

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD



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IRAN

1. **U.S. Describes Confrontation With Iranian Boats**
(*New York Times*)....Thom Shanker and Brian Knowlton
Five armed Iranian speedboats approached three United States Navy warships in international waters in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on Sunday, then maneuvered aggressively as radio threats were issued that the American ships would be blown up, military officials said Monday.
2. **Iranian Boats Press US Ships**
(*Boston Globe*)....Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman
Five Iranian gunboats threatened US warships in the Persian Gulf on Sunday, racing within striking distance of the three vessels before retreating, according to the US Navy's top officer, who called the provocative maneuvers "extremely unprofessional, unsafe, and unhelpful."
3. **U.S. Expresses Alarm After Iranian Boats Threaten Three American Vessels**
(*Washington Post*)....Robin Wright and Ann Scott Tyson
..."I found the action by the Iranians quite troubling, actually, and a matter of real concern," Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said yesterday while visiting the USS New Orleans in San Diego. "This is a very volatile area, and the risk of an incident ... escalating is real. I can't imagine what was on their minds."
4. **Persian Gulf Run-In Raises Specter Of Past Mission**
(*San Diego Union-Tribune*)....Steve Liewer
Retired Rear Adm. Guy Zeller of Coronado knows something about going muzzle to muzzle with the Iranian navy. Zeller led a battle group aboard the aircraft carrier Enterprise in the Persian Gulf during the late 1980s, when Iranian warships routinely harassed U.S. Navy and merchant vessels and planted mines in the strategic waterway.
5. **Chief Of U.N. Nuclear Agency To Meet With Iran's Leaders**
(*New York Times*)....Associated Press
Mohamed ElBaradei, the chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear monitoring agency, will visit Iran this week, his spokeswoman announced Monday.
6. **TV News Coverage From Pentagon Correspondents**
(*ABC, CBS, CNN*)....Jonathan Karl; Bob Orr; Barbara Starr
Three Monday evening reports on the naval confrontation between Iranian speedboats and U.S. ships.

GATES TRIP

7. **Gates Hears From Southland Troops**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Peter Spiegel
On his visit to Camp Pendleton and San Diego, the Defense secretary meets with sailors and Marines and recognizes their families' sacrifice.

8. **Gates Stops By To Chat With Enlisted Ranks**

(*San Diego Union-Tribune*)....Rick Rogers

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates took off his suit jacket, poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down at a table full of young Marines and sailors yesterday afternoon at Camp Pendleton.

IRAQ

9. **New Leaders Of Sunnis Make Gains In Influence**

(*Washington Post*)....Sudarsan Raghavan

U.S.-backed fighters find empowering role.

10. **Suicide Bomber Kills Key Sunni Leader**

(*New York Times*)....Richard A. Opiel Jr. and Mudhafer al-Husaini

Militants assassinated two key leaders of American-backed neighborhood militias in northern Baghdad over the past two days, highlighting the militants' strategy of eliminating militia commanders who have embraced partnerships with American forces but who themselves remain vulnerable to attack.

11. **Bomber Kills Security Figure In Baghdad**

(*Los Angeles Times*)....Kimi Yoshino

...Al Qaeda in Iraq may see Adhamiya, still a Sunni stronghold, as one of its last chances to stop the trend of insurgents joining forces with Americans. The area's volunteers represent one of the newer councils.

12. **Sunni Security Unit Leader, Colleagues Killed In Attack Encouraged By Bin Laden**

(*Washington Post*)....Amit R. Paley

...Sammarai, about 47 years old, was recruited last year by the American military to lead the Awakening group, which includes 700 fighters who are each paid about \$300 a month by the U.S. military, according to Sammarai's aides. Navy Rear Adm. Gregory J. Smith, a spokesman for U.S. forces in Iraq, said the spike in attacks carried out recently on the Awakening groups reflected their success in winning over residents and driving out insurgents.

13. **Bush To Highlight 'Diplomatic Surge'**

(*Washington Times*)....Jon Ward

President Bush will speak today by videoconference with members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghdad, part of the administration's effort to draw more notice to local political progress, one of the success stories in Iraq that the White House sees as underreported.

14. **U.S. Commander Says EFP Attacks Have Fallen Dramatically In 6 Months**

(*Mideast Stars and Stripes*)....Lisa Burgess

U.S. forces traveling Iraq's highways are seeing far fewer attacks from armor-piercing explosively formed penetrators compared to six months ago, according to one U.S. commander.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

15. **Many Troops Openly Gay, Group Says**

(*USA Today*)....Andrea Stone

Claims servicemembers not being discharged according to policy.

16. **Union Files Supreme Court Appeal Of NSPS Lawsuit**

(*GovExec.com*)....Brittany R. Ballenstedt

A federal labor union on Monday filed an appeal with the Supreme Court against the Defense Department's new personnel system.

ARMY

17. **General Readies For Iraq Mission**

(*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*)....Henry Cuningham

Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III said Monday that he expects to take charge of forces in Iraq in mid-February.

18. **4th Brigade Re-Enlistment Rate Leads Army**

(*Anchorage Daily News*)....George Bryson

...Among the Army's 37 combat brigades, the re-enlistment effort by the 4th Brigade (25th Infantry Division) -- in sheer numbers -- was second only to a larger brigade based in Fort Lewis, Wash., Goodwin said. But in percentage terms, the 4th brigade was tops.

19. **Army Support Specialists Help Soldiers Gain Injury Pay**

(*Colorado Springs Gazette*)....Tom Philpott

Too many severely injured troops and their families haven't been getting the help they need in preparing applications to qualify for up to \$100,000 in traumatic injury insurance. But that is going to change, Army Col. John Sackett said.

MARINE CORPS

20. **Marines Publicly Probe Shootings**

(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Associated Press

The Marine Corps launched a rare tribunal yesterday to publicly investigate disputed allegations that a special-forces unit killed as many as 19 Afghan civilians after the military convoy was rammed by a car bomb.

AIR FORCE

21. **Minot Nuke Handlers Still Not Ready For Inspection**

(*Air Force Times*)....Michael Hoffman

...So it's not surprising that a recently announced delay of the inspection, which had been planned for Jan. 23, has many observers wondering what's going on. It's been a little more than four months since airmen at Minot made the unprecedented mistake of unknowingly loading a B-52 with six nuclear warheads and flying them from North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

NATIONAL GUARD/RESERVE

22. **State Still Calling Out The Troops**

(*Tulsa World*)....Jim Myers

Oklahoma entered the new year as one of the top states in the number of its military troops mobilized, according to new figures released by the Department of Defense.

23. **2 Brothers Also In Band Of Brothers**

(*Chicago Tribune*)....Robert Channick

Marine reservists glad to serve in same unit in Iraq.

AFGHANISTAN

24. **2 Soldiers Killed By Roadside Bomb**

(*Los Angeles Times*)....Unattributed

A roadside bomb killed two U.S.-led coalition soldiers and wounded a third in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, officials said. Their nationalities were not released, but most of the troops in the area are American.

MIDEAST

25. **Oceana-Based Jets Collide In Gulf; Aviators Safe**

(*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*)....Matthew Jones

Two F/A-18 Super Hornets with the Truman Strike Group apparently collided in midair Monday in the Persian Gulf.

26. **Washington Visit Stresses U.S. Ties**

(*Washington Times*)....Nicholas Birch

Turkish President Abdullah Gul's White House visit today marks a watershed in U.S.-Turkey relations, which have dramatically improved since Washington began providing Ankara with intelligence on a Kurdish terrorist movement.

27. **Arabs Share Bush's Concerns Over Growing Power Of Iran**

(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Salah Nasrawi, Associated Press

Iran is the one issue where President Bush and Arab leaders have shared concerns. Ahead of the president's Mideast trip, Arab nations are eager to contain growing Iranian power, though they are wary of doing so militarily.

28. **Tsongas To Visit Troops Battling In The Mideast**
(Boston Globe)....Martin Finucane
 ...Tsongas, who won a special election in October in the Fifth Congressional District, will travel to both Iraq and Afghanistan. She will leave today and return Jan. 16. The trip will also include stops in Greece and Turkey. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the delegation will meet with troops, as well as military commanders and national leaders.

ASIA/PACIFIC

29. **North Korea Given Time To Send Data**
(New York Times)....Reuters
 North Korea's failure to meet a deadline to declare its nuclear activities should be confronted with patience and perseverance, a senior American envoy said here on Monday.
30. **China To Launch 17 Satellites This Year**
(New York Times)....Reuters
 China said it would launch 15 rockets, 17 satellites and its third mission with astronauts in 2008. Huang Qiang, secretary-general of the Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense, made the announcement at a news conference, the Xinhua news agency said.

BUSINESS

31. **Northrop To Compete To Build Humvee Successor**
(Wall Street Journal)....August Cole
 Northrop Grumman Corp. is seeking a contract potentially valued at billions of dollars to build vehicles to replace the Humvees that now provide basic transportation for the Army and Marine Corps.
32. **3 Firms Revise Helicopter Bids**
(Seattle Times)....Unattributed
 Boeing, Lockheed Martin and United Technologies' Sikorsky revised their bids to build a new combat search-and-rescue helicopter in an Air Force competition that has been twice delayed by losers' protests.
33. **Defense Contractors Arrested**
(Washington Times)....Jerry Seper
 Two Defense Department contractors were arrested in New York City on charges of conspiring to steal information relating to contracts to supply fuel to department aircraft worldwide.
34. **RAF Makes £500m Bid For Drone Bombers**
(London Daily Telegraph)....Thomas Harding
 The RAF has made a £500 million bid for a squadron of drone aircraft to seek and destroy Taliban forces in Afghanistan, it has been disclosed.

OPINION

35. **Iran 1, USA 0**
(New York Post)....Ralph Peters
 EARLY Sunday morning, the US Navy lost its nerve and guaranteed that American sailors will die at Iranian hands in the future.
36. **America's Upper Classes Have Gone AWOL**
(Christian Science Monitor)....Peter A. Gudmundsson
 During this presidential campaign, voters will hear much about the divergent economic realities between "the rich" and "the middle class." Yet there is another partition in America that is less visible, but no less troubling. The great divide between the civilian and military communities leaves the nation and its electorate ill-equipped to make informed judgments about military and international affairs.
37. **A Purple Heart In War Of Ideas?**
(Washington Times)....Frank J. Gaffney Jr.
 When the history of the George W. Bush administration is written, one of the most important questions to be addressed will surely be: Why did a president who repeatedly talked about the ideology animating our enemies in

this "War on Terror" do so little to wage an effective "War of Ideas" against it?

38. **Support Troops By Helping Them Heal From War Damages -- (Letters)**

(USA Today)...Melia Meichelbock

I empathize with the women USA TODAY interviewed for the cover story "Mental toll of war hitting female servicemembers." But I don't think these women represent the vast majority of female soldiers serving in Iraq.

CORRECTIONS

39. **Corrections**

(Washington Post)....The Washington Post

A Jan. 5 Page One article about Baghdad's protected Green Zone gave the wrong location for the 14th of July monument. It is at al-Kindi and 14th of July avenues.

New York Times
January 8, 2008
Pg. 1

1. U.S. Describes Confrontation With Iranian Boats

By Thom Shanker and Brian
Knowlton

WASHINGTON — Five armed Iranian speedboats approached three United States Navy warships in international waters in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on Sunday, then maneuvered aggressively as radio threats were issued that the American ships would be blown up, military officials said Monday.

The confrontation, which ended after just under 30 minutes without damage, shots fired or any injuries, took place during daylight on Sunday as the three American ships were entering the Persian Gulf.

On Monday, the senior Navy officer in the region, Vice Adm. Kevin J. Cosgriff, criticized the Iranian actions as “unnecessarily provocative.” Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, said the Iranians had acted in a “reckless and dangerous” manner.

Iranian officials played down the significance of the encounter. “This is an ordinary occurrence, which happens every now and then for both sides,” said Muhammad Ali Hosseini, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, as quoted by the state-run news agency IRNA.

But several Pentagon officials said the commander of a Navy destroyer involved in the episode had been on the verge of issuing an order to fire on one of the small, high-speed boats sailing near the American naval convoy.

The commander of the Hopper, a guided-missile destroyer, was “very close to giving the order to fire,” said one of the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak for attribution. “We were perilously close to an incident where we would have taken out at least one of the

Iranian small boats.”

The Hopper had trained an M240 machine gun — which fires upward of 10 armor-piercing slugs per second — on one of the Iranian boats that had pulled to within 200 yards of the American vessel, well within the gun’s range, Pentagon officials said. But before the order to fire was issued, the Iranian boat suddenly steered away from the Hopper.

The United States has conducted major war games to prepare for just the kind of event that unfolded over the weekend, because Navy officers have expressed concerns that the weaker Iranian fleet might choose to confront American warships by “swarming” with larger numbers of smaller craft.

Admiral Cosgriff, commander of the Fifth Fleet, said the episode was “more serious than we have seen,” in particular because it occurred in an important maritime choke point vital to the global economy.

“I am concerned with what I consider unnecessary and irresponsible maneuvering and behavior like this on the part of those patrol boats in, again, international waters in an area that’s traversed by numerous ships of all nations peacefully day in and day out,” he said during a video news conference from his headquarters in Bahrain.

In addition to the Hopper, the American ships involved in the episode were the cruiser Port Royal and the Ingraham, a frigate.

Commanders and crews sailing in the region are especially mindful of the damage small craft can inflict on American warships. In October 2000, 17 American sailors died when a small boat was detonated next to the destroyer Cole while it was docked for refueling in Yemen.

This is a time of considerable tensions between the countries, as President Bush is to visit the region for a

weeklong tour aimed both at encouraging Middle East talks and at conveying a message that Iran continues to pose a serious threat.

Defense Department and military officials said that as the Iranian boats neared the American vessels, a radio threat was issued that the American ships would explode. The verbal warnings broadcast over the internationally recognized bridge-to-bridge radio channel said, “I am coming at you, and you will explode in a few minutes,” an American official said.

Two of the Iranian boats also dropped boxes in the path of the final American ship in the maritime convoy. The boxes could have been mines or simply dummy boxes meant to test — and learn from — the reaction, officials said.

Defense Department officials said the five speedboats belonged to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Traditionally, the Revolutionary Guards maritime forces have operated in a far more hostile manner than the regular Iranian Navy. In addition, the United States Government describes the Revolutionary Guards as being involved with unconventional weapons and its most elite organization, the Quds Force, as a supporter of terrorism.

In Tehran on Monday, the news agency FARS, which is close to the Revolutionary Guards, wrote in an analysis that the accusations were baseless and aimed at depicting Iran as a threat ahead of Mr. Bush’s trip to the region.

The White House warned Iran against any further confrontations. “We urge the Iranians to refrain from such provocative actions that could lead to a dangerous incident in the future,” said Gordon D. Johndroe, a White House spokesman.

Admiral Cosgriff said that, in the past, relations with the regular Iranian Navy had been courteous and professional, and that many interactions at sea

with the Revolutionary Guards vessels have been normal.

But the allied navies operating in the region have been especially watchful since last March, when sailors believed to be from the Revolutionary Guards captured 15 British sailors in waters the British insisted were international, and held them for nearly two weeks.

The Pentagon said last year that there were signs that Iran had turned command of its naval missions in the Persian Gulf over to the Revolutionary Guards Corps’ maritime forces, stripping Iran’s regular navy of that responsibility.

Nazila Fathi contributed reporting from Tehran.

Boston Globe
January 8, 2008
Pg. 1

2. Iranian Boats Press US Ships

*Sailed within striking distance
in Persian Gulf, top admiral
says*

By Bryan Bender and Farah
Stockman, Globe Staff

Five Iranian gunboats threatened US warships in the Persian Gulf on Sunday, racing within striking distance of the three vessels before retreating, according to the US Navy’s top officer, who called the provocative maneuvers “extremely unprofessional, unsafe, and unhelpful.”

Admiral Gary Roughead, chief of naval operations, also said that US officers commanding the three ships - a destroyer, a cruiser, and a frigate - picked up threatening radio transmissions after unsuccessfully trying to contact the Iranian vessels.

“They came within a couple of hundred yards of the ships,” Roughead said in an interview with the Globe yesterday. “They approached the ships in an aggressive manner and maneuvered close aboard.”

The confrontation, which occurred in international waters just days before

President Bush is due to make a high-profile tour of the Middle East, prompted a strong reaction from US military leaders who are seeking to avoid an armed conflict with Iran. It also raised new concerns about the hair-trigger tensions in the region and the potential for a deadly miscalculation between two navies that have no official mechanism to communicate concerns.

Over the radio, the admiral said, the US vessels picked up comments "that were aggressive" and indicated the gunboats "were closing" in on the USS Hopper, USS Port Royal, and USS Ingraham.

In a conference call with Pentagon reporters, Vice Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, commander of the US Fifth Fleet, said the transmissions were to the effect that the "US ships would explode" - sparking fears of a repeat of the suicide bombing of the USS Cole off the coast of Yemen in 2000 that killed 17 US sailors.

But Roughead said it was unclear whether the radio warning came from Iranian vessels or from shore along the Straits of Hormuz, a narrow, 34-mile opening into the Persian Gulf, through which an estimated 40 percent of the world's oil supply is shipped. Sunday's incident occurred at 8 a.m. local time when the three American vessels were entering the Persian Gulf through the straits.

"In that part of the Gulf, who was saying what [is] sometimes very difficult to determine," Roughead said.

Cosgriff also said that two of the Iranian boats dropped white "box-like objects" that floated in the path of the Ingraham, the final ship in the formation, but caused no damage.

Roughead said it was unclear whether the five so-called "fast attack" craft, which are outfitted with small-caliber weapons but not anti-ship missiles, were operated by the Iranian Navy

or by the more aggressive Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps or by both.

US officials described the incident as the most significant since the Iranian Navy temporarily took 15 British sailors hostage last year after alleging their vessel entered Iranian territorial waters in the northern Persian Gulf. They suggested that the US ships were only moments away from firing on the Iranian naval vessels before the Iranians retreated.

Reaction to the incident from the White House and the State Department was muted.

"We urge the Iranians to refrain from such provocative actions that could lead to a dangerous incident in the future," said Gordon Johndroe, a White House spokesman.

Mohammad-Ali Hosseini, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, said the Iranian vessels merely made a routine acknowledgement of the US ships. Iranian officials said they had no knowledge of any boxes or radio communication threatening explosions.

But Navy officers, who have frequent, businesslike radio interactions with individual vessels in the Iranian Navy, were concerned about the incident.

Iran controls the eastern side of the Strait of Hormuz, and Iranian Navy officers make contact with ships that pass through, asking them to identify themselves and state their course and speed. US naval officers respond by giving the name of their ship, the speed, and their course through international waters.

Sunday's incident, where it occurred and the hostile nature of the Iranian boats' maneuvers, are what "made this one so unusual," Roughead said.

"Professional navies do not operate that way," he said, during an interview with Globe reporters and editors. "That to me is an issue that does not help the security and stability in that part of the world. It is a

very constrained passage, a very critical passage for so many countries. That sort of behavior is extraordinarily unhelpful."

The move follows a period of relative calm in the heated rhetoric between the United States and Iran. US military officials in Iraq recently have noted that the number of Iranian-made weapons entering the country has declined. Meanwhile, the latest National Intelligence Estimate determined Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003.

As Bush makes his first visit to the region, analysts said, the incident may have been intended as Iran's warning that it will not be isolated or ignored. The confrontation may have also been a signal for Arabic states in the Gulf, "who have to make their continuing decisions about aligning more closely with the United States, or accommodating the Iranians," said Paul Pillar, a former CIA analyst now at Georgetown University. "Whatever ideas the US may have to push Iran around, Iran has options to push back."

Others said they believe the Iranians may have been probing the United States' willingness to engage their military. "I think it was an effort to test the US reaction," said Kenneth Katzman, a specialist on the Persian Gulf at the Congressional Research Service, the research arm of Congress. Katzman has written a book on Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

"I think in the wake of the release of the US intelligence estimate, they were probing to see how the US rules of engagement might have changed, whether US contemplation of military action is more or less likely," he said.

The strategic waterway has been a flashpoint before.

In what came to be known as the 1987 Tanker War, Kuwaiti oil tankers sailed under US flags after the Iranian

Navy mined the strait and fired on ships at the height of the Iran-Iraq war. The next year, US forces destroyed two Iranian offshore military installations after 10 American sailors were injured by a mine that Iran was believed to have planted.

After another US warship was damaged by a mine, Americans sank two Iranian warships and several armed speedboats. The one-day battle severely damaged the Iranian Navy.

Several security experts insisted yesterday the Iranian vessels are no serious threat to the American warships. They also doubt that the Iranians would want to shut down the straits, which are critical to their own economic well-being.

John Pike, who runs the think tank GlobalSecurity.org, noted that the Iranian gunboats that menaced the US warships lack heavy firepower and do not pose a significant threat, unless they are used in suicide attacks.

By contrast, Pike said, the US ships are armed with sophisticated, large-caliber guns that would "just shred" the Iranian craft. The Iranians, he added, "can do whatever they please to unarmed oil tankers, but why would they want to? Their financial situation is more precarious than everyone else's."

Nevertheless, Admiral Roughead said he worried such behavior could have escalated unintentionally into a military confrontation before either side could call for a halt. "I do not have a direct link with my counterpart in the Iranian Navy," he said. "I don't have a way to communicate directly with the Iranian Navy or Guard."

Stockman reported from Washington and Bender from Boston.

3. U.S. Expresses Alarm After Iranian Boats Threaten Three American Vessels

By Robin Wright and Ann Scott Tyson, Washington Post Staff Writers

We're coming at you, the Iranian radio transmission warned. Your ships will explode in a couple of minutes.

The United States and Iran reached the verge of a military confrontation early Sunday after five Iranian patrol boats sped toward the USS Port Royal and two accompanying ships as they crossed the Strait of Hormuz into the Persian Gulf. The Iranian vessels, manned by the Revolutionary Guard Corps, broke into two groups and "maneuvered aggressively" on both sides of the U.S. ships, coming as close as 500 yards, recounted Vice Adm. Kevin J. Cosgriff, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command.

After the radio transmission, two of the Iranian boats dropped "white box-like objects" into the water, Cosgriff said. The U.S. ships responded with evasive maneuvers, radioed warnings to the Iranians and sounded ships' whistles, while ordering increased readiness of their own vessels. After their messages were not heeded, the U.S. ships prepared to fire in self-defense, but the Iranians abruptly turned and sped north toward their territorial waters.

The incident, which lasted less than 30 minutes, comes on the eve of President Bush's trip to the Middle East, in which he is expected to seek support from Gulf nations for a tougher stance against Tehran. The Bush administration called the episode a serious provocation and warned Iran about the dangers of such actions.

"I found the action by the Iranians quite troubling, actually, and a matter of real concern," Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said yesterday while visiting the USS New Orleans in San Diego. "This is

a very volatile area, and the risk of an incident ... escalating is real. I can't imagine what was on their minds."

Gates said the incident "is a reminder that there is a very unpredictable government in Tehran," adding that "it would be nice to see the Iranian government disavow this action and say that it won't happen again." U.S. and Iranian naval vessels have been involved in two or three similar events over the past year, but they were "not quite as dramatic as this one," he said.

Yesterday, Iran played down the encounter as a "regular and natural issue."

"That's something normal taking place every now and then for each party and it is settled after identification of the two parties," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency. Similar incidents in the past were resolved when the two sides identified each other, he said.

U.S. officials disputed the claim. "It was reckless and dangerous activity on the part of the Iranians," said Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman. "It could have escalated potentially to the level at which they would have posed a hostile threat and would have required further action." The U.S. government "expects an explanation, and we clearly expect the Iranians to cease these activities that are dangerous," he said.

U.S. military officials said U.S. ships are well marked and well known. The Port Royal is an Aegis cruiser, and the two accompanying ships were the USS Hopper, a destroyer, and the USS Ingraham, a frigate.

"Based on all the information that is available to me," Gates said, "this is a one-sided provocation."

Iran engaged in a showdown with Britain in the Gulf last spring, when Revolutionary Guard naval vessels seized 15 British sailors and Marines patrolling for

smuggled goods in the Persian Gulf. The Britons were held in Tehran for 12 days.

The United States is also sensitive about the intentions of small speedboats following the 2000 attack by a single craft on the USS Cole during a refueling stop in Yemen, resulting in the deaths of 17 American sailors.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have escalated in the past year over Iranian aid to Shiite militants in Iraq as well as Tehran's controversial nuclear energy program. The United States and its allies remain particularly concerned about Tehran's refusal to heed two U.N. resolutions demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment, a process that can be used for peaceful nuclear energy and to develop a nuclear weapon. A U.S. intelligence report last month concluding that Iran suspended its weapons program in 2003 has not defused the issue.

In October, the Bush administration imposed tough unilateral sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard and the Quds Force, as well as Iranian banks and businesses linked to weapons proliferation. The administration is pressing to get similar measures passed this month in a third U.N. resolution.

Iran has in turn blasted the Bush administration for interfering in the Middle East. "America has not been successful in isolating Iran," the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said Sunday. "We are witnessing the expansion of Iran's relations with different countries."

Iran's media have focused heavily on Bush's impending visit. "American officials are extremely worried about how things are unfolding in the Middle East, and the only way they found to cover the failure of American plans is to arrange for the American president to go on a boisterous visit to the Middle East so the razzmatazz and propaganda surrounding

this visit overshadows their serious failures in the region," the conservative Jomhuri Eslami editorialized over the weekend.

Yesterday, two U.S. Navy fighter jets collided in flight and crashed into the Persian Gulf, but all three pilots on board ejected and were rescued in "good condition," said Cosgriff of Central Command. The pilots were undergoing medical checks on the USS Harry Truman, the aircraft carrier from which they operated, he said.

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January 8, 2008
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4. Persian Gulf Run-In Raises Specter Of Past Mission

Naval experts are stunned over Iran's aggressiveness

By Steve Liewer, Staff Writer

Retired Rear Adm. Guy Zeller of Coronado knows something about going muzzle to muzzle with the Iranian navy.

Zeller led a battle group aboard the aircraft carrier Enterprise in the Persian Gulf during the late 1980s, when Iranian warships routinely harassed U.S. Navy and merchant vessels and planted mines in the strategic waterway.

Zeller commanded a battle group for Operation Praying Mantis after one of those mines crippled the Navy frigate Samuel B. Roberts and wounded 10 sailors in 1988. The retaliatory mission, which sank two of Iran's naval ships and three armed speedboats and destroyed two of its oil platforms, remains the largest U.S. naval engagement since World War II.

Through two more wars in the Middle East, including the current Iraq war, the U.S. Navy has never lost its supremacy in the Persian Gulf. Which is why it stunned Zeller to learn that five Iranian gunboats reportedly charged three U.S.

Navy ships in the gulf Sunday.

Members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard “maneuvered aggressively” to within 500 yards of the cruiser Port Royal, the destroyer Hopper and the frigate Ingraham, said Vice Adm. Kevin Cosgriff, commander of U.S. 5th Fleet, which patrols the gulf and is based in nearby Bahrain.

Pentagon officials said crews from two of the Iranian gunboats dropped white, boxlike objects that floated and resembled mines.

“Mining in international waters is an act of war,” Zeller said. “Somebody would have to do something about it, and that somebody would be the United States.”

The warships passed by the boxes without harm. They didn’t retrieve them, so Pentagon officials don’t know whether the boxes posed an actual threat.

At another point during the confrontation, the warships received a threatening radio call from the Iranians, “to the effect that they were closing (on) our ships and that the ... U.S. ships would explode,” Cosgriff said.

The U.S. commanders took a series of defensive steps, including making radio calls to the Iranians that went unheeded. As they prepared to fire warning shots, Cosgriff said, the Iranians fled toward their shore. The entire standoff lasted about 30 minutes.

The incident increased friction between Washington and Tehran as President Bush prepared to depart today for the Middle East.

Tensions between the United States and Iran have grown in recent years over Washington’s charge that Tehran has been secretly seeking to develop nuclear weapons and supplying and training Iraqi insurgents using roadside bombs, the No. 1 killer of U.S. troops in Iraq.

On Sunday, the three warships were heading into the gulf through the Strait of

Hormuz on what the Navy called a routine passage inside international waters. The five gunboats approached them about 8 a.m.

Pentagon officials said the warships were about three miles outside Iran’s territorial waters, which extend 12 miles from its shores.

Navy ships routinely have contact with Iranian naval vessels without confrontation, Cosgriff said. The three U.S. warships involved in Sunday’s incident had earlier exchanged normal communications with Iranian shore stations and a passing Iranian naval ship, he added.

In Tehran, Iran’s Foreign Ministry suggested the Iranian boats had not recognized the U.S. vessels. Spokesman Mohammed Ali Hosseini played down the incident, saying it was “similar to past ones.”

“That is something normal that takes place every now and then for each party, and (the problem) is settled after identification of the two parties,” he told the state news agency IRNA.

During a tour of San Diego-area military facilities yesterday, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates urged Iran to avoid provocative military acts.

“The risk of an incident or an incident escalating is real,” Gates said, describing the Tehran regime as very unpredictable. “I can’t imagine what was on their minds.”

Gates said there had been two or three similar incidents – “maybe not quite as dramatic” – over the past year in the gulf. He offered no further details.

Sunday’s incident brought back unsettling memories of the U.S.-Iranian confrontation in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s. At the time, Iran was at war with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, which the United States then supported.

Six months after the frigate Samuel B. Roberts struck the mine in January 1988, the U.S. cruiser

Vincennes shot down an Iranian civilian airliner, killing 290 passengers. The Navy said it was an accident, but Iran’s leaders said the ship targeted the plane.

During that period, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard frequently harassed ships under Rear Adm. Zeller’s command.

“The Revolutionary Guards are known as being hotheads,” Zeller said.

Some Navy officials viewed them as bullies.

“When you stand up to them, they tend to back off,” said Tony Less, a retired vice admiral who was the senior Navy commander in the Persian Gulf region during Operation Praying Mantis.

The commanders of Navy ships have broad authority to defend themselves in an attack, Zeller and Less said.

“You’re going to protect your ship,” Less said in a telephone interview from his home in Clifton, Va.

Navy ship commanders must absorb lots of historical lessons. They remember the nearly unarmed spy ship Pueblo, surrounded and seized 40 years ago in international waters off North Korea, its crew tortured into making phony confessions during 11 months in captivity. They also remember the destroyer Cole, attacked during a port call in Yemen by al-Qaeda suicide bombers in a small boat. Seventeen sailors died in the blast.

The Navy should give no quarter when it comes to protecting so crucial a waterway as the Persian Gulf, said independent naval analyst Norman Polmar of Alexandria, Va.

“My feeling is, just blast the hell out of them,” Polmar said. “You attack a (U.S. Navy) destroyer or a cruiser, you can expect to get killed.”

At the same time, military experts said acting aggressively could lead to disaster.

“If you’re too rambunctious with protecting

your ship,” Less said, “you stand a chance of not only embarrassing yourself, your Navy and your government, you also stand a chance of wreaking havoc.”

Staff writer Greg Gross and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

New York Times

January 8, 2008

Pg. 4

5. Chief Of U.N. Nuclear Agency To Meet With Iran's Leaders

VIENNA (AP) — Mohamed ElBaradei, the chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear monitoring agency, will visit Iran this week, his spokeswoman announced Monday.

Diplomats, meanwhile, said Iran had begun sharing information about past programs that the United States says were attempts to make weapons.

Dr. ElBaradei will be in Tehran on Friday and Saturday “with a view of resolving all remaining outstanding issues and enabling the agency to provide assurance about Iran’s past and present activities,” said Melissa Fleming, his spokeswoman.

She said Dr. ElBaradei would meet with top officials, but gave no details. But a diplomat familiar with Dr. ElBaradei’s itinerary said he was expected to meet with Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity because the information was confidential.

The trip comes at a time of renewed efforts by the United States to keep the pressure on Iran on the nuclear issue.

A recent United States intelligence assessment that Iran had a clandestine weapons program but that it stopped working on it four years ago has hurt American efforts to

have the United Nations Security Council impose a third set of sanctions on Iran for failing to halt enrichment.

Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. The United States and its allies say Iran could use its enriched uranium to make nuclear payloads for missiles.

An Israeli Defense Ministry official said Monday that Israel would urge President Bush, who is to visit the Middle East this week, to reassess the American conclusion that Iran stopped nuclear arms development in 2003.

The defense minister, Ehud Barak, is expected to tell Mr. Bush that Israeli intelligence analysts have concluded that Iran is still trying to produce nuclear arms, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was barred from publicly commenting on the talks in advance.

Part of past evidence presented by the United States to close allies and the I.A.E.A. to back its accusations was material on a computer reportedly smuggled out of Iran. In 2005, United States intelligence assessed that information as indicating that Iran had been working on details of nuclear weapons.

Iran has long dismissed such claims as propaganda and refused to talk about them. But on Monday, diplomats familiar with the Iran file said Iran had begun substantial discussions with I.A.E.A. experts on some issues linked to "weaponization," as part of the agency's investigation of Iran's nuclear activities.

re going to turn next to a confrontation at sea. We learned today that five Iranian speedboats confronted three U.S. Navy ships in the Persian Gulf. Before the incident ended, U.S. and Iranian tensions came closer than they have in years to actual shooting.

Our senior national security correspondent Jonathan Karl reports.

JONATHAN KARL: The three U.S. Navy ships were entering the Persian Gulf when five speedboats bearing Iranian flags and mounted machine guns swarmed them. The Americans received this radio message in English: "I'm coming at you. You will blow up in a couple of minutes." The Navy ships warned the Iranians not to come closer. The commander of the destroyer USS Hopper issued a "prepare to fire order." Two of the Iranian boats dropped unidentified boxes into the water, forcing the Navy ships to maneuver out of the way. Senior defense officials say the Americans were within seconds of firing when the Iranians suddenly pulled back. One of the Iranian speedboats had come within 200 yards of the U.S. ships. The whole incident lasted less than 30 minutes.

DEFENSE SECRETARY GATES: This is a very volatile area. The risk of an incident and of an incident escalating is real.

KARL: Some Pentagon officials told ABC News they were surprised the Iranian boats were allowed to get so close.

BRUCE RIEDEL [Saban Center at Brookings Institution]: If these five boats had been five martyrdom boats filled with TNT and one of them had hit one of our destroyers, it could have done considerable damage.

KARL: But senior Navy officials say one of their biggest fears is being provoked into a conflict with Iran, and that explains why the ship's

commander was reluctant to fire.

Terse statement, the Iranian foreign ministry called the incident ordinary. Whatever it was, it brought those Navy ships to the brink of military confrontation with Iran. As one senior official told me, those Iranian speedboats came within a heartbeat of being blown up.

Charlie?

GIBSON: Jonathan Karl reporting tonight from the Pentagon.

CBS Evening News, 6:30 PM

KATIE COURIC: There was a dangerous confrontation over the weekend between U.S. and Iranian forces. It happened in the Strait of Hormuz and nearly led to a battle at sea. More from Bob Orr at the Pentagon.

BOB ORR: High seas hostilities have been building for months, with heavily armed speedboats carrying Iran's Revolutionary Guard darting near U.S. ships patrolling the dangerous waters of the Persian Gulf. Now, one senior Pentagon official says an incident early Sunday was the most provocative we've seen so far.

Three U.S. warships were passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic oil shipping channel, when five small fast boats sped toward their right flank. The boats, one flying an Iranian flag, raced directly at the U.S. ships, dropping unidentified white boxes in the water. A warning crackled over the ships' radios. "We're coming at you," a voice said. "You'll blow up in a couple of minutes."

Military sources say the U.S. ships began taking evasive actions, and at least one of them came extremely close to firing just before the Iranian boats sped away.

VICE ADMIRAL KEVIN COSGRIFF [Commander, U.S. 5th Fleet]: When they act that way, it raises the possibility of a miscalculation on their part that somebody might take it

just too far.

ORR: This is at least the third time in six months that Iranian boats have harassed U.S. ships in international waters. And just last March, 15 British sailors were captured in the Persian Gulf and held for two weeks by the Revolutionary Guard.

Now, U.S. officials are warning Iran in polite terms to knock it off before someone gets hurt.

Bob Orr, CBS News, the Pentagon.

Lou Dobbs Tonight (CNN), 7:00 PM

LOU DOBBS: One of the most dangerous confrontations in years between the U.S. Navy and Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Five Revolutionary Guard boats speeding toward three of our warships in the Persian Gulf in what the Navy says was an aggressive and threatening manner. The Iranian boats turned away just as our warships were about to open fire. Barbara Starr reports from the Pentagon.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

BARBARA STARR, CNN **PENTAGON CORRESPONDENT:** A potentially deadly military confrontation with an old enemy, Iran that all came close to becoming a shootout. It all happened Sunday morning in the Persian Gulf when three U.S. Navy warships were routinely sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. It was 7:40, suddenly five boats from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard approached at high speed. The Iranians' actions had the U.S. Navy ready to open fire.

VICE ADMIRAL KEVIN COSGRIFF, U.S. **NAVAL FORCES CENTRAL COMMAND:** These are, in my mind, unnecessarily provocative.

STARR: According to a timeline provided by the military to CNN, at 7:45 the Iranians swarmed around the U.S. ships. Two Iranian boats made a direct run at the USS Hopper the lead ship coming within 200 yards; 7:47, a

ABC, CBS, CNN
January 7, 2008

6. TV News Coverage From Pentagon Correspondents

World News With
Charles Gibson (ABC), 6:30 PM

CHARLES GIBSON:

threatening radio transmission is received saying, I am coming at you, you will explode in a couple of minutes; 7:49, the Iranians dropped white boxes in the water. The U.S. doesn't know if they contained explosives; 7:50, the Hopper's captain ordered a machine gun to be turned on the Iranians. At that point, the Iranians turned around and left. The senior U.S. admiral in the region says there have been encounters with the Iranians in the past.

COSGRIFF: I take this incredibly seriously and I expect the commanding officers will successfully defend their ships and their crews at all times in this theater.

STARR: According to Iranian news agencies, the Revolutionary Guard denied any aggression against the U.S., but experts have long warned these tense waters can quickly spiral out of control.

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS: This is the most dangerous possibility of all that a war starts by accident, by a miscalculation, by the Revolutionary Guard going a little too far and the U.S. firing back.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

STARR: Lou, U.S. military commanders say this was one of the most provocative incidents with the Iranians in years, and, yes, they were within minutes of shooting the Iranians out of the water -- Lou.

DOBBS: To be clear here, Barbara, those five lightboats of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard actually encircled the warship and came -- how close to that warship?

STARR: Well we said in that piece about 200 yards. Now, in the last couple of hours, the Navy said, well, maybe it was 500 yards. It really doesn't matter. What you're talking about is that real hair trigger. And the problem for the U.S. Navy, Lou, is to walk that fine line between

being very tough on any Iranian provocation and not getting sucker-punched by them into a shooting war that they don't want. Today, they came out lucky. They're worried about what's going to happen next.

DOBBS: Luck should play no part in what the United States Navy is doing in that region, as you document. It is a tense and understandably tense region. That those craft could get that close to a U.S. Navy vessel is troubling for everyone. What are the rules of engagement?

STARR: Well, to be clear, we don't know, because the rules of engagement, as you say in those very tense waters, are classified. There are a number of escalator procedures. We do know that the commander of the Hopper was in the process of giving the shoot-to-kill order when the Iranians turned back. When I say luck, Lou, you know nobody wants to start World War III out there unless they absolutely have to.

DOBBS: And one of the ways in which it seems to me it might be prevented, Barbara, and I would love to hear what the United States general staff has to say about this, would make it very clear to Iran what the rules of engagement are and the distance at which we will tolerate their vessels approaching a ship of the line. This is an absurdity, it seems to me.

STARR: Well a lot of people are asking that very question because even the Navy today wanted to remind people about the USS Cole, which was bombed and several Navy sailors killed during a small boat attack. That's a big problem out in those waters. Those small boats come along very fast. And I must tell you, Lou, I suspect the facts are still unfolding as to what exactly transpired here.

DOBBS: Well they're discomfiting facts at best to this point, although thank goodness nothing did happen

of a violent nature as a result. Thank you very much, Barbara Starr from the Pentagon.

Los Angeles Times
January 8, 2008

7. Gates Hears From Southland Troops

On his visit to Camp Pendleton and San Diego, the Defense secretary meets with sailors and Marines and recognizes their families' sacrifice.

By Peter Spiegel, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO — Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates on Monday made his first official visit to Southern California since taking the post, kicking off his second year in office by presenting awards to 17 sailors, including several Navy SEALs, who recently returned from Iraq.

Gates spent 141 days on the road last year, mostly on high-profile overseas trips to regional hot spots and world capitals.

And like those foreign travels, Gates took several hours out of his schedule here to meet privately with dozens of enlisted personnel -- either deploying or returning from war zones -- to gauge their views on issues affecting the military.

Pentagon officials said the Defense secretary had also attempted to use a series of lower-profile domestic trips to express gratitude to family members of troops who have been deployed overseas.

During his daylong stay, which included a tour of naval facilities in San Diego and an afternoon trip to Camp Pendleton near Oceanside, Gates made repeated mention of the sacrifices parents and spouses make during the ongoing deployments to war zones.

In a short news conference after touring the amphibious assault ship New Orleans, Gates singled out the San Diego area -- home to one of the highest concentrations of military personnel in the U.S.

-- for particular gratitude.

"I don't think there's a community in America that's more supportive of our men and women in uniform than San Diego," he said.

Pentagon officials have grown increasingly concerned that, even as retention rates within the military have remained high throughout the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, family "influencers," particularly wives and mothers, are exerting increasing pressure on soldiers to stop reenlisting.

Gates has made improved treatment of military families one of his priorities, and he is considering a wide range of measures, including the expansion of education benefits to family members, to win over wavering spouses.

The issue came up repeatedly in talks with Navy and Marine personnel here, according to service members who attended the meetings with Gates, one of which was held aboard the New Orleans and two others at Camp Pendleton.

According to Marines who met with Gates at Camp Pendleton, most of whom recently returned from Iraq's western Anbar province, the Defense secretary expressed optimism that the decrease in violence in Anbar -- a onetime insurgent hotbed -- can be replicated elsewhere in the country.

But, they said, Gates also was concerned such advances could be reversed.

"He knows that progress is escalating," said Marine Cpl. Dan Ristow, 21, of Alaska.

"But he told us it's all about timing and pacing, and it's important that we don't get excited and jump the gun" and withdraw too quickly, he said.

Added Lance Cpl. Chad Crawford, 21, of Oklahoma: "It's good to know that somebody in the government supports us."

About 330 Marines from Camp Pendleton and an additional 112 from the Twentynine Palms base have

been killed in Iraq, according to the independent website icasualties.org.

No Marines from Pendleton have been killed in the last two months, a fact Marine leadership interprets as showing they have been able to "suffocate" the insurgency.

Times staff writer Tony Perry contributed to this report from Camp Pendleton.

San Diego Union-Tribune
January 8, 2008

8. Gates Stops By To Chat With Enlisted Ranks

Defense secretary pays a visit to county military bases

By Rick Rogers, Staff Writer

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates took off his suit jacket, poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down at a table full of young Marines and sailors yesterday afternoon at Camp Pendleton.

"Thank you for coming," he told 19 wide-eyed servicemen before launching into what a Pentagon spokesman said was a favorite part of Gates' job: engaging in unscripted conversations with lower-ranking, enlisted members of the military.

"We didn't brief the Marines on what to say. Secretary Gates wanted to hear what they have to say," said Maj. Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, commander of the 1st Marine Division. He was one of several generals who waited outside while Gates and the troops talked.

After the session, which was not open to the media, Gates held another private chat with about 30 enlisted Marines. He later traveled to a firing range on the base to observe boot-camp recruits going through training.

His activities at Camp Pendleton capped a daylong visit to military installations in the county, including Navy bases in San Diego. It was Gates' first stop in the region since becoming defense

secretary.

Marines who spoke with Gates said he seemed intent on hearing their views. Topics included when base officials would fix damage caused by the Horno wildfire in October, and whether Gates would allow the Marine Corps to swap its increasingly nation-building mission in western Iraq for an expeditionary combat role in Afghanistan.

Gates answered each question fully and carefully, the round-table participants said.

Sgt. Kevin Knight said the meeting energized his faith in the highest reaches of the military.

"I think (it) says a lot about our leaders' caring about the opinions of young Marines and the military in general," said Knight, a member of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment.

Knight asked Gates why it took years to build urban combat simulators when such training methods might have saved more Marines on the battlefield.

"He gave a great answer – that no one could have predicted how long the war was going to last," Knight said.

Gates began his swing through the county with a stop at the Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado, where he pinned Bronze Stars on 10 members of an explosives-disposal unit and half a dozen Navy SEAL commandos who fought in Iraq. He also spoke to a class of sailors training to become SEALs.

Gates praised the bomb-disposal experts, some of whom have served three tours during the Iraq war, for their work in disarming roadside bombs and for setting up an operating base from scratch in southern Baghdad.

He thanked SEAL combat veterans for their "secret reconnaissance and direct-action missions against some of the world's most ruthless and dangerous killers."

The SEALs, Gates said,

saw heavy action in Ramadi and Habaniyah, Iraq. They established outposts, foiled ambushes by insurgents and trained Iraqi soldiers and police.

Gates described how one of the Bronze Star recipients used grenades to flush out insurgents who were firing on his position – after taking a bullet in the chest that was stopped by his body armor.

"Stories of SEALs' grit and sacrifice are usually unknown and untold," he said.

Gates then went to San Diego Naval Station, where he joined a private lunch with 25 sailors from the amphibious transport dock ship *New Orleans*.

"Each of them asked me a question," Gates said, "and a couple of them gave me advice."

Staff writer Greg Gross contributed to this report.

Washington Post
January 8, 2008
Pg. 1

9. New Leaders Of Sunnis Make Gains In Influence

U.S.-Backed Fighters Find Empowering Role

By Sudarsan Raghavan,
Washington Post Foreign
Service

MADERIYAH, Iraq -- Saad Mahami wanted more firepower. He didn't trust the Iraqi government to give him support, so inside Patrol Base Whiskey, at the edge of this village south of Baghdad, he told U.S. commanders that his 71 Sunni fighters needed additional weapons to fight the insurgent group al-Qaeda in Iraq.

As he listened to Mahami's demand, Capt. David Underwood reminded his superiors that Mahami's men -- all members of a U.S.-backed Sunni paramilitary movement called Sahwa, or "Awakening" -- were already buying arms with U.S. reward money for finding enemy ammunition

dumps. "And as we confiscate weapons, we hand them to Saad Mahami," Underwood told Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, the top commander in the region, during their meeting with the Iraqi.

The United States is empowering a new group of Sunni leaders, including onetime members of former president Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, intelligence services and army, who are challenging established Sunni politicians for their community's leadership. The phenomenon marks a sharp turnaround in U.S. policy and the fortunes of Iraq's Sunni minority.

The new leaders are decidedly against Iraq's U.S.-backed, Shiite-led government, which is wary of the Awakening movement's growing influence, viewing it as a potential threat when U.S. troops withdraw. The mistrust suggests how easily last year's security improvements could come undone in a still-brittle Iraq.

"We feel we are more in control," said Safah Hassan, 28, one of Mahami's fighters. "The Americans have encouraged us to stand up for our society. We never thought this would happen."

When Hussein was toppled, Sunnis felt their power waning, and their sense of dispossession hit bottom when Hussein was executed a year ago. Now the Awakening movement is given credit for helping to reduce violence, and the new Sunni role shows that they remain a linchpin of stability.

Initiated by tribes in Anbar province, the Awakening movement spread across Iraq last year, as growing numbers of Sunnis turned against the extreme tactics of al-Qaeda in Iraq, a mainly homegrown and predominantly Sunni group that U.S. officials say is led by foreign fighters. U.S. military commanders rapidly entered into risky alliances with tribal leaders and onetime members

of other insurgent groups, which included men who had killed U.S. soldiers. Today, the Awakening forces -- also known in many areas as "concerned local citizens" -- number nearly 71,000 fighters, and have pushed al-Qaeda in Iraq out of areas it once controlled.

Ali Hatem Ali Suleiman, who leads one of the largest Anbar tribes, described al-Qaeda in Iraq as a nail in the side of the U.S. military and Iraqi forces. "We broke that nail," Suleiman said. "What other way does the prime minister or the American president have? They have to accept the way we have drawn."

In interviews over the past month, several Awakening leaders and foot soldiers said they wanted to ensure their community's survival by bringing services and economic development to their areas. They are hardening their grip over Sunni enclaves throughout the country, weakening the central government's authority.

In Baghdad's Fadhil neighborhood, signs proclaim the power of Adil Mashadani, known to be a former member of Hussein's Republican Guard and a onetime insurgent who controls Fadhil's Awakening Council.

In Babil province, Sabah al-Jenabi is now the mayor of the town of Jurf a-Sakr -- less than four months after he signed his first contract with the Americans. The Jenabis are a preeminent tribe that thrived under Hussein and later backed the insurgency.

So far, however, the new leaders have secured little more than guns, money and the support of U.S. military officers, but those gains help men such as Mahami keep their vows to protect their territories, not only from al-Qaeda in Iraq, but also from Shiite militias and Iraq's Shiite-dominated security forces.

The U.S. commanders in

Maderiyah knew little about Mahami -- only that he was a lawyer and a community leader. Most of his men were from the Islamic Army, an insurgent group that broke away from al-Qaeda in Iraq last year, Underwood said.

Mahami told the U.S. commanders that he needed more than weapons. He also wanted radio equipment and a car. He looked at Lynch, the U.S. regional commander, and asked him to blow up four nearby bridges to prevent al-Qaeda in Iraq from entering the village.

"We will be very happy to do it," Lynch replied.

'We Rely on Ourselves'

Riyadh Hadi is the field commander of the Lions of Adhamiyah, the Awakening force in a middle-class Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad. Tall with a long, goateed face, the 37-year-old Hadi said he commands 1,400 fighters, 700 of whom receive a \$300 monthly salary from the U.S. military.

He described himself only as a metalworker and "a son of Adhamiyah" who rose up against al-Qaeda in Iraq after the group killed his brother. Residents and insurgents said he is a former Baathist who was a member of several militant groups, including the 1920 Revolution Brigades, which once had strong links to al-Qaeda in Iraq.

"Our men know who the al-Qaeda are," he said with pride, referring to its members. "Our men can catch them before they can do anything."

Many leading Sunnis joined the insurgency after U.S. administrators dismantled Hussein's system in the wake of the 2003 invasion. Adhamiyah, in particular, turned into an insurgent stronghold, and by 2004, a sanctuary for al-Qaeda in Iraq. But last year, many insurgents turned against the jihadists, who many Sunnis felt had undermined the image of the Sunni resistance and imposed Islamic laws that were too

restrictive.

The Lions emerged on the streets of Adhamiyah on Nov. 10. Their forces quickly engaged in two clashes against mostly Shiite policemen, who were stunned to see the Sunni fighters now taking over the enclave.

In the first clash, Hadi was taken into custody and beaten by police officers who declared their loyalty to Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia, Hadi recalled. "We are Sunnis," he said. "It was a direct challenge."

He spent 30 minutes in a cell before U.S. troops arrived and set him free. Brig. Gen. Hussein al-Dulaimi, an Adhamiyah police commander, described the clashes as "a misunderstanding."

One day last month, Hadi's men were stationed at nearly every intersection. They checked vehicles at the entrances to the neighborhood, which was protected by tall blast walls. Elsewhere the fighters were much less visible. "Under Saddam Hussein, there was no army in the streets. He used intelligence men, his Baathists, he was controlling everything, like what we are doing now," Hadi said.

The area was brimming with cars and shoppers. Laughing children played in a small amusement park with a creaking Ferris wheel that had recently reopened. Some women walked across a busy traffic circle without head scarves, past grim buildings disfigured by war.

"Al-Qaeda killed a girl over there for not wearing a hijab," said Ali Salim, 25, a resident, pointing at a baby-blue complex pocked by bullet holes and referring to the head covering worn by many Muslim women. "Now, there's a big difference."

"We rely on ourselves to protect our community," said one of Hadi's fighters, Abu Omar, 42, eyes twinkling through his oval glasses. "This is the best we Sunnis can hope for under this government."

Last week, Hadi's men attempted to stop Iraqi army troops from conducting house raids with U.S. troops, prompting a firefight.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq still poses a threat. On Monday, Riyadh al-Sammarai, an Awakening leader who backed Hadi's men, was killed in a suicide bomb attack, one of several recent attacks against Awakening forces.

Not all residents trust Hadi's men. Abu Youssef, a 47-year-old Sunni taxi driver, fled the enclave last year after al-Qaeda in Iraq accused him of spying. Today, he fears returning to Adhamiyah "because many al-Qaeda members have joined the Awakening... I have no confidence because of their history."

"The Shiite militias were police in the morning and criminals in the night," added Abu Youssef. "What is the point of replacing the Shiite militias with Sunni militias?"

Scrawled on a wall, near graffiti that hailed the "Adhamiyah Heroes," was an ominous sign of a future battle: "Death to the Mahdi Army."

Past the minarets of Adhamiyah's Abu Hanifa mosque, Iraq's holiest Sunni shrine, the Bridge of the Imams arches over the Tigris River toward the Shiite neighborhood of Kadhimiyah. There, the Mahdi Army, led by Shiite cleric Sadr, rules.

In a region awash in sectarian currents, many Awakening leaders are suspicious of Iran's growing power, convinced that it backs Shiite militias and its intentions are to control Iraq's government and undermine the Sunni world.

"If they don't cleanse Iraq from Iranian influence, at any moment we can be attacked," Hadi declared.

A half-hour later, he stared across the barricaded bridge toward Kadhimiyah.

"Of course, we will fight them if they choose to come over here," Hadi said. "Even

children will fight the Mahdi Army. Even the Americans will join us."

Salah al-Obaidi, Sadr's chief spokesman in Najaf, said the government and U.S. military were "opening the doors for al-Qaeda followers and killers of Shiites" to reemerge as the Awakening movement. "It will lead Iraq into more trouble," Obaidi warned.

A Community 'Up for Grabs'

Suleiman, the Anbar tribal chief, and other Awakening leaders are trying to leverage their community's growing street power into political clout in Baghdad. Under U.S. pressure, the government has hired 23,000 Anbar fighters into the police force. But Suleiman is expecting a lot more in return.

"We're asking the Americans and Iraqi government, 'Where is the reconstruction?' " Suleiman said.

Last month, the Awakening's political arm recommended 15 people to fill ministerial positions left empty by the Tawafaq, the main Sunni political bloc, which pulled out of the government in August.

"We're at a period when the Sunni community is a bit up for grabs right now in terms of leadership," said a senior U.S. diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The tribal chiefs view the Tawafaq politicians as outsiders because many were in exile during Hussein's reign. The Tawafaq bloc is also widely believed to have insurgent links.

"The Tawafaq are not able to represent the needs of the people," said Hameed al-Haies, a burly Anbar tribal leader who survived three assassination attempts by al-Qaeda in Iraq. The latest left a bullet scar on his chest. "The people like us a lot. They think we are the spark that helped Iraq."

Tawafaq leader Adnan al-Dulaimi said that his group's

members welcomed the Awakening's political involvement but added that the 2005 elections, in which Tawafaq won 44 parliamentary seats, were proof that the bloc had "wide support among the Sunni society."

"No side can say it alone represents all Sunnis," he said.

The Awakening movement itself is divided, along lines of tribe, territory, ideology and personality. Not all the Awakening forces report to Suleiman's group. The tribal leaders are wary of the former insurgents once aligned with al-Qaeda in Iraq or former Hussein loyalists.

One such person is Abu Abed, a 35-year-old former Hussein-era army sergeant and intelligence officer who controls Baghdad's Amiriyah neighborhood with his Knights of Mesopotamia force.

When asked about Abu Abed, Rasheed Jubair, a senior Anbar Awakening leader, said: "If he does something wrong, I will break his back. We don't accept anyone to go beyond the law."

Mutual Lack of Trust

The future of the Sunni community, perhaps of Iraq itself, will likely be shaped by men such as Hassan, the Awakening fighter in Maderiyah. For the past few months, he has tried to join the Iraqi security forces, but he has had no response. Neither have his comrades or Hadi's men.

"I do not trust this government," Hassan said. "It is based on religion, ethnicity, and they just do not want to share power with us."

The government is worried that the Sunni fighters could turn against it when U.S. troops pull out of Iraq. In public statements, government officials warned they would not permit the Awakening movement to become "a third force" alongside the police and army.

If he does not get a government job, Ahmed Nadji, a 20-year-old Awakening fighter, predicted this scenario:

"We will quit. Al-Qaeda will come back again. Adhamiyah will go back to chaos again. The Iraqis who have returned from Syria will go back again. Everything will collapse again."

Yet that grim scenario is also why his community's newly empowered leaders are optimistic. "The government has no choice but to accept us," Suleiman said. "They have seen what we have done, how strong we are on the land. The political process cannot run without us."

Special correspondent Zaid Sabah in Baghdad contributed to this report.

New York Times

January 8, 2008

Pg. 9

10. Suicide Bomber Kills Key Sunni Leader

By Richard A. Ooppel Jr. and Mudhafer al-Husaini

BAGHDAD — Militants assassinated two key leaders of American-backed neighborhood militias in northern Baghdad over the past two days, highlighting the militants' strategy of eliminating militia commanders who have embraced partnerships with American forces but who themselves remain vulnerable to attack.

On Monday morning, a suicide bomber on foot killed Col. Riyadh al-Samarrai, a founder of the Sunni Awakening Council in Adhamiya, a Sunni stronghold that until recently was a haven for insurgents.

The Awakening Councils are groups of Sunni — and in some cases Shiite — fighters who have renounced ties to insurgents and are now on the payroll of the American military, standing guard in areas that not long ago were controlled by militants.

The bomber struck at the offices of the Sunni Endowment, one of the most powerful Sunni institutions in Iraq and an influential backer

of the new Sunni alliances with American forces. The suicide blast and a nearly simultaneous car bombing just yards away killed 14 people and wounded 18 others.

On Sunday, gunmen riding in a single car and brandishing pistols with silencers killed a founder of the Awakening movement in Shaab, Ismael Abbas, an Interior Ministry official said.

Shaab is a large and predominantly Shiite district in northern Baghdad that is near Adhamiya. Over the weekend, militants distributed leaflets in Shaab warning that Awakening members would be killed for "protecting" the Americans.

The killings punctuated a wave of violence that has unfolded in the capital and left more than 30 people dead over the past two days, chipping away at the relative lull the city enjoyed late last year.

On Monday alone there were eight other bombings — in addition to the Adhamiya attacks — that killed at least four people and wounded 23. Gunmen kidnapped eight Awakening Council guards in Shaab, and over the past two days the police have discovered the bodies of 13 men strewn about the city who all appeared to have been killed at close range.

Attacks are rising on Awakening Council members — fighters whose presence in volatile neighborhoods has been credited with helping bring about a sharp decline in violence.

In another such assassination, gunmen on Sunday burst into the home of an Awakening leader in the volatile city of Baquba, north of Baghdad, killing him and his wife, according to the police in Diyala Province.

"The suicide attacks will go on, because the enemy does exist and no one can neglect this truth," said Bassim al-Azawi, a senior member of the Adhamiya Awakening Council. He vowed that despite Colonel Samarrai's death, the

work of the Awakening will go on.”

While there is no concrete evidence pointing to who is carrying out the attacks, the string of assassinations has come on the heels of Osama bin Laden's condemnation of Awakening Councils and his warning that their members will lose “this world and the afterlife.”

The most striking of the recent attacks was Monday's killing of Colonel Samarra. The militants were able to kill a skilled and experienced commander who had been entrusted with providing security for one of the most powerful Sunni leaders in Iraq.

In addition to leading the Adhamiya Awakening Council, Colonel Samarra was a close aide and security adviser to the leader of the Sunni Endowment, Sheik Ahmed Abdul Ghafour al-Samarra. The sheik has angered hard-line Sunni leaders in recent months by openly promoting Sunni Awakening groups.

Colonel Samarra was also in charge of a detachment of government forces who guard the offices of the Sunni Endowment, which administers Sunni mosques throughout Iraq.

According to witnesses and Awakening officials, Colonel Samarra's assassin, who appeared to be acquainted with the colonel, waited patiently inside the main gate of the offices of the Sunni Endowment. When Colonel Samarra emerged from a meeting inside the building, the killer walked up, began to embrace him, and then yanked the trigger on his hidden explosive belt.

Witnesses said the colonel's bodyguards did not try to stop the bomber, suggesting that he was known to people at the endowment, and raising fears of complicity from within.

“He reached him easily and was about to shake hands and hug him,” said Tariq Abed,

a laborer at the endowment offices who suffered wounds to his face and shoulder. He said that judging by the ease of the assassin's approach, he must have been friends with the colonel.

The attack was closely coordinated with a car bombing minutes later outside the gate that killed several people who had rushed to the scene, and damaged trucks carrying victims of the first bombing to the hospital.

Sheik Ghafour told Iraqi state-run television on Monday night that he believed Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia was responsible for the attacks. Numbering well into the thousands, the members of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia are overwhelmingly Iraqi, but American intelligence officials say they believe that the group has foreign-born leaders.

Last week, Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner, chief American military spokesman in Iraq, said the pace of attacks against Awakening fighters was “perhaps one of the clearest indications of the importance that these Awakening movements and concerned local citizens are having on improving the security situation in Iraq.”

Victims of the two blasts were taken to Numan Hospital in Adhamiya. Squads of Awakening fighters followed closely behind in pickup trucks. They removed wooden coffins and carried them inside the hospital to gather the remains of their friends.

Fears ran high that another bomber would attack, and Awakening guards blocked even anxious relatives from entering the hospital. Family members stood outside, sobbing or talking on cellphones.

One woman pleaded to see her son Ahmed, who she said was being treated inside. “He's a young guy, and he's never done anything bad,” she said.

One of the Awakening guards did not want to tell her the grim news. “Poor woman,”

he said, when she was out of earshot. “I took him to the hospital myself and he was already dead.”

Reporting was contributed by Khalid al-Ansary, Karim Hilmi, Abeer Mohammed and Qais Mizher.

Los Angeles Times
January 8, 2008

11. Bomber Kills Security Figure In Baghdad

The leader of a citizens group allied against insurgents is among at least 18 slain in eight blasts in the capital.

By Kimi Yoshino, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — The suicide bomber walked straight to the Sunni Arab leader of a group battling Al Qaeda in Iraq, shook his target's hand and detonated the explosives wrapped around his body.

Minutes later, as survivors were being moved to safety, witnesses said a second suicide attacker drove into the north Baghdad compound and set off his explosives.

The apparently coordinated attack killed at least 14 people, including Col. Riyadh Samarra, commander of the Adhamiya neighborhood's citizens security group, police and government officials said.

The U.S. military immediately denounced the attack on the American-backed neighborhood group, blaming Al Qaeda in Iraq for finding “new depths of depravity” to fight those who reject its ideology.

By evening, eight bombs had exploded in Baghdad neighborhoods east of the Tigris River, killing at least 18 people and injuring more than three dozen. Some officials put the death toll as high as 25 and the injury count at more than 50.

In a separate incident, 20 gunmen ambushed a security checkpoint manned by members of another neighborhood patrol in

northeastern Baghdad, kidnapping eight of them, Iraqi government officials said.

Samarra's assassination in the Sabaa Abkar area just outside of Adhamiya comes as the U.S. military has been heralding the rise of citizens groups, known as Awakening Councils, as a key reason for a reduction in violence. The attack came nine days after Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden threatened to punish those who aid Americans.

Since Bin Laden's threat, the attacks have been hitting the capital almost daily. A suicide bomber targeted a funeral, killing at least 34 people on New Year's Day. On Sunday, at least three Iraqi soldiers were killed in the middle of an Army Day celebration, moments after they had been jubilantly dancing in the streets, shouting, “Where is terrorism now?”

The increase in the number of bombings is raising unsettling questions: Can the Awakening movement progress even as leaders have become targets? And is violence in the capital returning after months of relative calm?

“The remnants of Al Qaeda [in Iraq] are only trying to prove their existence by choosing random targets,” said Brig. Gen. Qassim Musawi, a spokesman for Baghdad's security forces. “We did warn our people that it's not over, to be careful. Our hard efforts for eight months did have positive results, but things will not be perfect just overnight.”

Except for the twin suicide attacks near Adhamiya, Monday's explosions did not appear to target specific people. Insurgents hit some of the city's safer neighborhoods, striking a university, killing at least three students, and attacking a restaurant and an ice cream shop.

Student Mahmoud Abdullah, 22, said he was grabbing a snack at a kiosk in front of the University of Technology when he saw a

"ball of fire" and heard the explosion.

"There is nothing that can justify such an attack on innocent students and civilians," said Abdullah, who was being treated at Kindi Hospital for minor shrapnel injuries. "I am really afraid of the current situation. I think the bad period of explosions will come back."

Iraqi military officials urged caution to residents who have started venturing out after a drop in attacks during the latter half of 2007. Security forces immediately began enforcing a vehicle ban in Adhamiya.

Members of the neighborhood's Awakening group, called the Adhamiya Revolutionaries, pledged to find a new leader and press forward.

"This crime will not stop us," said Abo Mohammed, the group's operations commander. "We will continue fighting Al Qaeda."

Al Qaeda in Iraq may see Adhamiya, still a Sunni stronghold, as one of its last chances to stop the trend of insurgents joining forces with Americans. The area's volunteers represent one of the newer councils.

Ammar Tuama, a Shiite Muslim member of parliament's defense and security committee, said the government must embrace the Awakening movement.

"Al Qaeda is weakening in Iraq, but it is not finished," Tuama said. "They still have some active role, so we need the Awakening to finish them. I think there is a relative equation. The stronger the Awakening gets, the weaker Al Qaeda will be."

Elsewhere in Iraq, an electrical short sparked a blaze in a fuel storage tank in Baiji, at the country's largest oil refinery. One worker was killed and 36 suffered minor injuries, said Salih Qaisi, a refinery employee.

Times staff writers Caesar Ahmed, Mohammed Rasheed,

Saif Hameed, Saif Rasheed and Usama Redha and special correspondents in Baghdad and Tikrit contributed to this report.

Washington Post
January 8, 2008
Pg. 14

12. Sunni Security Unit Leader, Colleagues Killed In Attack Encouraged By Bin Laden

Deadly Fire Erupts at Iraq's Largest Oil Refinery

By Amit R. Paley, Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Jan. 7 -- A suicide bomber killed the leader of a U.S.-backed neighborhood security force in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district Monday, his aides said, the latest in a string of attacks against such forces.

The blast, along with a second explosion, killed Col. Riyadh al-Sammarai and at least 10 others, witnesses said.

The campaign against the so-called Awakening groups began after Osama bin Laden called on Muslims late last month to attack such "dangerous conspiracies."

"They are sending a message to the Awakening fighters that we must leave the movement," said Riyadh Hadi, field commander of the Adhamiyah Awakening, as he stood among the corpses of his colleagues. "But this will only increase our will to fight against them more and more."

The attack took place about 10 a.m. as Sammarai was leaving his home in the compound of the Sunni Endowment, an institution responsible for overseeing the sect's mosques in Iraq. As he left the Endowment, employees came up to greet him.

Then a man, whom Sammarai appeared to know, walked up carrying a blanket and motioned as if he were about to shake Sammarai's hands, said Maj. Mohammed Hazim, an Iraqi army official at

the compound. The man then detonated his explosives, killing Sammarai, three of his bodyguards and three Endowment employees, witnesses said.

As more than a dozen wounded were being transported to the hospital, a second bomb detonated and killed four of the injured, witnesses said. Other casualty reports varied.

Sammarai, about 47 years old, was recruited last year by the American military to lead the Awakening group, which includes 700 fighters who are each paid about \$300 a month by the U.S. military, according to Sammarai's aides.

Navy Rear Adm. Gregory J. Smith, a spokesman for U.S. forces in Iraq, said the spike in attacks carried out recently on the Awakening groups reflected their success in winning over residents and driving out insurgents.

"Clearly al-Qaeda is very, very concerned about the Awakening movements," he said, adding that most of the attacks appeared to have been carried out by the insurgent group al-Qaeda in Iraq. "That's why we're now seeing these attacks by Sunnis against Sunnis."

In a 56-minute audio recording released Dec. 29, bin Laden lashed out at the Awakening groups as "conspiracies that are being weaved against you by the Zionist-crusader alliance led by America."

Safa Hussein, Iraq's deputy national security adviser, said al-Qaeda in Iraq is trying to both attack the Awakening and penetrate its ranks. "Al-Qaeda's policy is in two directions," he said.

"The Sahwa, when they were created, it was a big action, and al-Qaeda needed some time to respond to it," he said, using the Arab word for Awakening. "And we all know the people of al-Qaeda are adaptive. But we think the ultimate outcome is not in their favor."

At least 42 members of Awakening groups have been killed in Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, and more than 50 in Sunni-dominated portions of Babil province, south of Baghdad, security officials said.

Also Monday, a mechanical failure at the nation's largest oil refinery, in Baiji, sparked massive fires that killed one person and wounded at least three, the U.S. military said. Bilal Mohammed, an engineer at the refinery, said nine workers were burned in the fire, which took three hours to extinguish.

Correspondent Joshua Partlow and special correspondents Zaid Sabah, Dalya Hassan, Saad al-Izzi and K.I. Ibrahim in Baghdad, Saad Sarhan in Najaf and other Washington Post staff in Iraq contributed to this report.

Washington Times
January 8, 2008
Pg. 4

13. Bush To Highlight 'Diplomatic Surge'

By Jon Ward, Washington Times

President Bush will speak today by videoconference with members of a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghdad, part of the administration's effort to draw more notice to local political progress, one of the success stories in Iraq that the White House sees as underreported.

The virtual meeting with the group is part of a White House effort to better publicize the "diplomatic surge" that accompanied the addition of 30,000 combat troops over the past year.

A key element of the Bush administration's "surge" was a change in political strategy to rely more on local progress and less on national government unity. While the central government in Baghdad has made limited progress, the military surge has paid dividends, and local political

progress has taken off in some parts of Iraq.

But the level of reconciliation has been a hard sell to news outlets, said a top State Department official.

"It's the kind of thing that happens slowly and doesn't produce dramatic moments. That's what we've struggled with," said Barbara Stephenson, deputy coordinator for Iraq at the State Department.

The job of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) is to "bring Iraqis together, make meetings happen, and [the Iraqis] bring consensus."

"It doesn't photograph well. And that's been a challenge," Mrs. Stephenson said. "It's profound in its ramifications, but it's hard to make a good story because it's about building processes."

There are 24 PRTs in Iraq, ranging in size from six or seven persons to the largest in Baghdad, which numbers about 100. About half of the 600 or so PRT personnel are State Department employees, and the rest are foreign diplomats or Iraqi nationals. There were about 300 PRT personnel in Iraq at the beginning of last year, said Mrs. Stephenson, a career Foreign Service officer.

Most of the extra PRT personnel were embedded with U.S. combat teams and worked to help local communities rebuild infrastructure and institutions. The decision to lean more heavily on local reconciliation marked a shift in White House policy that one former administration official said went largely unnoticed, while most media attention and public discussion centered on the troop increase.

The first PRTs were installed in November 2005 in four Iraqi cities: Kirkuk, Nineveh, Babel and Baghdad. In summer 2006, the State Department helped Britain set up a PRT in Basra, the South Koreans in Erbil, and the Italians in Dikar.

In November 2006, just before the president announced

his surge, PRTs started to focus primarily on helping Iraqi provinces execute budgets, so that they could receive money from the central government and properly distribute it.

"Everything we see as normal aspects of government function is sort of being learned relatively late," said one senior State Department official involved with Iraq affairs, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, Mrs. Stephenson said, "people described [budgets] as bags of money from Saddam."

The PRTs embedded with combat brigades have also worked to set up microloans for small businesses, a White House spokeswoman said.

Mideast Stars and Stripes
January 8, 2008

14. U.S. Commander Says EFP Attacks Have Fallen Dramatically In 6 Months

By Lisa Burgess, Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — U.S. forces traveling Iraq's highways are seeing far fewer attacks from armor-piercing explosively formed penetrators compared to six months ago, according to one U.S. commander.

In July, there were about 20 EFP attacks against coalition forces on Iraq's main arteries, Col. Charles Flynn, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team, told Pentagon reporters Monday.

By December, the number of EFP attacks against coalition forces had dropped to three, Flynn said during a remote briefing from his headquarters.

Attacks of all kinds have dropped, he said, including small-arms fire; indirect fire, which includes mortars and rockets; exploded roadside bombs (including EFPs); and roadside bombs discovered before they exploded.

In December, the number of all these attacks was 28, according to Flynn.

In July, when the 1st BCT arrived in Iraq from Fort Bragg, N.C., to begin its 15-month deployment, the unit logged a total of 92 attacks across all four categories.

Flynn attributed the reduction to several factors, including increased patrols, better intelligence collection methods and the "stand-down" of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in August.

The United Nations-hosted meeting in Baghdad on Sept. 23 between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki appears to have had an effect on cutting down the number of EFPs, he said.

"I think that since the talks in September, there has been what would appear to be reduction in lethal flow of EFP and other ordnance or munitions that have been used in attacks," Flynn said.

U.S. military officials have accused Iran of supplying Iraqi insurgents with EFPs, beginning last January when they held a news conference in Baghdad that featured fragments of an allegedly Iranian-made munition.

The officials said markings on the EFPs, as well as the machining processes, identified the weapons as being "uniquely" Iranian.

Unlike other Army combat units, the 1st BCT is not a "land owner," Flynn said.

Instead, the brigade, which is based near Nasariyah in southern Iraq, provides security throughout Iraq for other units, with a special focus on ensuring the country's major highways are kept safe.

When it comes to highways, Flynn said, the brigade's No. 1 goal "is reducing EFP attacks."

USA Today
January 8, 2008

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15. Many Troops

Openly Gay, Group Says

Claims servicemembers not being discharged according to policy

By Andrea Stone, USA Today
Army Sgt. Darren Manzella figured that stating he was gay on national television would surely get him booted from the military under the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

But Manzella has heard nothing in the three weeks since he told CBS' *60 Minutes* that his fellow soldiers knew he was gay and the program aired a home video that showed him kissing a former boyfriend.

"I thought I would at least be asked about the segment or approached and told I shouldn't speak to the media again," says Manzella, 30, a medic who recently returned from Kuwait and plans to hold a news conference today in Washington to discuss the military's silence.

He says he is among a growing number of servicemembers who have told other troops and even commanders they are gay and have not been discharged.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a gay advocacy group, says it knows of about 500 gay servicemembers who are serving openly without consequences. "That's the highest number we've ever been aware of," SLDN spokesman Steve Ralls says. "Their experiences point to an undeniable shift in the armed forces."

Manzella says he was invited to join more than 600 members of an invitation-only MySpace group, Guys and Gals Like Us, for gays who don't hide their orientation from their units. Members use pseudonyms because some gay troops have been discharged for acknowledging their orientation elsewhere online.

Nearly 12,000 servicemembers have been

dismissed under the policy approved by President Clinton in 1993. Discharges peaked at 1,273 in 2001 and have fallen sharply since the Iraq war began.

"A lot of servicemembers are getting 'wink-wink' treatment from their commanders," says Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which studies the policy.

Elaine Donnelly, whose Center for Military Readiness favors a ban on gays, says "skepticism is in order" about reports that they are serving openly without sanctions. She says she has been "bothering" commanders at Manzella's base, Fort Hood in Texas, to take action since the *60 Minutes* piece aired. "We have yet to get an answer," she says. "His commanders should be disciplined appropriately for failing to do their duty."

Manzella, who earned a Combat Medical Badge for service in Baghdad, says he has been open about his sexuality for 18 months. He says he told his commander he was gay because he was getting anonymous e-mails threatening to expose him. The Army investigated in August 2006 and viewed the video that showed his boyfriend.

After all that, "They found 'no evidence of homosexuality,'" Manzella says. "They recommended that I just go back and keep doing my job." He soon headed to Kuwait for his second Iraq war deployment.

Col. Diane Battaglia, a Fort Hood spokeswoman, said Manzella's commanders were unavailable for comment because his unit was redeploying from the Middle East. But, she said, "There's always an investigation conducted" when a soldier declares he's gay.

Army spokesman Paul Boyce says the "policy is public law, and it is being enforced." It's not illegal to be gay in the military, he points

out, as long as a servicemember keeps quiet.

Eugene Fidell of the National Institute of Military Justice, a group of military legal experts, wonders whether the dwindling number of discharges suggests broader implications for the policy. "Is it dying basically for lack of interest?" he asks. "Military managers may be turning a blind eye because it's a nuisance, and we need these people."

GovExec.com

January 7, 2008

16. Union Files Supreme Court Appeal Of NSPS Lawsuit

By Brittany R. Ballenstedt

A federal labor union on Monday filed an appeal with the Supreme Court against the Defense Department's new personnel system.

The American Federation of Government Employees filed a petition with the high court, asking it to hear a case on the legality of the National Security Personnel System's labor relations rules for civilian employees.

In May, a panel of judges for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that under the 2004 law allowing NSPS, Defense has the authority to limit the collective bargaining rights of its civilian employees through November 2009. In August, the coalition's request for a full court review of that ruling was denied.

The union's move comes just weeks after Congress passed authorizing legislation that would restore the collective bargaining and appeal rights of employees and modify the way across-the-board and performance-based pay increases are awarded. While the union called the legislation "an acceptable compromise," it indicated plans to move forward with the Supreme Court petition if the legislation

was not signed by Jan. 7 -- the Supreme Court-issued deadline for an appeal.

Last week, President Bush pocket-vetoed the authorizing legislation over an unrelated provision that would open up the Iraqi government to lawsuits.

AFGE has pursued the case with eight other unions in the United Defense Workers Coalition. But in weighing a Supreme Court appeal, the other unions dropped out of the case, noting fear that an unfavorable ruling by the high court could set a broad precedent that could hinder the ability to negotiate in the federal sector.

Fayetteville (NC) Observer

January 8, 2008

17. General Readies For Iraq Mission

By Henry Cuningham, Military editor

Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III said Monday that he expects to take charge of forces in Iraq in mid-February.

"Between now and mid-February, of course, we will make final preparations and actually move over to get situated to assume command," he said.

Austin, the commander of Fort Bragg and the 18th Airborne Corps, made his comments during an interview with George Breece on WFNC (640 AM) radio. He and his wife, Charlene, discussed the upcoming deployment and its effect on Fort Bragg and military families.

"The community outreach has just been fabulous," Charlene Austin said. "We are very, very appreciative of the new initiatives that Fayetteville has launched for us."

The corps headquarters will be making its third deployment since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The headquarters has been deployed in Afghanistan and will be making its second deployment in Iraq.

"There are a number of

folks that are in the ranks that have prior experience in Iraq or Afghanistan or both," the general said. "We've been able to capitalize on that experience by doing a number of things."

In preparation, the corps staff has conducted mission rehearsal exercises on Fort Bragg, traveled to U.S. Central Command at Tampa, Fla., and brought in retired senior military officers for advice.

"The electronic connectivity that we have now far exceeds any capability that we've ever had before," Austin said. He sees most of the briefings and reads most of the reports the commander in Iraq is reading, he said.

Austin will replace Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno as commander of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq. Odierno has held the job since Dec. 14, 2006.

Multi-National Corps-Iraq is the tactical unit responsible for operations throughout Iraq. The command is part of Gen. David Petraeus' Multi-National Force-Iraq.

Anchorage Daily News

January 7, 2008

Pg. 3

18. 4th Brigade Re-Enlistment Rate Leads Army

More than 1,100 of Fort Rich unit's soldiers re-upped in 2007.

By George Bryson

Fourteen months in Iraq took a definite toll on his troops, but something must have gone right, said Col. Michael Garrett, commander of the 4th Airborne Brigade Combat Team, which returned to Fort Richardson before Christmas.

Last year a higher percentage of his soldiers re-enlisted than did soldiers in any brigade in the Army, Garrett noted in a recent interview.

"We exceeded 200 percent of our re-enlistment goals, and that says a lot."

Actually, the brigade

exceeded its re-enlistment target set by the Department of Defense by 267 percent last fiscal year, said Master Sgt. Douglas Goodwin, who leads the brigade's retention efforts, speaking in a second interview.

In all, 1,105 soldiers in the unit re-upped -- more than a third of about 3,000 noncommissioned soldiers in the brigade eligible for re-enlistment, Goodwin said.

Among the Army's 37 combat brigades, the re-enlistment effort by the 4th Brigade (25th Infantry Division) -- in sheer numbers -- was second only to a larger brigade based in Fort Lewis, Wash., Goodwin said. But in percentage terms, the 4th brigade was tops.

"We were the highest by far," he said.

One attraction may have been the Army's generous new bonus system -- with cash inducements to re-enlist ranging from \$20,000 to \$35,000 for medics and highly skilled infantry soldiers.

Re-enlistment bonuses paid last year to members of the 4th brigade alone exceeded \$8.5 million, Goodwin said.

"Certainly the money is a factor," added Garrett, who is due to relinquish his command in June, as the brigade launches a brand new life-cycle.

"But ... if the guy or the gal did not like the unit -- the leadership ... the environment -- they would not make the choice to stick around."

His soldiers paid a high price while helping Iraqi Security Forces to patrol streets, search for roadside bombs and battle insurgents in dangerous combat zones south and west of Baghdad in 2006 and 2007.

During its 14-month deployment, the 4th Brigade lost 53 soldiers. An additional 345 soldiers were wounded.

Now Garrett is trying to determine how many more troops under his command suffered a traumatic brain injury in combat, or might now be experiencing post-traumatic

stress disorder.

"We won't know until March or April the real impact of post traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries," he said. "Certainly there are a number of folks who have shown the indicators of both of those."

Colonel: war hard on marriage

Col. Michael Garrett, commander of the 4th Airborne Brigade Combat Team at Fort Richardson, shared the following thoughts in a recent interview:

On evaluating his troops for mental stress:

"What the Army has found over time -- there will be hundreds of folks who will need to be seen by our mental health professionals. What's most important is the next screening that's scheduled for March. That will be a pretty big deal. That will be every single person in the brigade. I have a friend of mine who is a therapist and she's seeing lots of (4th brigade) Spartans. ... They're calling her, making appointments through the military health care system. ... And that's good. I think that's healthy.

On families struggling with divorce:

"My sense is that, yes, (deployments) are tough. And yes some marriages fail. ... A lot of it, too, is you have young people making, I think, simply poor decisions and some of those marriages not working out.

"I can't tell you how many paratroopers we had get married two days before they deployed. Or how many paratroopers got married during their mid-tour leaves. And I will tell you that a lot of those (marriages) didn't work out."

On how soon the brigade might return to Iraq:

"Anything is possible in this day and age. The Army guarantees units 12 months of 'dwell time' (home between deployments). What a year of dwell time doesn't give you in

all cases is the opportunity to train everybody and to send people to the schools they need to go to -- the noncommissioned officer course ... jump-master school ... ranger school."

On what he'll do after relinquishing his command in June:

"We'll find out in the March-April time-frame exactly where we're goin. g... (I) may go to the war college. ... I was selected (to attend the college) three or four years ago, and just haven't been able to go because I've been in command."

On his own plans during the brigade's January block leave:

"I've got a list of winter things that you can only do in Alaska. ... (and) I'm just hanging out with my family.

"I've got what you'd call one of those high-energy households ... a 13-year-old daughter who is a big swimmer ... an 11-year-old son who is a big hockey player ... a wife who works part time (as a nurse) over at Elmendorf. So for me it's kind of interesting just watching all this ... watching my wife work this very challenging schedule."

Colorado Springs Gazette
January 7, 2008

Pg. 4

Military Update

19. Army Support Specialists Help Soldiers Gain Injury Pay

By Tom Philpott

Too many severely injured troops and their families haven't been getting the help they need in preparing applications to qualify for up to \$100,000 in traumatic injury insurance. But that is going to change, Army Col. John Sackett said.

Sackett heads the Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance branch within the U.S. Army Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Va. More than

6,600 claims for TSGLI have been filed by wounded or injured soldiers since the program began on Dec. 1, 2005. But only 2,700 claims, about 40 percent of the total, have been approved.

Many more wounded members from all services would be found eligible for TSGLI if service members, family caregivers and especially medical staff were better informed on the kind of detailed documentation TSGLI requires, Sackett said.

To increase their knowledge and boost the number of claims approved, the Army is assigning soldier family support specialists to 10 military treatment facilities critical in the treatment of trauma patients.

These specialists already are deployed and holding TSGLI training sessions for anyone involved in caregiving or advising severely injured members at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.; Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas; William Beaumont AMC at Fort Bliss, Texas; Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Bragg, N.C.; and Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Fort Gordon, Ga.

More of these counselors are being trained to deploy soon to Schofield Army Medical Center, Hawaii; Blanchfield Army Community Hospital, Fort Campbell, Ky.; Guthrie Ambulatory Army Medical Center, Fort Drum, N.Y.; Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis, Wash.; and Darnall Army Hospital, Fort Hood, Texas.

Every member covered by Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance pays an extra \$1 a month for traumatic injury protection. TSGLI pays up to \$100,000 to help severely injured members and families handle the extra expense of adjusting to life-altering injuries.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, which administers TSGLI, lists 44

types of losses that can qualify a member for payment. Conditions not difficult to document involve the loss of body parts or bodily functions, severe burns or severe brain and spinal cord injuries.

A far bigger and more complex problem in preparing TSGLI claims, however, involves members who suffer severe wounds to limbs that are saved or have mild traumatic brain injury. The trauma can leave them dependent on others to perform “activities of daily living” such as dressing, bathing, toileting or feeding themselves for extended periods.

If unable to independently perform two or more of these activities for 30 days, the member will qualify for \$25,000 in TSGLI. If debilitated in this way for 60 days, the payment is \$50,000; 90 days, \$75,000; and 120 days would qualify for the maximum \$100,000.

Of nearly 3,700 Army TSGLI claims rejected by the VA, about 90 percent involve claims of members’ lost ability to perform activities of daily living. They are being rejected, Sackett said, because caregivers aren’t documenting loss of ability to perform daily activities.

Too often a patient’s medical records, Sackett said, “simply states ‘We’re treating an injury,’ ‘We’re treating an injury,’ ‘We’re treating an injury,’” with no indication of how injuries affect their daily living.

“The way to resolve this is to put boots on the ground, so to speak, to help the individuals get the necessary documentation they need at the military treatment facility,” Sackett said.

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 8, 2008

20. Marines Publicly Probe Shootings

By Associated Press

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. - The Marine Corps launched a

rare tribunal yesterday to publicly investigate disputed allegations that a special-forces unit killed as many as 19 Afghan civilians after the military convoy was rammed by a car bomb.

The court of inquiry will focus on the actions of Maj. Fred C. Galvin, commander of the 120-person unit, and platoon leader Capt. Vincent J. Noble. They were members of a special operations company that opened fire March 4 on a crowded road in Nangahar province after an explosives-rigged minivan crashed into their convoy. No Marines died.

Witnesses said the Marines fired indiscriminately at pedestrians and people in cars, buses and taxis, Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission said in a report. A defense attorney said evidence would show the patrol followed regulations. Testimony was to start today.

--AP

Air Force Times
January 14, 2008

Pg. 9

21. Minot Nuke Handlers Still Not Ready For Inspection

By Michael Hoffman

The new 5th Bomb Wing commander at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., isn’t mincing words.

Col. Joel Westa described his wing’s looming nuclear surety inspection as “the most scrutinized inspection in the history of time.” He understands his airmen have something to prove to the rest of the Air Force and the nation.

So it’s not surprising that a recently announced delay of the inspection, which had been planned for Jan. 23, has many observers wondering what’s going on.

It’s been a little more than four months since airmen at Minot made the unprecedented mistake of unknowingly

loading a B-52 with six nuclear warheads and flying them from North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

After a six-week investigation into the incident, Maj. Gen. Richard “Dick” Newton, deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and requirements, said an “erosion of adherence to weapons-handling standards” led to five major procedural errors at Minot. Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne called it an “unacceptable mistake.”

The “Bent Spear” incident resulted in the firing of Westa’s predecessor, Col. Bruce Emig. Two group commanders and a squadron commander also got sacked, and 65 airmen were decertified from working with nuclear weapons, basically unable to do their jobs until they were recertified.

Still, with all that pressure and all that time, the 5th Bomb Wing isn’t ready to get back to work.

When Air Combat Command inspectors visited Minot on Dec. 16 for its initial nuclear surety inspection — held before the NSI can start — they decided to push back the scheduled Jan. 23 inspection, consequently delaying the process to recertify the wing to handle nuclear weapons.

Since the ACC commander decertified the 5th Bomb Wing from its wartime mission — maintaining part of the nation’s nuclear stockpile — shortly after the incident, the Air Force has relied on airmen from Barksdale’s 2nd Bomb Wing to continue operations at Minot.

Meanwhile, the 5th Bomb Wing’s airmen are sitting on the sideline, training until the wing is recertified. To do that, it must pass its NSI, Westa said.

It took two months before Westa was given authority by ACC to train and recertify the airmen who had lost their certification under the

Personnel Reliability Program, which the U.S. uses to monitor those who handle nuclear weapons.

To date, he said about 95 percent of those who lost their certification to handle nukes are now recertified under the commander’s guidance. Westa recertified most of the airmen not involved in the incident, but he said there are still some who will never get it back.

Westa pointed to the lack of senior enlisted leadership and the short amount of time he and other Minot officials had to train the airmen on new procedures as the cause of the delay of the inspection.

“The key piece that is driving all this is the flow of information was slow to come after the investigation and caused us some time that we were unable to train, and there were some key billets that weren’t changed,” he said.

Along with the high-ranking officers, four senior NCOs with the 5th Munitions Squadron were fired, pushing back the squadron’s ability to train the recertified airmen, Westa said.

“We lost four really critical SNCOs, and then there were some other unfilled positions,” he said. “It took awhile to get [their replacements] identified.”

Westa said he expects to bring aboard the necessary senior enlisted leaders this month and, once they get settled, to get back on track toward restarting the inspection process following about a 60-day training period.

“There was about a two-month period until we could go back to just training, and it’s a significant skill set,” he said. “It’s something that requires constant honing. The weapons we are talking about have extremely tight tolerances.”

He did confirm that the disciplinary actions over the incident have ceased, and the ACC investigation led by Lt. Gen. Norman Seip, which looked into potential criminal

charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, is closed without anyone being charged.

The 5th Bomb Wing commander could not go into detail over how his wing has amended its procedures to prevent a Bent Spear incident from occurring again, but he said he could "guarantee beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is not a weapon moved that [he] does not absolutely know about."

The changes to procedure he could describe dealt with the lengths to which airmen go to verify they are moving the correct weapon. Every move is backed up by five or six personal checks and five or six database checks, Westa said.

Every time a nuclear weapon is moved, it can't occur without Westa's voice approval. This is not new, but Westa said only one or two checks used to be made. Now, he is intimately involved with each and every movement from storage to its final destination.

Also, the status of each nuclear weapon is now briefed to Westa, much like the status of each aircraft owned by the wing.

Although Westa said he was initially disappointed over the delayed NSI, he said this was an inspection that the wing needed to be 100 percent sure it would pass.

The last time the 5th Bomb Wing was inspected, in 2006, it received the highest rating — satisfactory.

"No one wants to see us fail," he said. "It's not one of those things where you can just scrape through an NSI." So far, the date of the next inspection has not been set.

Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Oklahoma entered the new year as one of the top states in the number of its military troops mobilized, according to new figures released by the Department of Defense.

The figures show that Oklahoma has 3,368 members of the National Guard and Reserves on federal status. That puts the state third, after Indiana's 4,515 and California's 3,914.

Eight Guard and Reserve units in Tulsa, eight in Broken Arrow and one in Sapulpa were among those listed in the announcement.

U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, a veteran member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, cited the planned deployment this year of members of the 45th Infantry Brigade to Iraq.

"Our Oklahoma Army National Guard and Army Reserve units are some of the best trained and equipped in the nation," said Inhofe, R-Okla. "As a brigade of 2,613 Oklahoma National Guardsmen prepares to deploy to Iraq this month, Oklahoma currently stands as one of the greatest contributors of mobilized reservists and Guardsmen to the war on terrorism."

Inhofe said the 45th Infantry Brigade's continued high level of readiness following its earlier deployment to Afghanistan and its high recruiting and retention rates have earned it a reputation as being one of the most capable brigades in the country and well suited for its mission.

Rep. Dan Boren, D-Okla., a member of the House Armed Services Committee, noted that the state ranks high despite its size.

"We may not be the largest state in population, but per capita there are few who have given more to their country than Oklahomans," Boren said.

"There is a very long and proud tradition of heroism amongst our National Guard

and reservists from the state of Oklahoma. These men and women continue to conduct their missions with diligence and honor."

Boren also cited \$2.7 million he secured for improvements at Camp Gruber, where members of the 45th are trained.

Lt. Col. John Altebaumer, deputy director of public affairs for the Oklahoma National Guard, said the deployment of the 45th Infantry Brigade boosted the state's numbers.

"When the nation needs us, that is what we will respond to," Altebaumer said. "That's what we are there for."

Even with the numbers being deployed currently from the state, Altebaumer said the Oklahoma National Guard will be able to meet local needs.

"We make sure we can still respond to state emergencies," he said.

Oklahoma is bucking a national trend, Pentagon figures show. A decrease in the number of troops on federal status was announced by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard. Only the Marine Corps had an increase.

Explaining that those figures change on a regular basis, the Defense Department said that 90,252 National Guard and Reserve personnel are mobilized.

Top states for troop mobilization

Indiana: 4,515; California: 3,914; Oklahoma: 3,368; Texas: 3,206; Virginia: 2,966; Maryland: 2,524; South Carolina: 2,413; Puerto Rico: 2,334; Pennsylvania: 2,222; Missouri: 2,089; Alabama: 2,016

Source: Department of Defense

Chicago Tribune
January 7, 2008

23. 2 Brothers Also In Band Of Brothers

Marine reservists glad to serve in same unit in Iraq

By Robert Channick, Special

to the Tribune

Brian and Mike Wiebe shared everything, from friends to a passion for football, while growing up in northwest suburban Rolling Meadows.

On Monday, the brothers will return to a Marine Corps base in California to complete intensive training that will prepare both for a tour of duty in Iraq.

"I couldn't really be happier to be in with somebody like my own brother," said Lance Cpl. Mike Wiebe, 20. "It's comforting thinking that he's there with me."

Wiebe and his brother enlisted in a Chicago-based Marine Reserve unit -- the 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines -- which was called to active duty in September. The brothers had been home for the holidays but will return to the Twentynine Palms base before shipping out in a few weeks.

Mike Wiebe, the younger brother, enlisted on his 18th birthday while a senior at Rolling Meadows High School. He was an all-conference center in football but passed up a possible scholarship to Northern Illinois University in DeKalb to join the military. "That was a tough decision," he said. "But it was something I knew I wanted to do since the beginning of high school."

The two are assigned to different companies within the battalion. Trained for infantry, Mike Wiebe will be a convoy driver, and Brian Wiebe will be as a radio operator.

But brothers serving in the same combat unit is unusual, officials said.

"It's not commonplace, but it does happen every once in a while," said Maj. Jay Delarosa, a Marine Corps spokesman.

Lance Cpl. Brian Wiebe, 23, was a fullback on the 2003 National Junior College Championship football team at Harper College in Palatine. He was studying criminal justice at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago when he was inspired to enlist in 2006, after seeing the transformation

Tulsa World
January 6, 2008
Pg. 17

22. State Still Calling Out The Troops

Oklahoma ranks third in the country in National Guard and Reserve activations.

By Jim Myers, World

in his younger brother.

"I went to his graduation from boot camp, and I decided that this is what I want to do," said Brian Wiebe, who also works as a part-time community service officer for Park Ridge police. "Seeing that change from when you go in as a civilian and you come out as a Marine, it's a big difference."

That the two will be deployed together is a comfort and a concern for their parents and younger brother, Patrick.

"Any parent would be worried," said their father, Brian Sr., 52, a longtime Rolling Meadows resident and superintendent of public works in Park Ridge. "At least I know they're there together."

Also in the same unit is Marcus Brightwell, a neighbor who played football with them in high school.

Mike Wiebe took advantage of the holiday leave to marry his high school sweetheart, Ashley Pera. After a civil ceremony last week and small reception. They are planning for a honeymoon getaway upon his return from Iraq.

Though Brian Wiebe considers his entire unit a band of brothers, he shares some of his parents' concerns -- at least for the newly married Mike, if not for himself.

"I think it would be tougher if I were at home," he said. "I'd rather be out there with him."

Los Angeles Times
January 8, 2008

Afghanistan

24. 2 Soldiers Killed By Roadside Bomb

A roadside bomb killed two U.S.-led coalition soldiers and wounded a third in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, officials said. Their nationalities were not released, but most of the troops in the area are American.

In the southern province of Kandahar, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked a police patrol, killing one officer and

wounding four, officials said.

In neighboring Helmand province, police discovered and tried to defuse a remote-controlled bomb, but it exploded, killing two officers and two civilians, provincial police chief Mohammed Hussain Andiwai said.

In Kandahar's Zhari district, three suspected Taliban fighters were killed in a battle against police and North Atlantic Treaty Organization troops Sunday, the Interior Ministry said.

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
January 8, 2008

25. Oceana-Based Jets Collide In Gulf; Aviators Safe

By Matthew Jones, The Virginian-Pilot

Two F/A-18 Super Hornets with the Truman Strike Group apparently collided in midair Monday in the Persian Gulf.

The three aviators were rescued, but both planes were destroyed.

The crash occurred at about 7:30 p.m. local time in the northern part of the Gulf, said Lt. John Gay, a Navy spokesman with the Bahrain-based 5th Fleet. The planes were patrolling about 20 miles from the carrier Harry S. Truman "to ensure maritime security operations" when the incident happened, Gay said.

The aviators ejected. They were rescued and taken back to the aircraft carrier. They were medically evaluated and appeared to be in good condition, Gay said.

The crash is under investigation, he said. Meanwhile, the Truman Strike Group was able to continue normal operations, part of the routine U.S. presence in the region.

The planes were part of Carrier Air Wing 3. One plane was carrying two aviators.

Carrier Air Wing 3 includes strike fighter squadrons VFA-11, VFA-32,

VFA-37 and VFA-105, which are assigned to Oceana Naval Air Station.

One of the fighters, a two-seater F/A-18F, belonged to strike fighter squadron 11, known as the Red Rippers. The other, a one-seater F/A-18E, belonged to strike fighter squadron 105, known as the Gunslingers.

The air wing also includes Tactical Electronics Warfare Squadron VAQ-130, Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron VAW-126, and Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron HS-7.

Midair collisions occur periodically during flight training, but crashes such as Monday's - which happened during actual flight operations - are rare.

In January 1999, a Marine pilot crashed about 20 miles off the coast of southern Japan after apparently colliding with another military jet.

In February 1998, two Marine Corps jets collided over the Persian Gulf and crashed near Kuwait, killing one pilot. That crash was later blamed on confusion in a crowded air space during a midair refueling.

A single Super Hornet costs \$57 million, according to the Navy.

News researcher Jakob Hays contributed to this report.

Washington Times
January 8, 2008

Pg. 9

26. Washington Visit Stresses U.S. Ties

Strain between countries eases

By Nicholas Birch,
Washington Times

ISTANBUL — Turkish President Abdullah Gul's White House visit today marks a watershed in U.S.-Turkey relations, which have dramatically improved since Washington began providing Ankara with intelligence on a Kurdish terrorist movement.

"Turkish-American relations have not been as good as this since the end of the

Cold War," the Turkish government's chief foreign policy adviser, Ahmet Davutoglu, said on Turkish television late last week.

For years, the relationship had been strained over Turkey's refusal to permit U.S. forces to invade Iraq from its territory in 2003, and the perception that Washington was unwilling to act against the Iraq-based Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) separatists.

That changed after talks with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in early November, when the United States began providing high-level intelligence support for Turkish raids against PKK bases in northern Iraq.

Since then, there has been a rapid decline in Turkish anti-Americanism and increased official optimism on both sides. However, some officials warn the gains remain fragile.

"Yes, November 5 was an important step," said Faruk Logoglu, a former Turkish ambassador to Washington. "But the new cooperation has to be continuous, or things will be back to square one."

One potential area for future cooperation between the two countries is Pakistan, where scheduled February elections offer fragile hopes for an emergence from the turmoil created by the Dec. 27 assassination of prime minister hopeful Benazir Bhutto.

"Turkey has a lot of credit in both Pakistan and Afghanistan," said Hikmet Cetin, a former NATO senior representative in Afghanistan. "It has more space for maneuver than the U.S. in both countries, and it should do more."

With 1,500 troops in Afghanistan, Turkey is the only Muslim state among 18 nations contributing to peacekeeping efforts there.

Pakistan's founders modeled themselves on Turkish founder Kemal Ataturk. Most Turkish 30-somethings can still sing

bits of the Pakistani songs they were made to learn by heart when Pakistani dictator Gen. Zia ul-Haq visited Turkey in the 1980s. More recently, Turkey played a behind-the-scenes role in a historic 2005 meeting between the Pakistani and Israeli foreign ministers. In April, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf was in Ankara to forge an agreement with Afghan leader Hamid Karzai to increase cooperation against terrorists.

Mr. Gul repaid the compliment to his Turkish-educated, Turkish-speaking counterpart when he traveled to Pakistan on Dec. 3 for talks with that country's political leaders.

"Turkey has very close political and military relations with Pakistan, and a lot of influence on Musharraf," said Zeyno Baran, a Turkey analyst at the Hudson Institute in Washington.

"As a Muslim country, Turkey has a natural insight that Westerners sometimes lack," she said. "Simply translating what is happening on the ground [in Pakistan] to a Western perspective would be a great help."

George Perkovich, a Pakistan analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, agreed that members of the Bush administration would probably be grateful for some Turkish ideas.

Since Mrs. Bhutto's assassination, he said, senior members of the Bush administration have "absolved themselves of Pakistan. They don't know what they want to do.

"If somebody from Turkey came along and said, 'We've got an idea of how to push things forward,' I think the president would say, 'Gee, tell me.'"

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 8, 2008

27. Arabs Share Bush's

Concerns Over Growing Power Of Iran

By Salah Nasrawi, Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt - Iran is the one issue where President Bush and Arab leaders have shared concerns. Ahead of the president's Mideast trip, Arab nations are eager to contain growing Iranian power, though they are wary of doing so militarily.

Arab countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf region, are worried that the long standoff between Iran and the United States could escalate into military action and that they could get caught in the cross fire, with their vital oil exports disrupted.

Arab nations also worry about Iran's increasing influence in the region, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon.

Sunni Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states fear that Iran will dominate Iraq in coming years through its influence on the country's Shiite politicians, particularly if U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq. So they want to ensure the position of Iraq's Sunni Arab minority.

Even before Bush begins his Mideast tour, Arab allies were pushing an effort to isolate Iran. Their focus is Lebanon, where they fear Iran - through its allies Syria and Hezbollah - can strengthen its foothold on a sensitive border with Israel.

Bush, who will visit several Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Egypt after his first stop in Israel tomorrow, has said he will work with Mideast allies to develop a security plan to counter Iran. But while they may welcome U.S. support against Iran, Gulf nations are wary of signing a military or security pact with Washington, at least publicly, since they don't want to look like collaborators in a U.S. push against a Muslim country.

Iran already has threatened

to hit U.S. bases in the Gulf and disrupt oil shipping if the United States launches military action, and Gulf states do not want to make themselves a direct target.

Instead, Arab countries are focusing on diplomatic moves, keeping up communications with Iran while trying to blunt its forays into the region.

Egypt last month rebuffed an Iranian attempt to restore full diplomatic ties, cut off since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Ali Larjani, a top envoy of Iran's supreme leader, was in Egypt for two weeks trying to negotiate a resolution, even offering generous incentives such as helping build nuclear reactors for Egypt and providing it with low-priced wheat.

But Egypt refused, apparently unable to ensure Iranian cooperation on a host of issues, including Iraq and Lebanon. "To have sustainable relations [with Iran], we should have a consensus" on regional issues, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said.

On Lebanon, Arab allies of the United States are worried that if the Syrian-backed opposition, particularly the Shiite extremist group Hezbollah, gains more power there, it will mean giving Iran an even stronger foothold in the country. That, and Iran's influence with the Palestinian extremist group Hamas, would give Tehran greater ability to disrupt the peace process between the Arabs and Israel.

At an Arab League meeting in Cairo on Saturday, Egypt and Saudi Arabia pushed Syria into accepting a formula for resolving the crisis over Lebanon's presidency. Syria signed on to a deal that backed naming Lebanese military chief Michel Suleiman as president and putting off the question of the shape of the next government, in which the opposition is demanding more power.

Arabs feel that Syria may

only be ducking pressure it expects will mount during Bush's tour, while holding off until after an Arab summit in Damascus in March.

While Arab countries may see eye to eye with Bush on concerns over Iran, they are deeply skeptical over the other goal of his Mideast visit: pushing the Arab-Israeli peace process.

After a November conference in Annapolis, Md., Bush said he hoped Israel and the Palestinians could reach a peace accord before the end of his term in January 2009. But many in the Arab world see Washington's new push on peace as too little, too late, and doubt the United States will pressure Israel to make the concessions they demand.

"We will be waiting to see what the U.S. offers during the upcoming visit of President Bush, who bears the responsibility of moving the process forward," Arab League chief Amr Moussa said.

Boston Globe
January 8, 2008

28. Tsongas To Visit Troops Battling In The Mideast

By Martin Finucane, Globe Staff

US Representative Niki Tsongas, who pledged during her campaign to try to get American troops out of Iraq, will travel to that strife-torn country this week as part of a bipartisan congressional delegation.

"No matter how many stories we read in the paper, ... there's nothing like seeing those places firsthand and hearing firsthand from those who are experiencing this very grave situation," she said in a conference call with reporters yesterday.

Tsongas, who won a special election in October in the Fifth Congressional District, will travel to both Iraq and Afghanistan. She will leave today and return Jan. 16.

The trip will also include stops in Greece and Turkey. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the delegation will meet with troops, as well as military commanders and national leaders.

Tsongas, who serves on the military personnel subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, said she wanted to talk to the troops about whether they were adequately equipped and how their families were doing.

She acknowledged that President Bush's troop buildup has improved security in Iraq but said the Iraqi government had failed to craft a political solution to bring peace to the country. She said she hopes her trip would give her "a better understanding of why that hasn't taken place."

During the campaign, Tsongas described the election as a referendum on Bush and the Iraq war. She supported a timetable to begin troop withdrawal, and one of her television ads told voters, "One vote can help end this war: Yours." She said yesterday that she still supports a timetable for withdrawal and believes it could spur the Iraqi government to make political progress.

New York Times
January 8, 2008
Pg. 6

29. North Korea Given Time To Send Data

TOKYO (Reuters) — North Korea's failure to meet a deadline to declare its nuclear activities should be confronted with patience and perseverance, a senior American envoy said here on Monday.

North Korea said Friday that it had already accounted for its nuclear arms program as required under a multilateral disarmament deal, but the assertion was rejected by the United States.

"They were prepared to give a declaration which wasn't going to be complete

and correct," said Washington's top envoy to nuclear talks with North Korea, Christopher R. Hill, "and we felt that it was better for them to give us a complete one even if it's going to be a late one.

"So I think we have to have a little sense of patience and perseverance," he told reporters in Tokyo after arriving for talks with Japanese officials.

The United States and several allies have said North Korea missed a Dec. 31 deadline to submit a full inventory of its nuclear arms programs, as promised in six-party negotiations last year, and to disable its main nuclear complex at Yongbyon.

At the talks — involving the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia — the North agreed to abandon its nuclear program for aid and a better international standing.

"No one likes being late, but being late is probably preferable than being wrong or giving us something that we can't work with," said Mr. Hill, who will go to Seoul on Tuesday.

"Some of the programs are ones that they would rather not discuss publicly," Mr. Hill said when asked why, according to the United States, the North had not made a full declaration. "And I must say this is a society and a government whose first instinct is not to be transparent."

New York Times
January 8, 2008
Pg. 6

30. China To Launch 17 Satellites This Year

By Reuters

China said it would launch 15 rockets, 17 satellites and its third mission with astronauts in 2008. Huang Qiang, secretary-general of the Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense, made the announcement at a news conference, the Xinhua news agency said.

Wall Street Journal
January 8, 2008
Pg. 16

31. Northrop To Compete To Build Humvee Successor

By August Cole

Northrop Grumman Corp. is seeking a contract potentially valued at billions of dollars to build vehicles to replace the Humvees that now provide basic transportation for the Army and Marine Corps.

The Los Angeles defense contractor, in its most recent move to broaden its business beyond its aerospace and naval lines, is expected to announce today that it will compete for a chance to build as many as 140,000 vehicles. Northrop is teaming up with Oshkosh Truck Corp., which has extensive experience making military trucks.

Northrop believes its ability to pack the Oshkosh, Wis., company's vehicles with the latest technologies will give it the edge in a competition that could deliver \$20 billion to \$30 billion for building and maintaining the vehicles over the coming decades. Northrop's biggest rivals in the defense market -- Lockheed Martin Corp., BAE Systems PLC, Boeing Co. and General Dynamics Corp. -- already are vying for the contract with their own teams of partners. For example, Boeing is working with Textron Inc., and fighter-jet maker Lockheed is working with BAE.

Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, or JLTV, from Northrop Grumman and Oshkosh Truck.

Northrop is entering a technically challenging competition: The Pentagon is seeking a light vehicle robust enough to withstand roadside bombs and with a price tag of less than \$300,000 each. The Pentagon will begin winnowing the list of competitors this year, with the hopes of fielding the vehicles

in the next decade.

In a break with traditional development programs, the Pentagon is expecting the contractors to foot the bill for the research and development on their vehicles, to hold down costs and shorten the time it takes to get them in the field.

In an interview, Undersecretary of Defense John Young, the Pentagon's top weapons buyer, said the "competition will bring us creativity and pricing benefits." He said he hopes to employ the same philosophy on other programs as well.

The foray into this corner of the military market is a departure for Northrop, which built B-2 stealth bombers for the Air Force. Northrop, like some of its aerospace-oriented rivals, sees Army vehicle contracts as potentially lucrative new lines of business that it has yet to tap. Funding for programs tied to replacing or repairing military equipment worn out in Iraq and Afghanistan looks promising because there is an obvious, and urgent, need.

Northrop decided to get involved after the Pentagon last summer began to look seriously at how to pack its next-generation vehicles with more technology while simultaneously making them more resistant to blast damage. According to Jerry Agee, president of Northrop's mission-systems division, it was then clear that "it was more than just a truck-building competition."

The military's experience in Iraq led it to add armor to Humvees and eventually spend billions of dollars on armored trucks designed to withstand improvised roadside bombs that have caused hundreds of casualties in Iraq.

Despite being on track to buy more than 15,000 heavily armored vehicles for use in Iraq and Afghanistan, military commanders acknowledge that the larger trucks are too heavy and cumbersome to be used off-road or in tight urban

confines.

The Pentagon's solution is what is called the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, a family of three vehicle types capable of performing missions from reconnaissance to cargo hauling. The vehicle's target weight is below 20,000 pounds, about half the weight of the heavier armored vehicles now being rushed to Iraq. At less than \$300,000 each, the JLTV would also be half the cost.

Although Northrop lacks Oshkosh's history of making trucks for the Army, Northrop officials say their experience in converting Humvees into mobile command centers has helped them understand what the military needs.

Hybrid engine technology is being considered, which would reduce fuel consumption and make the vehicles quieter when being driven in electric-only mode.

The companies face a tough task. The JLTV must meet strict weight limits while also being robust enough to withstand roadside bombs. "It's not going to be the same vehicle you see as the Humvee today," said Mr. Agee.

Seattle Times
January 8, 2008

32. 3 Firms Revise Helicopter Bids

Boeing, Lockheed Martin and United Technologies' Sikorsky revised their bids to build a new combat search-and-rescue helicopter in an Air Force competition that has been twice delayed by losers' protests.

Lockheed and Sikorsky challenged Boeing's November 2006 win of the \$10 billion contract, saying the Air Force overlooked support costs for the aircraft. The Air Force reconsidered its original award after the Government Accountability Office supported the protests in February.

None of the companies indicated when the military

will pick a winner. The contract calls for 141 new helicopters, Boeing said Monday in a statement.

Officials for Boeing, Lockheed and Sikorsky also declined to provide details on their companies' new offers.

Washington Times
January 8, 2008

Pg. 3

33. Defense Contractors Arrested

Suspected of plotting to steal fueling details

By Jerry Seper, Washington Times

Two Defense Department contractors were arrested in New York City on charges of conspiring to steal information relating to contracts to supply fuel to department aircraft worldwide.

Also charged were two contractor firms and a third person for participating in the conspiracies, the Justice Department said yesterday.

In a three-count indictment returned Dec. 5 and unsealed yesterday in U.S. District Court in Baltimore, Christopher Cartwright and Paul Wilkinson were charged for their suspected roles in the conspiracies.

Along with Mr. Cartwright and Mr. Wilkinson, two affiliated companies — Prague-based Far East Russia Aircraft Services Inc. (FERAS) and the Isle of Man-based Aerocontrol LTD — also were charged in the indictment.

Mr. Cartwright and Mr. Wilkinson are U.S. citizens who have been living in Prague. A separate charge was filed yesterday in U.S. District Court in Baltimore against Matthew Bittenbender of Baltimore, charging the same criminal offenses.

"These cases demonstrate that we will aggressively investigate and prosecute those who attempt to derail the efforts of the Department of Defense to obtain essential goods and services, such as aviation fuel, at competitive

prices," said Assistant Attorney General Thomas O. Barnett, who heads the department's Antitrust Division.

According to the indictment, Mr. Cartwright, Mr. Wilkinson, FERAS and Aerocontrol conspired with Mr. Bittenbender to defraud the United States, commit wire fraud and steal trade secrets. Mr. Bittenbender is a former senior contract fuel manager at Avcard, a division of Kropp Holdings LLC, a Hunt Valley, Md., company that provides fuel and fuel services to commercial and government aircraft.

Mr. Bittenbender is charged with taking confidential bid data and other proprietary information related to fuel supply contracts with the Defense Department from Avcard, and selling that information to competitors Mr. Cartwright, Mr. Wilkinson, FERAS and Aerocontrol.

In return, the indictment said Mr. Bittenbender received cash payments and a percentage of the profit earned on the resulting fuel supply contracts awarded by Defense. According to the charges, Mr. Cartwright, Mr. Wilkinson, FERAS and Aerocontrol used that illegally obtained information to bid against Avcard at every location where the companies were bidding head-to-head, thereby subverting Defense's competitive bidding procedures for fuel supply contracts.

Ultimately, the indictment said, Avcard lost each of the contested bids, and Defense was deprived of its right to competitive bids.

The investigation was conducted by the Antitrust Division's National Criminal Enforcement Section and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service.

London Daily Telegraph
January 8, 2008

34. RAF Makes £500m Bid For Drone Bombers

By Thomas Harding, Defence

Correspondent

The RAF has made a £500 million bid for a squadron of drone aircraft to seek and destroy Taliban forces in Afghanistan, it has been disclosed.

An "urgent operational requirement" has been made by Air Force chiefs to purchase 10 Reaper aircraft, which could play a major role in defeating the insurgents in Helmand.

Commanders have been desperate for the cutting-edge technology that the most advanced "unmanned aerial vehicle" would give.

The Reaper can fly faster, higher and for longer than its predecessors and carries a deadly array of weapons

Packed with sophisticated eavesdropping and surveillance equipment the aircraft, which could be directed by an operator in London, can drop laser-guided bombs or missiles on to Taliban targets.

On several occasions in the past year military commanders have been frustrated at having to wait for up to an hour for fighters to get over a target that has been located by surveillance aircraft.

RAF crews working alongside American Reaper operators have become considerably impressed with aircraft working from the base in Kandahar.

With a turboprop jet engine, the Reaper, the size of an executive jet, can fly at 250mph and carry four Hellfire missiles and two 500lb bombs.

Its biggest asset is being able to loiter over the battlefield for 14 hours, flying at 50,000ft and unseen by the enemy.

However, with the final talks for the MoD's budget for this year already begun, the order is under threat.

A spokesman for the MoD said the proposal for 10 Reapers was "at this stage an expression of interest" and "not an intention to buy".

New York Post

January 8, 2008

35. Iran 1, USA 0

Naval Error In The Gulf

By Ralph Peters

EARLY Sunday morning, the US Navy lost its nerve and guaranteed that American sailors will die at Iranian hands in the future.

As three of our warships passed through the Straits of Hormuz, five small Iranian patrol craft rushed them. As the Revolutionary Guard boats neared our vessels, an Iranian officer broadcast a threat to our ships, claiming they'd soon explode.

The Iranians tossed boxes into the water. Mines? Just in case, our ships took evasive action.

The Iranians kept on coming, closing to a distance of 200 meters - about two football fields. Supposedly, our Navy was ready to open fire but didn't shoot because the Iranians turned away at the moment the order was given.

We should've sunk every one of them.

Not because we're warmongers. But because the Iranians had made threats, verbal and physical, that amounted to acts of war. When will we learn that resolute action taken early saves vast amounts of blood and treasure later?

Oh, from Washington's perspective we did the right thing by "exercising restraint." But Washington's perspective doesn't amount to a gum wrapper in a gutter. What matters is what the *Iranians* think.

They now believe that the Bush administration, our military and the entire United States are afraid of them.

It goes back to the politicized and irresponsible recent National Intelligence Estimate that insisted the Iranians had abandoned their nuclear-weapons program years ago.

They didn't. They're pursuing enriched uranium as fast as they can. That's what you need for bombs. At most,

Tehran ordered its weaponeering efforts to parade rest - until it has the ingredients it needs, after which building bombs won't take long at all.

Forget Washington's trust-fund-twit view of all this: Here's how the train of thought rolled down the tracks in Tehran:

"The Americans have told the world we don't want nuclear weapons, even though they know we *do* want them. That can only mean that America is afraid to confront us, that their weak, defeated president needs an excuse to back down.

"We can push these cowardly Americans now. They've had enough in Iraq. Their spirits are broken. Their next president will run away like a gazelle pursued by a lion.

"Even their military is frightened of us. On Sunday, America's might bowed down to us. They are frightened and godless, and the time has come to push them."

Sunday's incident wasn't a one-off event improvised by the local yokels after a long Saturday night at the hookah bar. It was blessed and carefully planned in Tehran and had practical as well as political goals.

At the tactical level, the Revolutionary Guards' naval arm was testing our responses: How soon do the American weapons radars activate? At what range do the lasers begin to track targets? How close can a small vessel get to a major American warship? How do the Americans respond to possible mines? Can we use phony mines to steer them into real ones? How long does it take an American commander to make a decision?

Above all: Does an American commander have the *courage* to make a decision on his own? When he doesn't have time to deflect responsibility onto his superiors?

And it wasn't just some madrasa dropout with salt spray on his glasses scribbling

notes on the lead Iranian boat. On shore, the Iranians would've had all their intelligence facilities tuned in to map our electronic profile as our ships prepared to defend themselves. Rent-a-Russian military experts would've been onhand to assist with the newest gear purchased from Moscow.

The Iranians may even have had an escalation plan, in case we opened fire. President Ahmedinejad and his posse may seem contemptible to Washington, but the Iranians think several moves ahead of us: We play checkers, they play chess.

On Sunday, the Iranians tested us. We failed. They'll probe us again. And every time we fail to react decisively, we raise the number of future US casualties.

Remember the USS Cole? You bet the Iranians do. They plan to better that attack by an order of magnitude.

For almost 70 years, we've deployed the finest navy in the history of the world. But it looks increasingly as if we've gone from "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" to "Will this interfere with my next promotion?"

Ralph Peters' latest book is "Wars of Blood and Faith."

Christian Science Monitor
January 8, 2008

36. America's Upper Classes Have Gone AWOL

So many 'elites' today simply lack human reference points to war.

By Peter A. Gudmundsson

DALLAS -- During this presidential campaign, voters will hear much about the divergent economic realities between "the rich" and "the middle class." Yet there is another partition in America that is less visible, but no less troubling. The great divide between the civilian and military communities leaves the nation and its electorate ill-equipped to make informed

judgments about military and international affairs.

I recently returned from a trip to San Diego, during which I toured the Marine Corps Recruit Depot and spent two days at sea with the officers and crew of the USS Nimitz. To say the least, it renewed my respect for the professionalism, competence, dedication, and sacrifice of America's men and women in uniform. I was deeply impressed by the vigor and apparent confidence with which they attend to their duties.

A quick glance at the troops I met immediately revealed a broad representation of America's ethnic groups - a diversity that's typical throughout America's armed forces. Statistics reveal high standards of educational attainment and the near nonexistence of illegal drug use or criminal backgrounds. Many come from families in which military service is a common experience. Yet I can't help concluding that the upper and upper-middle or "elite" social classes seem to be conspicuously absent.

A Navy admiral told me, "America is not at war. Its military is." He was acutely aware that a prominent segment of society had little but tax money invested in the outcome.

The civilian leaders with whom I traveled to the ship were clearly surprised by their exposure to young Americans who were seriously and stoically preparing to deploy to a war from which some might not return. Concepts of duty, honor, and sacrifice were simply not central to the life experiences of these civilians. America's elites don't necessarily lack patriotism, but precious few of these leaders have engaged in military service themselves. They simply lack reasonable reference points.

In the middle of the 20th century, military service was near universal for American men. While some used their

privileged status to escape arduous or risky duty, society as a whole came together in the common cause of national defense. As a result, America was full of veterans who could place "news from the front" in context for friends and neighbors.

For example, to the extent that the American family received accurate estimates of casualties from the Normandy landings in 1944, a nearby uncle or father would have been able to put those figures in context by declaring, "I was on the Western Front in the Great War; we could have lost many more on Omaha Beach. All things considered, it seems that they managed that campaign as well as could be hoped."

A society with veterans represented at all levels of the community is better equipped to interpret accounts of inadvertent civilian casualties, interrogation interpreted as torture, or prisoner abuse. With the abdication of the upper classes from military service, most elites in the media, private sector, and government service don't have the intimate human context for the realities of war.

The debate about US engagement in Iraq is at its core an estimate of whether America is winning – or indeed can win, given the circumstances. The fourth estate long ago declared this war unwinnable. But how do we know that? How can they?

No electorate can make informed decisions about the exercise of military power in a far-off theater if it lacks a reasonable measure of collective experience with military matters. And any society that restricts its information and analysis to the sound bites of "embedded" journalists and political pundits will find itself highly susceptible to the manipulations of partisan politicians and interest groups at either extreme of any debate. It is simply too difficult to

separate hope from fear and fiction from fact.

What can we do to correct course? To begin, America must find a way to reengage the nation's elites with the satisfactions and sacrifices of military and national service. Leading colleges should reinstate ROTC programs. Corporations should emphasize postmilitary recruiting. Likewise, professional organizations such as bar associations and business trade groups must seek opportunities to attend military expositions and demonstrations.

Just as America responded to the Soviet Union's Sputnik launch some 50 years ago with a vigorous effort to strengthen math and science education, America today must overhaul its school history curricula to engage students in military culture. And it must equip them to effectively and skeptically evaluate future military and political issues in the context of past experience.

It is only with an experienced and knowledgeable citizenry that we as a nation can prosecute sound strategy to achieve US policy goals while avoiding the pitfalls of failure and their attendant human, financial, and diplomatic costs.

Peter A. Gudmundsson, a former US Marine field artillery officer, is CEO of Dallas-based Beckett Media LP.

Washington Times
January 8, 2008
Pg. 12

37. A Purple Heart In War Of Ideas?

By Frank J. Gaffney Jr.

When the history of the George W. Bush administration is written, one of the most important questions to be addressed will surely be: Why did a president who repeatedly talked about the ideology animating our enemies in this "War on Terror" do so little to wage an effective "War of Ideas"

against it?

The good news is that historians — and the rest of us — have just been given an insight into that highly consequential disconnect. The bad news is that the incident suggests a problem of such ominous proportions that it raises questions as to whether our government is being rendered incapable of fighting successfully an ideology best described as Islamofascism at home, to say nothing of abroad.

The incident involves the firing last week of the Pentagon's foremost authority on the Islamofascist theo-political-legal code known as Shariah. According to reporting by Bill Gertz, The Washington Times' intrepid national security correspondent, Stephen Coughlin, a major in the U.S. Army Reserves who has served as a civilian lawyer to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fell "afoul of a key aide to [Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon] England, Hasham Islam."

Unnamed Pentagon sources told Mr. Gertz that the latter, employed by the deputy secretary to help with Muslim outreach, "confronted Mr. Coughlin during a meeting several weeks ago when Mr. Islam sought to have Mr. Coughlin soften his views on Islamist extremism." At issue evidently was Maj. Coughlin's fastidious chronicling of the true nature and activities of organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). In briefings prepared for the U.S. military, he had concluded that ISNA is one of a number of front organizations for the Muslim Brotherhood — a particularly insidious wing of the Islamofascist movement that shares with its ideological soulmates a commitment to imposing Shariah worldwide, albeit putatively through nonviolent means.

Interestingly, the Justice Department arrived at a similar conclusion, as evidenced in its

designation of ISNA as an unindicted co-conspirator in the recent trial of the Holy Land Foundation. The latter operated as an Islamist "charity" in Houston until it was shut down by the government after September 11, 2001, and charged with providing funds to Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization. While the lengthy proceeding resulted in a mistrial (due, it appears, to misconduct by a self-professed Hamas-sympathizing juror), documents placed in the record by prosecutors are damning with respect to connections between Saudi-financed influence operations like the ISNA and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) on the one hand and various bad actors around the globe on the other.

Evidently, however, the Islamic Society of North America is one of the organizations with whom Hasham Islam has encouraged Pentagon outreach. When Steve Coughlin refused to modify his assessment of the organization, Mr. Islam reportedly accused him of being "a Christian zealot with a pen." Such a description calls to mind the terms "racist" and "bigot" used to silence others who have raised alarms about efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood and its fellow-travelers to penetrate our government and society.

Thus branded, Maj. Coughlin has become "too hot" for the Joint Chiefs and is now what Mr. Gertz calls "a casualty of the War of Ideas." Perhaps he will receive its first Purple Heart.

If allowed to stand, the effect of Maj. Coughlin's dismissal would be a surgical strike on a man who is arguably one of the most knowledgeable opponents of Shariah — not only in the Defense Department, but inside the entire U.S. government.

Sadly, it was but the latest of a series of successes for our enemies in the undeclared war

against Islamofascism, including the following:

*Karen Hughes, President Bush's close friend and, until recently, his point-person in the War of Ideas as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy, reportedly considered as her "guru" a professor at Georgetown University whose program is underwritten by a \$20 million grant from a Saudi prince.

*Unsurprisingly, Mrs. Hughes' first public appearance after assuming her responsibilities at State was an address to the annual ISNA conference in 2005. While there, she told the organization's members she considered them "the front-line in public diplomacy because you are more credible than I am." Interestingly, a survey of her "frontline" troops, found that, by a 3-to-1 margin, ISNA's members believe the U.S. government had advanced knowledge of the September 11, 2001, attacks and allowed them to happen.

*Muslim chaplains and lay leaders for the U.S. military were recruited, trained and credentialed by an organization that the Wall Street Journal described as "part of Saudi Arabia's state-run university system." At the time, that institute was operated by Aburahman Alamoudi, the godfather of the Islamist apparatus in America who is now serving a 23-year prison sentence for terrorism financing and related charges.

*FBI personnel continue to receive "sensitivity training" from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, even though the Justice Department has also designated it an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land case.

Many more examples of Islamist penetration and influence operations could be cited. Suffice it to say that, as long as such activities are allowed — and those like Steve Coughlin who challenge them are fired or cowed —

neither Mr. Bush nor his successors will be able to properly comprehend, let alone prevail in, the War of Ideas and the larger War for the Free World of which it is a central front.

Frank J. Gaffney Jr. is president of the Center for Security Policy and a columnist for The Washington Times.

USA Today
January 8, 2008
Pg. 11

38. Support Troops By Helping Them Heal From War Damages

I empathize with the women USA TODAY interviewed for the cover story "Mental toll of war hitting female servicemembers." But I don't think these women represent the vast majority of female soldiers serving in Iraq.

Speaking for those who have worked outside the safety of the compounds with large groups of men, I know that most women have assimilated quite well to combat.

Even so, it disturbs me that someone with 25 years of military service, with as high of rank as master sergeant, would be so fearful of living within the safety of a compound. Senior non-commissioned officers are supposed to be our leaders and role models.

As a female soldier, it is true that it has always been tough to be treated as an equal. Nonetheless, special treatment programs and talk of female emotional needs aren't going to improve the situation. How about focusing on some of the positive work female soldiers have been doing in Iraq? Or all the ways female soldiers are coping successfully?

In my case, I was separated from my unit and everyone I knew, moved six times, was exposed to multiple explosions and gun fire, served as a gunner on the top of a Humvee, was stuck with all

men and had to fight sexual harassment. I coped by keeping a journal and my sense of humor.

It is possible to withstand all the pressure and stress and still come out with a positive experience.

Melia Meichelbock, Civil Affairs Sergeant, U.S. Army Reserve, Special Operations Command, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.

Editor's Note: The article by Andrea Stone appeared in the *Current News Early Bird*, January 2, 2008.

Washington Post
January 8, 2008
Pg. 2

39. Corrections

A Jan. 5 Page One article about Baghdad's protected Green Zone gave the wrong location for the 14th of July monument. It is at al-Kindi and 14th of July avenues.

Editor's Note: The article by Karen DeYoung appeared in the *Current News Early Bird*, January 5, 2008.