

# Pakistan fired on rebels on Afghan border: Nato

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan fired on militants who attacked a Nato outpost on the Afghan border, the alliance said yesterday, an example of the cooperation seen as vital against the rising power of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Relations between Pakistan and the US are under strain because of a wave of American missile strikes on militant strongholds in Pakistan, including one on Wednesday that the government condemned as a "grave provocation."

However, Nato and US officials say coordination between security forces along both sides of the mountainous frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan is improving.

A statement from the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force said insurgents hit one of its remote bases and a nearby Afghan border checkpoint with rockets in the eastern province of Paktika on Tuesday.

"After the attacks, Isaf contacted the Pakistani military for support. The Pakistani military then launched a

mortar strike on the insurgents' firing location inside Pakistan," it said.

There were no reports of Nato or Pakistani casualties. Nato didn't mention any militant losses.

Pakistani military officials were not immediately available for comment.

However, the army released a brief statement from Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani urging an end to the missile strikes.

Addressing Nato defence chiefs in Brussels on Wednesday, Kayani "highlighted the need to reinforce Pakistan's effort and operate in a coordinated manner within respective national boundaries," the statement said.

According to Pakistani officials, at least two missiles destroyed a house in Pakistan's Bannu district before dawn on Wednesday.

Bannu adjoins North Waziristan, part of the tribal belt where Pakistan's government has little control and which is considered a possible hiding place for al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Pakistani officials said they were

investigating whether an al-Qaeda member identified as Abdullah Azam al-Saudi and other militants were among about six people killed.

Villagers and a local lawmaker insisted all were civilians, though provide no details on the victims' identity.

The United States has staged some 20 missile strikes and at least one commando assault inside Pakistan since August, a barrage seen as a sign of Washington's frustration with the inability of its nuclear-armed ally to curb militants blamed for rising attacks in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's government complains that the attacks fan already widespread anti-American sentiment in Pakistan and undermine its own growing efforts to combat militants.

However, the country relies heavily on US financial aid and has not gone beyond voicing criticism. Some experts question whether the leadership secretly condones the attacks while speaking out publicly against them something the government denies.



PHOTO: AFP

The Liberian-flagged oil tanker MV Sirius Star is at anchor on Wednesday off the coast of Somalia. The Saudi-owned very large crude carrier was hijacked by Somali pirates on Nov 15 about 450 nautical miles off the coast of Kenya and forced to proceed to anchorage near Harardhere, Somalia. The company operating the Saudi super-tanker seized by pirates remained tight-lipped on Wednesday on reported negotiations for a ransom.



PHOTO: AFP

People are seen at the scene after a pre-dawn bomb blast inside a demonstration site at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. At least one Thai anti-government protester was killed and 21 were wounded in front of a stage at the Government House compound, which protesters from the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) occupied in late August.

## Iraqi parliament likely to approve US pact

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's parliament appeared likely to approve a comprehensive US military pact that would see all troops leave by the end of 2011 despite a loud and contentious debate of the measure yesterday.

Lawmakers succeeded in holding a second reading of the agreement after hardline Shia nationalists had shouted down the deal Wednesday but the session was punctuated by shouting, interruptions, and desk-pounding.

Followers of the hardline anti-US Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr are fiercely opposed to any agreement with the US "occupier" and his loyalists in parliament have struggled to derail the deal by stalling the discussion off.

But the measure appeared to have won the support of the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the largest bloc in the 275-member assembly with 86 seats, and the Kurdish bloc which holds 50 seats.

The measure requires a simple majority of 138 votes for approval.

UIA vice president Ali al-Adeeb told parliament that "all the fears our brothers in parliament are talking about, the Iraqi negotiators have taken them into account. They were not absent. The negotiators have done very well."

But parliament speaker Mahmud Mashhadani, speaking on behalf of the Sunni Concord Front and a Sunni independent bloc, which together hold 47 total seats, said his group would make "requests" regarding the text.

## Nobel winners highlight edn as tool for peace

AFP, London

Thirty-one Nobel Peace Prize winners urged world leaders yesterday to devote more attention to an estimated 37 million children who live in conflict-affected countries and cannot go to school.

In a joint statement, the Dalai Lama, former US president Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu and Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi among others called for urgent action to improve education to help build peace in those nations.

"War and conflict are perpetrated by adults. But every adult was once a child and grew up with experiences and guidance that shaped their lives. At the heart of this lies education," they said.

## Red Sea nations in emergency talks on Somali piracy

AFP, Cairo

Arab Red Sea states were holding an emergency meeting in Cairo on Thursday to discuss the threat of piracy off Somalia, with Egypt saying all options were on the table to deal with the growing crisis.

Senior officials from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen met for the talks amid growing international frustration over a situation described by the International Maritime Bureau as "out of control."

Pirates at the weekend seized the Saudi-owned Sirius Star oil tanker, the largest ship yet taken and the attack further threatened away from Somalia.

The hijackers are demanding 25 million dollars in ransom for the ship and its cargo of 100 million dollars of oil, one of the pirates told AFP on Thursday.

With three more ships captured since the Sirius Star was taken, foreign ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said Egypt would consider all possibilities in dealing with the crisis.

"The Egyptian national security establishment works intensively on all options, examines what measures could be taken in this regard, and decides whether a diplomatic and political solution will be preferred."

"All options are open," Egypt's official MENA news agency quoted him as saying.

## IAEA makes little headway on Syria, Iran

AFP, Vienna

The UN atomic watchdog on Wednesday reported scant progress in its investigations into alleged suspect nuclear activities in both Iran and Syria.

In its first official report on the Syrian dossier, the International Atomic Energy Agency said it could not yet determine if a building in a remote site in the Syrian desert bombed by Israeli planes last year was a nuclear reactor, as the United States claims.

The IAEA also complained that it had made no "substantive" progress in its six-year investigation into Iran's disputed nuclear activities.

Both matters are set to top the agenda of the traditional November meeting of the IAEA's 35-member board of

governors next week.

The watchdog dispatched a team of experts to Damascus in June to investigate US allegations that Syria had been building a clandestine nuclear facility with North Korean help.

However, an official close to the agency said Wednesday that the IAEA was "not in a situation to say that it was a nuclear reactor" even if "we cannot exclude that it was one."

In the restricted report, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, the IAEA said: "While it cannot be excluded that the building in question was intended for non-nuclear use, the features of the building... along with the connectivity of the site to adequate pumping capacity of cooling water are similar to what may be found in connection with a reactor site."

## Jordan king meets Abbas after 'secret' Israeli talks

### Palestinians push Arab peace plan

AFP, Amman/ Jerusalem

Jordan's King Abdullah II held talks yesterday with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas two days after Israeli leaders made a clandestine visit to the kingdom, a senior Jordanian official said.

The meeting took place at the kingdom's southern Red Sea resort of Aqaba, the official said as the palace declined to comment on this week's Jordanian-Israeli talks.

According to Israeli public radio, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defence Minister Ehud Barak made a secret visit to Jordan on Tuesday and met with the king.

During the meeting the Jordanian monarch urged the Israeli leaders to refrain from launching a large-scale military operations in the Gaza Strip, the radio reported on Thursday citing a

senior Israeli official.

The radio said the king took the initiative to seek to avoid a confrontation that might also cause trouble in his country, home to many Palestinians.

Olmert's press secretary declined to comment on the report when contacted by AFP in Jerusalem.

The palace also declined to confirm or deny the report.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority published a full-page ad in Israeli newspapers on Thursday promoting a peace plan calling for Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for an end to the occupation.

Yediot Aharonot, Maariv and Haaretz, the three leading Israeli dailies, printed the advertisement, which is headed by the Palestinian and Israeli flags.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians queue to buy bread at a bakery in Gaza City on Wednesday. Israeli authorities tightened their blockade and completely sealed off the Palestinian territory on November 5 in response to rocket attacks by Gaza militants. Since then it opened a fuel terminal for two days to allow the delivery of EU-funded diesel to Gaza's sole power station, and let in 33 truckloads of basic supplies on November 17.

## Rebels fighting pro-govt militia in DR Congo

AFP, Kiwanja

Fighting broke out yesterday between Laurent Nkunda's rebel force and pro-government militia in the east of Democratic Republic of Congo, several sources reported.

The fresh clashes happened at the villages of Katoro and Nyongera, near Kiwanja in Nord-Kivu province, a security source at Kiwanja who asked to remain anonymous told AFP.

The source said that as well as the rebels and the Mai-Mai militia, the fighting might also involve government troops and possibly Rwandan Hutu rebels.

"The CNDP are trying to dislodge us from Katoro," said Mai-Mai spokesman Didier Bitaki of Nkunda's National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP).

CNDP spokesman Bertrand Bisimwa said the use of heavy weapons meant that government troops and Rwandan Hutu rebels were involved in the fighting. The Hutu force was fighting alongside the government soldiers, he said.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman carries some of her belongings on Wednesday on the main road crossing the North Kivu town of Kayna in DR Congo. The town was the scene of an armed clash Tuesday in a "friendly fire" incident with government forces. Government soldiers looted villages and attacked local people after the incident, according to the leader of the Mai-Mai militia, General Lafontaine.

## S Koreans float more propaganda leaflets into North

AP, Seoul

South Korean activists sent propaganda leaflets over the border Thursday into North Korea, ignoring their own government's pleas to stop the practice and threats from the North to sever relations if it continues.

North Korea announced last week it would ban border crossings starting Dec. 1, citing the South Korean government's refusal to clamp down on "confrontational" activities, including the leafletting.

South Korean officials implored activists Wednesday to stop sending the leaflets critical of leader Kim Jong Il and his authoritarian regime, saying the campaign threatens to heighten tensions with the North.

Relations between the two Koreas have been tense since conservative South Korean President Lee Myung-bak took office in February pledging to get tough with the North.

However, activists went ahead Thursday and sent about 10 huge helium balloons each stuffed with some 10,000 flyers across the heavily fortified border.

## Obama taps Daschle to lead health drive

AFP, Washington

Barack Obama picked former Senate leader Tom Daschle to end the US healthcare crisis and stocked his White House staff with loyal campaign aides, as new contenders emerged Thursday for key cabinet posts.

The president-elect, who takes office in January, spent Wednesday in his Chicago transition office, but a Democratic official said he had asked ex-South Dakota senator Daschle to be health and human services secretary.

Obama was also reported to have candidates in mind to head the key departments of Homeland Security and Commerce. US media reported he was likely to name Democratic Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, 50, to run the Department of Homeland Security, which was created following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the United States.

The popular two-term governor was an early Obama supporter and has been frequently mentioned as a possible cabinet member. On Thursday the Washington Post cited Democratic sources as saying Napolitano was Obama's choice for secretary of homeland security. On Wednesday she downplayed the prospects of joining the administration, saying she was "not campaigning nor seeking a job." CBS News reported on its website.

Chicago billionaire businesswoman Penny Pritzker, 49, is the leading candidate to be commerce secretary, CNN reported citing multiple sources.

Pritzker, an heir of the Chicago family that founded the Hyatt chain of hotels, raised record amounts of money as Obama's national finance chair for his campaign.

Both women would accept the positions if offered, the sources told CNN.

Daschle, 60, will be tasked with shepherding healthcare reform legislation through Congress in line with Obama's campaign vow to revamp the US medical system to help 45 million Americans who have no health insurance.

The last major healthcare reform attempt by a Democratic president, piloted by Hillary Clinton during her husband Bill Clinton's administration, ended in a notorious failure.

More than a decade on, there was no indication Wednesday on whether the former first lady would accept Obama's overtures concerning the key post of secretary of state.

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