. The Sadr bloc holds 30 of the 275 seats in the Iraqi parliament and is a strong Shiite political force. Initial suggestions from Iraqi political analysts have stated that the move may be unlikely to cause a complete collapse of Maliki's government but could cause shockwaves in the Shiite bloc that holds a total of 130 seats.

Iraq – 17.04.2007: Six cabinet ministers loyal to the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr quit the government on Monday weakening the legitimacy of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Sadr bloc resigned en masse due to the failure of the Maliki government to draft a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from the war-torn country. Fears are mounting that the political move may pave the way for further instability on the ground as there has been an upsurge in sectarian deaths allegedly perpetrated by Sadr's Mahdi Army, the bane of American and Iraqi security forces.

Iraq – 18.04.2007: Total carnage was created in Baghdad when four car bombs exploded across the city in separate incidents killing at least 157 people. Most of the casualties were recorded in Shiite-dominated area of Sadriya, central Baghdad, where a car bomb killed 82 people and wounded a further 94. At the entrance of Sadr City, an explosives-laden vehicle rammed into a police checkpoint killing at least 30 people. Two more car bombings occurred in Karradah and Risafi killing dozens and wounding scores more. Despite heightened security measures that saw a dip in incidences of violence over the past couple of months, Baghdad is witnessing an upsurge in spectacular bombings that seem dispel any notion of it becoming a safer place.

Iraq / Turkey – 18.04.2007: Ambitious gains by Kurds in Iraq is causing concern with the Turkish government who fear that such gains in regional-autonomy for Kurd-

ish strongholds in northern Iraq and economic independence through the annexation of the oil city of Kirkuk will add fuel to the perpetual Kurdish separatist movement in southern Turkey. Recently Iraqi Kurds won concessions from Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that paved the way for them to resettle thousands of Sunni Arabs from Kirkuk thus enabling them to establish a stronger foothold in the region. Ankara has already called on Baghdad to crack down on Kurdish separatists who use Iraq as a safe haven from Turkish security forces; the Kurd issue is causing further strain on Baghdad-Ankara relations.

Iraq – 19.04.2007: The widespread devastation that gripped areas of the capital Baghdad on Wednesday has seen the death toll rise to at least 183 according to latest reports. This would make April 18 the fourth bloodiest day in Iraq in the past 16 months and reiterates the increasingly apparent trend of major suicide and vehicle borne explosions targeting Shiite areas of the Iraqi capital. Although US officials maintain that overall sectarian violence has decreased since the launch of the February 14 security clampdown, recent bombings and attacks appears to dispel the myth that Baghdad is becoming safer.

Palestinian Territories / Israel – 14.04.2007: Prior to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's scheduled Sunday meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, a spokesman for the Palestinian Authority has hinted that the two leaders will have a general discussion on the possibility of embarking upon the US-proposed two-state solution. An official from Olmert's office said that talks would primarily focus on security and humanitarian issues. The Olmert-Abbas summit is due to take place in Jerusalem on April 15 (Sunday) where security has been bolstered in anticipation of any terrorist attacks.

Palestinian Authority / Israel – 15.04.2007: Ahead of today's anticipated meeting between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, there were high hopes that the two would be able to overcome some of the myriad of obstacles that are preventing the Middle East peace process from becoming a reality. The Olmert-Abbas meeting took place

Calendar

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

April 22nd — 28th

22nd

France: First round of presidential elections are scheduled to take place with the possibility of tensions enflaming in suburbs of the major French cities.

Philippines: The Palarang Pambansa games are being held in Koranadal City, Mindinao and are likely to be a highly attractive target for the active terrorist groups in the region. The games will last until April 28th and a US travel advisory warning has been issued.

Syria: Parliamentary elections are scheduled to be held in Syria.

23rd

Turkey: Independence Day celebrations could prove a viable target for separatists and militants.

24th

Israel: Independence Day celebrations could prove a viable target for terrorist attacks.

27th

Sierra Leone: Independence day celebrations could cause disruption to travel plans.

Togo: Independence day celebrations could cause disruption to travel plans.

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

Afghanistan / Bolivia / Burma / Colombia / Georgia / Indonesia / Israel / Italy / Lebanon / Maldives / Mali / Nepal / Nigeria / Palestinian Territories / Thailand / Uganda

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

Public Announcements: Global Terrorist Threat / Guinea / Mexico

Travel Warnings: Afghanistan / DR Congo / Sri Lanka

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