

# A year full of conflict

World works to contain violence on many fronts

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The Associated Press

Rockets lit up the skies over Iraq and Lebanon and bloodied the streets below. Iran and North Korea both grew bolder in their nuclear brinkmanship. And a thwarted plot to blow up jetliners rattled nerves on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 2006, a world weary of war grappled with a new slew of security threats, struggled to contain violence and misery in Sudan, and witnessed the U.S. president weakened at the ballot box.

It now seems vulnerable on other fronts, too: Voracious demand for energy from China and India raised concerns about sustainable resources and global climate change, and Vladimir Putin's newly confident Russia translated its oil wealth into new — some say dangerous — clout.

## Rumsfeld resigns

Civilian and military casualties mounted in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein was convicted of mass murder and sentenced to hang. With Iraq in political disarray, and the U.S. body count approaching 3,000, a disillusioned American electorate handed President Bush a rebuke by putting Democrats in charge of Congress. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld resigned.

Iraq's shadow over the U.S. presidential campaign darkened and deepened when a bipartisan commission said Bush's policy "is not working" and suggested withdrawing most American combat troops by early 2008.

The West's standoff with Iran over its suspect nuclear program rose another notch: The U.N. Security Council slapped the Islamic republic with sanctions as a defiant Tehran raced to bring its first nuclear power plant on line in late 2007.

## Korea tests bomb

The stakes also increased dramatically with North Korea, which tested a nuclear bomb in October. Pyongyang agreed to resume long-stalled international disarmament talks, but much of Asia — well within striking distance — remained wary.

Hezbollah militants in Lebanon fought a 34-day war with Israel that dealt another setback to Middle East peace hopes. Lebanon's Western-backed government was then engulfed in political turmoil.

Ehud Olmert became Israel's prime minister after Ariel Sharon was felled by a stroke and quickly faced multiple crises: The militant group Hamas' election victory in the Palestinian territories, the Lebanon fighting, Iran's nuclear ambitions and its president's calls to wipe Israel off the map.

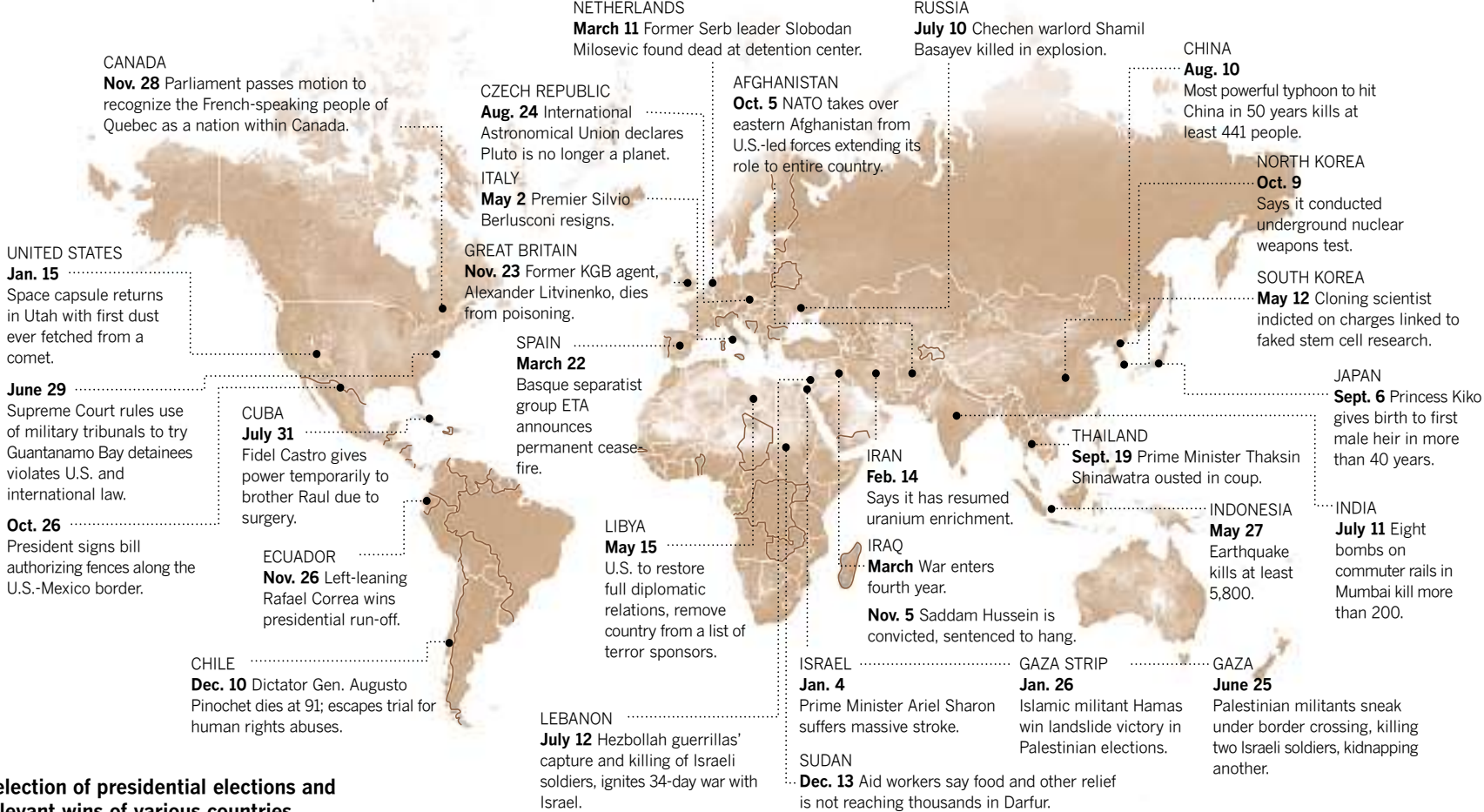
A U.S. airstrike eliminated one threat by killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq. But NATO forces in southern Afghanistan faced another: a resurgent Taliban waging a relentless war of roadside bombings and ambushes.

## Terrorist strike in India

Terrorists struck again, blowing up crowded trains and killing more than 200 commuters in Mumbai, India. British authorities said they narrowly thwarted a plot to

## World weary of wars

Selection of events from around the world  
— Countries with presidential elections



## Selection of presidential elections and relevant wins of various countries



Raul Castro took over as the leader of Cuba following the surgery to Fidel Castro.

rival the 9/11 attacks by downing multiple jets over the Atlantic — a sobering disclosure that swiftly led to tough new restrictions on the contents of carryon luggage.

Cartoons in European newspapers depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist triggered violent protests in the Islamic world. The firestorm flared anew when Pope Benedict XVI quoted a Byzantine emperor who characterized some of Muhammad's teachings as "evil and inhuman." The pope later expressed regret that his speech caused offense.

The 25-nation European

Union agreed to take in two more eastern countries in 2007 — ex-communist Bulgaria and Romania — but cooled on mostly Muslim Turkey's membership bid.

## Maps change

Maps of the Balkans became obsolete overnight when tiny Montenegro gained independence, completing the long and tumultuous breakup of Yugoslavia. At the United Nations, South Korea's Ban Ki-moon was elected to take over Jan. 1 from Kofi Annan as the first Asian to lead the world body in 35 years.

Fears of a killer pandemic

briefly swept the globe when four Turkish children succumbed to bird flu, but the virus seemed to vanish as quickly as it surfaced. Not so with AIDS, an old nemesis: The United Nations said 39.5 million people were living with HIV and nearly 3 million died in 2006 alone.

## Quakes kill thousands

Other disasters struck: An earthquake killed 5,800 people and destroyed 135,000 homes in Java, Indonesia, and scientists sounded fresh warnings about global warming.

Violence worsened in Sudan's western Darfur region, where fighting between rebels and government forces has killed more than 200,000 people. The U.N., desperate to avoid a full-blown humanitarian disaster, approved a 20,000-strong peacekeeping force, but Sudan blocked its deployment for months.

A decade of fighting by rebels trying to turn Nepal into a communist state ended with a cease-fire and peace talks, and ETA, Spain's armed Basque separatist group, laid down its arms.

But war flared anew in Sri Lanka — where at least 3,500 people died in clashes between the military and Tamil Tiger rebels — and Somalia's prime minister warned that the rise of Islamic militants made fresh conflict in the restive Horn of Africa "inevitable."

In several Latin American countries it was a good year for the left. Re-elected were firebrand Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, fresh from denouncing Bush before the U.N. as "the devil," and moder-

ate Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil. Former Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega returned to power in Nicaragua, and Evo Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous Indian president.

## Calderon wins

But in Mexico, conservative Felipe Calderon won a razor-thin victory over a leftist rival in an election judged honest by foreign observers yet challenged by prolonged leftist protest rallies.

Cubans prepared for a historic changing of the guard after 80-year-old leader Fidel Castro underwent intestinal surgery and temporarily ceded power.

Congo managed to elect a president, raising fragile hope

that the arena of Africa's worst fighting in the 1990s was finally finding peace.

Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian agent and fierce Kremlin critic, was fatally poisoned in London with radioactive polonium-210. Litvinenko blamed Putin, a leader increasingly beset by accusations that his government is resurrecting Soviet-era strong-arm tactics.

Even when the world played together at the 2006 Turin Olympics, it stumbled: Doping scandals marred the games.

Those who looked to the heavens for a little cosmic relief were disappointed. Earth's leading astronomers, intent on downsizing the solar system, stripped poor, pitiful Pluto of its longtime status as a planet.

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