

CURRENT NEWS

EARLY BIRD



January 16, 2008

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Item numbers indicate order of appearance only.

AFGHANISTAN

1. **Gates Faults NATO Force In Southern Afghanistan**
(*Los Angeles Times*)....Peter Spiegel
In an unusual public criticism, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said he believes NATO forces currently deployed in southern Afghanistan do not know how to combat a guerrilla insurgency, a deficiency that could be contributing to the rising violence in the fight against the Taliban.
2. **3,200 Marines To Deploy To Afghanistan In Spring**
(*Washington Post*)....Ann Scott Tyson
President Bush has approved an "extraordinary, one-time" deployment of about 3,200 Marines to Afghanistan for seven months starting this spring, the Pentagon announced yesterday, while defense officials continued to urge NATO allies to supply more forces to fill a long-standing shortfall of 7,500 troops that commanders say are needed to improve security.
3. **4 Arrests Made In Kabul Hotel Attack**
(*New York Times*)....Abdul Waheed Wafa
Police authorities in Afghanistan have arrested four people in the aftermath of the suicide bomb attack on Monday evening at a Kabul luxury hotel and said Tuesday that three Americans and one Frenchwoman might have been among the six dead.
4. **Taliban Says It Will Target Westerners In Kabul**
(*USA Today*)....Unattributed
The Taliban said its suicide bombers will attack restaurants where Westerners eat in the Afghan capital of Kabul.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

5. **Gates's Voice Moderating US Policies**
(*Boston Globe*)....Bryan Bender
...Gates's influence has brought the president's foreign policy more in line with that of the elder Bush, steering the administration toward a more traditional model of coalition-building and advocating military force as a last resort, they said.

IRAQ

6. **Rice, In Baghdad, Praises New Law**
(*New York Times*)....Solomon Moore
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise visit to Iraq on Tuesday to brief Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and other top politicians about President Bush's recent talks with Arab leaders and to praise recent legislative progress.
7. **As Al-Maliki Gains Strength, Some Question His Will For Unity**

(USA Today)...Charles Levinson

When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised Nouri al-Maliki's government during a surprise visit to Baghdad on Tuesday, she was addressing an Iraqi prime minister who — for better or worse — has strengthened his grip on power.

8. **Iraqi Spending To Rebuild Has Slowed, Report Says**

(New York Times)...James Glanz

Highly promising figures that the administration cited to demonstrate economic progress in Iraq last fall, when Congress was considering whether to continue financing the war, cannot be substantiated by official Iraqi budget records, the Government Accountability Office reported Tuesday.

9. **Turkey Bombs Kurdish Rebels**

(New York Times)...Unattributed

Turkish fighter jets bombed Kurdish militants in northern Iraq on Tuesday, the military said, the fourth major airstrike in a month in what has become an extensive Turkish air campaign against the Kurdish fighters.

10. **Fire Shuts Oil Refinery In Iraq**

(Los Angeles Times)...Garrett Therolf

An oil refinery near Iraq's southern port city of Basra probably will remain shut for days after a large fire Tuesday that highlighted the vulnerability of the country's energy infrastructure to criminal and political power struggles.

11. **3 US Soldiers May Have Died From Friendly Fire**

(Boston Globe)...Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press

Three Army soldiers who were gunned down during an intensive, three-hour firefight in Salahuddin Province north of Baghdad last week might have died from friendly fire, military officials said yesterday.

12. **Official's Convoy Runs Over Children**

(Washington Times)...Unattributed

Five schoolchildren were killed yesterday after being struck by a car in the convoy of a top judicial official during a chaotic gunbattle with checkpoint guards, police and hospital officials said.

13. **Displaced Iraqis Suffer Hardship**

(Washington Times)...John Zarocostas

The plight of the 1.2 million Iraqis internally displaced since February 2006 has continued to worsen, aggravated by a lack of access to food rations, health care and basic services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity, a report by a global relief agency said.

14. **Engineers Take IED Attacks 'Personally'**

(Washington Times)...Richard Tomkins

The unsung heroes of the war in Iraq — or any war — are the combat engineers, the men who go ahead of the infantry to clear a path through the enemy defenses.

MIDEAST

15. **France Announces Base In Persian Gulf**

(Washington Post)...Molly Moore

President Nicolas Sarkozy announced Tuesday that France would establish a military base in the United Arab Emirates, making it the only Western power other than the United States to have a permanent defense installation in the strategic Persian Gulf region.

16. **Bomb Targets U.S. Car In Beirut**

(New York Times)...Nada Bakri

A bomb exploded next to an American Embassy vehicle on Tuesday, killing at least three civilians and wounding many other people, including an American bystander and an embassy employee, Lebanese and American officials said.

17. **Troubled Waters?**

(NBC)...Jim Miklaszewski

And there are new questions tonight about what has been reported as a confrontation between U.S. Navy warships

and Iran in the Straits of Hormuz, a report that surfaced on the eve of the president's trip to the Middle East, you may recall. The question is: was there, in fact, a real threat to American sailors ever, or some sort of a hoax?

ASIA/PACIFIC

18. **Visiting American Admiral Confers With Chinese Generals**
(*New York Times*)....Jim Yardley
China must be more open about its rapid military buildup and should expand military collaboration with the United States to develop greater trust and thereby prevent misunderstandings and confrontation, the United States commander in the Pacific said Tuesday.
19. **Admiral Pursues Chinese Answers, Ties**
(*Washington Times*)....Bill Gertz
The commander of U.S. Pacific forces said in Beijing yesterday that he is troubled by China's missile buildup and anti-satellite weapons, but hopes military ties to its Communist Party-led forces will improve.
20. **Port Request To Test China's Openness**
(*Miami Herald*)....Tim Johnson
The Pentagon soon will ask China to approve a port call by a U.S. Navy vessel in Hong Kong, and will be watching the response as "kind of a signal flare" for whether China wants improving relations, a senior U.S. military officer said Tuesday.

EUROPE

21. **Polish Official Says Deal Over U.S. Missiles Possible**
(*USA Today*)....Unattributed
Poland's defense minister said the United States appears willing to consider his country's insistence on U.S. security aid in exchange for hosting U.S. missile-defense interceptors.
22. **Warsaw Ups Ante For U.S. Shield**
(*Washington Times*)....Nicholas Kralev and Andrew Borowiec
The United States is headed for tough negotiations with Poland over a planned missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, with Warsaw now demanding that Washington pour hundreds of millions of dollars into improving its defense capabilities.
23. **Gates Discusses Missile Interceptors With Polish Defense Minister**
(*Aerospace Daily & Defense Report*)....John M. Doyle
Poland receives more military assistance from the U.S. than any other European nation, according to the Defense Department, and Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich began two days of talks with Defense Secretary Robert Gates at the Pentagon Jan. 15.

ARMY

24. **Oversight Of Iraq Contracts Is Shifted Amid Army Probes**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Richard Lardner, Associated Press
Oversight for nearly \$4 billion in Iraq war contracts has been shifted from a troubled procurement office in Kuwait to an Army organization in Illinois as part of an ongoing effort to curb waste, fraud and abuse in military purchasing.
25. **High-Profile Officer Nagl To Leave Army, Join Think Tank**
(*Washington Post*)....Thomas E. Ricks
One of the Army's most prominent younger officers, whose writings have influenced the conduct of the U.S. troop buildup in Iraq, said he has decided to leave the service to study strategic issues full time at a new Washington think tank.

NAVY

26. **Admiral Sees Littoral Ship As 'Workhorse In Our Navy'**
(*Green Bay (WI) Press-Gazette*)....Richard Ryman
The U.S. Navy's top admiral said Monday he's committed to the littoral combat ship program while inspecting the

first ship of that line under construction at Marinette Marine Corp.

27. **Navy Is Asked For Road Money**
(*Washington Post*)....Steve Vogel
The Montgomery County Council yesterday pressed the Navy to provide federal money for road improvements needed as part of the expansion of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda.
28. **Navy Divers Honored For Work At I-35 Bridge Collapse In Minneapolis**
(*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*)....Cindy Clayton
Navy divers from the Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two who worked to recover victims in the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis in August were honored with medals Monday for their efforts.

MARINE CORPS

29. **Marines Training On The Cutting Edge**
(*San Diego Union-Tribune*)....Rick Rogers
The Marine Corps is embracing breakthrough holographic technology to teach combat tactics and battlefield ethics at Camp Pendleton as troops there begin another major round of deployments to Iraq.
30. **Marine Reported No Threat From Man Now Wanted In Her Slaying**
(*USA Today*)....Mike Baker, Associated Press
A 20-year-old pregnant Marine who disappeared in December told victims' advocates at Camp Lejeune that she didn't feel unsafe in the presence of the colleague now wanted in her death, Marine Corps officials said Tuesday.
31. **Marines' Ad Campaign Targets Wider Audience**
(*Wall Street Journal*)....a Wall Street Journal staff reporter
The U.S. Marine Corps is rolling out a new ad campaign this week in an effort to target teachers, coaches, clergy and other groups that tend to have influence on kids' career paths.

NATIONAL GUARD/RESERVE

32. **F-16 Crashes Near Key West; Pilot Ejects Safely**
(*MiamiHerald.com*)....Associated Press
An F-16 fighter plane crashed into the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday evening during a routine training mission, a spokesman for Homestead Air Reserve Base said.
33. **Copter Heroes Of Katrina Set To Go To Iraq**
(*New Orleans Times-Picayune*)....Paul Purpura
In the past three years, the Army National Guard's 1/244th Air Assault Helicopter Battalion returned home from a yearlong tour in Iraq, served another six months on active duty because of Hurricane Katrina, and then began re-training for a new combat mission and refitting its helicopters for battle.

MILITARY

34. **Lengthy Volunteer Stints Burn Out Military Wives**
(*USA Today*)....Gregg Zoroya
...She's not Army. She's not trained. Her only qualification, then at age 24, was being an officer's wife who volunteered to run Bravo Troop's Family Readiness Group — a job of e-mailing and organizing potluck dinners in peacetime. But when Bravo went to war, she became a social worker, grief counselor and a 24-hour hotline overnight.

CONGRESS

35. **House To Vote On Troop Pay**
(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Anne Flaherty, Associated Press
The House plans to pass as early as today a new defense-policy bill that includes a pay raise for troops.
36. **Lawmaker Moves To Block Sale Of JDAMS To Saudi Arabia**

(*Defense Daily*)....Jen DiMascio

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) said yesterday he is moving to block the president's proposed sale of precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia.

AMERICAS

37. **Is Latin America Heading For An Arms Race?**

(*Christian Science Monitor*)....Andrew Downie

Increased defense spending by Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador, coupled with significant arms purchases by Chile and Colombia, may mark the start of an arms race in South America – a region that hasn't seen a major war between nations in decades.

AFRICA

38. **Combined Joint Task Force Commander Reflects On Progress In Horn Of Africa**

(*Mideast Stars and Stripes*)....Zeke Minaya

Asked about his accomplishments as head of the Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa, Rear Adm. James Hart talks about the village of Assamo.

BUSINESS

39. **Wicker's Earmark Elicits Criticism**

(*Washington Post*)....Matthew Mosk

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Mississippi Republican congressman appointed to replace Trent Lott in December, last year obtained a \$6 million earmark for a defense contractor whose executives were among his top campaign contributors and were represented in the matter by Wicker's former congressional chief of staff, according to federal records.

40. **Carlyle In Talks To Buy Unit Of Booz Allen**

(*Washington Post*)....Thomas Heath

The Carlyle Group is in talks with Booz Allen Hamilton to purchase the technology and consulting firm's government business, according to a source familiar with the negotiations.

POLITICS

41. **After Losing Son In Iraq, Retired Colonel Wages Challenge For Vet's House Seat**

(*USA Today*)....Associated Press

The father of a Marine killed in Iraq announced Tuesday that he is running for the House seat held by the only Iraq war veteran in Congress.

OPINION

42. **The News From Iraq: Reasons For Fear, Hope**

(*Philadelphia Inquirer*)....Trudy Rubin

...Having traveled to Baghdad last month, I can tell you that things in Iraq are much better than Democrats want to believe. But the current situation makes Republicans who prate of "victory" look foolish.

Los Angeles Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 1

1. Gates Faults NATO Force In Southern Afghanistan

The U.S. Defense secretary says he thinks the soldiers from Canada, Britain and the Netherlands do not know how to fight a guerrilla insurgency.
By Peter Spiegel, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON —In an unusual public criticism, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said he believes NATO forces currently deployed in southern Afghanistan do not know how to combat a guerrilla insurgency, a deficiency that could be contributing to the rising violence in the fight against the Taliban.

"I'm worried we're deploying [military advisors] that are not properly trained and I'm worried we have some military forces that don't know how to do counterinsurgency operations," Gates said in an interview.

Gates' criticism comes as the Bush administration has decided to send 3,200 U.S. Marines to southern Afghanistan on a temporary mission to help quell the rising number of attacks. It also comes amid growing friction among allied commanders over the Afghan security situation.

But coming from an administration castigated for its conduct of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, such U.S. criticism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is controversial. Many NATO officials blame inadequate U.S. troop numbers earlier in the war in part for a Taliban resurgence.

"It's been very, very difficult to apply the classic counterinsurgency doctrine because you've had to stabilize the situation sufficiently to start even applying it," said one European NATO official, who discussed the issue on condition of anonymity

because he was not authorized to speak for the alliance. "Even in the classic counterinsurgency doctrine, you've still got to get the fighting down to a level where you can apply the rest of the doctrine."

Gates' views, however, reflect those expressed recently by senior U.S. military officials with responsibility for Afghanistan. Some have said that an overreliance on heavy weaponry, including airstrikes, by NATO forces in the south may unwittingly be contributing to rising violence there.

"Execution of tasks, in my view, has not been appropriate," said one top U.S. officer directly involved in the Afghan campaign who discussed internal assessments on condition of anonymity. "It's not the way to do business, in my opinion. We've got to wean them of this. If they won't change then we're going to have another solution."

Gates has publicly criticized European allies in the past for failing to send adequate numbers of troops and helicopters to the Afghan mission. But concerns about strategy and tactics are usually contained within military and diplomatic channels.

In the interview, Gates compared the troubled experience of the NATO forces in the south -- primarily troops from the closest U.S. allies, Britain and Canada, as well as the Netherlands -- with progress made by American troops in the eastern part of Afghanistan. He traced the failing in part to a Cold War orientation.

"Most of the European forces, NATO forces, are not trained in counterinsurgency; they were trained for the Fulda Gap," Gates said, referring to the German region where a Soviet invasion of Western Europe was deemed most likely.

Gates said he raised his concerns last month in Scotland at a meeting of

NATO countries with troops in southern Afghanistan and suggested additional training.

But he added that his concerns did not appear to be shared by the NATO allies. "No one at the table stood up and said: 'I agree with that.'"

The NATO forces are led by a U.S. commander, Army Gen. Dan McNeill, who has called for greater contributions by NATO countries. Some member nations are reluctant to deepen their involvement.

NATO officials bristled at suggestions that non-U.S. forces have been ineffective in implementing a counterinsurgency campaign. They argued that the south, home to Afghanistan's Pashtun tribal heartland that produced the Taliban movement, has long been the most militarily contested region of the country.

The European NATO official, who is directly involved in Afghan planning, angrily denounced the American claims, saying much of the violence is a result of the small number of U.S. troops who had patrolled the region before NATO's takeover in mid-2006, a strategy that allowed the Taliban to reconstitute in the region.

"The reason there is more fighting now is because we've uncovered a very big rock and lots of things are scurrying out," the NATO official said.

Pentagon concerns have risen as violence in the south has steadily increased, even as other parts of Afghanistan have begun to stabilize.

Last year was the deadliest for both U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion, according to the website icasualties.org.

But both U.S. and NATO officials have expressed optimism that eastern Afghanistan, which is under the control of U.S. forces led by Army Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, has substantially improved in recent months.

Rodriguez implemented a campaign that incorporated

many of the same tactics being used in Iraq by Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Baghdad who co-wrote the military's new counterinsurgency field manual.

"If you believe all the things you hear about Afghanistan, this ought to be real hot," Navy Adm. William J. Fallon, commander of U.S. troops in the Middle East and Central Asia, said of eastern Afghanistan. "More than half the border is Pakistan, it's a rough area, historically it's been a hotbed of insurgent activity. It's remarkable in its improvement."

At the same time, violence has continued to rise in the south, which is controlled by a 11,700-soldier NATO force largely made up of the British, Canadian and Dutch forces. Britain saw 42 soldiers killed last year, almost all in southern Afghanistan, its highest annual fatality count of the war; Canada lost 31, close to the 36 from that country killed in 2006. American forces lost 117 troops in 2007, up from 98 in 2006, but U.S. forces are spread more widely across Afghanistan.

"Our guys in the east, under Gen. Rodriguez, are doing a terrific job. They've got the [counterinsurgency] thing down pat," Gates said. "But I think our allies over there, this is not something they have any experience with."

Some U.S. counterinsurgency experts have argued that the backsliding is not the fault of NATO forces alone.

Some have argued that an effective counterinsurgency campaign implemented by Army Lt. Gen. David W. Barno and Zalmay Khalilzad, who were the U.S. commander in and ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, was largely abandoned by officials who came later.

Barno retired from the military and heads the Near East South Asia Center at the National Defense University.

In an article in the influential Army journal *Military Review* last fall, he blamed both NATO and U.S. commanders for moving away from the counterinsurgency plan since 2006.

Barno accused NATO and U.S. forces of ignoring the cornerstone of a counterinsurgency campaign -- protecting the local population -- and said they instead focused on killing enemy forces.

"We had a fundamentally well-structured, integrated U.S. Embassy and U.S. military unified counterinsurgency campaign plan which we put in place in late '03 that took us all the way through about the middle of 2005," Barno said in an interview. "And then it was really, in many ways, changed very dramatically."

Currently serving American officers, however, have singled out non-U.S. NATO forces for the bulk of their criticism. Among the concerns is that NATO forces do not actively include Afghan troops in military operations.

As a result, local forces in the south are now less capable than those in the east, which operate very closely with their American counterparts.

"Every time you see our guys in the field, you don't have to look very far and you'll see them," said the senior U.S. officer involved in the Afghan campaign. "Getting the Brits to do this and the others is a little more of a problem."

In addition, U.S. military officials said NATO forces in the south are too quick to rely on high-caliber firepower, such as airstrikes, a practice which alienates the local population.

"The wide view there, which I hear from Americans, is that the NATO military forces are taking on a Soviet mentality," said one senior U.S. military veteran of Afghanistan. "They're staying in their bases in the south, they're doing very little patrolling, they're trying to avoid casualties, and they're using air power as a substitute

for ground infantry operations, because they have so little ground infantry."

The European NATO official said, however, that alliance data show that all countries, including the U.S., use air power in similar amounts when their troops come in contact with enemy forces.

"Everyone is grateful for the Americans ... but this kind of constant denigration of what other people are doing isn't helpful," the official said. "It also makes the situation look worse than it is."

Washington Post
January 16, 2008
Pg. 11

2. 3,200 Marines To Deploy To Afghanistan In Spring

By Ann Scott Tyson,
Washington Post Staff Writer

About 2,200 Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., will deploy in March to southern Afghanistan, where Taliban insurgents have escalated attacks and repeatedly seized territory over the past year.

"This has been timed to maximize our ability to take on the Taliban should they choose -- unwisely, I may add -- to attempt a second spring offensive," Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said yesterday. Those Marines will focus on combat operations and work under a NATO command led by Canada.

Another 1,000 Marines from the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, based in Twentynine Palms, Calif., will take train Afghan security forces, primarily the police, and will work under U.S. command.

The deployment will bring U.S. forces in Afghanistan to more than 30,000 troops, the greatest number since the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban government in late 2001. There are currently about

28,000 non-U.S. foreign troops in Afghanistan, according to Pentagon data.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has long urged NATO allies to provide more forces and lift restrictions on their combat roles in Afghanistan, and officials said the decision to send the U.S. Marines does not alleviate that need. "It is our hope that our allies in NATO and other partners ... in Afghanistan will see what more they can do to add forces to bring down the shortfall that will exist even after we deploy these additional Marines," Morrell said. This would include, "at the very least," sending forces to replace the Marines when they leave at the end of this year, he said.

Stretched thin by rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military has struggled to muster the additional troops. "Finding these forces has been difficult," Morrell said.

As a result, the Marine Corps will have to sustain through 2008 a high pace of deployments -- which now dictate that Marines in combat units spend about as much time at home as in the war zone -- whereas previously that tempo was expected to ease in the spring, said Col. Dave Lapan, a Marine Corps spokesman.

The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit was already scheduled to deploy for seven months to the Middle East, where it was to serve as a contingency force, or "theater reserve," for U.S. Central Command, led by Adm. William J. Fallon. Another U.S. combat force will now fill that role, which normally involves only a few months of combat time.

The Marines headed to Afghanistan will not come from Iraq, where Gates has made it clear that they are still needed. Nevertheless, the initial drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraq -- particularly the departure last fall of two Marine infantry battalions from Anbar -- has helped make it

possible to send reinforcements to Afghanistan, Morrell said.

"We are reaping the benefits to some extent from the success we have been seeing in Iraq," he said.

New York Times
January 16, 2008

3. 4 Arrests Made In Kabul Hotel Attack

By Abdul Waheed Wafa

KABUL, Afghanistan — Police authorities in Afghanistan have arrested four people in the aftermath of the suicide bomb attack on Monday evening at a Kabul luxury hotel and said Tuesday that three Americans and one Frenchwoman might have been among the six dead.

Foreign officials in Kabul could not confirm the number of Americans who had been killed, and on Monday the State Department confirmed only one American death.

At a news conference, the chief of the National Security Directorate, Amrullah Saleh, said that one of the men arrested had been taken into custody in the hotel, the *Serena*, 20 minutes after the attack. He was disguised in a police uniform and was wearing an explosives belt, and hotel cameras had captured him shooting at people, Mr. Saleh said.

Two other attackers died as they detonated their explosives in the *Serena*, which is frequented by foreigners, in one of the most brazen assaults by the Taliban in the heavily protected heart of the Afghan capital.

The police also arrested a man who they said planned the attack, provided the weapons and explosives, and transported the three attackers to the hotel. He was arrested in eastern Afghanistan, near the Pakistan border.

The two other people arrested were brothers suspected of putting the attackers up in their home in Kabul before the bombing, Mr. Saleh said, and a videotape

found at the house showed two of the attackers, the arrested man and one of the men killed, talking about their readiness for a suicide mission. Mr. Saleh said the third attacker was not videotaped, indicating "he was either a foreign national or he was not able to speak the local language."

One American and a Norwegian journalist were reported Monday as being killed. But Mr. Saleh said the dead included an Afghan guard, three Americans and one Frenchwoman. The nationality of the sixth person killed could not immediately be disclosed, he said.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, repeated the group's claim of responsibility on Tuesday, saying the attack was aimed mainly at the Norwegian foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støer, who was attending a meeting at the hotel but was not hurt. Norway has 500 peacekeeping troops stationed in Afghanistan.

"We will carry out more attacks in the capital where the foreigners stay," Mr. Mujahid said.

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 11

4. Taliban Says It Will Target Westerners In Kabul

The Taliban said its suicide bombers will attack restaurants where Westerners eat in the Afghan capital of Kabul.

The warning came a day after a bombing and shooting attack at the Serena Hotel left eight people dead. Four arrests have been made.

"We have jihadists in Kabul right now, and soon we will carry out more attacks against military personnel and foreigners," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said.

United Nations
Secretary-General Ban Ki

Moon and the U.N. Security Council condemned the suicide attack and called for added efforts to stop the Taliban.

Boston Globe
January 16, 2008

5. Gates's Voice Moderating US Policies Stances on war, torture, Iran mark key shift

By Bryan Bender, Globe Staff
WASHINGTON - When Robert M. Gates was sworn in to replace Donald H. Rumsfeld as secretary of defense, President Bush said he was counting on his new Pentagon chief to "forge a new way forward in Iraq."

But in the year since he was hired to reverse US fortunes there - advocating a military "surge" that by most accounts has reaped significant dividends - the unassuming former CIA director and confidant of the president's father, George H.W. Bush, has also been undertaking a much broader mission.

Gates, 64, in an alliance with his former aide, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, has helped to roll back some of the most hawkish stances of the first six years of the Bush presidency - on the use of torture, US-Iranian relations, and the policy of preemptive war that Vice President Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld, and others espoused, according to interviews with current and former administration officials and private analysts.

Gates's influence has brought the president's foreign policy more in line with that of the elder Bush, steering the administration toward a more traditional model of coalition-building and advocating military force as a last resort, they said.

"What you have is a change in the climate around the president," said Brent Scowcroft, who served as national security adviser for the first President Bush, when Gates served as his deputy and Rice oversaw Soviet affairs.

Given his background as a former CIA analyst and president of a major university, Gates has a "different kind of personality and outlook" than his highly ideological predecessor, Scowcroft said. Gates's influence has helped replace the "formidable pressure" exerted on the president by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and their neoconservative allies with "a much more nuanced foreign policy."

For example, top national security officials clashed with Congress and human rights advocates over their refusal to rule out "waterboarding," an interrogation technique that involves simulated drowning and is deemed torture by the Geneva Conventions.

But when the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff equivocated in November when asked whether he considered waterboarding to be torture, Gates cut him off. "No member of the US military is allowed to do it, period," Gates said.

Besides railing against torture as an interrogation tactic in the war on terror, Gates has advocated closing down the Guantanamo Bay detention center in Cuba, which he believes has sullied America's reputation.

He has successfully pushed the administration to engage Iran to help improve security in Iraq, over the objections of Cheney. Breaking with Rumsfeld, Gates also negotiated with Russian officials to assuage their anger over a US plan to erect an antimissile system in Eastern Europe.

Then in late November, Gates surprised the Washington establishment by advocating a major increase in the State Department's budget, saying the United States "must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military."

Scowcroft, a close friend of Gates, said Gates considers the speech at Kansas State University to be among his

proudest moments as defense secretary. It was also a break from Rumsfeld and signaled that Gates believes the military should not be the primary tool of American foreign policy.

"There is no more talk about spreading democracy" by force, said Joseph Nye, a former assistant secretary of defense in the Clinton administration who teaches at Harvard University. "Bob is a very practical, sensible person. I think they would have been a lot better off if he had been the defense secretary in 2001."

Nye recalled how Rumsfeld was dismissive of "soft power" - the use of diplomacy and other noncoercive means to influence adversaries. Asked about soft power at a 2003 Army conference, Rumsfeld replied, "I don't know what it means," Nye recalled.

At Kansas State four years later, Gates declared, "I am here to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use soft power" and advocated "a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security" like diplomacy, economic aid, and cultural exchanges.

"What better illustration can you have of the differences" between Gates and Rumsfeld, Nye said.

While Gates is hailed as a breath of fresh air, critics say he is still presiding over a widely unpopular war in Iraq.

Michael O'Hanlon, a defense analyst at the Brookings Institution, believes Gates's heavy focus on Iraq has come at the expense of the war in Afghanistan, where violence is up and insurgents are making gains on coalition forces.

"In Afghanistan, Gates's record is mixed," O'Hanlon said.

Nevertheless, Gates has won high marks from lawmakers in both parties on Capitol Hill.

Most Democrats and Republicans hail his efforts to

reach out to both parties and to allies around the world, and to restore the government's credibility.

"He has been very straightforward," said Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri, the Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. "He gives us periodic briefings on the situation in the Middle East that he pledged he would do. He told us at his confirmation hearing that he would not mislead us and has lived up to it."

In the Bush Cabinet, Gates has found an intellectual soul mate in Rice, a former university administrator, according to those knowledgeable about the administration's internal deliberations.

Gates "allows Condi to expand more in her areas when she couldn't before, when she got slapped down every time she moved," Scowcroft said.

Meanwhile, former secretary of state James A. Baker III, another member of the elder Bush's inner circle, is also considered close to Gates. Baker was one of the key moderate voices that helped the first President Bush build an international coalition in the 1990-91 Persian Gulf war and was among those who warned against invading Iraq in 2003 without United Nations backing.

"There is a sense that the system is working again," said John Hamre, former deputy secretary of defense in the Clinton administration and recently picked by Gates to head the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee.

"The system had broken down rather badly, and there is a feeling that things are back to a regular order," Hamre said.

Gates's stewardship could help salvage the president's foreign affairs legacy.

"Robert Gates is a bipartisan moderate rather than a highly partisan hard-liner," said Loren Thompson,

president of the Lexington Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank specializing in defense policy. "He is nobody's idea of a liberal, but he knows how to make a government of divided parties and diverse viewpoints work. Bush has been dragged back to the center by Gates."

New York Times
January 16, 2008

6. Rice, In Baghdad, Praises New Law

By Solomon Moore

BAGHDAD — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise visit to Iraq on Tuesday to brief Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and other top politicians about President Bush's recent talks with Arab leaders and to praise recent legislative progress.

Speaking alongside Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, inside the Green Zone, Ms. Rice singled out the passage of a new law on Saturday as an important step toward reconciliation with former members of Saddam Hussein's government, who are mostly Sunni Arabs. The law would allow some former officials from Mr. Hussein's Baath Party to fill government positions and impose a strict ban on others.

American diplomats had urged the Iraqi government to improve the old de-Baathification process and included a new vetting process among a list of political benchmarks to be accomplished during the American troop increase.

Under the old law, tens of thousands of Baath Party members were purged from the government. Critics said that the process was politicized, arbitrary and far too restrictive, and complained that it only aggravated sectarian tensions and inflamed the Sunni Arab insurgency.

But the new law has loopholes that some critics have said may ultimately make it more restrictive than the old

one. Although Ms. Rice acknowledged that the new measure remained controversial, she praised it as an example of Iraq's emerging democracy.

"I don't know of any law that has ever been passed that is everything that everybody wants," she said. "That's the nature of democracy. The law will be more than some people wanted. It will be less than some people wanted. That's the nature of democratic compromise."

Some leaders said the law would give more jobs to ex-party members, while providing purged Baathists with pensions, which the old process did not do. But some hard-line Shiite politicians who supported the law, and minority Sunni political party members who did not, agreed that the legislation was even more restrictive than the original process, and that it would be used to justify further purges.

One clause prohibits former Baathists from working in several of Iraq's most important ministries, including Foreign, Interior and Defense, despite American plans to integrate more Sunni Arabs into Iraq's security forces. Critics of the law said it could have the opposite of its intended effect, and eventually rekindle sectarian bloodshed after the current lull in violence.

United States officials, who had been pushing the Iraqi Parliament to adopt a law revising the de-Baathification process, billed the new measure as a critical accomplishment that vindicated the strategy of an American troop increase. But since its passage on Saturday, American officials had been conspicuously tight-lipped about its content as they studied the legislation closely and tried to gauge its impact.

Although Ms. Rice did not address the most controversial portions of the law, she was upbeat about its passage.

"This law, the Accountability and Justice Law, is clearly a step forward for national reconciliation," she said. "It is clearly a step forward for the process of healing the wounds of the past, and it will have to be followed up by implementation that is in the same spirit of national reconciliation."

President Bush, in an interview with reporters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said the legislation was a sign of Iraq's maturing political process after decades of brutal repression under Mr. Hussein.

"A political system evolves and grows," he said. "It grows when people have confidence. It grows when the grass roots begins to agitate for change. It grows when there's alternatives. There's competition emerging."

Ms. Rice and Mr. Zebari predicted that progress would soon be made on two more crucial benchmarks: a national oil revenue sharing law and an agreement on the contested northern city of Kirkuk.

On Sunday, a broad swath of sectarian, ethnic and secular parties formed a coalition to push for greater central controls on regional hydrocarbon resources and to set aside a planned popular referendum on the status of Kirkuk, an oil-rich city that Iraq's powerful Kurdish alliance regards as part of the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan.

The coalition pits nationalist interests against the Kurdish and Shiite parties, including the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, which have pushed for more regional power. Competing Kurdish and Arab claims for Kirkuk, which remains among Iraq's most troubled areas, remain a particularly delicate problem, which American officials have compared to a ticking time bomb.

Mr. Zebari, who is also a prominent Kurdish leader, said he hoped Kirkuk's status would be resolved within six

months, and described the new political alliance as a positive development and played down potential tensions.

"There are new alliances being built and being formed," he said. "I don't think we should be terrified of such political developments. I think it is all healthy."

Earlier on Tuesday, a vehicle in an eight-vehicle Justice Ministry convoy slammed into a group of children on their way to school in downtown Baghdad, killing a 9-year-old boy and injuring four other children. The accident set off a gunfight between Iraqi soldiers stationed nearby and ministry guards traveling with the convoy.

A witness named Ahmed, who gave only his first name for fear of reprisals, said the same convoy had run over a motorcyclist in the same place last year. Ahmed said that one of the vehicles drove onto a sidewalk, hitting several children and slamming one child against a telephone pole, killing him.

"He did not stop at that point," Ahmed said. "He turned his vehicle around, running over another child. Then Iraqi soldiers shot the tires."

In other violence, a member of a Concerned Local Citizens group, one of the Sunni tribal militias that have turned against the insurgents, died in a clash with gunmen in Baghdad, according to the Iraqi police.

Iraqi security officials said that American and Iraqi forces had killed 17 gunmen in southwest Baquba, the capital of troubled Diyala Province, and killed another gunman in a northern suburb.

Two suicide bombers exploded near a police checkpoint in Tikrit, in Salahuddin Province, killing one officer and wounding two Concerned Local Citizens members and six civilians.

Reporting was contributed by Steven Lee Myers from

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Abeer Mohammed, Stephen Farrell, Balen Y. Younis and Qais Mizher from Baghdad; and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya.

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 10

7. As Al-Maliki Gains Strength, Some Question His Will For Unity

By Charles Levinson, USA Today

BAGHDAD — When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised Nouri al-Maliki's government during a surprise visit to Baghdad on Tuesday, she was addressing an Iraqi prime minister who — for better or worse — has strengthened his grip on power.

As recently as last fall, al-Maliki's coalition government appeared to be in danger of collapsing. Since then, he has taken advantage of a dramatic drop in violence throughout Iraq to fend off challenges from other political parties and exert more control over security forces.

Some analysts and U.S. military officers doubt that the 57-year-old Shiite leader will use his increased clout to heal divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, although last week, al-Maliki helped push through the parliament the first major law aimed at reconciliation between the two religious sects.

The bill would allow some former low-ranking members of Saddam Hussein's political party back into government jobs.

Rice called the measure "a step forward for healing the wounds of the past."

"Al-Maliki is stronger now than at any point since taking power," says Mithal al-Alusi, an independent Iraqi lawmaker who has criticized al-Maliki's government for failing to

control Shiite militias. "Other parties thought they could pressure him and bring down his government, but al-Maliki fought back — and he won."

Since he took office in April 2006, Al-Maliki has stayed in power largely by arguing that no one else in Iraq was equipped to replace him. Last spring, lawmakers loyal to the anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, representing the largest Shiite party in the parliament, withdrew support for al-Maliki. In August, six Sunni Cabinet ministers followed suit. On both occasions, al-Maliki ignored calls to resign.

Some politicians say al-Maliki has done a more effective job of playing political hardball.

They cited his reaction to a recent uprising by Kurdish members of his coalition who were angry over his failure to hold a vote on the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and other issues.

Shortly after a meeting with al-Maliki on Sunday, Shiite and Sunni leaders announced a rare joint coalition opposed to some Kurdish demands for autonomy.

Though al-Maliki's office insists the prime minister had nothing to do with the alliance, Kurdish lawmaker Mahmoud Othman was among those who saw it as a savvy political maneuver that gave al-Maliki a bargaining chip to use in negotiations with the Kurds.

"I think al-Maliki may have encouraged the pact," Othman said.

Brig. Gen. David Phillips, the senior U.S. officer in charge of training the Iraqi police force, is among those who accuse the prime minister of resisting efforts to accommodate the country's Sunni population, whose alienation in postwar Iraq has been the driving force behind the insurgency.

"Al-Maliki is an effective leader if you're looking at this from a sectarian agenda," Phillips said.

Phillips criticized al-Maliki's office for holding up the appointments of Sunni police officers and attempting to remove Sunni soldiers from strategically important army units, such as those in charge of guarding the sacred Shiite shrine in Samarra.

President Bush has also expressed frustration with al-Maliki's inability to broker compromises on benchmark laws.

Al-Maliki's chief political adviser, Sadiq al-Rikabi, says the prime minister has been instrumental in restoring security to Baghdad's streets and in encouraging reconciliation between Shiites and Sunni.

"The prime minister has saved Iraq and all the Middle East from the disaster of a sectarian war," al-Rikabi said.

Steve Biddle, a former adviser to the senior U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, says a strengthened al-Maliki may spell trouble for the U.S. mission in Iraq.

"It's not clear to me that a stronger al-Maliki is in our interests," Biddle said. "We're trying to drag him kicking and screaming to a more compromise-oriented willingness to accept concessions."

"In a sense, the stronger the guy gets, the more power he has to resist what we want because he doesn't need us as much."

New York Times
January 16, 2008

8. Iraqi Spending To Rebuild Has Slowed, Report Says

By James Glanz

Highly promising figures that the administration cited to demonstrate economic progress in Iraq last fall, when Congress was considering whether to continue financing the war, cannot be substantiated by official Iraqi budget records, the Government Accountability

Office reported Tuesday.

The Iraqi government had been severely criticized for failing to spend billions of dollars of its oil revenues in 2006 to finance its own reconstruction, but last September the administration said Iraq had greatly accelerated such spending. By July 2007, the administration said, Iraq had spent some 24 percent of \$10 billion set aside for reconstruction that year.

As Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top American commander in Iraq, and Ryan C. Crocker, the American ambassador to Iraq, prepared in September to report to Congress on the state of the war, the economic figures were a rare sign of progress within Iraq's often dysfunctional government.

But in its report on Tuesday, the accountability office said official Iraqi Finance Ministry records showed that Iraq had spent only 4.4 percent of the reconstruction budget by August 2007. It also said that the rate of spending had substantially slowed from the previous year.

The reason for the difference, said Joseph A. Christoff, the G.A.O.'s director of international affairs and trade, was that few official Iraqi figures for 2007 were available when General Petraeus and Mr. Crocker went to Congress.

So the administration, with the help of the Finance Ministry in Baghdad, appears to have relied on a combination of indicators, including real expenditures, ministries' suggestions of projects they intended to carry out, and contracts that were still under negotiation, Mr. Christoff said. But actual spending does not seem to have lived up to those estimates for spending on reconstruction, a budget item sometimes called capital or investment expenditures, he added.

"So it looked like an improvement, but it wasn't an

improvement," he said.

The United States Treasury Department and State Department criticized the conclusions in comments included in the report, saying that the G.A.O. had not accounted for all places in the Iraqi budget where investment or capital expenditures had been made. But the report said those departments had not been able to identify specific places where those other expenditures had taken place.

A spokeswoman for the United States Embassy in Baghdad said Tuesday that she could not comment. The White House press office did not respond to a request for comment.

After the United States spent more than \$40 billion to rebuild Iraq's faltering electricity, water, sewage, transportation and petroleum sectors, with mixed results at best, Iraq's failure to devote its own resources to continue the task brought severe criticism from Western government and technical organizations.

The reasons for that failure, Iraqi and American officials said, included the challenges of carrying out construction projects in a dangerous countryside, a lack of expertise in a nation drained of technical talent, and a fear that new anticorruption measures would be widely used to prosecute Iraqi officials accustomed to operating in a culture of bribes and financial back-scratching.

Still, after Iraq's failure to spend its own money on reconstruction was first disclosed in late 2006, Iraqi and American officials repeatedly asserted that the problems would be much less severe the next year, as the new government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki found its way.

In addition, the officials said, with the American troop increase and security improvements, security problems would lessen. And American training programs

were producing more skilled Iraqi contracting and finance officials. The figures put forth in September appeared to endorse those claims.

But the accountability office figures, which Mr. Christoff said were taken directly from Finance Ministry records, show that through August 2007 the Iraqi government had spent less than half the percentage of its investment budget that it had spent in the same period in 2006.

Rick Barton, co-director of the postconflict reconstruction project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said all measures of economic progress in Iraq were difficult to pin down precisely. But he said the United States, taking those difficulties into account, should have been wary of touting progress before the facts were clear.

"The data in these places is hugely unreliable to begin with, primarily because nobody gets out in the field to see what's going on," Mr. Barton said. "But what is probably troubling is that when you know this, you shouldn't be using this to create wrong impressions or false impressions and pretending that you know what's going on."

New York Times
January 16, 2008

9. Turkey Bombs Kurdish Rebels

ISTANBUL — Turkish fighter jets bombed Kurdish militants in northern Iraq on Tuesday, the military said, the fourth major airstrike in a month in what has become an extensive Turkish air campaign against the Kurdish fighters.

The military reported on its Web site that it "effectively hit" targets belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., in the Zap, Avashin, Basyan and Hakurk regions. No casualties were reported.

The strike came as Gen.

Ergin Saygun, the second in command of the Turkish military, visited Baghdad for talks on the Kurdish rebel group. General Saygun met with Iraqi officials and the top American commander, Gen. David H. Petraeus. They discussed "a range of military issues, as well as ways to establish cooperation in the struggle against terror," according to the Turkish military.

The attack was part of a calculated campaign against the rebel group that began on Dec. 1, when Turkish soldiers shelled rebel positions in Iraqi territory.

At the time, the Turkish military and government were under tremendous public pressure to act against the group, which had carried out a humiliating ambush in October that killed 12 Turkish soldiers.

Los Angeles Times
January 16, 2008

10. Fire Shuts Oil Refinery In Iraq

Potential sabotage suspects are numerous in the Basra area, plagued by violence between rival political and criminal factions.

By Garrett Therolf, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD —An oil refinery near Iraq's southern port city of Basra probably will remain shut for days after a large fire Tuesday that highlighted the vulnerability of the country's energy infrastructure to criminal and political power struggles.

Five men suffered severe burns, and the sky was clotted with thick smoke until the two-hour fire was extinguished. The refinery provides petroleum products to consumers in southern Iraq.

"There was severe damage to the refinery," said Basra Gov. Mohammed Waeli, adding that the facility would remain closed for days.

The Basra area is subject to entrenched banditry, estimated to cost the state

billions of dollars each year, at the hands of rival gangs, many of them suspected of affiliation with Shiite Muslim political parties that control the area.

As a result, "you can't imagine who wouldn't" commit sabotage in Basra, said a Western advisor to the Iraqi government. "These could be local rivalries; they could be broader rivalries."

The blaze may have been tied to "local advantage, maybe payback. Who knows?" the advisor said. "The situation in Basra [is]: It's hard to tell if there are any good guys."

Officials say smuggling-related violence is rooted in battles taking place in Basra among political factions and criminal gangs. Local chapters of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, Waeli's Fadila party and Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr's movement have all been accused of involvement in the lucrative smuggling trade.

British forces withdrew from the city in September, but officials worry about the lawlessness that still exists.

"The national government is trying to get the situations sorted in Basra to reduce corruption and get the [local] parties out of running things. It's not just the oil -- it's the ports, the points of entry -- it's everything," the Western advisor said.

Historically, two-thirds of Iraq's oil output came from southern fields and flowed through Basra. More than 1.5 million barrels of oil still move through the area every day, providing the bulk of the central government's revenue.

Iraq's proven oil reserves are estimated to be around 115 billion barrels, the world's third-largest after Saudi Arabia's and Canada's.

Witnesses said Tuesday's blaze was ignited by a rocket or mortar attack, but their account did not win full endorsement from authorities. Investigators said they were not yet able to rule out mechanical failure.

Meanwhile, Iraq's Oil Ministry alleged that a helicopter belonging to the U.S.-led coalition was somehow responsible -- a charge denied by the military.

Hakim Mayahi, head of the Basra provincial council's security committee, said, "We should not forget that there are international terrorist organizations and regional countries' intelligence agencies that often interfere in order to create security chaos in Iraq."

Anthony Cordesman, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said the many conflicting gangs "make it pretty damn difficult to understand what is going on."

The effects, however, are acute.

"All of the impact of an interruption is felt immediately, because there are no stockpiles; there is nothing to absorb the shocks," said the Western advisor to the Iraqi government.

Meanwhile in Baghdad, Justice Ministry vehicles slammed into a group of fourth- and fifth-grade students Tuesday. The disturbance caused guards at a nearby checkpoint for the Foreign Affairs Ministry to open fire. Five boys were killed in the initial accident.

Elsewhere in the capital, Majid Khudair Lafta, a Shiite leader of a local volunteer group, was killed in a confrontation with gunmen.

The volunteer groups, known as concerned local citizens, are largely made up of former insurgents who have agreed to work alongside U.S.-led security forces in exchange for payment. They have been credited with contributing to Iraq's recent decrease in violence.

Along the nation's northern perimeter, Turkish attack planes bombarded Kurdish villagers, according to sources in the Kurdistan Workers Party, a rebel Turkish Kurd group. The attacks could not be immediately confirmed

by Turkish authorities.

Times staff writer Ned Parker and special correspondents in Irbil, Baghdad and Basra contributed to this report.

Boston Globe
January 16, 2008

11. 3 US Soldiers May Have Died From Friendly Fire

By Lolita C. Baldor,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Three Army soldiers who were gunned down during an intensive, three-hour firefight in Salahuddin Province north of Baghdad last week might have died from friendly fire, military officials said yesterday.

The three 101st Airborne Division soldiers were part of an Army company that was attacked by as many as 15 insurgents on Jan. 8, after discovering several large caches of explosives.

Military officials said the deaths were being investigated to determine whether the soldiers were killed by shots from the enemy or by US forces, including members of their unit and aircraft called in for backup.

A detailed account was given by several officials to the Associated Press.

The three soldiers were searching buildings southwest of Samarra early that Tuesday morning when they found more than 1,000 pounds of homemade explosives, two 55-gallon barrels rigged to blow up, a roadside bomb, bullets, and bomb-making materials.

Soon afterward they discovered that a second building was filled with explosives, guns, ammunition, and a disassembled suicide vest.

When they moved in on the insurgents, reports said, the soldiers discovered an extensive tunnel and trench network that was defended by

10 to 15 of the enemy, who attacked the company using mortars, grenades, and guns.

The fight lasted about three hours, escalating to a massive battle with US aircraft blasting the insurgents with rockets, several bombs, and .50-caliber guns.

At some point soldiers discovered that two members of their unit - Private First Class Ivan E. Merlo, 19, of San Marcos, Calif., and Private First Class Phillip J. Pannier, 20, of Washburn, Ill., had been killed. Three others were injured, and one of them - Sergeant David J. Hart, 22, of Lake View Terrace, Calif. - later died.

Washington Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 14

12. Official's Convoy Runs Over Children

BAGHDAD — Five schoolchildren were killed yesterday after being struck by a car in the convoy of a top judicial official during a chaotic gunbattle with checkpoint guards, police and hospital officials said.

The children, ages 6 to 10, were hit by the car during an exchange of gunfire between the official's security team and Iraqi police who opened fire after the convoy failed to stop at a checkpoint in central Baghdad.

The police and hospital officials said the children were heading to school in the al-Salhiyah district near the Foreign Ministry compound.

Bosho Ibrahim, Iraq's deputy justice minister, said the convoy carried Midhat al-Mahmoud, president of the Supreme Judicial council, the country's top legal oversight agency.

Washington Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 15

13. Displaced Iraqis Suffer Hardship

Relief not reaching evacuees

By John Zarocostas,
Washington Times

GENEVA — The plight of the 1.2 million Iraqis internally displaced since February 2006 has continued to worsen, aggravated by a lack of access to food rations, health care and basic services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity, a report by a global relief agency said.

Population displacement within and from Iraq "remains one of the largest and most serious humanitarian crises in the world," the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a European-based intergovernmental organization, said in a report.

More than 2 million Iraqis have taken refuge in neighboring Jordan and Syria. A total of 2.4 million have been displaced within the war-torn nation since 2003, including 1.2 million that were forced from homes since February 2006, when sectarian violence changed the scale of the uprooting.

"Although military operations, crime and general insecurity remain factors, sectarian violence became the primary driver for population displacement," said the report, which draws on a survey of 142,000 displaced families throughout the country.

By religion and ethnicity, nearly 61 percent of the population displaced in 2007 are Shi'ite Arabs, 28.2 percent are Sunni Arabs, 3.6 percent are Christians, and 2.6 percent are Sunni Kurd, the study said.

The survey found that only 22 percent of the internally displaced people had regular access to the government's public distribution of food rations, while another 22 percent said they had "no access at all."

Despite the pressing humanitarian needs, the IOM report voiced concern that only 25 percent of agency's \$85 million proposal to assist internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups in Iraq has been funded by donor

countries.

"We welcome the funding we have received from the donors including the U.S. which has contributed a significant amount to our appeal. But overall the response is a disappointing one, given the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the needs which are so clearly evident," said IOM chief Brunson McKinley, a former U.S. ambassador.

Washington Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 14

14. Engineers Take IED Attacks 'Personally'

Reporter recalls explosion with front-line team

By Richard Tomkins,
Washington Times

FORWARD
OPERATING BASE
NORMANDY, Iraq -- The unsung heroes of the war in Iraq — or any war — are the combat engineers, the men who go ahead of the infantry to clear a path through the enemy defenses.

In Iraq, they perform another task as well: Finding and destroying improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the military term for roadside bombs that al Qaeda has used with horrific effect on U.S. troops and hapless noncombatants.

"They take this personally, it's not just a job," said Sgt. Richard West, a 12-year Army veteran from Grapevine, Texas. "I just can't describe the anger and hurt they feel when someone is hurt or killed by an IED they missed."

Sgt. West is a member of the 38th Combat Engineer Battalion, 4th Stryker Combat Brigade Team of the 2nd Infantry Division. He's been hit at least three times in Iraq by IEDs. The last incident, when he was outside his armored vehicle, left him with a dozen shrapnel wounds.

A specialist who asked not to be named is also with the 38th. He'd been hit four times

in Iraq when he spoke to me. He was happy to speak of anything and everything but fell silent when asked his full name, his hometown and his home state.

"My family doesn't know much of this. And I want to keep it that way," he said.

I had been out with the route clearance teams before but had never encountered an IED. That all changed at 6:33 a.m. Jan. 8, the kickoff day for Operation Raider Harvest in Diyala province's northern Diyala River Valley, to root out al Qaeda terrorists.

The mission of the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Platoon of the 38th was to lead a company of infantrymen in armored Stryker troop carriers into the area while clearing their path of IEDs.

IEDs come in all shapes and sizes; they can be concealed under freshly laid gravel or in roadside trash heaps or disguised as discarded plastic jugs. They can be detonated by a crushwire or tripwire or by an operator using a cell phone or other electronic device. They can be made with plastic explosive, TNT or unused ordnance, such as mortar or artillery shells.

And they kill — suddenly, devastatingly, horribly.

"You sure you want to do this?" an Army public affairs sergeant had asked the night before. "You'll be in the most dangerous position, but in the safest vehicle, a Buffalo."

"Good to go," I said, my ego fed by the prospect of being at the so-called tip of the spear. "I want it."

The Buffalo is in no way an attractive vehicle. It weighs about 40 tons and looks like a gigantic box on wheels. But it has a V-shaped bottom to deflect explosive blasts as well as upper armor. It's also fitted with a hydraulic arm with a giant fork on the end for "interrogating" suspicious objects and holes.

It does its job well, as cumbersome as it is. It also has ample leg room, a special perk

in a military vehicle not to be casually dismissed.

On my Buffalo, there was a crew of four. Three were veteran combat engineers who had survived previous IED blasts. The fourth was a 19-year-old private straight out of training school.

The first village we entered was Silsil. It looked innocuous enough as we crossed a canal and slowly rolled up its main street. There were small vegetable and fruit stands in front of homes and shops; orchards of oranges and pomegranates were close by. The streets were deserted at the break of day.

One hundred yards, 125 yards, we traveled from the canal, slowly making our way to a T-junction. Everyone scoured visually for IED crushwires while electronic equipment sent out waves to jam any electronic detonator signals.

At 150 yards, as we slowed for the junction, the specialist, who was driving, called out: "Do I go right or left ..."

He never finished the sentence. The last letter in "left" was replaced by a massive, metallic bang. Almost simultaneously, the Buffalo was lifted into the air and then crashed down.

There was no sound from the four soldiers in the Buffalo, not immediately anyway, except for heavy breathing. Everyone just listened anxiously. Was there going to be a second explosion — from the fuel tanks or from a daisy-chained IED?

The dust, dirt and gravel wrapped us in an impenetrable gray-brown blanket as debris rained down on us.

Later came the near-hysterical jokes and bantering when it appeared there would be no explosion No. 2. We'd survived. Our vehicle was a mess — its frame was bent, armor plating blown off — but we'd survived.

The IED was estimated to

have contained 50 to 60 pounds of TNT. It was buried under the packed gravel road and exploded directly beneath us, set off by a crushwire that had been covered over to blend in with the road surface. It left a crater 2½ feet deep and 5 feet across.

Others later that day weren't so fortunate. Two men in a Stryker were severely wounded after striking an IED, a fact that didn't sit well with the engineers, who took the injuries personally.

Later that day, we were taken to a medical facility where we were poked, probed and questioned.

"Don't tell them you're hurting if you want to go out again tomorrow," someone whispered in my ear.

I kept my mouth shut. When I failed the eye exam, I told the medical technician that it was because I didn't have my glasses with me. The wobbly performance on heel-toe exercises was the result of bad knees, I added; my inability to perform the memory tests of word lists and reciting the first four letters of the alphabet backwards were the result of "senior moments."

We went out again the next day, and it was uneventful — for us. Six soldiers and their Iraqi interpreters were killed nearby when they entered a booby-trapped house.

As we returned to Forward Operating Base Normandy, the conversation in the Buffalo turned to who had a stash of Advil or Tylenol. The headaches had set in with a vengeance, but none of the crew wanted to risk being medically restricted from duty by going to the medical building for pills.

I'm on medical restriction now. I couldn't hide the concussion as well as the others. There's only so much you can claim to be the result of age or wobbly knees. And a wonky eye and fluid in an ear helped push me to go back to the doctor and confess.

But tomorrow is a new day

and there are new missions. Where to go and what to do? Well, the 38th did give me an open invitation.

Washington Post
January 16, 2008
Pg. 11

15. France Announces Base In Persian Gulf

Deal With U.A.E. Seen as Warning to Iran

By Molly Moore, Washington Post Foreign Service

Sarkozy signed the deal in Abu Dhabi with Sheik Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, president of the U.A.E., describing it as "a sign to all that France is participating in the stability of this region of the world."

The base, announced at the end of a three-day visit by Sarkozy to Persian Gulf countries, is part of his effort to raise France's international and diplomatic profile.

Though small in size -- at least 400 navy, army and air force personnel -- the installation would be an important symbol for both countries.

The announcement signals a shift in the political realities and sensitivities of the region from the days of the first U.S.-led war against Iraq in 1991, when most Persian Gulf countries demanded that the United States keep its bases in the region officially secret.

Sarkozy also used his visit, with stops in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, to cement his alliance with the United States in demanding that Iran -- seen by many of its Persian Gulf neighbors as a growing threat -- halt its uranium enrichment program. President Bush is also in the region this week, issuing similar pointed criticism of Iran.

French officials said the U.A.E. military base, coupled with an agreement to help the Emirates build two nuclear reactors for energy production, is intended in part to warn Iran against taking aggressive steps toward any of its neighbors.

"France responds to its

friends," Sarkozy told reporters after signing the military agreement. "France and the Emirates signed a reciprocal defense accord in 1995. Our friends from the Emirates asked that this accord be prolonged and asked that a base with 400 personnel be opened."

France is a major arms supplier to the U.A.E. and other Middle Eastern countries and stages regular joint military exercises with the Emirates.

In two of the largest weapons sales to the U.A.E. in recent years, France signed a \$3.4 billion deal involving 63 Mirage 2000 fighter aircraft and a \$3.4 billion agreement to supply 390 Leclerc tanks.

The French base will be set up in Abu Dhabi, the largest and wealthiest of the seven emirates, and will become operational in 2009, according to French officials. Officials declined to provide specifics of the base's operations. Abu Dhabi is just across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

French Vice Adm. Jacques Mazars, who will head the project, said that in addition to the 400-plus people at the base, as many as 150 French navy personnel would be assigned to a U.A.E. naval base in Abu Dhabi, according to news service accounts from the region.

The United States has strategic military bases in many parts of the Middle East, including the Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. The British military is part of the coalition naval task force based in Bahrain and operates aircraft from a U.S. air base in Qatar.

Sarkozy also used his trip to solidify other ties. He extended agreements in the U.A.E. for economic, education and cultural projects and signed new accords on transportation and intellectual property rights.

Both the French and U.S. presidents cautioned the petroleum-producing states

about the high price of oil, currently around \$90 per barrel, and urged them to raise production to help bring down prices.

New York Times
January 16, 2008

16. Bomb Targets U.S. Car In Beirut

By Nada Bakri

BEIRUT, Lebanon — A bomb exploded next to an American Embassy vehicle on Tuesday, killing at least three civilians and wounding many other people, including an American bystander and an embassy employee, Lebanese and American officials said.

The explosion occurred as President Bush toured the region. It was the first attack on American interests in Lebanon since the 1983 truck bombing that killed 241 American service members at the United States Marine barracks here.

Lebanese and Western officials said the embassy vehicle was probably the target of the attack, though no one claimed responsibility for the bomb and initial investigations could not determine if it had been placed under a car or on the side of the road.

The bomb blew up as the embassy's armored sport utility vehicle passed, narrowly missing it but wounding its driver and killing two Lebanese in the car behind it, and a Syrian bystander, security officials said. At least 20 other passers-by and shop and office workers were wounded.

The blast occurred on a coastal road north of Beirut, the capital, in a busy industrial district called Bourj Hammoud. It destroyed at least six cars, shattered windows and tore masonry from buildings.

"The scene was inhumane; it was devastating," said Alaa al-Hatil, 35, an Egyptian shop worker. "There was blood and flesh everywhere. I could not look."

The American who was

wounded in the blast was identified as Mathew Clason, a Minnesota native who arrived two weeks ago to work at the National Evangelical Church.

In Washington, Sean McCormack, a State Department spokesman, said two embassy employees had been in the vehicle damaged by the blast, which could be heard across the capital and sent gray smoke billowing near the Mediterranean coast.

The driver was slightly wounded and the other staff member was fine, Mr. McCormack told reporters. He said no American diplomats or United States citizens had been in the vehicle.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who is with Mr. Bush on his regional tour, condemned the attack but said it would not change American policy in Lebanon. "The United States will, of course, not be deterred in its efforts to help the Lebanese people, to help the democratic forces in Lebanon, to help Lebanon resist force and interference in their affairs," she told reporters from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The explosion on Tuesday increased concern in a nation already paralyzed by a power struggle between the Western-backed ruling majority coalition and the opposition, which is led by the Shiite militant group Hezbollah and supported by Iran and Syria. The dispute has blocked the election of a president, leaving the country without one for more than a month.

In the last three years, the country has also had a string of assassinations of anti-Syrian officials, journalists and a top Lebanese Army official.

Prime Minister Fouad Siniora held an emergency cabinet meeting to condemn the attack. Members of the ruling coalition, who have blamed Syria for most assassinations, condemned the attack. The majority leader of Parliament, Saad al-Hariri, said the bombing was intended to destabilize Lebanon and block

its recovery. Hezbollah's leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, also condemned it.

Mr. McCormack said agents from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the State Department would work with Lebanese authorities to investigate it and that the American Embassy in Beirut was reviewing security. "We are going to take a look at what implications, if any, there are for our security posture in Beirut," Mr. McCormack said.

Graham Bowley contributed reporting from New York.

NBC

January 15, 2008

17. Troubled Waters?

By Jim Miklaszewski

NBC Nightly News, 7:00 PM

WILLIAMS: And there are new questions tonight about what has been reported as a confrontation between U.S. Navy warships and Iran in the Straits of Hormuz, a report that surfaced on the eve of the president's trip to the Middle East, you may recall. The question is: was there, in fact, a real threat to American sailors ever, or some sort of a hoax?

We get more from our correspondent at the Pentagon, NBC's Jim Miklaszewski.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI: This video, edited and released by the U.S. Navy, was the stuff of high seas drama.

U.S. SAILOR: Five unidentified small surface contacts inbound.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Sunday, January 6th, five Iranian revolutionary guard speedboats closing fast on three U.S. warships in the Strait of Hormuz. The Navy says seven minutes into this encounter, their warships received an ominous sounding radio call.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: I am coming to you. You will explode after a few minutes.

MIKLASZEWSKI: U.S. military officials at first thought the broadcast came

from Iranians, either in the boats or on shore. January 7th, Iran denied it had provoked the U.S. warships, then on January 9th claimed the audio had been fabricated. But that same day, U.S. military officials in the Persian Gulf acknowledged they could not tie that threatening radio call to the Iranian boats. That's because the call came through on channel 16, a frequency like a CB radio that's open to everyone.

GEOFF MORRELL [Pentagon Press Secretary]: It may be an impossible task to figure out where a transmission over a common channel may have emanated from.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Still, on January 9th on a trip to Israel, President Bush issued a stern warning to Iran.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: There will be serious consequences if they attack our ships – pure and simple.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Critics contend the administration used the encounter at sea to assure Middle East allies the U.S. would remain tough on Iran.

PHILIP GORDON [Foreign Policy Analyst]: I think the temptation to hype the threat does exist, did exist. That's not to say that there isn't a threat there to begin with; there is.

MIKLASZEWSKI: A charge the Pentagon today strenuously denied.

MORRELL: But this notion that in any way this was hyped or – or this was in any way hyped is absurd.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Whatever the politics and wherever the radio message originated, U.S. military officials insist the Iranian Rev Guard boats did pose a threat that could have had deadly consequences.

Jim Miklaszewski, NBC News, the Pentagon.

New York Times
January 16, 2008

18. Visiting American Admiral Confers With Chinese Generals

By Jim Yardley

BEIJING — China must be more open about its rapid military buildup and should expand military collaboration with the United States to develop greater trust and thereby prevent misunderstandings and confrontation, the United States commander in the Pacific said Tuesday.

The commander, Adm. Timothy J. Keating, was visiting China as one of its top generals said the United States still far surpassed China's military capacity and should not be concerned about the buildup. "We don't have the ability to make you afraid of us," said Gen. Chen Bingde, chief of general staff of the People's Liberation Army.

The four-day visit by Admiral Keating followed a diplomatic dispute last year in which China unexpectedly denied the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk a scheduled Thanksgiving port call in Hong Kong. Days earlier, China blocked two American minesweepers from docking in Hong Kong during bad weather.

American military officials said that refusing the minesweepers safe harbor violated international naval custom and law.

"We were unhappy that the visit was canceled; we have discussed it," Admiral Keating said Tuesday at a news briefing at the American Embassy. Asked whether Chinese military leaders had explained why the ships were rebuffed, he said, "We didn't spend a whole lot of time on why."

China has given varying explanations for the incidents and suggested that they were reprisals because last year the United States government honored the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader who is considered a separatist by Chinese leaders.

China has also been unhappy about recent American arms sales to Taiwan. On Monday, Chinese generals met with Admiral Keating and urged the United States to stop selling weapons to Taiwan, which Beijing considers a breakaway province.

Before meeting with Admiral Keating, General Chen intimated that the Kitty Hawk had not followed appropriate protocol. "If your ship wants to stop by in Hong Kong, you have to follow the international rules and go through some procedures," he told a camera crew from ABC News.

Admiral Keating said that the Kitty Hawk had followed appropriate protocols for the visit and that General Chen had never mentioned any procedural issues during their meeting.

Washington Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 3

19. Admiral Pursues Chinese Answers, Ties

By Bill Gertz, Washington Times

The commander of U.S. Pacific forces said in Beijing yesterday that he is troubled by China's missile buildup and anti-satellite weapons, but hopes military ties to its Communist Party-led forces will improve.

"We are concerned about development of long-range cruise and ballistic missiles. We're concerned about anti-satellite technology, execution thereof. We're concerned about area-denial weapons," Adm. Timothy Keating told reporters.

A year ago, China sent shock waves through military and civilian leadership by shooting down a weather satellite with a ground-launched missile in a test of a weapon that no other country has.

Area-denial arms are what the Pentagon calls weapons

used to attack U.S. aircraft carriers and ships. They include ballistic and cruise missiles with precision-guided warheads for strikes against carriers and other warships that would defend Taiwan in any conflict, the Pentagon has said.

Adm. Keating is on his first visit to China since Beijing blocked the aircraft carrier strike group Kitty Hawk from making a long-scheduled port visit to Hong Kong in November. China also has blocked earlier and later ship visits.

Chinese officials did not explain yesterday their reasons for blocking the ships, but Adm. Keating said he was assured that future requests for ship visits would receive "more favorable consideration."

"We were unhappy that the visit was canceled. We have discussed it," he said, noting that despite his inquiries during meetings "we didn't spend a whole lot of time on why."

After the Kitty Hawk was denied entry to Hong Kong, it returned to its home port in Japan and on the way angered China by sailing through the Taiwan Strait.

"We don't need China's permission to go through the Taiwan Straits in international waters," Adm. Keating said.

Despite the Chinese stonewalling, Adm. Keating indicated he wanted to develop closer ties to a military that is controlled by the ruling Communist Party of China and not the government, singling out Gen. Guo Boxiong, vice chairman of the Communist Party Central Military Commission, as an emerging friend.

"We're developing, I believe, an honest and true friendship," he said. "I can pick up the phone and call some of these guys. General Guo, he's going to be a pal. We've got differences. He acknowledges them. I acknowledge them. But we're working through them."

Adm. Keating said he pressed Chinese military

leaders to be more open about the reasons behind their military buildup, which includes long-range strategic nuclear missiles and submarines, satellite-killing missiles and cyber-warfare capabilities.

"Increased transparency can lead to greater trust that reduces the potential for misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding can lead to conflict or crisis and that is very much not in our interest," he said.

Miami Herald
January 16, 2008

20. Port Request To Test China's Openness

Despite several recent, prickly maritime incidents between the U.S. and China, the United States will seek permission to dock a Navy vessel soon.

By Tim Johnson, McClatchy News Service

BEIJING -- The Pentagon soon will ask China to approve a port call by a U.S. Navy vessel in Hong Kong, and will be watching the response as "kind of a signal flare" for whether China wants improving relations, a senior U.S. military officer said Tuesday.

China denied a port call to the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier and its escort ships over Thanksgiving, and turned away two minesweepers fleeing stormy seas and an Air Force aircraft taking supplies to the U.S. consulate there.

Adm. Timothy Keating, the chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, based in Hawaii, said he told Chinese officials, "We were unhappy that the [Kitty Hawk] visit was canceled."

"We are very anxious to ensure our ability to visit Hong Kong," Keating said. He said he'd told Chinese diplomats and military leaders that the Pentagon would ask for the green light for another U.S. naval vessel to visit Hong Kong "fairly soon."

Keating said Chinese

leaders didn't explain why the U.S. vessels were turned away last November. He said, though, that Chinese diplomats and military leaders had indicated that the new U.S. request would "receive favorable consideration."

Keating said the request would serve as a test to determine the level of "trust and confidence and transparency" that Chinese military leaders desired with the Pentagon.

"We think it's kind of a signal flare for positive improving relations," he said.

Keating's announcement came a day after a Chinese general brushed aside concerns about his nation's growing military strength, and suggested that the Kitty Hawk carrier group did not follow procedure.

"The distance between China and U.S. militaries is big. If you fear China's military buildup, you don't have much courage," Gen. Chen Bingde, army chief of General Staff, said Monday. "We don't have the ability to make you afraid of us."

Of the Kitty Hawk, Chen said: "If your ship wants to stop by in Hong Kong, you have to follow the international rules."

Keating said he didn't know to what Chen was referring. But he said he was sure that "whatever international rules were required to be observed ... were observed."

About 50 U.S. naval vessels a year usually make port calls in Hong Kong.

Keating defended the decision made after the port denial to send the Kitty Hawk, three guided missile destroyers and a guided missile cruiser through the Taiwan Strait, a potential military flash point barely 100 miles wide. China claims the independently governed Taiwan as part of its territory.

"We don't need China's permission to go through the Taiwan Strait. It is

international water. We will exercise our free right of passage whenever and wherever we choose," Keating said, adding that "the weather was pretty crummy" in Pacific waters outside Taiwan, making a strait transit desirable as the ships sailed toward Japan.

The last time an entire U.S. carrier group went through the strait was in 2002.

Keating said friction over the port calls and the Taiwan Strait transit showed the need for dialogue between the U.S. and Chinese militaries.

"We don't want to be confrontational about this," Keating said of the strait transit. "I understand that China's going to go, 'Hey, what are you doing here?' Well, we'll explain. And that goes to [improving] transparency. If they have a question, ask. We'll tell them the truth. So, too, would we request that sort of healthy robust dialogue in the case of a denial of a port-visit request... . Yes or no, and here's why."

News media speculation over why China denied the port visits focused on Chinese unhappiness over U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan and the awarding in October to the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, of the highest medal of the U.S. Congress.

In other remarks, Keating said the Pentagon had invited China to take part in Cobra Gold, a multinational exercise in Thailand in May.

He strongly urged China to take steps toward greater transparency about its military and the intent of a buildup to avoid the risk of missteps with U.S. forces, including the possibility of conflict between submarine fleets.

"The Chinese military is developing impressive capabilities. We are watching carefully," Keating said, noting U.S. concern about China's development of cruise and ballistic missiles, anti-satellite technology and special weapons to deny access to territory or sea.

Keating, who made his first visit to China as U.S. Pacific commander last May, said one reason for his follow-up visit "is to express our interest -- in fact our requirement -- for transparency with the Chinese military."

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 9

21. Polish Official Says Deal Over U.S. Missiles Possible

Poland's defense minister said the United States appears willing to consider his country's insistence on U.S. security aid in exchange for hosting U.S. missile-defense interceptors.

Bogdan Klich, on his first visit to Washington as defense minister under the new Polish government, said last week that he would press for strengthening Poland's short- and mid-range air defenses.

The proposed missile-defense site has angered Russia, which has warned that its missiles could target the base in Poland.

Washington Times
January 16, 2008
Pg. 13

22. Warsaw Ups Ante For U.S. Shield

Says base 'risk' with added costs

By Nicholas Kralev and Andrew Borowiec, Washington Times

The United States is headed for tough negotiations with Poland over a planned missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, with Warsaw now demanding that Washington pour hundreds of millions of dollars into improving its defense capabilities.

The Bush administration considered the deal almost done under Poland's previous government, but the recently elected Prime Minister Donald Tusk has raised serious

questions about the costs and benefits from the missile system for his country.

Mr. Tusk sent his defense minister, Bogdan Klich, to Washington this week to make the new government's case. "We believe that the injection of American funds into modernization of our armed forces would balance the risk to our security linked to the construction of the base," Mr. Klich told the Dziennik newspaper before leaving Poland.

Mr. Klich met yesterday with Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates after holding talks with Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte on Monday.

"It's a negotiation. We are allies, but even allies have negotiations," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. "They have a certain set of interests, and we want to talk to them about how, in the framework of these negotiations and our understanding, that we can accommodate their interests."

U.S. officials did not say whether they would accept Poland's new demands, but they indicated that the significance of the missile project for the administration would translate into flexibility during the negotiations.

"They have some domestic concerns which they are trying to address, while at the same time we are trying to figure out how to work with them to continue to move forward on what we believe to be a program of vital importance not just for us but really for Europe," said Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell.

Mr. Klich said after his meeting with Mr. Gates: "We still in Poland do not see the right balance between the costs and the benefits of this installation."

The \$3.5 billion system known at the Pentagon as the Ballistic Missile Defense European Capability is intended to protect Europe and

the United States against a limited intermediate- and long-range ballistic missile attack from the Middle East, particularly Iran.

The Bush administration wants to place 10 interceptor missiles in Poland, for which it would have to build a base, and a radar installation in the Czech Republic.

But Mr. Tusk and other Cabinet members have said that hosting part of the system would make Polish air space more vulnerable.

"We feel no threat from Iran," Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski told the Warsaw daily Gazeta Wyborcza. "It is not the benefits but the risks of the system that have to be discussed fully. ... We cannot carry the cost alone."

Mr. Morrell said yesterday such statements "are not helpful." He reminded the Poles that the United States was "instrumental in them becoming members of NATO."

"They are the biggest beneficiary within Europe of defense aid. Nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars under the Bush administration has been provided to the Polish military in military aid," he said. "And because of that special relationship, we believe that we can overcome whatever differences may exist on this issue very quickly."

Another complicating matter for the U.S. is Mr. Tusk's promise to repair relations with Russia, which have been strained since the end of the Cold War and particularly under the previous Polish government.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has described the planned installation of interceptors and radar sites in Europe as the start of a new arms race and suspended Russia's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty.

Andrew Borowiec contributed to this article from Geneva.

Aerospace Daily & Defense Report

January 16, 2008

23. Gates Discusses Missile Interceptors With Polish Defense Minister

Poland receives more military assistance from the U.S. than any other European nation, according to the Defense Department, and Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich began two days of talks with Defense Secretary Robert Gates at the Pentagon Jan. 15.

U.S. plans to place ballistic missile interceptors in Poland took up the bulk of the conversation, said Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell. He called the talks "frank but productive."

Poland is "the biggest beneficiary within Europe of [U.S.] defense aid," said Morrell, placing the total U.S. assistance at "nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars under the Bush administration."

The U.S. wants to place the interceptors in Poland, along with a radar warning system in the Czech Republic, to protect Europe and the U.S. from ballistic missile attacks by Iran and other so-called rogue states.

But Klich told reporters last week before departing for Washington that locating the interceptors in Poland would make Polish airspace "more vulnerable" to attack. The new Polish government, which believes its predecessor failed to conduct tough negotiations about financing the interceptors and their maintenance, is seeking additional assistance from the U.S., including Patriot missiles to boost its air defense capabilities.

The U.S. missile plan has angered Russian President Vladimir Putin, who sees the missiles' potential proximity to Russia's border as a threat.

Morrell said Washington's timeline for basing the missiles is "as soon as possible." But officials at the State and Defense departments want to work out Polish concerns, he said. Polish opinion polls are said to be running against basing the missiles in Poland and some Democratic leaders in the U.S. Congress have questioned the cost, capability and necessity of the ground-based system.

-- *John M. Doyle*

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 16, 2008

24. Oversight Of Iraq Contracts Is Shifted Amid Army Probes

By Richard Lardner,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Oversight for nearly \$4 billion in Iraq war contracts has been shifted from a troubled procurement office in Kuwait to an Army organization in Illinois as part of an ongoing effort to curb waste, fraud and abuse in military purchasing.

The change in control of the 12 contracts for maintenance and other support work is not a reflection of poor performance by the companies, said Mike Hutchison, deputy director for acquisition at the Army Sustainment Command in Rock Island, Ill. Rather, the transfer is part of a broader initiative aimed at overhauling the Kuwait contracting office, which the Army has identified as a hub of corruption.

In a separate action, two teams poring over hundreds of other contracts issued by the Kuwait office have referred an unspecified number of awards to criminal investigators and auditors for further review, according to the Army Materiel Command at Fort Belvoir, Va. If any wrongdoing is uncovered, the number of Army military and civilian employees accused of accepting bribes and kickbacks could grow. More than 20 have been charged so far.

The Kuwait contracting office, located at Camp Arifjan, buys gear and supplies to feed, clothe and house U.S. troops as they move in and out of Iraq. The pace of that operation grew rapidly after the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003.

An initial Army probe of the Kuwait office uncovered numerous problems, including inadequate staffing and oversight, high staff turnover and poor record-keeping.

In the last few months, new leadership has been installed and more officers assigned. The Army also transferred active contracts worth \$1 million or more to Sustainment Command, where there is a deeper pool of personnel with experience in complex acquisitions.

The work being done under the dozen support contracts includes janitorial services, transportation, operation of a firing range, and provision of security at U.S. installations.

The largest of the dozen contracts now being managed by Sustainment Command is held by Combat Support Associates. The California company gained notoriety for hiring the former Blackwater USA guard accused of killing an Iraqi in Baghdad in December 2006. Hutchison said that the command had reviewed the Combat Support contract and found areas that could be improved, but that the Army was satisfied with the company's record.

The contract-review teams also examined a sampling of the roughly 6,000 contracts worth \$2.8 billion issued by the Kuwait office since 2003. One team inspected 339 contracts under \$25,000 in value; another checked 313 contracts worth more than \$25,000.

Both found problems and alerted the Army Audit Agency and the Army Criminal Investigation, but no details were released.

The Criminal Investigation Command has 87 ongoing

investigations related to allegations of contract fraud in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. Twenty-four people have been charged with contract fraud, and more than \$15 million in bribes has changed hands, spokesman Chris Grey said.

Washington Post
January 16, 2008

Pg. 5

25. High-Profile Officer Nagl To Leave Army, Join Think Tank

By Thomas E. Ricks,
Washington Post Staff Writer

One of the Army's most prominent younger officers, whose writings have influenced the conduct of the U.S. troop buildup in Iraq, said he has decided to leave the service to study strategic issues full time at a new Washington think tank.

Lt. Col. John Nagl, 41, is a coauthor of the Army's new manual on counterinsurgency operations, which has been used heavily by U.S. forces carrying out the strategy of moving off big bases, living among the population and making the protection of civilians their top priority.

A Rhodes scholar, Nagl first achieved prominence for his Oxford University doctoral dissertation, which was published in 2002 as a book titled "Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam." The introduction to a recent edition of the book was written by Gen. Peter Schoomaker, at the time the Army's chief of staff.

Nagl led a tank platoon in the 1991 Persian Gulf war and served in Iraq in 2003 and 2004 as the operations officer for an Army battalion in Iraq's Anbar province. "I thought I understood something about counterinsurgency," Nagl told the New York Times Magazine in January 2004, "until I started doing it."

After serving in Iraq, he

became an assistant to then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz. Next, under the stewardship of Gen. David H. Petraeus, now the top U.S. commander in Iraq, he helped produce the Army's counterinsurgency manual. He then became the commander of a battalion in Fort Riley, Kan., that teaches U.S. soldiers how to train and advise Iraqi forces. He has continued to have a high profile, with interviews on National Public Radio, "The Charlie Rose Show" and "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart."

Nagl said in a brief telephone interview yesterday that he has filed his papers requesting retirement. "I love the Army very much," he said, but he added that he decided to leave after discussing his future with his family. "It's not the strain of repeated deployments," he said, but "a belief that I can contribute perhaps on a different level — and my family wants me to leave."

He said he plans to become a fellow at the Center for a New American Security, a centrist think tank recently founded by Kurt Campbell and Michèle Flournoy, Clinton-era Pentagon officials. Nagl said he looks forward to working with them. "I hope to focus on national security for the remainder of my days," he said. "Obviously you don't have to do that in uniform."

Nagl's departure is a serious loss for the Army, said retired Marine Col. T.X. Hammes. "He's a serious student of warfare, he's smart, he's articulate, he's successfully led troops in combat, and he's worked at the highest levels of the Pentagon," said Hammes, himself the author of a book on contemporary war. "The Army just doesn't have that many officers with his set of qualifications."

Green Bay (WI) Press-Gazette
January 15, 2008

26. Admiral Sees Littoral Ship As 'Workhorse In Our Navy'

Roughead visits Marinette Marine to inspect USS Freedom

By Richard Ryman

MARINETTE — The U.S. Navy's top admiral said Monday he's committed to the littoral combat ship program while inspecting the first ship of that line under construction at Marinette Marine Corp.

"The most important thing is getting this ship to sea and getting it out there operating," said Adm. Gary Roughead, chief of naval operations. "Once we get these two ships to sea, we'll see the value in the LCS program."

Marinette Marine is building the USS Freedom (LCS-1) as part of a team headed by Lockheed Martin. A team led by General Dynamics is building a second ship, USS Independence (LCS-2), in Mobile, Ala. The programs have experienced delays and cost overruns that prompted the Navy to cancel contracts for two more prototypes.

Navy Times said in January 2007 that a cost review of the USS Freedom showed that the estimated price had jumped from a planned \$220 million to between \$331 million and \$410 million, according to a Navy official.

The price of General Dynamic's ship also was rising. Navy Times reported in March that LCS-2 also might cost about \$400 million.

"Regrettably, we had to cancel LCS 3 and 4, but that was the best thing to do," Roughead said.

Marinette Marine representatives said delays and higher costs resulted, in part, from the availability of parts and materials and, in part, from the normal learning curve of building a prototype vessel.

Roughead said he is committed to ordering more Freedom Class ships after the prototypes have been tested

and cost issues analyzed.

"I predict the LCS will be a workhorse in our Navy," he said. "We are looking at what the acquisition strategy should be."

Roughead said progress has been made on Freedom since he saw it six months ago, and he's comfortable with the delivery schedule. He declined to say when delivery would be.

The 377-foot Freedom is capable of speeds in excess of 40 knots and can operate in water less than 20 feet deep.

The ship will act as a platform for launch and recovery of manned and unmanned vehicles. Its modular design will allow the ship to be reconfigured for antisubmarine warfare, mine warfare or surface warfare missions on an as-needed basis.

Roughead has been touring all Navy shipyards since becoming chief of naval operations in September.

The chief of naval operations is the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Navy and is a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I'm going to be making a lot of decision. I like to have walked the ground and talked to the people building the ships," he said.

Washington Post
January 16, 2008
Pg. B6

27. Navy Is Asked For Road Money

The Montgomery County Council yesterday pressed the Navy to provide federal money for road improvements needed as part of the expansion of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda.

At a meeting yesterday, council members echoed concerns voiced last week by the county Planning Board over the Navy's contention that it has no responsibility for funding \$70 million in road improvements outside the facility, including widening Wisconsin Avenue.

"We don't have it [the money] and the state of Maryland doesn't have it, and it is fundamentally your responsibility," council member Roger Berliner (D-Potomac-Bethesda) told David K. Oliveria, the Navy's program manager. The Navy is expanding the hospital in conjunction with the Pentagon's planned closure of Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2011.

Oliveria said the county's request "will have to be considered" by the Navy in its evaluation of the public response to its draft environmental impact statement, which was released last month.

Steve Vogel

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
January 15, 2008

28. Navy Divers Honored For Work At I-35 Bridge Collapse In Minneapolis

By Cindy Clayton, The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK -- Navy divers from the Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two who worked to recover victims in the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis in August were honored with medals Monday for their efforts.

They paused with a moment of silence and recited the names of the people whose bodies they recovered from the Mississippi River.

"You executed extremely professionally and never gave up," said Col. Mike Chesney, the defense coordinating officer in Minneapolis. "You represent what's best about our military."

Those who deployed to the bridge had medals pinned to their uniforms in recognition of their work during a ceremony at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base. The unit also received the Meritorious Unit Commendation for work done throughout 2007.

The 17 divers who were

deployed to Minneapolis worked with local, state and federal agencies to find missing people, remove debris and recover vehicles from tons of concrete and steel that fell into the River on Aug. 1.

Hennepin County, Minn., Sheriff Richard W. Stanek attended the ceremony at Little Creek and thanked the members of the unit for their hard work.

"It wasn't easy, I know that," Stanek told the unit members. "The 18 feet of water, the currents, tons and tons of concrete and steel and rebar and vehicles. I know what you did under that water."

He praised the cooperation between his department and the Navy unit.

"We'd serve with you any day," Stanek said.

According to the Navy, the following people were given awards: Lt. Li Ping Sung, Chief Warrant Officer Doug Fasseel, Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Mikulski

Camp Pendleton. The program capitalizes on 15 years of Navy and Marine research on everything from body movements to urban warfare, coupled with the latest advancements in simulation from defense companies such as Lockheed Martin.

The new training area is "a pretty big deal ... that's expected to save lives," said Col. Clarke Lethin, chief of staff for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

He added that it also could help guide Marines through the tough process of making split-second battle decisions involving morality and legality.

"As we go through the war, it's changing out there. There are more no-shoots than shoots," Lethin said. "We want to make sure that we are shooting the right people."

During the Iraq war, some incidents in the combat theater have embarrassed the Marine Corps and called into question its leadership and training on ethics.

The government charged a group of Camp Pendleton Marines with murdering two dozen civilians Nov. 19, 2005, in Haditha, Iraq. Members of another unit from the base were charged with kidnapping and executing a grandfather April 26, 2006, in the village of Hamdaniya.

In a third case, a few current and former members of a Camp Pendleton company have been charged or are being investigated for allegedly killing detainees Nov. 9, 2004, during an offensive in Fallujah.

The eight Hamdaniya defendants struck plea agreements or were convicted during courts-martial, with the mastermind found guilty of unpremeditated murder and sentenced to 15 years in the brig.

The Haditha court proceedings are ongoing. Two defendants are set for court-martial on the charge of involuntary manslaughter, while two others are scheduled for trial because they are

accused of not properly scrutinizing the 24 civilian deaths.

Last year, the Pentagon acknowledged that its first-ever survey on the ethics of U.S. troops in Iraq underscored the need for stronger training, intervention and leadership.

The study found that only 40 percent of Marines would report a member of their unit for killing or wounding an innocent civilian. One-third of the Marines surveyed would turn in someone for stealing, and 30 percent would report a unit member for unnecessarily destroying property.

Figures for the Army were about 15 percent higher in those three categories, but even they were depicted by the report's authors as being in clear need of improvement.

The new simulation program is designed to reinforce ethical conduct, hone small-unit infantry skills and sharpen Marines' combat instincts.

It takes its inspiration from a city block in Iraq that U.S. troops typically would patrol, complete with a warren of shops and houses. Hardly a detail is overlooked among the props, modeled with Hollywood set-design techniques: Laundry hangs on the clotheslines. A grill sits against a wall. Propane tanks are placed here and there amid the musky scent of unpaved streets and alleys.

Perched in the rafters are projectors that cast life-size images of civilians and insurgents on wall after wall in the building. Live actors and pyrotechnics round out the integration of sight, sound and smell.

"It's called hyper-realistic training," Marine Cpl. Eddie Wright said.

During an April 2005 battle in Fallujah, a rocket-propelled grenade blew off Wright's hands. Now, he works as a military training coordinator for the San Diego-based Strategic Operations, the organization

operating the Infantry Immersion Trainer.

The simulator "offers an urban environment like the one we are fighting in over there," said Wright, 32. "It gets you thinking more along the lines of what you have to think over there to be successful."

A lot of that thinking must be done in a flash, such as when troops have to clear rooms.

So the Marines practice this process during their simulation exercises. After bursting through doors, they have fractions of a second to decide whether to shoot. They use specially modified weapons to fire small-arms marking system rounds, which are similar in concept to paintball rounds.

The training facility opened without fanfare in November. Relatively few Marines have run through the simulation course, but those who have give it high marks.

"It's definitely Iraq," said Lance Cpl. William Hawkins, 21, of Kokomo, Ind.

"It's pretty good," said Lance Cpl. Jason Trehan, 24, of Toledo, Ohio, as his men regrouped after clearing a room.

"It has the looks and the sounds," said Trehan, who has served two tours in Iraq with the 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment.

The immersion program figures to be a central part of future infantry training as the Marine Corps continues its presence in the Anbar province of Iraq and will take on expeditionary combat in Afghanistan this spring.

The converted warehouse provides another training tool for Marines, who already practice in an outdoor simulated town called Mojave Viper, spend months refining their weapons skills, study the dangers of improvised explosive devices, learn basic Arabic, receive cultural training and undergo other preparations for warfare.

Marine commanders

San Diego Union-Tribune
January 16, 2008

Pg. 1

29. Marines Training On The Cutting Edge

*High-tech simulator unveiled
at Camp Pendleton*

By Rick Rogers, Staff Writer

The Marine Corps is embracing breakthrough holographic technology to teach combat tactics and battlefield ethics at Camp Pendleton as troops there begin another major round of deployments to Iraq.

Marine officials yesterday unveiled the Infantry Immersion Trainer, a high-tech prototype simulator that resides in a former – and decidedly low-tech – tomato-packing plant that still bears directions for truck drivers.

The 32,000-square-foot, \$2.5 million training ground became reality after a request from Gen. James Mattis, former commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force at

would like to make the new simulation trainer more versatile so it can depict additional types of missions – combat and humanitarian.

Yesterday, they asked a group of defense contractors to tour the facility and submit suggestions for enhancing the training's realism and expanding its range of scenes.

On the wish list for Lethin, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force's chief of staff, are scenarios portraying a meeting with a sheik, vehicle searches and a riot.

Trehan and Hawkins have their own suggestions. They would like to see a much bigger and taller simulation area, one that could accommodate Marines running across rooftops or tackling conflicts not confined to a room.

"Size matters," Trehan said. "Sometimes a firefight can consist of a house; sometimes it can consist of several blocks."

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 5

30. Marine Reported No Threat From Man Now Wanted In Her Slaying

By Mike Baker, Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, N.C. — A 20-year-old pregnant Marine who disappeared in December told victims' advocates at Camp Lejeune that she didn't feel unsafe in the presence of the colleague now wanted in her death, Marine Corps officials said Tuesday.

Marine Cpl. Cesar Laurean never violated the military protective order directing him to stay away from Lance Cpl. Maria Lauterbach, and he continued to report for work on time in the weeks after her disappearance, said Col. Gary Skolowski, the judge advocate general officer for the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force.

"At no time did she indicate that she was

threatened by Cpl. Laurean," Skolowski said. "When she was asked if she felt threatened by Cpl. Laurean, she said she did not feel threatened."

Authorities confirmed Tuesday that remains found last weekend in a fire pit in Laurean's backyard were those of Lauterbach and her fetus. Onslow County medical examiner Charles Garrett said Lauterbach, eight months' pregnant when she vanished, died of "traumatic head injury due to blunt force trauma."

The autopsy did not answer all the questions about the circumstances of Lauterbach's death, county prosecutor Dewey Hudson said.

Detectives are still not sure whether she gave birth before her slaying.

Laurean, 21, is believed to have fled Jacksonville early Friday morning, after leaving a note in which he admitted burying Lauterbach's body. But Tuesday, officials said they think he has gone into hiding and is no longer on the run.

"We believe it's certainly possible, based on him being out there for this long, and not having any sightings, that he is getting help," Onslow County Sheriff's Capt. Rick Sutherland said.

Authorities said Tuesday afternoon they found Laurean's black pickup in a motel parking lot in Morrisville, not far from where it had been seen by witnesses in Durham, about 150 miles northwest of Jacksonville.

It was unclear how long the truck had been at the Microtel Inn. Front desk worker Sherrie Joyner said Laurean never checked in.

Wall Street Journal
January 16, 2008
Pg. B14

31. Marines' Ad Campaign Targets Wider Audience

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

The U.S. Marine Corps is rolling out a new ad campaign this week in an effort to target teachers, coaches, clergy and other groups that tend to have influence on kids' career paths. The ad, which will appear on Fox's hit-show "American Idol," marks a shift for the Marines, which has previously aimed its marketing directly at young adults and depended solely on programs that air on networks such as Walt Disney's ESPN or News Corp.'s FX. "American Idol" has a broader audience that includes adults as well as kids. One of the commercials, made by WPP Group's JWT, features a line of Marines standing in formation in front of landmarks across the U.S. such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Independence Hall. The ad campaign also includes an online and print component. The Marines is targeting adults because "not many youngsters nowadays have grown up with grandfathers or fathers in the service," says Lt. Col. Michael Zeliff, a spokesman for the U.S. Navy.

MiamiHerald.com
January 15, 2008

32. F-16 Crashes Near Key West; Pilot Ejects Safely

KEY WEST, Fla. -- An F-16 fighter plane crashed into the Gulf of Mexico on Tuesday evening during a routine training mission, a spokesman for Homestead Air Reserve Base said.

The plane went into waters west of Key West at about 7:30 p.m., said spokesman Tim Norton. The plane's pilot, whose name has not been released, ejected from the aircraft and was picked up by a Navy helicopter.

Norton said the pilot was taken to a Key West hospital and was released hours later.

The pilot is assigned to the 482nd Fighter Wing, based in Homestead, Norton said.

Authorities are

investigating the crash.

New Orleans Times-Picayune
January 15, 2008

33. Copter Heroes Of Katrina Set To Go To Iraq

'It's a busy time' for National Guard

By Paul Purpura, West Bank bureau

HAMMOND -- In the past three years, the Army National Guard's 1/244th Air Assault Helicopter Battalion returned home from a yearlong tour in Iraq, served another six months on active duty because of Hurricane Katrina, and then began re-training for a new combat mission and refitting its helicopters for battle.

And after nearly a year of being on alert for mobilization and seeing a turnover within its ranks caused by their Katrina losses, Task Force Voodoo, as the 400-soldier battalion calls itself, is going back to Iraq.

"It's a busy time to be in the National Guard," said battalion commander Lt. Col. Patrick Bossetta, a onetime LSU linebacker who has set aside his law practice and real estate development ventures in New Orleans because of his ongoing military obligations.

In mid-April, following a send-off ceremony at the Southeastern Louisiana University campus in Hammond, the battalion's troops and fleet of 30 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters will deploy to Fort Sill, Okla., for intensive combat training.

Task Force Voodoo will then deploy to an undisclosed base north of Baghdad as an air assault helicopter battalion. The battalion resumed that mission on Oct. 1, 2006, and with it, Task Force Voodoo was enlarged by the addition of a helicopter company from the Florida Army National Guard.

In Iraq, they will work for ground commanders, getting their infantry troops and gear into the fights.

"It is getting his combat

power where he needs it, when he needs it," Bossetta said of the air assault role.

While active-duty Army units serve in Iraq for 15-month tours, Defense Department policy is that National Guard units serve a year at most, Bossetta said.

An invaluable resource for stateside emergencies, such as hurricanes, the battalion will be gone for the 2008 storm season. Bossetta said three Blackhawks will be available in the state, which has military agreements with other states to supply equipment and manpower during emergencies.

Unlike the active-duty military, the National Guard has a federal wartime mission and a stateside one, such as its work during Katrina or its ongoing operations in New Orleans, where 360 soldiers and airmen are helping the Police Department patrol the city.

The 1/244th is not the first Louisiana National Guard unit to face a second federal mobilization since Sept. 11, 2001, said Maj. Michael Kazmierzak, Guard spokesman.

Last month, the headquarters and service companies for the 769th Engineer Battalion deployed to Iraq, four years after the entire battalion deployed to Afghanistan. About 80 soldiers in the headquarters company for 165th Combat Sustaining Support Battalion in Bossier City will be shipping out to Iraq soon, while the Guard has frequently had individual soldiers and airmen volunteer to deploy overseas to fill vacancies. A small team of volunteers will ship out to Afghanistan this month to help train that country's soldiers, he said.

"We get requests for volunteers a lot," Kazmierzak said.

The last time Task Force Voodoo went to Iraq, its mission was essentially that of an aerial transportation service to fly dignitaries, such as

then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and even the deposed dictator Saddam Hussein. Hussein flew at least twice in Task Force Voodoo Blackhawks, said Bossetta, who flew one of those trips.

Seven months after it returned to New Orleans, with Katrina forecast to strike Louisiana, Gov. Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency and Task Force Voodoo returned to active duty. After riding out the brunt of the storm in Baton Rouge, their Blackhawks were the first helicopters of their type to be airborne as winds died down. During the ensuing days, they rescued and moved 16,000 people.

The battalion's facilities at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport were swamped by the tidal surge, expediting the unit's move to Hammond, where new facilities are being built. Much of its equipment was destroyed during the storm, and about 100 soldiers who lived in the New Orleans area lost their homes.

"It's been a difficult road back," Bossetta said.

Some soldiers and their families opted to leave the area because of the storm, and others left the unit after the Iraq deployment, Bossetta said.

"It's like a whole new unit came on board," he said. He did not quantify the turnover but said, "It has not been all that horrible."

The unit still has retained experience in both its officer and enlisted ranks, said 1st Sgt. Danny Bergeron of Slidell, the battalion headquarters company first sergeant.

"So I think we know what we're walking into," said Bergeron, who will deploy to Iraq for the third time, including the 1991 Persian Gulf War. "They should be able to do their jobs and not have any questions."

The new blood includes seasoned pilots and some fresh from Army aviation school who are in the hands of Chief Warrant Officer Laz Murphy, a

Blackhawk pilot who racked up 500 combat flight hours during the battalion's last Iraq deployment.

Murphy took leave from her job with the Baton Rouge Police Department last month to help prepare the younger pilots, as she braces herself for another stint away. During her last deployment, she returned to the states briefly, got married and then went back to Iraq.

This time, she will leave behind a 1-year-old daughter.

"Going this time is going to be a little harder," Murphy said of the "heart-wrenching" separation that will be tempered thanks to Internet-based communications.

An influx of financing since Katrina has allowed Bossetta to bring air crews on active duty for training that includes replicating desert conditions at a central-Louisiana site, Bossetta said.

That has enabled them to accumulate more flight time, particularly at night, with the aid of night-vision goggles. In Iraq, the pace will more than quadruple. Stateside, the unit typically accumulates about 350 flight hours monthly; in Iraq, they'll fly about 1,800 hours monthly.

"We go every day, everywhere," said Bossetta, who is making his third trip to Iraq, including the 1991 war, during which he was an active duty Army helicopter pilot.

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 1

34. Lengthy Volunteer Stints Burn Out Military Wives

Family support leaders bear brunt of rising stress on home front

By Gregg Zoroya, USA Today
FORT BRAGG, N.C. —

During the worst of Bravo Troop's 15-month tour in Iraq, when soldiers were dying in bunches, families here poured

out their fear, frustrations and even hysteria onto one young woman: Bana Miller.

She's not Army. She's not trained. Her only qualification, then at age 24, was being an officer's wife who volunteered to run Bravo Troop's Family Readiness Group — a job of e-mailing and organizing potluck dinners in peacetime.

But when Bravo went to war, she became a social worker, grief counselor and a 24-hour hotline overnight. At various times, wives threatened to commit themselves to a mental institution or go to the media if Miller did not help bring their husbands home.

"I was in this alternative universe thinking: 'What has my life become?'" says Miller, who grew up in the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia and married the boy she met in seventh grade.

As the Iraq war nears a sixth year, the Army has more than 3,000 volunteers such as Bana Miller, and many are buckling under the pressure of duties that they never expected would be so hard or last so long. The Army and Marine Corps lean on these family support volunteers to be the first stop for families struggling to deal with war, separation and loss.

"Two volunteer leaders had to step down ... because they needed a break," says Lisa Meyers, the wife of a command sergeant major in the 82nd Airborne and a supervising volunteer leader here. "Most of the leaders are on their third or fourth deployment back-to-back."

Miller persevered for more than 12 months. Within two few weeks after Capt. Matthew Miller came home Oct. 29, she readily handed off the job to another wife.

Volunteer burnout has touched Army and Marine Corps bases nationwide, says Fonta Footman-Mitchell, director of volunteer services for the National Military Family Association, a support and advocacy group with

liaisons at U.S. military installations. From 5% to 7% of the association's own volunteers also have quit, she says.

Though neither could provide statistics, the Army and Marine Corps are seeing an increase in turnover among volunteers, according to Marine Lt. Col. Jacqueline Melton, head of family readiness programs, and William Bradner, a spokesman for the Army's Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command.

Melton says the increasing turnover in volunteers stems from "the demands of wartime operations."

Volunteers grow weary of "not knowing when (combat missions) will end," Bradner says.

The problem, says Melton, is that the volunteer programs are "based on a peacetime model with normal deployment cycles and largely supported on the backs of our dedicated volunteers."

The Army and Marines, whose troops bear the brunt of ground combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, are trying to ease pressures.

The Marines, Melton says, are spending \$30 million over two years to shift from volunteers to paid staff members. The Army is spending \$45 million to hire about 1,000 full-time workers to help some volunteers, Bradner says.

Some say the Army could go even further.

"If I had my wish of wishes, all the (volunteer family support programs) would be run by paid employees," says Michele Votel, wife of Brig. Gen. Joe Votel, assistant division commander for the 82nd Airborne Division.

War is 'unchartered territory'

Volunteerism is essential to military installations. At the core are those who support military families — wives helping other wives and

servicemembers' parents in most cases. The Army calls them Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). The Marines have the Key Volunteer Network.

They are structured along military lines, often with the wife of a division commander overseeing family support within the division, the wife of a brigade commander doing the same at that level and so on. In the Army — where half the soldiers are married and families are prevalent — the structure extends to the company or troop level, where volunteers deal directly with the spouses or parents.

In peacetime, the job is alerting families to services and news about the unit, and arranging meetings.

"It would be similar to your church," Meyers says. "Your congregation steps up to help — that's what an FRG does."

Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq brought new stresses, Marine and Army leaders found.

"For 500,000 spouses and 700,000 children, six years of war is uncharted territory," Army Secretary Pete Geren told an Association of the United States Army audience in October. "Our family support systems ... did not contemplate the operational tempo our families are experiencing today."

Despite many resources for families, including a 24-hour Military OneSource help line for anything from counseling to financial advice, officials saw a trend developing. Troubled wives gravitate to other wives — the FRG or Key volunteers.

"It does seem paradoxical," Bradner says. "We've got this volunteer being the face of the Army."

Recruiters promise that the military will take care of families, so wives assume their FRG or Key volunteer will help with anything from fixing a flat tire to babysitting. Demands grow more frantic with deployments and

casualties.

"They forget that we all have children or work or have our own husband in combat," says Beth Poppas, a battalion-level FRG leader here. "And they call you at all hours of the night. You want to do things for them. I try to be helpful. It just gets to the point where you just can't take it anymore."

Volunteers are told by the Army and Marine Corps to be dispassionate — provide resource contacts to troubled families and send them on their way. But volunteers find this difficult, particularly when they all have spouses fighting side by side in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"They take it upon themselves to mother everyone," Meyers says.

"When somebody is in pain," Miller says, "my first reaction is to help alleviate that pain and to help them grieve in whatever way they grieve, just holding their hand while they're going through a funeral process, or fielding phone calls or whatever they needed me to do. ... I was the person there to give them a hug.

"It's a difficult thing to try and turn off and say, 'You know, I need to go home and get some sleep.'"

'I was breaking down'

Raised in the tended colonial villages of Main Line, Miller says she never envisioned a military life, much less becoming the go-to person for dozens of anxious military wives and parents.

She is the daughter of Jordanian immigrants — her father a former senior associate dean at Villanova University's School of Business and her mother a child psychologist. Bana Najdawi, the oldest of three, met Matt Miller in middle school and they dated through high school.

Matt's grandfather is a retired Army colonel, and his dream was to join the military. While Matt went to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., Bana studied

communications at Syracuse University. They married after graduation on Oct. 30, 2004, shortly before Matt was posted to Fort Bragg.

They live off post, and she took a public relations job in Raleigh, N.C. "We kind of just wanted to create our own lives," she says. "We didn't want the Army to take over."

As Bravo Troop prepared to go to Iraq last year, however, it needed an FRG leader. Because the commander of Matt's unit was unmarried and Matt is Bravo's executive officer, Bana Miller volunteered.

Soon, soldiers' wives began contacting her for almost anything.

"We had people calling up saying, 'I need to get a trampoline set up in my backyard,' " says Miller, who politely referred them to Army services or suggested that a neighbor help.

When Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced at a news conference in April that combat tours would be extended to 15 months, eight families called Miller at work in 15 minutes demanding more information. In 24 hours, three dozen families would weigh in by phone or e-mail, anxious to know more. Miller had nothing to tell them.

"They thought this was my full-time job, that I was getting paid to do it. It's not," Miller says. "I'm working 60 hours a week. But I'm also working 30 to 40 hours a week as an FRG leader."

Nothing, however, would prepare her for how to deal with combat and casualties.

In 15 months of fighting in Diyala province north of Baghdad, the 5th Squadron, with Bravo Troop, would suffer nearly 40% casualties among its 300 soldiers. Twenty-two were killed, half in Bravo Troop. Five paratroopers would earn Silver Stars. A sixth would be recommended posthumously for a Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the

Medal of Honor.

In one April day, nine Bravo Troop soldiers would be wiped out in a single attack.

Bravo's first fatality on Nov. 16, 2006, was Matt's best friend, Capt. John "Ryan" Dennison, who was shot to death by insurgents.

Bana Miller had to inform families about any deaths in the squadron — calls known as red-line messages.

"The first that I made I was breaking down," she says. Co-workers drove her home.

Back home in Bryn Mawr that Thanksgiving, her family saw her react to news reports of casualties. "I mean she was shaking, physically shaking immediately after the news segment," recalls her younger brother, Hume Najdawi.

An 'overwhelming' situation

By Christmas 2006, as casualties mounted, wives were calling Miller demanding that husbands be sent home. One threatened to — and finally did — go to a local television station to complain. Another said she might miscarry and would have herself committed if her husband did not return.

"I tried to talk her through it," Miller says. "There was only so much that I could do."

With each news story about attacks, Miller was flooded with calls.

"They were all these people who are demanding and hysterical," she recalls. "It's understandable because people just want information, and they're not getting it."

Meanwhile, her job and her volunteer work collided.

"I tried to make the balance as best I could," she said. "But at the same time — when you have somebody crying on the phone, or a lot of times I was a mother's only contact for information about her son — it was a definite balancing act."

Miller says she was too close to the problem to find fault with it.

"I could never sit back and get perspective," she says. "I

certainly wasn't the only FRG leader going through it. I never stopped to question it."

Friends saw mounting strain.

"She was tired, stressed out and worried the whole time," recalls former Syracuse classmate and close friend Robin Nathan of Atlanta. "She had to keep it together because she had all these people depending on her."

Miller worked the phones delivering red-line messages. Four squadron paratroopers were killed on March 25, 2007; four on April 7.

"It's not a job that I wanted to do. I didn't want to be calling and saying, 'I'm sorry, there's been another casualty,'" she says.

One family called back, raving for 15 minutes that Miller had ruined their Easter with such news.

"I just let them say it," she says.

Others praised her for helping them feel connected to their soldier. Miller was learning she had a way with people.

Across continents, Matt and Bana Miller comforted each other by satellite phone, sometimes just listening to the other's breathing, not saying a word. "We just both needed the other person," Matt says.

He says her job was made more difficult because problems at home can have ripple effects on the war front. "Any break in teamwork or frustrations between people back home just caused almost a mirror effect" in Iraq, he says.

Last April was especially difficult. A suicide truck driver detonated his explosive-laden vehicle outside a compound in the village of As Sadah, killing nine Bravo soldiers. It took three days for the Army to reach all nine families for formal notification. Meanwhile, other families lived in terror that someone would come knocking, and they hounded Miller for news.

"That was completely overwhelming," she says.

Families of two dead soldiers lived near Fort Bragg, and Miller worked with other volunteers to coordinate meals, housekeeping or funerals.

"I was up until 2 a.m. every morning," she says. "After work, I would go straight to families' houses and just sit with them."

Death became so second nature that Miller's last red-line messages were delivered with no emotion at all. "I hated that," she says. "I never wanted to be calloused."

In the end, Miller says, she felt overwhelmed and somewhat resentful that the Army had taken over her life for a year.

She also learned something about herself. "I love counseling," she says. "I'm actually going back to get my master's in counseling."

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 16, 2008

35. House To Vote On Troop Pay

By Anne Flaherty, Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The House plans to pass as early as today a new defense-policy bill that includes a pay raise for troops.

President Bush rejected an earlier version of the legislation because he said it would expose the Iraqi government to expensive lawsuits.

Democrats yesterday sent the bill back to the House Armed Services Committee, which will quickly redraft the measure to address Bush's concerns and send it back to the floor for a final vote by week's end.

The decision to revise the bill without attempting to block Bush's action reflects the difficulty that Democrats have had in challenging the president on even minor issues. Democrats lack the two-thirds majority needed to override a presidential veto.

The new bill is expected to increase troop pay by 3.5

percent, retroactive to Jan. 1. Overall, the bill authorizes about \$696 billion in defense spending, including \$189 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition to setting pay raises for service members, the bill's primary purpose is to guide Pentagon policy, including setting restrictions on the Pentagon's multibillion-dollar acquisition program.

Amended will be a provision by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D., N.J.) that would have guaranteed that U.S. victims of state-sponsored abuse have the right to sue those governments in court. The legislation was embraced by Republicans. By mid-December, the bill passed by overwhelming margins in both chambers.

A couple of weeks later, after Iraqi officials objected, Bush announced his opposition. He said the bill would subject the Iraqi government, struggling to rebuild itself, to expensive lawsuits seeking damages from the Saddam Hussein era.

The new bill will probably grant Bush the authority to waive the provision, effectively making it null and void, according to a Democratic aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision was not final.

Defense Daily
January 16, 2008
Pg. 1

36. Lawmaker Moves To Block Sale Of JDAMS To Saudi Arabia

By Jen DiMascio

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) said yesterday he is moving to block the president's proposed sale of precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia.

The president on Jan. 14 formally notified Congress about its intent to sell up to 900 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) worth as much as

\$123 million to the Middle Eastern country, according to a statement from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

Lt. Gen. Gary North, commander of Central Command's Air Forces, yesterday discussed the sale, saying that having similar equipment helps build the nation's relationships in the Middle East and helps the nations work together as a joint team.

"It's our western equipment. It's our western technology. It's our western tactics. And when we are willing to share the releaseable technologies, it goes a long way to breed trust and avoid conflict in the region," North said at a breakfast sponsored by *DieticaDFI*. "This is where our congressional support for foreign military funding and foreign military sales becomes so vitally important to our business."

Weiner and Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) are cosponsoring a resolution that would pull the plug on congressional support for the sale of the GPS-guided weapons made by Boeing. They argued yesterday that Saudi Arabia has not been a good partner in terms of applying sanctions to Iran or bringing down the price of oil.

Congress has 30 days to pass that kind of resolution; Weiner acknowledged doing so will be a difficult task.

Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) leads the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over foreign military sales.

A spokesman for the committee said early this week he is not providing support for moving Weiner's resolution from the committee to the House floor.

During a press briefing yesterday, Weiner said leadership has provided no commitment to consider the resolution. He said he intended to meet last night with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to discuss it.

In the meantime, Weiner and Wexler are trying to gather cosponsors, in the hopes that the Foreign Affairs Committee would reconsider.

Currently 51 members have signed the resolution, including two Republicans--Rep. Mike Ferguson (N.J.) and Rep. Walter Jones (N.C.).

Christian Science Monitor
January 16, 2008

37. Is Latin America Heading For An Arms Race?

Recent increases in defense spending by Brazil and Venezuela are attracting observers' attention.

By Andrew Downie,
Correspondent of The
Christian Science Monitor

São Paulo, Brazil -- Increased defense spending by Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador, coupled with significant arms purchases by Chile and Colombia, may mark the start of an arms race in South America -- a region that hasn't seen a major war between nations in decades.

"There is a real risk of it escalating and it could become very dangerous," says Michael Shifter, the vice president of policy at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington.

Concern has grown in the wake of recent purchases by Venezuela and Brazil. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, flush with oil money, has spent freely on attack and transport helicopters, Russian fighter planes, and 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles.

In neighboring Brazil, which, with half of Latin America's landmass and population, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva recently asked Congress to allocate 10.13 billion reais (\$5.6 billion) -- a 53 percent increase -- for its 2008 military budget.

Those increases came after Chile invested significant sums earlier in the decade. Colombia has received hundreds of millions of dollars in US

drug-war aid for military purchases. And now Ecuador is also spending more on weapons.

"I think that it is done in different places for different motivations," says Mr. Shifter, who testified before the US Congress last year on the implications of Venezuela's increased military spending. "[Mr.] Chávez is using this as part of mobilizing the country and thinking of a possible attack from the US. In Chile, it is much more about giving the armed forces what they want. Colombia spends because a lot of the [US] aid comes in the form of military equipment."

The problem, continues Shifter, is that "there is tremendous mistrust between countries ... if you don't know what your neighbors' intentions are, then it is natural is to build up as much as you can to prepare for any contingency."

Some South American nations worry about Chávez's ambitions and do not want him to gain a significant military edge.

"Brazil won't say it, but Chávez's build up is what has made it invest in its military," says Reserve Col. Geraldo Lesbat Cavnari, coordinator of the Strategic Studies Group at Unicamp university in São Paulo.

Brazil and Venezuela already vie for political supremacy in South America with Chávez bringing together the radical leftists under his socialist banner and President Lula leading a more measured coalition of social democrats. At this point, the two leaders are friends and the two nations have no border quarrels or historical feuds that could flare up. But there are tensions between Venezuela and Colombia over gas-rich territorial waters and border areas where Colombia's FARC guerrillas are active. And Venezuela has made claims on the western part of Guyana.

But few people believe Chávez is buying weapons in order to attack a neighbor. He

has warned opponents of his Bolivian ally Evo Morales that "rifle and machine guns will thunder" if they try to topple President Morales but Venezuela still does not have a military machine capable of shock and awe, analysts said.

In addition, its army is one-third the size of Brazil's, and distinctly less experienced and battle hardened than neighboring Colombia's.

Any attempts to settle territorial claims on western Guyana would give both the US and Britain, a former colonial power, reasons to enter the fray.

Yet the thought of an unpredictable leader with modern weaponry concerns some of the continent's moderates. Moreover, many analysts say the region cannot afford to devote large amounts of money to weaponry. Poverty is still a major problem in most South American countries and that -- along with infrastructure, justice, and education -- is seen as a more worthy priority than submarines or fighter planes.

"An arms race on our continent will oblige us to depart from the path of giving priority to investments in social programs," says Jose Sarney, a Brazilian senator and a fierce critic of Chávez. "Having a military power on the continent is dangerous for both Brazil and... Latin America."

Nevertheless, no one wants to get left behind, especially Brazil. Investment in modern weaponry, analysts agree, is long overdue for South America's biggest nation.

Years of neglect have left much of Brazil's war machine obsolete or in disrepair. Meanwhile, its priorities have changed from worrying about Argentina in the south to protecting its jungle frontiers on the north and west and its territorial waters that are home to sizeable new finds of oil and gas.

"There are very real security concerns that are being neglected," says Martin Joyce,

the South America defense analyst for Jane's. "One is the Amazon region where drug traffickers are operating with impunity. Secondly, we are also seeing an increased presence of Colombian guerrillas, and that requires mobility and that is why we see helicopters and military airlift high on the priority list. Then there is the new oil reserves. Part of the reason for the procurement of a nuclear submarine is because they said they need to protect those resources. Venezuela comes fairly low down the list."

Mideast Stars and Stripes
January 16, 2008

38. Combined Joint Task Force Commander Reflects On Progress In Horn Of Africa

Education, water quality, health among improvements cited

By Zeke Minaya, Stars and Stripes

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti — Asked about his accomplishments as head of the Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa, Rear Adm. James Hart talks about the village of Assamo.

The small Djiboutian hamlet sits near the border with Somalia. During his year directing CJTF — HOA, the task force has built a medical clinic in the village, as well as constructed improvements to the local school and upgraded water quality.

Those kinds of civic enhancements — targeting education, water quality and health — were spread all throughout Eastern Africa, he said. "We are trying to do that in many different places," Hart said.

Hart is due to step down from his post in February, when he will be replaced by Rear Adm. Philip Greene, Jr.

Greene is currently the director of policy, resources and strategy at U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa at

Naples, Italy.

During his tenure, adding the U.S. military's capability to the existing network of aid organizations and State Department initiatives took some coordination, Hart said.

Previously, the military had problems with continuity and credibility when it came to humanitarian projects in the region, according to leaders of African aid organizations.

Hart made it a priority to improve communication between the military, State Department, non-governmental organizations and the various African governments.

Hart said that he asked himself, "How do we take the great capability that the American country has and work through African organizations?"

Hart placed liaisons with embassy and aid organizations and reached out to African governments. The improvements were quickly evident.

"I'm glad to see the military get smart," said Kevin A. Rushing, deputy mission director for USAID in Ethiopia.

Hart said he was glad to learn from organizations that had been in Africa longer.

"USAID has a long history and has a strong network," Hart said. "By developing a relationship we have learned much from USAID."

In the waning days of his tenure at CJTF-HOA, Hart is hoping to include Rwanda in the task force's area of responsibility.

He also planned to escort a group of American businessmen through the region, to give them a glimpse of the potential in the area.

Hart said if he had more time he would have liked to spread the message of the task force on a grass-roots level through the radio.

"Everybody here has transistor radios," he said. "That's how they get their information here."

Hart would not reveal

what his future plans were, but he said that he has enjoyed his time in Africa.

"It's been a real pleasure for me to work with people here," he said.

Washington Post
January 16, 2008
Pg. 3

39. Wicker's Earmark Elicits Criticism

Watchdogs Decry \$6 Million for Contractor

By Matthew Mosk,

Washington Post Staff Writer

Wicker's earmark for Manassas-based Aurora Flight Science fits a pattern that recently attracted bipartisan criticism and gave rise to the most far-reaching ethics overhaul legislation in a generation: The firm retained the services of the congressman's top aide after he passed through the revolving door to become a lobbyist, and its employees helped underwrite Wicker's reelection.

Over the past three years, as Aurora sought defense contracts, the Republican member of the Appropriations defense subcommittee received escalating contributions from the company's executives. Aurora was Wicker's top source of campaign funds in 2006, campaign finance records show. In 2005, the company flew the congressman on a private jet to the ribbon cutting of a manufacturing facility it opened in Wicker's Mississippi district.

And just days after Wicker's chief of staff, John Keast, left his employ in 2006, Aurora began listing the former staffer on public forms as one of its lobbyists in Washington. Wicker placed the earmark in a defense appropriations bill that became law in November 2007.

None of those contacts with the congressman violated any laws. But they drew criticism from the Project on Government Oversight and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics (CREW), nonprofit

groups that have tried to change how Congress handles earmarking.

"It's so commonplace that people have become desensitized to the outrage, but the fact is earmarks for the well-connected leave that much less money available for the real needs of the American public," said Melanie Sloan, CREW's executive director. "Congressional leaders promised they were ushering in an era of cleaner government. I guess not."

Wicker did not dispute his role in the earmark or the company's contacts with him, but said in an interview that he sees no problem with directing money to Aurora. He said contributions from its employees played no role in his decision to request the earmark in March 2007. The money was meant to speed development of a new, unmanned aircraft that would be able to fly for days at high altitudes -- a valuable military tool, Wicker said. And the company is developing the aircraft while creating jobs in his home state.

"The long and short of it is, Aurora is putting out a good product in return for these federal expenditures," Wicker said yesterday. "It clearly passes any cost-benefit test." Patti Woodside, a spokeswoman for Aurora, said the earmark was going to develop "a vehicle with tons of potential. I don't think anyone would dispute that this is a worthwhile endeavor." The aircraft is in the research and development phase, Woodside said. The company is developing the aircraft for the Army's Space and Missile Defense Command.

She said Aurora located its facility in Mississippi because the company's chief executive had a close friend at the Mississippi State University, not because of Wicker's representation of the 1st Congressional District from 1994 until his appointment to the Senate. She also said that

while the company's lobbying firm, Cornerstone Government Affairs, hired Keast after he left Wicker's employ, another lobbyist at the firm, Dan Fleming, took the lead in helping them obtain federal funding.

Messages left Monday and Tuesday for Keast and Fleming were not returned. A lobbying disclosure statement filed for the period from Jan. 1 to June 30, 2007, lists both as lobbyists for Aurora before the House on budget issues. Wicker served on the House Appropriations defense subcommittee before his appointment to the Senate. That appointment came shortly after Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) described earmarking as the key factor in scandals that helped drive Republicans from power in 2006.

John Pruett, a fellow at the Project on Government Oversight, said: "There are a thousand companies out there that make unmanned vehicles. Why did he choose Aurora? It points out that [it should not be] ... left to the inclinations of a representative. There should be some standard."

John Cummings, a spokesman for the Army command, said he did not know why Wicker submitted the earmark request. "It's a congressional add," he said. "It was not requested. It wasn't in the president's budget. Anything that comes in above that means it has not been requested by us."

Records show that Aurora chief executive John S. Langford made his first contribution to Wicker in March 2005. In April, Aurora flew Wicker, Keast and another staffer on a private jet to Starkville, Miss., to attend the opening of the company's new facility there. Under old congressional ethics rules, the private flight was valued at the cost of a commercial flight, or \$3,083.

Wicker said the facility is in an area referred to as "the golden triangle," on the border between two congressional

districts, where several military contractors have factories. The Aurora plant has created 45 jobs and promises to yield as many as 200, Wicker said.

"It was not a requested earmark from DOD," said Kyle Steward, Wicker's spokesman. "But I will say we had discussions with DOD. They told us no one else is as close to developing this technology as Aurora, and DOD folks are very interested in it, and they see this technology as a need in the future."

On Feb. 5, 2006, after working jointly for Wicker and the Appropriations Committee, Keast left to join Cornerstone. He registered to represent Aurora on Feb. 14, 2006. Cornerstone reported earning \$40,000 in lobbying fees from Aurora that year. The same year, Aurora employees donated more than \$13,000 to Wicker -- his top campaign contributor that year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Wicker submitted his earmark request on March 22, 2007, less than two months after the one-year cooling off period in which Keast was barred from lobbying Wicker on Aurora's behalf. The company paid Keast's lobbying firm \$60,000 in the first half of 2007.

Wicker said yesterday he had been "working with Aurora" long before Keast left his staff, and that he was certain that Keast "complied with all the waiting periods." Wicker said the company is one of several that have donated money to him and benefited from defense appropriations when he was on the subcommittee.

None of that should trouble people, he said. "Basically, I was just trying to create jobs for Mississippians and provide a strong national defense at the same time," Wicker said. "I'm a good vote for a strong national defense. When we can combine that with creating good jobs in Mississippi, in my mind, it's a

two-fer."

Research director Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report.

Washington Post
January 16, 2008
Pg. D1

40. Carlyle In Talks To Buy Unit Of Booz Allen

By Thomas Heath, Washington Post Staff Writer

Booz Allen spokesman Marie Lerch last night declined to comment on whether Carlyle, based in the District, was in talks with the McLean firm. The report appeared on the Web site of the Financial Times yesterday. A potential sale has been the subject of media speculation for weeks.

Carlyle spokesman Christopher Ullman declined to comment. The stage of the talks could not be determined.

Booz Allen, which is privately held, is among the top government contractors in the country and one of the largest employers in Northern Virginia, with more than 11,000 employees in the region. It has 20,000 employees worldwide, most of whom work on its government business. Its clients include the Navy, Air Force and U.S. Agency for International Development.

On the commercial side, which is believed to be the more lucrative part of the business, Booz Allen is a well-known source of market research. About 20 percent of its employees focus on the commercial sector.

The consulting firm, which went public in 1970 and then was taken private six years later, is owned by 300 top executives and has about \$4 billion in revenue. About half of that comes from the government.

A marriage between Carlyle and Booz Allen could make sense for the private-equity giant for many reasons. Carlyle has a long and lucrative history of owning and doing business with

government defense contractors, such as aerospace and ground-based military programs.

Carlyle owns Vought Aircraft Industries, an aerospace company. Its buyout arm made a substantial profit with the purchase and subsequent sale of United Defense, another military contractor.

Carlyle has about \$75 billion under management and is looking for places to put that money to work. It recently launched an infrastructure fund that will invest in and operate toll roads, water purification systems and other such structures.

Booz Allen hinted last month that it might change its strategic direction. Its chairman, Ralph W. Shrader, sent an electronic memo to employees in December informing them that the company was considering separating its commercial and government businesses.

Shrader said in the memo that the strategy of splitting the company into two parts was in the "development stage." He also said both Booz Allen units were successful but were facing vastly different business models and regulatory issues.

Booz Allen Hamilton was the main sponsor of the PGA Tour stop in the Washington region from 2004 to 2006.

USA Today
January 16, 2008
Pg. 9

41. After Losing Son In Iraq, Retired Colonel Wages Challenge For Vet's House Seat

By Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The father of a Marine killed in Iraq announced Tuesday that he is running for the House seat held by the only Iraq war veteran in Congress.

Thomas Manion, a Republican who recently retired as a colonel in the Marine Reserves, is unhappy

with positions Rep. Patrick Murphy, D-Pa., has taken against the war.

Manion's son, 1st Lt. Travis Manion, 26, of Doylestown, Pa., died April 29 during his second Iraq tour while living with an Iraqi unit he was leading and training. Manion said his son's death was a wake-up call to step forward and serve.

"My son was about this country, so I'm sure he'd be very proud that I'm stepping forward and stepping on the field, as he was, to try to make a difference for our country," Manion, 53, said in a phone interview.

Adam Abrams, Murphy's spokesman, said in a statement that the freshman Democrat is "bringing people together — Democrats, Republicans and independents" — to work for his district.

"There will be plenty of time for politics later," Abrams said.

Murphy, 34, served as a military lawyer in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne Division. Seizing on voters' discontent with the Iraq war, Murphy in 2006 beat then-congressman Mike Fitzpatrick with less than 51% of the vote. The competitive district includes a part of Philadelphia and its suburbs.

In office, Murphy has been out front in the Democrats' fight to get troops out of Iraq and was vocal in his opposition to President Bush's "surge" plan announced early last year. As part of the plan, 30,000 additional soldiers and Marines were stationed in the country.

Although more troops died in 2007 than in any other year in the war, the death count declined substantially by the end of the year, and fighting was calmed in parts of the country. The Iraqi government, however, has been criticized for making less political progress than was promised.

Manion, a pharmaceutical executive, said his son had expressed confidence in the decision to increase troop

levels before he died. While "nobody wants the war to end as much as I do," Manion said stability in Iraq is essential for stability in the Middle East, and U.S. military leaders should be given an opportunity to make that happen.

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 16, 2008

Worldview

42. The News From Iraq: Reasons For Fear, Hope

By Trudy Rubin, Inquirer Columnist

Iraq is back. The story is back on page one and back in the presidential primaries. Has any political progress been made? And how long should we stay? (John McCain just said 100 years was "fine with me.")

Having traveled to Baghdad last month, I can tell you that things in Iraq are much better than Democrats want to believe. But the current situation makes Republicans who prate of "victory" look foolish.

Everything is in flux. There are possibilities for Iraqi political progress in coming months, but they could be dissipated. How soon we can withdraw substantial forces depends largely on whether the next president has a more realistic strategy for the region than George W. Bush.

The key change in Iraq, which makes other changes possible, is that the sectarian violence has lessened.

"It is not over," Iraq's shrewd foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, told me, "but it has died down. There are still hot coals under the ashes, but the overall atmosphere has changed."

But as critics of Bush policy point out, the expressed purpose of the "surge" - as laid out by Gen. David Petraeus - was to provide calm and space for Iraqi sectarian factions to formally reconcile. This was supposed to be the prerequisite

for American troops to depart.

The political benchmarks set by the Iraqis - proposed laws that were supposed to ease the tensions between ethnic and sectarian groups - have mostly languished without passage. No one is certain of the impact of the law, finally passed this week, to permit former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party to regain jobs and pensions.

More important are other developments going on further from public view.

One important development is the beginning of feelers across sectarian lines to create new political movements. Right now, most of Iraq's political parties are based on sect or religion. But leaders of the largest Shiite party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), are meeting with Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar province who are thinking of forming new Sunni political parties. There is talk of a possible new Shiite-Sunni political alliance in the next parliamentary elections. This kind of alliance might do an end run around the insular Shiite Dawa party of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and around the more sectarian Sunni parties now in the parliament.

In other words, security gains on the ground are encouraging new political thinking which will take more time to jell.

There is also new strategic thinking among Iraqi leaders. I talked with Shiite Vice-President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, who has been pushing for years for a status of forces agreement with the United States that would regulate the number and role of U.S. forces. Such an agreement will now be negotiated this year.

"Now we are all prepared for negotiations," Mahdi says. "Our long-term relationship will be defined. No one is talking about bases, even the Americans. They are talking about facilities, training,

airfields." Mahdi said Iraqis still needed "a strong partner" and urged Americans to have patience. "We need time to bring Iraqis to political maturity," he pleaded. But he thought that U.S. troop levels could "go down by half in the next year or two."

Of course many will question how much leverage the Iraqis will have in such talks, but, if security improves, I think that leverage will increase.

And Mahdi put forward another proposal that I think is key to stability in Iraq.

Until now, Iraqi leaders were leery of any regional security arrangement that included Sunni Arab states, Iran and the United States, because they thought the Sunni Arabs might gang up against Shiite-led Iraq. But the Iraqi outlook has changed as relations with Sunni Arab states have improved.

"Now we think we need a regional pact to stabilize things - an agreement in which all can participate and be real partners, including Iran and Turkey.

"The United States should play a helpful role," he added. "We understand we can't [do a regional pact] without a dialogue between the United States and Iran." That kind of dialogue has not been on the agenda of the Bush White House.

This brings me back to the U.S. election campaign. Those candidates who want to help Iraq need to pay attention to what Iraqi leaders are saying. Anger at past Bush administration mistakes shouldn't cause candidates to overlook progress.

There is an urgent need for this kind of serious regional diplomacy, which the Bush administration has steadfastly avoided - for a pact that would give Iraq's neighbors a vested interest in aiding, not interfering, with Baghdad's future. This is the strategy that should be promoted by Democrats who want to bring the troops home.